PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 170

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

THIRD SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
THIRTY-NINTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1989-90

COMPRISING PERIOD
26 MARCH—20 APRIL 1990

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26 March 1990

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OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE THIRD SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 25 JUNE 1987]

THIRTY-NINTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES VOLUME 170

NINTH VOLUME OF SESSION 1989-90

House of Commons

Monday 26 March 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

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BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE SOUTHBANK BILL

Lords amendments agreed to.

Oral Answers to Questions

ENERGY

Offshore Energy Industry

1. **Mr. Donald Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what has been the level of employment in the offshore oil and gas industry in each of the years from 1983 to 1989.

The Minister of State, Department of Energy (Mr. Peter Morrison): Employment in the offshore oil and gas industry has ranged from 31,300 to 22,300 during the past seven years. It is currently over 30,700—the highest level since 1984.

Mr. Thompson: While thanking my right hon. Friend for that reply, may I remind him of not only offshore investment, but inshore investment in the oil industry—in valves, heavy engineering equipment and highly technological equipment, in which British engineers lead the world? Will he do all he can to encourage inshore investment, as well as offshore investment?

Mr. Morrison: My hon. Friend is right. Literally tens of thousands of people are employed onshore in the services and capital goods industries. I am delighted that the numbers employed onshore have increased substantially in the past year.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister explain why his Department today issued such a pathetically weak response to the report of the Select Committee on Energy on Britoil and BP job losses and assets sales? Why was not his Department able at least to agree with the Select Committee that to sack 1,000 people a mere 18 months after apparently promising them job security represented a substantial breach of the spirit of that assurance? Has not the Department of Energy, under Tory control, once again demonstrated that it is not fit to police oil companies independently in the North sea and has no intention of protecting Scottish interests?

Mr. Morrison: The hon. Member will understand that it was not a weak response in any sense. It responded to the points that he and others made in the Select Committee report, which we welcomed and, by and large, agreed with. Unlike him, I am no interventionist.

Mr. Moss: Now that offshore employment is at its highest level for six years, thanks to the massive investment in the United Kingdom continental shelf, does my right hon. Friend agree that that is good news for jobs in Scotland?

Mr. Morrison: It is certainly good news for jobs in Scotland. My hon. Friend points out what some Opposition Members apparently do not want as much as we do.

Greenpeace

2. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met representatives of Greenpeace; and what matters were discussed.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Tony Baldry): My right hon. Friend and I have not met Greenpeace.

Mr. Fearn: Does the Minister agree that, in that case, more regular meetings are needed with Greenpeace and that, at those metings, the decommissioning of nuclear plants should be discussed, especially those of Sellafield and Springfield which discharge into the River Ribble and the coastline of my constituency at Southport? Does he also agree that the three-mile safety limit should be extended to 15 miles around the nuclear power stations where 3 million people live?

Mr. Baldry: I am always happy to meet Greenpeace and any other organisations to discuss matters of energy policy. We have made our intentions on nuclear policy perfectly clear. There will be a full review of nuclear policy in 1994. We all look forward with interest to discovering the energy policies of the party that the hon. Gentleman represents. There seems to be some confusion between those in his party who were once members of the alliance.

Dr. Michael Clark: Will my hon. Friend confirm that he shares Greenpeace's concern for the environment? When he meets Greenpeace, will he find out whether it will acknowledge the cost of the measures it advocates and recognise that those costs have to be passed on to the consumer?

Mr. Baldry: Yes, my hon. Friend makes a telling point. The comparison does not involve merely economic costs but environmental costs. One of the concerns, which I suspect Greenpeace and many of us have, is what to do about sulphur emissions. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in an excellent speech to the Royal Society last week, the Government, as part of their policy, are fitting flue gas desulphurisation equipment at the most modern of our coal-fired power stations, Drax in Yorkshire, at a cost of about £600 million for one single site. My right hon. Friend said:

> "retrofitting desulphurisation equipment is not the only way to achieve reductions. Indeed it can create wider environmental damage because it involves mining limestone (sometimes from some of the most beautiful areas of our countryside), the disposing of gypsum waste, and adding something to carbon dioxide emissions and thus to the greenhouse effect. As so often, solving one problem can create or exacerbate others."

Those costs must be taken into account when determining the best way forward.

Mr. Barron: Can the Minister explain the present position, because he appears to be switching the arguments weekly? Can he tell us why the Government have allowed the two new generators to slide backwards on the £2 billion programme to fit flue gas desulphurisation equipment to 12,000 GW of electricity generation capacity?

Is not it the case that the Prime Minister's words of last November—and what Ministers said throughout last year—have now been turned on their head? While Drax is going ahead, the Government have allowed National Power and PowerGen to forgo the rest of the capacity on the basis that the importation of low-sulphur coal, which at best could cut emissions by 50 per cent., is the correct policy to pursue in preference to retrofitting FGD, which would cut emissions by 90 per cent. In its press release on that subject, Greenpeace stated that if the Government allow the new generators to do that, we will rightly be called the dirty man of Europe. How will the Government meet those targets in view of their ratting on last year's agreements?

Mr. Baldry: The Government are committed to meeting the European Community large plant combustion directive in full and we will do that. I commend the attention of the hon. Gentleman to the most recent edition of the magazine "Power in Europe", which I suspect he reads with interest. It states:

> "In Brussels, European Community officials say the decision does not place the United Kingdom in contravention of Community environmental rules. 'We're concerned with the amount of sulphur in the air and not with how it does—or does not—get there,' said a source close to the European Community Commissioner for the Environment."

The hon. Gentleman can rest assured that we will meet the European Community large plant combustion directive in full.

Mr. Aitken: If my hon. Friend would like to keep one step ahead of Greenpeace, would he raise as a matter of urgency the fear expressed about the safety of French nuclear installations? Is he aware that there is a real fear among my constituents who live along the channel coast of a French Chernobyl, because the inspector of French nuclear safety has published a most damning report which states that, within the next 20 years, there is a one in 20 chance of a major nuclear accident in some of France's unsatisfactory nuclear stations, 14 of which are within 30 miles of the English coast? Will he raise that as a matter of urgency?

Mr. Baldry: If those reports are continuing to cause concern to my hon. Friend and others who have constituencies near his, I will ensure that they have a full explanation of the situation.

Electricity Imports

3. **Mr. Eadie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the current estimate, coal equivalent, of electricity that will be imported from France in 1990; and how much has been imported since the first months of 1990.

Mr. Baldry: Future imports and exports of electricity will largely depend on commercial decisions by Electricité de France and on market conditions in England and Wales. I understand that there were virtually no imports in January and February.

Mr. Eadie: Further to the Minister's answer, does he agree that it is a foolish policy for the Government to depend on energy supplies for this country from a foreign source? If we are so full of the idea that we should have electricity by cable or wire, why do not the Government pursue a policy of using the existing connector between Scotland and England, which has a capacity equivalent to 1·5 million tonnes of coal and, if strengthened, would have a capacity of 3 million tonnes? Why does not the Minister pursue that, as a more sensible energy policy?

Mr. Baldry: Electricité de France will provide an important source of competition in the United Kingdom electricity market. However, so will Scotland. I understand that, just as there are discussions between the area boards and the French, so too are there discussions between the area boards and the Scottish boards for the import of electricity from Scotland into England and Wales.

Mr. Hannam: My hon. Friend has underlined the importance of our nuclear industry. What preparations are being made for the vesting of our nuclear stations in Nuclear Electric plc?

Mr. Baldry: I am glad to be able to tell the House that full drafts of Nuclear Electric's licences have been prepared, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will place copies of them in the Vote Office and in the Library this afternoon.

Mr. Molyneaux: Given the feasibility of the linkage with France, is there any real technical difficulty in providing a similar link between Scotland and Northern Ireland?

Mr. Baldry: I am happy to look at that matter and hear the right hon. Gentleman's views on it in greater detail.

Sir Trevor Skeet: Does the Minister agree that section 32 of the Electricity Act 1989 provides for electricity from France to be part of the non-fossil fuel quota? Does my hon. Friend agree also that, when electricity from France is available, it will be the cheapest in Europe? Does he agree further that, in future, it might be an excellent idea to build a second line across, carrying 2,000 MW?

Mr. Baldry: The arrangement for French electricity will be outside the non-fossil fuel obligation. However, sales of French imports will not have to pay the levy. Clearly, with electricity supplies to and from Scotland and to and from France, we are anxious to ensure the greatest possible competition for the electricity industry in this country, which must be of benefit to the consumer.

Coal Contracts

4. **Mr. Haynes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he will make it his policy to publish his exchange of correspondence with the member of the European Commission responsible for competition policy regarding the coal contracts agreed between British Coal and National Power and PowerGen.

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. John Wakeham): It has been the policy of successive Governments to treat correspondence with the Commission as confidential.

Mr. Haynes: What is the Secretary of State doing swanning around in Europe, fixing up contracts for imports of foreign coal, when he stood at the Dispatch Box and promised miners in this country a fair deal? The miners of Nottinghamshire will not be very pleased with him; nor will the pensioner nor the consumer. Let us have the Secretary of State at the Dispatch Box and let us have the information that we require about what he has been doing.

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman is wrong if he thinks that I have been swanning round Europe fixing up coal contracts. Rather the opposite: I have been to Brussels on two occasions to obtain appropriate clearance for the contracts that have been negotiated between British Coal and the generators. I am pleased to inform the House that I do not see any difficulties in that clearance. The size of British Coal's market in the United Kingdom will be limited only by its capacity to supply coal of the required quality and price.

Mr. Knapman: But does not my right hon. Friend agree that, when the electricity supply industry is privatised, it will at long last be in the interests of the generators to buy cheap rather than dearer coal?

Mr. Wakeham: It has always been in the interests of generators to buy cheap coal, but they must buy cheap coal that is of the appropriate quality. British Coal is in the best position to supply the bulk of the requirements for British generators.

Gas and Electricity Prices

5. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he has made an estimate of the effect that announced changes in domestic gas and electricity prices in April 1990 will have on the retail prices index.

Mr. Wakeham: It is estimated that the changes in gas and electricity prices will add about 0·4 per cent. to the retail prices index once the tariffs have been fully implemented.

Mr. McFall: How does the Secretary of State's recent decision to allow electricity prices to rise by more than the rate of inflation square with the Government's long-playing record, which we hear every Tuesday and Thursday at 3.15 pm, by the female lead singer of the "Mid-Staffs Blues Band", called "Bearing Down on Inflation"?

Mr. Wakeham: I enjoyed the hon. Gentleman's well-rehearsed supplementary question. The increase in the price of electricity which has recently been announced means that, on average, all prices will be increased by less than 6 per cent., which is less than the rate of inflation. Average domestic prices will rise by about 9 per cent., and, on average, customers over 1 MW will get a reduction in price.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, since privatisation, the real price of gas to the consumer has fallen and that during the last five years of the Labour Government the price of electricity rose by 155 per cent? Does my right hon. Friend agree that that suggests that privatisation rather than nationalisation is the key to consumer satisfaction?

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Under this Government, prices have fallen, whereas they rose substantially under the last Government.

Mr. Morgan: Nevertheless, does the Secretary of State agree that the price rises that will take effect from next week have emerged as the most extraordinary unprotected rip-off ever to face the British consumer? Will the right hon. Gentleman comment on the letter that I received last weekend from Professor Stephen Littlechild, the regulator of the industry, who stated:

> "I shall have no power to suspend the recent price increases or to impose temporary price increases at a different level."?

As the price increases that have been announced cannot be commented on by the old electricity consumer consultative councils, which can comment only on this year's prices and which will go out of action on 31 March, and nor can they be commented on by the new statutory electricity consumer committees, will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that nobody can comment on those price increases except himself, the Secretary of State? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, in effect, the electricity consumer is being shipwrecked while both lifeboats have been hidden in the boat shed and he has hidden the key?

Mr. Wakeham: That is not correct. There is nothing that I can do to stop anybody commenting on the price of electricity. If I wanted to do something about it, I should not be able to achieve it. Although the price increase for domestic consumers is slightly above the rate of inflation this year, it will be followed by two years of price stability, which is good for the consumer.

Nottinghamshire Coalfield

7. **Mr. Andy Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what has been the rate of productivity growth in the Nottinghamshire coalfield.

Mr. Baldry: Productivity in the Nottinghamshire coalfield rose from 2·9 tonnes per manshift in 1985-86 to 4·64 tonnes in the first 11 months of 1989-90, an increase of 60 per cent.

Mr. Stewart: The Nottinghamshire mineworkers' productivity record is second to none. Never a week passes without one or another colliery breaking a previous record. All that is due to the skilful negotiations of the Union of Democratic Mineworkers, which has not only increased take-home pay for all miners, but secured the future of the British coal industry into the next century. Therefore, will my hon. Friend accept from me an invitation for our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy to visit Nottinghamshire and to thank our miners personally?

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. However, it must be noted that output per man shift has to increase by 10 per cent. across the country if British Coal is to become profitable. From what I have seen of the Nottinghamshire coalfield, I am confident of the spirit and the will, and the skills and the co-operation of the UDM work force there to achieve increases such as my hon. Friend has identified. I know that my right hon. Friend hopes to visit Nottinghamshire, as soon as that can be arranged, to thank the Nottinghamshire work force for what it has achieved.

Mr. Lofthouse: When the right hon. Gentleman visits Nottingham, will he also tell the UDM and the miners the number of pits that will close over the next five years as a result of the Government's policy and the number that will close because of the new 20 per cent. non-fossil fuel obligation on the electricity generating industry? No witness who has recently given evidence to the Select Committee on Energy has been able to give an estimate of the true cost of nuclear fuel, so can the Minister give us the true cost this afternoon?

Mr. Baldry: One depressing thing about having energy questions on a Monday is having to face the serried ranks of the Jeremiahs on the Opposition Benches. I draw to the hon. Gentleman's attention the recent statement by the chairman of British Coal, that he does not agree with such gloomy forecasts and that British Coal is determined to ensure that it remains

"the supplier-of-choice to the new generators".

The chairman recently described the new contracts as

"a firm rebuff for the Jeremiahs and their gloomy forecasts for the future of the coal industry."

He emphasised that

"scare stories of a further massive contraction of the industry have been seriously over-stated."

I am sorry to note that the hon. Gentleman is among the Jeremiahs who wish to do down that industry.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my hon. Friend agree that we need the productivity from all the other miners to keep up with that of the Nottinghamshire miners, so that the CEGB and its successors can be kept to the commitment to keep electricity prices down, because coal prices will be set at a steady rate? Might not we then be able to export electricity to France and use British coal in so doing?

Mr. Baldry: The Government have demonstrated their commitment to our coal industry, not least by the passing last week of the Coal Industry Act, which gives British Coal between £5 billion and £7 billion of taxpayers' money to help to clear its overhang of past debts. We wish to see a competitive and profitable coal industry, and that will require all the technology, investment and skills of those working in the coal industry. They have those skills, and with them can achieve further productivity gains.

Mr. Dobson: If what the Minister says about improved productivity in the Nottinghamshire coalfield is true, why are the Government proposing to stab the Nottinghamshire miners in the back by pushing for the Associated British Ports coal-importing installation at Immingham and supporting both PowerGen and National Power in building not one but two gas-fired power stations at Killingholme, so that even *The Daily Telegraph* says that, if these imports of coal continue, they will spell the end of the Nottinghamshire coalfield? Is not that a poor way to reward this increased productivity?

Mr. Baldry: I find it difficult to see as a stab in the back the £2 million every working day that the Government have invested in the coal industry and the between £5 billion and £7 billion that the Government gave to the coal industry at only the end of the last financial year towards its overhang and clearing past debts. It may have escaped the attention of the hon. Gentleman that British Coal has succeeded in securing with the generators coal contracts that will guarantee a stable market and income stream over the next three years.

Renewable Energy

9. **Mr. Maples:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what initiatives his Department is taking to develop commercially viable and environmentally acceptable forms of renewable technology.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Government are supporting a major research and development programme aimed at developing commercially viable and environmentally acceptable renewable energy technologies to contribute to future energy supply.

Mr. Maples: How many such projects are there and to what extent are private sector companies involved in them?

Mr. Morrison: There are some 300 or so such projects. We hope to see another 60 or 70 come on stream this year. They are very much joint ventures between the public and private sectors.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister recognise that, with the privatisation of gas and electricity, measures on renewable sources of energy and environmentally positive moves will always come second to the profit motive and market forces? If we are to have positive moves in such a direction, will the Government do much more?

Mr. Morrison: I remind the hon. Gentleman of the non-fossil fuel obligation. We have had 339 applications under that obligation, which are to be reviewed; that shows that, with the privatisation of electricity, renewables will be encouraged.

Mr. Barry Field: What reassurance can my right hon. Friend give that our beautiful coastline will not be littered with great big windmill generators under this programme? Having recently refused to endorse such a programme for Tennyson Down, I should not like to see my right hon. Friend become a modern-day Don Quixote.

Mr. Morrison: That is a blandishment which I find it difficult to resist. The normal planning application procedure will apply, but my hon. Friend makes a fair and reasonable point.

Nuclear Fusion

10. **Mr. Geraint Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the possible future application of nuclear fusion technology.

Mr. Baldry: If successfully developed, fusion would be a new source of electric power. It is too soon to speculate about its prospects.

Mr. Howells: Does the Minister agree that the development of nuclear fusion technology could bring many benefits to the people if pursued with urgency by the Government?

Mr. Baldry: It is important to make it clear that the Government already spend about £27 million a year on fusion research with the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, and a further £28 million, through the European Commission, on the Euratom fusion programme.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Will my hon. Friend confirm that there is no truth in the story put out two weeks ago by the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) that a nuclear power station will be built at Pembroke?

Mr. Baldry: The four successor companies have been allocated the properties they need for operational reasons. Other properties, such as that at Pembroke, which are not required for current operations, have been divided up to ensure an equitable distribution of assets among the companies. Nuclear Electric has no development plans for Pembroke. The house knows that we have decided that no new stations should be built anywhere by Nuclear Electric until a complete review of nuclear power has been carried out in 1994.

Mr. Wigley: How much money has been spent on fusion technology since the days of Zeta back in the 1950s? Does the Minister accept that it will be the year 2025 at least before benefits come from this technology, and that the millions of pounds that have been spent on research would have been much better spent on alternative technology, which could now be bringing real benefits?

Mr. Baldry: It is important to get these matters into context. A proper balance has to be struck, and I believe that the Government have arrived at that balance. Even if fusion were shown to be economic and reliable, it is unlikely that a commercial fusion reactor could be running before the middle of the next century.

Mr. Butler: Does my hon. Friend accept the advice of the leader of the Social and Liberal Democrats that the nuclear industry should be wound up?

Mr. Baldry: As I said in response to the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn), I am completely confused—as I suspect many hon. Members are—about the nuclear energy policies of the SLD and its associates in this place. I would welcome their making clear to the House exactly what their policies are for nuclear energy.

Mr. Dobson: Will the Minister tell the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) that he should not be too swift in ruling out a nuclear power station at Pembroke? I received a letter from the Secretary of State today stating that Nuclear Electric intends to keep the land at Pembroke until the review of nuclear policy is completed. It would not do that if it were not contemplating building it there.

Mr. Baldry: As I have made clear, Nuclear Electric has no development plans for Pembroke. We have decided that no new station can be built anywhere by the company until a review has been completed in 1994, and that is how matters stand.

Offshore Energy Industry

11. **Mr. Gerald Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many of the wells drilled on the United Kingdom continental shelf have been drilled *(a)* since 1964 and *(b)* since 1979.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Up to 12 February this year a total of 4,190 exploration, appraisal and development wells had been drilled on the United Kingdom continental shelf since 1964, of which 2,886 had been drilled since the beginning of 1979.

Mr. Bowden: I thank my right hon. Friend for supplying those figures, which demonstrate the success of the Government's energy policy and the climate that has been created for investment and enterprise with these drillings. Do the drillings show that there has been an overall increase in the resources available beyond that which was expected and estimated earlier?

Mr. Morrison: Due to the considerable number of discoveries made last year, the remaining reserves recoverable—proven plus probable—will have increased by about 10 million tonnes to 1,200 million tonnes.

Mr. Doran: Despite what the Minister said and the bright prospects for the North sea, will he confirm what last year's Brown Book figures show—that we are still producing more oil than we are finding in the North sea and that our reserves are depleting rapidly?

Mr. Morrison: I think that I would be right in saying that last year we produced a little less than we discovered. The figures will be announced formally in the Brown Book, which will be published in April.

Gas Tariffs

12. **Mr. Rost:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he next expects to meet the Director General of Ofgas to discuss British Gas tariffs.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My right hon. Friend and I meet the Director General of Gas Supply from time to time to discuss a range of issues of mutual interest.

Mr. Rost: I congratulate British Gas on its more competitive tariffs for industrial and commercial consumers in response to complaints from them. Will my right hon. Friend discuss with Ofgas the remaining serious problem for users of fewer than 25,000 therms? There is an incentive to waste gas because it benefits a user burning 22,000 therms to burn 25,000 or more as he would then pay less. Is not that a breach of the Gas Act 1986 and the licence? Should not there be a smoother banding and a lower threshold so that that ridiculous anomaly can be ended?

Mr. Morrison: I do not believe that it is a breach of the Gas Act. We have discussed the matter with the Director General of Ofgas who is having further discussions with British Gas. My hon. Friend's point is perfectly fair.

Mr. Jessel: Should not British Gas be warmly commended for its sponsorship of the arts, such as the concert at Hampton Court palace last September for charity—which you, Mr. Speaker, were kind enough to attend?

Mr. Morrison: Yes, and I hope that you enjoyed the concert, Mr. Speaker. It would be only fair to say that the entire energy industry should be commended for its sponsorship of the arts.

British Coal

13. **Mr. O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the chairman of British Coal; and what was discussed.

Mr. Wakeham: I meet the chairman of British Coal regularly to discuss all aspects of the coal industry.

Mr. O'Brien: During the right hon. Gentleman's latest discussions, did the chairman of British Coal outline the concern of people working in the mining industry and those in the mining communities about the 30 per cent. increase in electricity prices between April 1988 and 1990, with further increases to come? Those increases have occurred despite the fact that coal prices have remained the same or, in some cases, even been reduced. Is not the only purpose of such increases to fatten the bottom line of the CEGB's accounts? Is not that screwing the miners, the old people and the domestic customers? When will the Secretary of State ensure that customers, including the miners who produce the coal, obtain a fair deal?

Mr. Wakeham: I did not discuss that matter with the chairman of British Coal, but I did discuss the advantages for the coal industry of the passing of the Coal Industry Act 1990, which provides £5 billion to £7 billion of grant that will enable the coal industry accounts to be cleared of the hangover of past debts and will provide a good basis for the future. In addition, British Coal has secured a three-year contract with the generating industry at prices which, I hope, will enable it to be the supplier of first choice in the long term.

Mr. Hind: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the contracts between the electricity industry and British Coal are an extremely good deal for British Coal? Will he convey that view to its chairman? Does he——

Mr. Speaker: Order. One question please—that is only fair.

Mr. Wakeham: It is a good contract for British Coal and for the generators. The important matter is that it is still a tough contract for British Coal. Although it has made great strides—productivity is up by more than 75 per cent. on pre-strike levels—further productivity gains are essential. I believe that the industry has the technology, investment and skills to achieve that.

Mr. Hardy: Does the Secretary of State accept that the chairman of British Coal should have told him that the pursuit of international supplies of low-sulphur coal could be a wild goose chase? Will he explain to the chairman of British Coal the precise nature of the mathematical formula which *The Daily Telegraph* told the world the right hon. Gentleman was capable of explaining to the House and the public?

Mr. Wakeham: The answer to the mathematical formula is 10·6 per cent.—the fossil fuel levy.

Mr. Cummings: Is the Secretary of State aware of the chairman's recent remark that the north-east area is the jewel in the crown of British Coal? In view of that, does he agree that it is time to embark on a massive programme to fit flue gas desulpurisation equipment to make the importation of low-sulphur coal unnecessary?

Mr. Wakeham: I will not discuss which area of British Coal's activities is the jewel. There are many hardworking and highly skilful miners all over the country. I have nothing further to add to what my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State said recently about FGD. We are committed to the European directive. It is clearly laid down and we shall ensure that it is achieved. British generating companies are considering their plans for how best to implement it. My view is that they will implement it partly by fitting FGD, partly by switching to some new stations for gas burn and partly by importing low-sulphur coal.

THE ARTS

Public Buildings

63. **Mr. Gerald Bowden:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what plans he has to improve the fabric of buildings under his control by the year 2000.

The Minister for the Arts (Mr. Richard Luce): As I announced at the Museums Association centenary conference in September 1989, one of the major challenges that I have set is to get the national museums and gallery buildings for which I am responsible into good shape by the end of the 1990s.

Mr. Bowden: In welcoming my right hon. Friend's statement about museums and galleries, may I ask him to consider the plight of other great public buildings, cathedrals? Although they are not within his precise remit, they are often beyond the scope and resources of their deans and chapters. Would not it be a good idea to put them in order to face the next 1,000 years?

Mr. Luce: As my hon. Friend says, cathedrals are not my direct responsibility. I have noticed throughout the country several appeals for cathedrals which are meeting considerable success. With regard to my direct responsibilites, we should do our best to get our national institutions, galleries and museums into good shape. I am glad that, on top of the Government's additional £180 million in the next three years, Lord Wolfson and his foundation have agreed to provide £12 million over the next three years to help the renovation of our great museums and galleries.

Mr. Jopling: Does my right hon. Friend recall that there are only 35 known paintings by Vermeer of which two have been stolen in the recent past, following last week's Boston art theft? Will he carry out urgent checks on the four buildings in this country where there are paintings by Jan Vermeer so that those incomparble paintings are not put at risk?

Mr. Luce: I note my right hon. Friend's comments carefully and I shall certainly look seriously at the matter. The restitution of stolen works of art is a serious problem. I am considering it against the background of the review of export controls for works of art in 1992.

Mr. Fisher: I warmly welcome the generosity of Lord Wolfson and the Minister's response to it, but does not Lord Wolfson require that his gift be disbursed within three years? How can local authorities respond to initiatives about local museums when the Government have bound them hand and foot with penalties, the poll tax and this week, if we are to believe it, charge capping? What advice will the Minister give local authorities which want to respond to and participate in Lord Wolfson's generosity but cannot because of the Government's policies?

Mr. Luce: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman welcomes the new improvement fund for the fabric of museums. He is right to suggest that they apply to local museums and galleries as well as to national institutions. That is an important development. Together the Government and Lord Wolfson's foundation have earmarked £12 million for the next three years with an option to continue for a further two years with additional money. That money can be committed over a timespan which is agreed among the institutions, the local authorities and the private sector, which I hope will play a positive role.

Private Patronage

64. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what is his latest assessment of the contribution of private patronage to the arts.

Mr. Luce: Precise figures are not available for private donations to the arts, although there have been a number of outstanding acts of generosity such as that of Mr. Tsui to the Victoria and Albert and the Sainsbury family to the National gallery.

Mr. Butler: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the announcement about gift aid in the Budget could improve funding to the arts in the future?

Mr. Luce: My hon. Friend is right. The arts world has been asking for a long time that we provide better tax facilities to encourage more individual and corporate giving to the arts. I join my hon. Friend in welcoming most warmly the decision by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer which will help enormously to encourage the culture of giving and the growing number of individuals and corporations who wish to contribute to the expansion of the arts.

Mr. Bermingham: Does the Minister agree that at a time when the export of works of art is increasing, he should have a word with the Chancellor of the Exchequer about persuading the Inland Revenue to be more generous in accepting works of art in settlement of inheritance tax?

Mr. Luce: That is an important point. There is concern to preserve the most important parts of our heritage. I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees that the acceptance-in-lieu arrangements work extremely well. There is a reserve of £10 million, in addition to my budget of £2 million, which has been drawn on considerably and is working well, and there are the private treaty sale arrangements. All those measures, together with the work of the National Heritage Memorial Fund, provide considerable sums of money to enable us to preserve our heritage.

Wilding Report

65. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what representations he has received since his statement on the Wilding report; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: I welcome the general support for my statement on the Wilding report.

Mr. Hughes: Does my right hon. Friend agree that his statement has been widely welcomed in the arts world, because it redefines what everyone knows should have been the case—that the Arts Council lays down the strategy, but most of the work and grant-giving should be done in the regions where people know what is going on and where the excellence is?

Mr. Luce: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am glad that there has been strong support for that decision. As he implies, we should not underestimate the continuing important role of the Arts Council in devising an overall strategy for arts in the United Kingdom and for specific responsibilities, such as innovation, touring and a number of important matters. Its role and its accountability in partnership with regional arts boards will be important.

Dr. Kim Howells: Does the Minister recognise that the Wilding report has nevertheless generated much worry, especially in craft circles, that the Crafts Council will be merged with the Arts Council in a way that will be detrimental to the specific nature of the pursuits of craftspeople?

Mr. Luce: When making the announcement about the Wilding report, I made it clear that the Crafts Council will retain its independence. However, to ensure that we do not have duplication of resources, and to benefit craftspeople as much as possible I am asking the regional arts boards and craft units to work closely with the Crafts Council in the years ahead.

Government Grants

66. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Minister for the Arts *(a)* what Government grants were made to the arts between February 1974 and June 1979, *(b)* what grants have been made since June 1979; and what was the average annual increase in real terms in each case; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: Grants to the arts have risen from £157 million in 1979-80 to £449 million in the current year—an annual average increase in real terms of 3·6 per cent.

I regret that comparable information about grants in the earlier years is not available, but the total under the Department of Education and Science programme in 1978-79 was £129 million.

Mr. Greenway: Is not it clear that under this Government, grants to the arts have increased more in real terms than under any previous Government? Does not that show that the Government are paraclete and encourage the arts, and that the Opposition are nothing but a bunch of philistines?

Mr. Luce: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about our commitment to the arts on behalf of the taxpayer. The fact that, under the new funding arrangements, the Government have decided to increase overall funding for the arts in the next three years by 24 per cent. demonstrates our commitment to the arts. We believe that the taxpayer should underpin the expansion in the arts funding by the private sector.

Mr. Heffer: What personal representations has the right hon. Gentleman made to people in the private sector? For example, Tate and Lyle has made no contribution to the Tate gallery in Liverpool, although the company made its money in that city. Is not it important that the Government should make representations to that company? I have done so, but without great success. Would not it be a good idea if those who make money in the city of Liverpool made a contribution to the arts there?

Mr. Luce: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I am keen —obviously he does not oppose it, either—on an effective partnership being developed between the public and the private sectors and on corporations realising the benefit to them of contributing to the community through sponsorship or through donations. I want them to play their part, but they must decide, because they are accountable to their shareholders. I hope that the hon. Gentleman welcomes the decision of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to encourage giving through the gift aid arrangements that will be introduced next autumn.

Towngate Theatre, Basildon

67. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Minister for the Arts whether he has any plans to visit the Towngate theatre in Basildon.

Mr. Luce: I have no present plans to do so. I last visited the Towngate theatre in April 1988.

Mr. Amess: If my right hon. Friend were again to visit the Towngate theatre he would be shocked to learn of its serious financial circumstances due to the gross irresponsibility of the local Labour council, which has given an additional £600,000 to the theatre to prevent it from going into liquidation? Does he recognise the anger of my constituents who want to support a viable theatre but who do not regard its financing to that degree as being in any way helpful to Basildon's community charge of £478?

Mr. Luce: I hear what my hon. Friend says. It was he who welcomed my visit to the theatre when I saw the wide range of facilities that it had to offer. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The arts world must live within its means. It is for the local authority to decide how much it should give to arts organisations, but at the end of the day it is accountable to the charge payers. It must account for the money that it spends on the arts and other activities.

CIVIL SERVICE

Code of Conduct

75. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what representations he has received from the Civil Service unions about the proposed new code of conduct.

The Minister of State, Privy Council Office (Mr. Richard Luce): None, Sir.

Mr. Beith: Surely the Minister is aware of the First Division Association's representations on behalf of senior civil servants? Will he take careful note of its concern about the unqualified assertion in the new code that the duties of civil servants to the Crown are, for all practical purposes, owed to the Government of the day? When a Minister asks to see the papers of a previous Administration and is told by a civil servant that he cannot have those papers, is not the civil servant showing a duty to the integrity of Government as a whole? Is not that one of several instances where the duty extends beyond that to the Government of the day?

Mr. Luce: I do not understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but I do not think that there was any broad quarrel in the discussions with the union about the fact that civil servants are, broadly speaking, acountable to the elected Government of the day. That must be right, although one point of discussion with the union was that specific categories of civil servants, including lawyers, are more widely accountable under certain statutory provisions. That is understood. However, no one can undermine the concept that civil servants are accountable to the elected Government of the day.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Does my right hon. Friend accept that when Sir Robin Butler appeared before the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee I asked him the point blank question whether he thought that the new code made it more difficult for a civil servant to be faithful to his conscience and to the country, and he said, no? The reason for his answer was that a civil servant's duty must be to the Government of the day—not as a slavish follower but because any civil servant must serve the master of the day. If the master changes, his loyalty can change, not because he is a sycophant but because, if he does not carry out the will of the electorate whose will does he carry out?

Mr. Luce: My hon. Friend is right. It must be constitutionally right that civil servants are responsible to the elected Government. As he implied, if there is a problem of conscience, the procedures are clear. The Armstrong guidelines have made it clear since 1987 that a civil servant can appeal first to his permanent secretary and then, if he is not satisfied, to the professional head of the Civil Service. That is the right course to pursue.

First Division Association

76. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service when he last met representatives of the First Division Association; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Luce: I have not done so recently.

Mr. Field: Did my right hon. Friend read the report in *The Times* on 19 March of an interview with Sir Robin Butler? Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is another example of the open government that was promised as policy by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister? Will he confirm that he will consult the First Division Association about the disestablishment of the Church of England now that His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury has announced his resignation and——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is a little wide of Civil Service questions.

Mr. Field: It is a constitutional reform——

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps, but one question at a time.

Mr. Field: It is a constitutional reform, Mr. Speaker, which I think will be very popular.

Mr. Speaker: It may be, but that has little to do with the First Division Association.

Mr. Luce: I am most flattered that my hon. Friend considers that I have such a wide range of responsibilities. Having taken a keen interest in the establishment of Government agencies, he will know that it gives scope for much more open government, because the chief executives of those agencies can give evidence to Select Committees if they wish. Through that procedure, performance targets and measurements can be assessed by Parliament.

Mr. Alan Williams: Does the Minister realise that what he has just said about appeals has long been accepted, but was seriously damaged when the head of the Civil Service admitted that, at Ministers' behest, he had been economical with the truth? That statement did an enormous amount to undermine the integrity of the Civil Service. Does he accept that since then civil servants have, understandably, had great misgivings about what they used to consider a reliable appeals system? Many now believe that they need an outside and impartial point of appeal.

Mr. Luce: The right hon. Gentleman is entitled to his views. However, I should point out that the procedures that allow civil servants to appeal on matters of conscience —ultimately to the professional head of the Civil Service —have been in operation only since late 1987. I do not believe that it is true that confidence in the professional head of the Civil Service, Sir Robin Butler, has been in any way undermined—it is strong. I consider him an outstanding civil servant, and the vast majority, if not all, of the Civil Service feels the same.

Civil Service Unions

77. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service when he next intends to meet Civil Service trade unions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: I meet the Civil Service unions from time to time to discuss a range of matters.

Mr. Skinner: Will the Minister confirm that high-ranking civil servants from Oxford and Cambridge have been called upon to change the poll tax regulations about 12 times since the system came into operation? Will he give a guarantee that civil servants will not be called upon to bend the rules in a partisan political fashion to bring about the charge capping of Labour authorities, while finding a method by which to leave out Tory authorities? Will he also guarantee that the complaints procedure will be adequate for people to make the appropriate appeals?

Mr. Luce: What with questions about the Archbishop of Canterbury and about the poll tax, the assumption seems to be that I am the Minister for everything. On this occasion, I can tell the hon. Gentleman that civil servants —as we said earlier—are accountable to Ministers, and Ministers are accountable to Parliament. That is our constitutional system, and I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman does not understand that.

Mr. Aitken: Is my right hon. Friend aware that he is being asked such a wide variety of questions because the Civil Service has claimed such omniscience for so many years? The famous title given to civil servants—GCMG —was always known as "God calls me God", which seems very appropriate for the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Mr. Luce: I do not know whether my hon. Friend was recommending me for that as well. Let me make it plain that I believe that we have an outstanding Civil Service, which has a great sense of duty. Civil servants owe that duty to the elected Government of the day, and they serve those Governments with great loyalty and impartiality.

Dr. Marek: What developments can we expect in the provision of workplace nurseries for civil servants?

Mr. Luce: As the hon. Gentleman knows, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has rightly responded to representations asking him to encourage the employment of more women in not only the Civil Service but all employment sectors. With many other people, I welcome that: in the next few years—especially in the 1990s—many more women will be needed in the Civil Service.

Next Steps Agencies

78. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what recent representations he has received regarding the candidatures of passport offices to become next steps agencies.

Mr. Luce: The Passport Office is one of the 42 announced candidates for agency status. The main aim of the next steps initiative is to deliver Government services more efficiently and effectively, within available resources, for the benefit of taxpayers, customers and staff.

Mrs. Gorman: As we approach the season of cherry blossom, Easter holidays and Passport Office strike mayhem, will my hon. Friend consider bringing into the discussion some of the private organisations that are well experienced at making the necessary checks for the credit agencies and the banks, on the grounds that they turn round applications, having made all necessary checks, within a maximum of 10 days and at a cost of less than £2 an inquiry? Will my right hon. Friend give me his opinion on that possibility?

Mr. Luce: My hon. Friend will be aware that although it is primarily the responsibility of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, plans are well advanced for the establishment of an agency within the passport service. However, my right hon. and learned Friend has made it plain that he will use relevant private sector expertise where that would help to improve standards of service. Of course, the decsion to establish an agency, along with all the other agencies that we now have, is to help to improve services to the public. I hope that my hon. Friend will welcome that.

Disabled People

79. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what plans he has to encourage Government Departments to adhere to the quota system in order to ensure that better opportunities are available to enable disabled people to be recruited into the Civil Service.

Mr. Luce: All Departments aim to employ a 3 per cent. quota of staff who are registered as disabled. We will shortly be publishing a revised code of practice on disability to help to increase employment opportunities for disabled people in the Civil Service.

Mr. Wareing: It is nice to hear the Minister, who is sitting next to the Minister with responsibility for the disabled, say that the Government are trying to ensure that the quota is met, but they are not achieving much. Not a single Government Department, including the Cabinet Office, adheres to the 3 per cent. quota. Is that because it is really the Government's intention to phase out the 3 per cent. quota?

Mr. Luce: The latter part of the question is for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security, but the hon. Gentleman is wrong to suggest that no Department has met or exceeded the quota of 3 per cent. At 1 June 1989, five Government Departments were above the quota and four had reached 2·5 per cent. Overall 1·3 per cent. of Civil Service employees are registered disabled, which is a little more than the figure for the national work force.

Social Fund

3.31 pm

The Minister for Social Security (Mr. Nicholas Scott): With permission, Mr. Speaker. I will make a statement on the social fund. The House will recall that on 21 February the High Court delivered judgment on applications for judicial reviews in three cases concerning the social fund.

The judgment confirmed the power to give directions for the control and management of the social fund. It also confirmed the directions on how social fund inspectors are to review decisions, but found that some guidance was not consistent with the direction. Finally, it found that some aspects of the guidance on budgets was too prescriptive, and therefore not valid as guidance.

On the day of the judgment, the Department sent a letter to social fund officers informing them that the local office budget and the level of priority that might usually be met were factors to be taken into account in reaching a decision, but they were not the overriding factors. I am now in a position to set out in detail the further measures we shall be taking in response to the judgment.

We are today issuing new guidance to all social fund officers to take account of the court's decision that some of the guidance on the budget in the social fund manual was couched in language that was too prescriptive for guidance.

We are also issuing guidance today about applications for review from people who may have had applications to the fund turned down on grounds of insufficient priority because of budgetary constraints. A leaflet for the public to provide information on this matter is being distributed to DSS local offices.

As I have already mentioned, local offices were advised on the day of the judgment that the guidance on budgets was defective. From then onwards, cases should not have been refused on the basis of the defective guidance. However, if any applicants are dissatisfied with the social fund officer's decision they have the right to request a review in the ordinary way.

Although the court found that some of the guidance on budgets was too prescriptive, its judgment explicitly recognised that Parliament clearly intended that the social fund should be subject to strict monetary limits and that the Secretary of State needs to be able to give directions to achieve financial control. In the light of that, and so that there should be no doubt that it is the Government's intention that the social fund should be operated within a firm budgetary framework, I am introducing an amendment in the current Social Security Bill to make explicit the power of my right hon. Friend to give directions relating to the financial control of the fund. The amendment will similarly put beyond doubt my right hon. Friend's power to specify who is eligible for payments from the fund.

We will also take the opportunity to introduce two other minor amendments for the purposes of clarifying the procedures for applications for loans from the fund and the date on which an application to the fund is to be treated as having been made.

Copies of the new guidance on budgets and reviews and of the leaflet are in the Library.

I should also like to take this opportunity to remind the House that on Friday 16 February my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security laid the Social Fund (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations. These will introduce a number of beneficial changes to the scheme, with effect from 9 April. In particular, they will implement two changes which we announced in the uprating statement. First the change to the capital rule, which he made for social fund cold weather payments in January, will be extended to the other social fund-regulated payments. Thus, people aged 60 or over may qualify for help whilst retaining up to £1,000 rather than £500, in savings. Secondly, the regulations will increase the amount payable for maternity expenses from £85 to £100.

Finally, I wish to turn to the social fund budget for 1990-91. The House will recall that I announced last year that the gross allocation for discretionary payments in the coming year, 1990-91, would be £205 million. However, our experience of operating the loans element of the fund has clearly shown that it will be possible to use the available resources even more flexibly next year through the recirculation of repayments returning to the fund. I am therefore pleased to say that I am now able to increase the gross allocation by a further £10 million for 1990-91 to £215 million. This means that the gross budget for 1990-91 will be £12 million higher than the allocation made in April 1989. The £215 million will be divided to provide £152 million for loans and £63 million for grants. As in previous years, I shall be holding back £2 million as a contingency reserve.

In allocating the budgets to local offices, we have included the value of the additional allocations amounting to £3 million made in December and January to 106 offices facing particular pressure. I emphasise that every one of the Department's 448 local offices will receive a higher allocation next year. Of these, 15 per cent. will receive budget increases of 10 per cent. or more, compared with their April 1989 allocations, and nearly three quarters will get increases of 5 per cent. or more.

I shall circulate in the *Official Report* a list of the allocations to individual offices. I have also placed a copy of the allocations in the Library, together with a note explaining how they were calculated. I am confident that the measures I have announced today will ensure that the social fund continues to be a fair and flexible scheme for those who are most in need.

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): Is the Minister aware that there is a black hole in the middle of his statement? I refer to the fact that he has not told us what his amendment to the Social Security Bill is. He has not told us the one thing that the House needs to know—his answer to the High Court's judgment against him that he cannot have flexibility and discretion and a cash-limited budget at the same time.

Is the Minister aware that the real meaning of this disingenuous statement is that the Government intend to ignore the High Court decision, to give a nod and a wink to social fund officers to muddle through as best they can for the next three months or so, and, when the Bill becomes an Act in the summer, to issue a directive making it clear that the cash-limited budget must in all cases be the overriding consideration? Thus, any pretence of flexibility or discretion is removed.

Is the Minister aware that this is an incompetent, cynical and dishonest response to the High Court judgment? It is incompetent because it leaves local offices in a state of limbo, with a legal national budget to which social fund officers are entitled to have regard, but with

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local cash limits that DSS staff cannot use as a reason for rejecting applications. It is cynical because, effectively, it puts the High Court decision on ice. It is dishonest because it sidesteps any proper review of past claims in the light of the High Court ruling. On that specific point, will the Minister tell the House why he should not now instruct offices, which know exactly how many cases—and who—have been refused on priority grounds, to contact all these people and to review their claims?

Is it not clear that the statement completely dodges the central issue—that a cash-limited budget of £205 million, which has been raised by less than the rate of inflation to £215 million, cannot act as an adequate substitute in meeting need for the system of single payments, whose budget in 1986-87 of £365 million was almost twice as high?

Is the Minister aware that nothing in the statement eases the intolerable pressures building up on the social fund, which are leading to refusal rates for applications of 60 to 70 per cent? Nothing in the statement prevents the social fund from driving the poorest in our society deeper into poverty and debt. More than 400,000 people are having to repay social fund loans from their basic income support.

There is nothing in the statement that the Minister could not have said on the day of the judgment. We have waited five weeks for him to announce to social fund officers and to claimants that there will be no change. It is, "Business as usual, but do not shout it out too loud until the Government have squared the courts." Is not that a cynical and dishonest response to a High Court decision which found the Minister guilty of illegality?

Mr. Scott: On reflection, the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) may feel that his last remarks were unfair. Following the long and complicated judgment, it was right, in terms of the guidance that we are issuing today and whether we needed to legislate to put the matter right, that we should have taken legal advice and considered carefully what to do before making a statement to the House.

The purpose of the amendment is to put beyond doubt my right hon. Friend's right to issue directions to ensure that he is able to exercise financial control over the social fund budget.

The hon. Gentleman was wrong on his second point: the court did not find in the terms that he stated. Lord Justice Woolf said:

> "Although Parliament intended individual applications to be handled with flexibility, it . . . clearly intended that the scheme should be subject to strict monetary limits and the Secretary of State needs to be able to give directions to achieve financial control."

Lord Justice Woolf saw no conflict between strict monetary control and the flexibility that is at the heart of the social fund. That flexibility, combined with a firm budget each year, has proved its worth in the operation of the fund.

The reason why I do not believe that it is right for local officers to trawl for every claim and to try to identify the individuals concerned is that it is quite clear from the judgment that the change of circumstances since the original decision must be taken into account. It would be wrong to arouse expectations among perhaps thousands of claimants who might have been turned down only for their change of circumstances to show that they are not entitled to claim. The flexibility that is inherent in the scheme has proved its worth.

Sir George Young (Ealing, Acton): Is it not the case that my right hon. Friend's statement addresses itself squarely to the difficulties that arose from the judgment? The judgment made it quite clear that the social fund was meant to be subject to cash limits and that the Secretary of State must have power to give those directions. Does my right hon. Friend accept that Conservative Members regard the social fund as an effective mechanism for giving relief to those on low incomes and for the Department to plan its budget within sensible limits? With the extra help that my right hon. Friend has announced this afternoon, and with the amendment to the Social Security Bill, Conservative Members regard the social fund as an effective instrument of social policy.

Mr. Scott: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I agree with his remarks. Predecessor schemes of the social fund—single payments and so on—were totally out of control. Budgets were doubling every two years. It would have been impossible to continue with such provision and behave responsibly towards taxpayers, who provide the money for these schemes. I agree with my hon. Friend that we have achieved budgetary control and have the flexibility and capability effectively to help those most in need.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): Would it be fair to summarise the Government's statement in one sentence: the court found that the Government were breaking their own law in respect of the rights of poor people?

Will the Minister say a little more about the extra money that will now go to all offices? Will it help some claimants who are hard pressed and whose needs have not changed since they were refused help? For example, a disabled pensioner in my constituency who had no bed and borrowed a mattress, and who has found the greatest difficulty in getting up and down from the floor, was refused help from the social fund. Can we, with certainty, assure our constituents in similar circumstances that the extra help announced today will help them, or do the Government believe that such needs can remain unmet?

Mr. Scott: I disagree with the hon. Gentleman's opening sentence in which he sought to interpret the judge's findings. The central point of the judge's finding was that some of the guidance that we had issued was set out in terms which were too prescriptive. He said that we should use the language of guidance when giving guidance, not the language of direction. We are changing our policy to accord with the court's judgment because we agree, on reflection, that that is right. That does not mean that we have been behaving illegally.

The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that I will not comment on individual cases. However, the fact that we have been able to increase the budget allocation for the coming year in every local office will enable extra help to be given to some of the most deserving in our society.

Sir David Price (Eastleigh): To avoid any doubt as to the full purport of my right hon. Friend's statement, will he confirm that no social fund office will refuse a legitimate claim on the ground that it has temporarily exceeded its local budget?

Mr. Scott: My hon. Friend is entirely right to ask for clarity and I shall make the position clear. In the interim between now and when the Social Security Bill reaches the statute book, social fund offices will work on the guidance issued today, which is that social fund offices will have to take account of budget priorities, but those will not be overriding priorities, as indicated in the guidance which was found to be defective. If the Social Security Bill reaches the statute book in its present form, it will make absolutely clear my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's power to set down firm, financial guidelines for the fund's operation.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): Will not expectations be raised by the fact that this is a public statement which is presumably being broadcast? Therefore, will the Minister reconsider the suggestion made by the official Opposition that his Department and offices throughout the United Kingdom should contact applicants who have been refused? If that is impossible, can leaflets be made available soon to Members of Parliament who will have to bear the burden?

Mr. Scott: The right hon. Gentleman's second suggestion is the right way forward. Leaflets are available today in the Vote Office, if not in the Library. They are also being distributed to local offices, and local office managers are being encouraged not simply to keep them in the offices, but to make them available to citizens advice bureaux and other sources of welfare advice in their area.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Will my hon. Friend confirm that the effect of today's announcement is that more money is to be made available for social security? Is it not true that, overall, since the Government came to office, about three times as much money has been allocated to social security? Is not that far more than inflation would have added to social security? Therefore, are not the Government a caring Government when it comes to social security?

Mr. Scott: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support. Anyone who looks fairly at the Government's record since they came to office will see that, in terms of social security in general and help for the sick and disabled in particular, they have more than fulfilled their pledges to the electorate and performed a jolly sight better than the Labour party did when it was in office. We shall continue to find those resources because we run the economy much more successfully than did the Labour party.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): How will the budget of the social fund be affected if the independent living fund's current financial crisis is not resolved quickly? Will the Minister comment on that problem which, as he knows, is so important for severely disabled people in terms of community care?

Mr. Scott: I recognise what the right hon. Gentleman has said. However, he will not expect me to comment in detail today on the independent living fund because he knows that I am in touch with the trustees about their difficulties. We obviously hope to make our intentions clear about future funding in due course. However, I also recognise the valuable service that the fund has provided for severely disabled people.

Mr. Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar): While I welcome the increase in resources that my right hon. Friend has announced, I notice that approximately 70 per cent. is to be devoted to loans and only 30 per cent. to grants. In the light of the experience of the social fund so far, does my right hon. Friend remain convinced that that is the correct ratio bearing in mind the acute difficulty that some recipients will have in repaying loans? Will he also confirm that if a beneficiary defaults on the repayment of a loan in one year that will not militate against his being able to obtain a grant from the social fund in succeeding years?

Mr. Scott: That would be a matter for individual judgment by social fund officers in the particular circumstances of the case.

On the main thrust of my hon. Friend's comments, the proportion between grants and loans is broadly the same as it was last year——

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): It was not right then.

Mr. Scott: It was not wrong then. Within those parameters, it was possible for us to find in thousands of cases that people who could not get loans were given grants instead.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): Why has not the Minister taken this opportunity to remove one of the most offensive aspects of social security reviews—the withdrawal of a claimant's right to independent appeal outwith the existing social security system with regard to a claim? The Minister has quoted figures about the increases that he is making available. Is it not true that only one in 10 social security offices will see increases in their budgets that keep pace with inflation over the past 12 months? Is it not also true that even those figures are skewed as many people do not bother to claim in the first place, because they know that they will receive a loan which will come off their existing meagre income support benefits?

Mr. Scott: On the hon. Gentleman's first point, the system of reviews, including reviews within local offices of claimants' entitlements and also reviews of the work of the social fund inspectors, has worked very well. If the hon. Gentleman takes the trouble to read the judgment of Lord Justice Woolf, he will see that considerable compliments were paid to at least one social fund inspector for the meticulous way in which he carried out his work.

On the hon. Gentleman's second point, inflation is not the main issue which must be borne in mind when we are considering something the size of the social fund. We must bear in mind the level of need and the flexibility with which we can meet it. We must also consider matters such as the income support case load. As that has decreased, I suppose that some people could have made a case for reducing the size of the social fund. We have not done that—we have increased it.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancashire): Does my right hon. Friend accept that most sensible people believe that the single payment method was gobbling up far too much of the money available and that this method is much fairer? Have any of the 106 offices that are having difficulty run out of money, and, if so, what was my right hon. Friend able to do about it?

Mr. Scott: As my hon. Friend is aware, I share her view of the inadequacy of the single payment system and

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particularly the lack of any budgetary control over such payments. As has been announced already, 106 local offices were coming under pressure towards the end of last year and we were able to allocate about £3 million to help them. As pressures have become apparent in other offices since the turn of the year, we have been able to give another £1·5 million worth of help to other offices that are under pressure. No office has run out of money or is in danger of doing so.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): Will the Minister help me to advise my constituents following a meeting of just 100 people last week, many of whom were war pensioners, war widows, and on attendance allowance or disability allowance? We sat with counsellors for a long time discussing their financial problems. Many of them said, "We cannot afford to pay our poll tax. May we go to the social fund to get a loan?" Will they be able to get a loan to help to pay their poll tax?

Mr. Scott: Certainly not unless they were on income support, which is the basic qualification for getting a loan. The categories that the right hon. Gentleman mentioned —war widows, war pensioners and the disabled—are groups to which the Government have recently given substantial help.

Mr. Tim Rathbone (Lewes): Having reassured us that no office has run out of money, will my right hon. Friend also reassure us that he is content with the method of assessment of need for individual offices and the allocation of funds to those offices?

Mr. Scott: Each year we endeavour to look at the last year's allocation and see how it might be amended according to assessments of demand for the future. That requires a certain degree of fine tuning. With each year that passes we learn more about how to do that. Further, we try to ensure that no local office has too sharp a change in its allocation from one year to another.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): After the Social Security Bill has been amended, will it be possible for a local social fund officer to refuse an application on the ground that it will place undue strain on the local budget? Will the Government's guidance notes clarify the situation regarding applications for house repairs? There have been examples of one local office being given them and another not being give them.

Mr. Scott: It is up to local offices to exercise their discretion and judgment. Apart from any help under the social fund, income support can provide help, certainly with interest on loans for house repairs. The Department of the Environment also has schemes to help with such matters.

Let me make it clear that the intention behind the amendment, as I have said on several occasions, is to give my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State power to operate the fund under proper financial disciplines. It is absolutely implicit in that that local offices will be expected to adhere to fixed budgets.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) at least has the merit of consistency, because he was as over-the-top in his reaction to today's statement as he is to all statements that are made in the House? Does he agree further that there was manifold abuse of the old system of single payments and that, given the flexibility that he spoke about today, the social fund is not only a welcome development but a proper development?

Mr. Scott: When I see the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) at the Dispatch Box, I am sometimes reminded of what the late Iain Macleod said about Lord Callaghan—"The law of averages is suspended—he is always wrong."

Of course we all knew of the evidence of abuse under the single payment scheme—it was manifest around the country. Offices had thousands of applications for similar needs within a very few weeks because of take-up campaigns rather than real expressed need within their communities.

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): Will the Minister confirm that he does not collect information about different priorities given by different offices for the same types of need? How can he know whether payments are either equitable or adequate if, for instance, he does not know whether some offices deem shoes for disabled people a low priority and refuse grant on that ground?

Mr. Scott: We will monitor a number of aspects of the social fund to see whether it is meeting needs. Perhaps more important than that and more likely to meet the hon. Lady's particular requirements is the fact that, as she knows, we have commissioned research by the social policy research unit at York university. It is monitoring in some detail the effects of the social fund, and it will report next year on whether the social fund is meeting the needs that it was designed to meet when it was set up. All hon. Members will look forward to that research.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Several hon. Members are now rising who were not doing so before. I must put a limit on questions until 4.10 pm. We have an important debate ahead of us, in which I shall have to impose a 10-minute limit on speeches, and a ten-minute Bill.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): Despite the negative attitude of members of the Opposition Front Bench, who, as usual, are long on criticism and short on constructive policy, will my right hon. Friend accept my welcome for the extra money that is to be provided for the social fund which will benefit many of my constituents in Norwich? Can he explain under what circumstances my constituents, who have previously been refused payments from the social fund, will be able to reapply as a result of the statement, and will he also accept my congratulations on the swift way in which my local offices in Norwich respond to inquiries from Members of Parliament on behalf of their constituents?

Mr. Scott: I am grateful to my hon. Friend both for his praise about his local offices and for his gratitude about the money that we have been able to find to increase the level of the budget for the coming year. Anybody who has been turned down for a loan or a grant need only ask for his or her case to be reviewed by the local office. Those cases will then be reviewed in the light of the guidance that has been issued today.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. If hon. Members ask single questions, I may be able to call all those who wish to put a question.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Will the Minister confirm that the £12 million increase that he boasted about earlier does not take any account of the fact that, as he has said, he has had to increase by £4·5 million the amount that is given to social security offices during the year? Therefore, as compared with the current year's outturn, is not the increase really about £7 million, or about 3·5 per cent., at a time when the cost of living is rising by 9 per cent. for the people he describes as the most deserving in our society?

Mr. Scott: I hope that several of the reasons that have put local offices under particular pressure will be considered one-offs for last year. In the extra resources that we are giving local offices for the coming year, we still retain an ability to respond flexibly to special circumstances, such as to what happened in north Wales recently and to other pressures that are put on local offices. We intend to retain as much flexibility as we can within the overall budgetary allocation.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Did my right hon. Friend hear that in the question that attacked him for being disingenuous, the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) stated that the single payments fund was virtually double the present fund? By so doing, he clearly ignored about £65 million. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that carelessness with figures is precisely one of the reasons why the hon. Member for Oldham, West will never have the opportunity of being Secretary of State for Social Security?

Mr. Scott: I noticed the mistake that the hon. Gentleman made in his figures today. They were different from the figures that he used last time—and just as wrong.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Is the Minister aware that he let the cat out of the bag in his reply to the hon. Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Mr. Rowlands) when he admitted that, after the passing of the Social Security Bill, even those who are top priority cases may not get any help if there is a directive to that end? Can the right hon. Gentleman contradict what I have just said and give an assurance that no top priority case will ever be refused simply because of lack of money?

Mr. Scott: In the light of the increased allocation that I have announced today, I see no reason why highest priority cases should not be met. In many offices, the priorities to be met will fall well below that.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): Did my right hon. Friend hear BBC Radio 4 last Friday evening when there was a one-sided, biased, typical BBC attack on the social fund, in which one of the so-called "typical claimants" complained that she had to repay her loan for her television and video? Does my right hon. Friend agree that there are many people who would like to have a video but cannot afford one?

Mr. Scott: On the other hand, that shows the flexibility of the social fund. I do not know the circumstances of that case, but I do know that one lady who was suffering from agoraphobia and who was unable to go out was granted a loan to buy a television set and a video recorder to enhance the quality of her life. That shows the flexibility of the social fund in an imaginative way.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Why has the list of priority groups not been extended to include the homeless? I refer especially to women and children who have suffered domestic violence and who end up in hostels, but who cannot be rehoused by local authorities because they cannot get a social fund grant with which to set up a new home.

Mr. Scott: There is national guidance on this, but local offices also have the ability to set their own priority cases and to give guidance to that effect. Incidentally, although the legislation at the moment is permissive, enabling local area social fund officers—normally the local office manager—to give such guidance, that will be mandatory on them in the new scheme.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): We all sympathise with the view of any Minister who has a cash-limited budget, but a real problem arises as to where there is a genuine need. If there are more people in need than there is cash available, can my right hon. Friend assure us that it will not be spread so thin that somebody's need will not be met? That is the problem.

Mr. Scott: Any system that offers such lump sum payments within a controlled budget faces difficulties. In the *New Statesman and Society* on 2 March, Mr. Tony Lynes said that nobody has ever found a satisfactory way to cope with this situation. He was referring back to single payments as well as to the social fund. If Opposition Members—particularly the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who is Chairman of the Select Committee on Social Services and knows a great deal about this—reflect on the matter, they will know that that is true. There will be difficulties in running a scheme at the margins of a social security provision that has to cope with exceptional needs and exceptional circumstances and is budgeted. The alternative—a single payment scheme—is unacceptable.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Is it not the case that, because of the inadequacy of the social fund budget in meeting the needs of all needy people, more and more needy people will be driven into institutional care? Is that efficient? Does it deal with care of the needy? Is that the economics of the Government in dealing with this matter? Is not this system inefficient, and should not the Minister think again?

Mr. Scott: The hon. Gentleman knows that the community care grants under the social fund are an important part of the community care policy. He also knows that substantial and radical changes are being made to the policy for care in the community, to operate from April 1991, when local authorities will have extra responsibilities in this sector. We must look at community care in the round, and not narrowly at community care grants.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Had not the old system become a licence to print money? Does not the new system have the great merit, in an age of recycling, that it recycles money so that it can be lent again? Therefore, a lot of money benefits a lot more people.

Mr. Scott: I agree. Nobody can deny that the system of single payments was being abused and exploited, and that an open-ended budget encouraged such behaviour.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Does not the cash limiting of a budget that provides for the poorest, and often the destitute, only reflect how the Government are simply not interested in poverty and the position of the poor? Does not the by-election in Mid-Staffordshire tell the Government that many millions of our people——

Mr. Speaker: Order—one question. The hon. Gentleman is being unfair to his colleagues. We have only three minutes more.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Mr. Speaker, every time I ask a question, you interrupt me. Can you cease this practice? You are always doing it, and it is being commented on by my hon. Friends.

Mr. Speaker: I asked for single questions in the interests of the House, so that other hon. Members could ask questions. The hon. Gentleman always asks more than one question.

Mr. Scott: Let me put the social fund in context. The Department spends over £1 billion a week on social security, meeting need in a variety of ways. This is a fund at the edge of social security provision which provides exceptional help for exceptional needs, and it does it well and flexibly.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Under the single payment scheme, poor people could receive assistance for essential items such as furniture and clothing, but now they receive only a loan, which has to be paid back out of the lowest income—income support. Why is it that, time and again, the Government inflict further punishment on the poorest?

Mr. Scott: The hon. Gentleman overstates the attractions of the single payment scheme, whereby specific and detailed regulations determined whether somebody received any help. If they were just outside the provisions, they were denied any help, and if they were just inside, they got it. The social fund has an enviable flexibility.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Precisely how many personnel in the Minister's Department are employed to deal with the reviews which he has mentioned, where are they located and why do we not have a normal system of appeal?

Mr. Scott: I said in response to an earlier question that I believe that the review system has worked well. Individuals have built up considerable expertise in making these judgments. One of them was complimented warmly by the judge in the recent court case.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): It seems that the Minister is more interested in pedantry than poverty. Will he elaborate on local officers not being obliged to take overriding account of their budgets? What is the practical change between the position now and what it will be in a fortnight's time? What happens to the local manager who overruns his budget in response to local needs? What happens to the poor people who are deprived if that manager is in fear of the Minister's retribution?

Mr. Scott: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was in his place earlier when I said that I saw no problem in any local office outrunning its budget. I see that position continuing. Local managers are being asked not to give overriding priority to budgetary issues but to take into account a range of other factors. They have been doing that, incidentally, since the day of the judgment, but today we have issued specific guidance in that area.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Now that the Minister has admitted that in real terms the amount of money available in total will be less next year than it was this year, taking into account inflation, why does not the Minister go to cardboard city at Waterloo, instead of leaving this place and running to a television studio to be interviewed and to twist words to try to give the impression that a real advance has been made, and address the people there who have finished up in a heap because they have been unable to get the grants that used properly to be available? Why does not he tell them how many cardboard boxes could be purchased with a £2 million contingency fund?

Mr. Scott: Although I said that inflation was not the most important element which had to be considered, and that there were other factors such as the income support case load, in practice the allocation for the coming year, compared with the allocation announced for April of last year, will be broadly in line with the index that is used for calculating increases in costs, leaving out housing costs.

Basis of Social Fund Allocations 1990-91

1. This note explains the basis on which the social fund budget allocations for 1990-91 have been calculated.

Total Social Fund Budgets

2. The breakdown of the social fund budget for Great Britain for 1990-91 is as follows:

Community Care Grants: £63 million
Loans: £150 million (gross)

In addition £2 million has been held back centrally as a contingency reserve for meeting unforeseeable demands on offices in the course of the year (eg a local flood).

Principles of allocation to local offices in 1990-91

3. The 1990-91 allocation is based on a three component formula as follows:

(i) 86 per cent. of the national grants and loans budgets are distributed between local offices on the basis of their 1989-90 budget allocations;
(ii) 6 per cent. of the budgets is distributed on the basis of need as expressed by the offices' share of the national income support caseload;
(iii) 8 per cent. of the budgets is distributed on the basis of demand as expressed by the offices' share of social fund expenditure and the estimated value of refusals on grounds of insufficient priority.

The details of each of the components in the allocation formula are spelt out in more detail below.

Distribution by 1989-90 allocation

4. This simply allocates 86 per cent. of the total budget on the basis of an office's actual allocation for 1989-90. It includes where appropriate the value of any additional allocation made to 106 offices in December 1989-January 1990. The relatively high weighting given to this component ensures that the pace of change from one year to the next is contained.

Distribution by caseload

5. Caseload figures used were the average of income support caseloads at August and November 1989. Distribution was then made on the basis of an office's share of the national caseload for each of 4 client groups as follows:

P Pensioners
E Unemployed claimants paid through Unemployment Benefit Offices

D Claimants (not pensioners) receiving a disability premium

O Other income support claimants

Social fund data were then used to weight the distribution in respect of the 4 client groups on the basis of their share of payments made in the period April to December 1989 (the latest available) as follows:

	Community Care Grants *per cent.*		*Loans* *per cent.*
P	20·4	P	3·6
E	18·5	E	36·5
D	15·2	D	5·3
O	45·9	O	54·6

For example, the 20·4 per cent. of the community care grant budget distributed by caseload in relation to pensioners was made according to the following formula:

proportion of budget to individual office = pensioner caseload for the period in the individual office ÷ national pensioner caseload for the period.

The same principle was then applied for the other client groups and for the loans budget.

Distribution by demand

6. This was distributed on a similar basis to the distribution by caseload, but the weightings took account of both the value of payments in the period April to December *and* the estimated value of refusals on grounds of insufficient priority for the 4 client groups in the same period. The weightings used were as follows:

	Community Care Grants *per cent.*		*Loans* *per cent.*
P	20·3	P	3·6
E	18·5	E	36·4
D	15·2	D	5·3
O	46·0	O	54·6

(Does not sum to 100 per cent. due to rounding).

For example the 20·3 per cent. of the community care grant budget distributed by demand in relation to pensioners was made according to the following formula:

proportion of budget to individual office = value of awards and estimated value of refusals on insufficient priority grounds for pensioners for the period in the individual office ÷ national value of awards and estimated value of refusals on insufficient priority grounds for pensioners.

Adjustments to take account of changes to office catchment areas

7. Adjustments have been made where necessary to take account of office boundaries and hence to the sizes of the claimant populations served by those offices. If the change took place during the period covered by data on which the allocations are made adjustments have been based on the data for the period after the change. In other cases adjustments have been made simply by re-allocating budgets in proportion to the shifts in caseload population.

	Allocations for 1990-91 *Loans*	*Grants*
1. *London (North) Region*		
1 Aylesbury	143,035	63,570
2 Banbury	94,459	41,606
3 Barking	336,545	148,323
4 Barnet	108,611	50,409
5 Basildon	533,556	241,197
6 Bedford	259,397	115,761
7 Braintree	143,437	64,114
8 Bury St. Edmunds	160,629	72,066
9 Cambridge	272,770	125,442
10 Canning Town	273,643	113,112
11 Chelmsford	139,493	64,753
12 Clacton	115,841	51,368
13 Colchester	196,576	84,480
14 Cricklewood	261,005	111,566
15 Diss	36,445	16,997
16 Dunstable	94,899	42,297
17 Ealing DO	957,965	413,113
18 Edgware	172,564	74,153
19 Edmonton	254,432	112,130
20 Euston	272,237	125,384
21 Finsbury prk	535,198	228,214
22 Grays	247,906	109,433
23 Great Yarmouth	217,280	97,951
24 Hackney	674,492	279,522
25 Harlesden	456,034	195,341
26 Harlow	209,508	94,747
27 Harrow	205,940	89,709
28 Hemel Hempstead	121,382	56,446
29 Hendon	243,132	106,148
30 Hertford	119,982	54,454
31 High Wycombe	171,838	78,922
32 Highgate	429,221	197,251
33 Hoxton	408,137	176,015
34 Ilford	398,428	176,681
35 Ipswich	286,297	125,972
36 King's Lynn	268,366	117,659
37 Leytonstone	338,046	148,618
38 Lowestoft	196,464	86,029
39 Luton	372,065	151,594
40 Milton Keynes	308,026	129,974
41 Neasden	414,406	174,463
42 Norwich Chantry	300,033	133,442
43 Norwich Mountergate	467,025	198,894
44 Oxford	463,537	199,419
45 Paddington	400,847	184,242
46 Peterborough	672,464	284,093
47 Plaistow	378,791	159,364
48 Poplar	412,155	163,661
49 Romford	229,504	104,684
50 Shoreditch	362,591	158,363
51 Southend	300,524	132,050
52 St Albans	128,804	59,965
53 Stepney	214,181	90,893
54 Stevenage	213,057	91,947
55 Stoke Newington	325,740	137,436
56 Thames North	21,663	7,203
57 Tottenham	524,890	198,914
58 Uxbridge	263,780	116,413
59 Walthamstow	306,173	146,989
60 Watford	127,320	59,359
61 Wood Green	229,756	98,227
62 Woodgrange Park	616,125	258,911

	Allocations for 1990-91 *Loans*	*Grants*
2. *London (South) Region*		
63 Aldershot	178,887	74,195
64 Andover	71,414	32,763
65 Ashford	114,304	50,158
66 Balham	439,175	186,021
67 Basingstoke	90,736	37,966
68 Battersea	445,474	200,065
69 Bexley	382,346	164,183
70 Bloomsbury	183,605	85,037
71 Bognor Regis	117,151	52,770
72 Bracknell	113,858	52,171
73 Brighton	405,670	170,685
74 Brixton	395,636	174,105
75 Bromley	168,474	76,424
76 Camberwell	428,082	200,938

[Mr. Scott]

	Allocations for 1990-91	
	Loans	*Grants*
77 Canterbury	136,144	63,403
78 Chatham	404,165	162,622
79 Chelsea	348,299	150,360
80 Chichester	65,797	31,088
81 City (London)	101,379	45,897
82 Crawley	131,540	65,465
83 Croydon	405,634	162,169
84 Crystal Palace	411,931	184,624
85 Dartford	123,756	54,756
86 Dover	102,904	43,093
87 Eastbourne	174,820	79,517
88 Epsom	60,085	27,086
89 Fareham	212,745	86,328
90 Folkestone	127,130	55,328
91 Gravesend	121,381	51,534
92 Greenwich Park	543,040	228,284
93 Guildford	129,498	59,391
94 Hastings	233,151	113,207
95 Havant	221,873	88,514
96 Hither Green	73,266	32,100
97 Hounslow	400,588	171,874
98 Hove	173,687	82,647
99 Isle of Wight	233,831	100,865
100 Kennington Park	392,920	165,513
101 Kensington	207,091	89,444
102 Kingston	143,694	63,381
103 Lewes	110,718	49,701
104 Lewisham	578,812	243,943
105 Maidstone	164,592	71,760
106 Mitcham	135,644	61,585
107 New Forest	146,950	63,445
108 New Malden	78,558	34,349
109 Newbury	85,820	39,107
110 Orpington	94,885	42,199
111 Oval	411,832	199,167
112 Peckham	373,719	150,368
113 Portsmouth North	192,992	82,902
114 Portsmouth South	200,435	75,035
115 Reading	389,218	162,972
116 Redhill	106,415	48,222
117 Sittingbourne	180,284	74,574
118 Slough	235,074	101,459
119 Southampton	511,747	211,718
120 Southwark	459,613	224,244
121 Streatham	372,453	132,927
122 Sutton	84,297	37,484
123 Thames South	35,971	14,209
124 Thanet	270,383	120,637
125 Tunbridge Wells	123,333	55,913
126 Twickenham	81,535	37,520
127 Wandsworth	222,090	95,840
128 Westminster	159,594	71,926
129 Wimbledon	177,784	75,421
130 Winchester	99,984	42,491
131 Woking	158,995	68,610
132 Woolwich	749,499	318,730
133 Worthing	163,899	74,707

	Allocations for 1990-91	
	Loans	*Grants*
3. Midlands region		
134 Birmingham, Bradford Street	335,250	135,351
135 Birmingham, Edgbaston	625,148	266,869
136 Birmingham, Erdington	576,932	250,364
137 Birmingham, Handsworth	799,580	329,888
138 Birmingham, Ladywood	481,753	203,371
139 Birmingham, Northfield	571,223	237,978
140 Birmingham, Perry Barr	425,380	173,351
141 Birmingham, Ravenhurst	299,270	136,751
142 Birmingham, South Yardley	560,904	236,831
143 Birmingham, Sparkhill	230,820	96,834
144 Birmingham, Washwood Heath	496,594	219,871
145 Boston	131,208	58,093
146 Burton on Trent	128,828	57,409
147 Cannock	219,091	87,540
148 Chesterfield	440,639	187,762
149 Corby	189,377	78,868
150 Coventry, East	766,822	300,475
151 Coventry, West	488,648	195,622
152 Derby, Becket Street	243,130	107,559
153 Derby, Heritage Gate	142,506	61,336
154 Derby, London Road	345,640	142,485
155 Dudley, North	473,956	192,810
156 Dudley, South	216,456	96,559
157 Grantham	124,724	52,820
158 Hereford	217,681	98,940
159 Ilkeston	210,207	90,097
160 Kidderminster	256,545	100,098
161 Leamington	206,992	92,591
162 Leicester, Burleys Way	246,180	107,039
163 Leicester, Lower Hill Street	373,987	168,898
164 Leicester, Norton Street	422,097	185,193
165 Leicester, Yeoman Street	596,467	257,512
166 Lichfield	328,732	130,419
167 Lincoln, Newland	328,720	142,645
168 Lincoln, Orchard Street	384,204	175,940
169 Loughborough	185,298	80,819
170 Mansfield	391,307	180,253
171 Newcastle (Staffordshire)	249,611	102,861
172 Northampton	381,709	167,452
173 Nottingham, Castle Gate	349,577	153,998
174 Nottingham, David Lane	390,691	173,760
175 Nottingham, Shakespeare Street	501,296	217,668
176 Nottingham, Station Street	390,725	178,061
177 Nuneaton	291,826	118,819
178 Redditch	199,971	83,385
179 Rugby	120,130	53,449
180 Shrewsbury	309,767	135,679
181 Skegness	92,129	[illegible]1,524
182 Smethwick	520,889	216,838
183 Stafford	137,107	60,357
184 Stoke, North	436,633	202,155
185 Stoke, South	270,571	136,199
186 Sutton-in-Ashfield	196,191	84,702
187 Telford	464,842	198,959
188 Walsall, East	350,754	141,541
189 Walsall, West	466,648	205,599
190 Wellingborough	313,093	143,008
191 West Bromwich	585,650	248,315
192 Wolverhampton, North	739,143	302,661
193 Wolverhampton, South	604,938	254,817
194 Worcester	293,150	140,745
195 Worksop	250,038	106,190

	Allocations for 1990-91	
	Loans	*Grants*
4. North East Region		
196 Ashington	234,786	99,347
197 Barnsley East	620,133	255,731
198 Barnsley West	365,951	145,800
199 Berwick-On-Tweed	28,264	12,958
200 Bishop Auckland	421,175	166,432
201 Blyth	232,230	98,808
202 Bradford East	467,994	201,271
203 Bradford South	438,044	167,746
204 Bradford West	460,400	192,187
205 Bridlington	115,977	55,814
206 Castleford	198,774	80,820
207 Chester-le-Street	212,177	89,239
208 Darlington	473,149	195,931
209 Dewsbury	343,528	144,320

	Allocations for 1990-91	
	Loans	*Grants*
210 Doncaster East	369,040	148,452
211 Doncaster West	565,027	233,417
212 Durham	167,592	70,520
213 Eston	332,612	117,649
214 Gateshead	629,613	255,508
215 Goole	120,821	54,840
216 Grimsby	571,988	229,233
217 Halifax	473,759	206,594
218 Harrogate	152,310	67,918
219 Hartlepool	374,552	140,732
220 Hemsworth	170,781	72,426
221 Hexham	53,338	23,266
222 Houghton le Spring	175,439	69,459
223 Huddersfield	435,664	166,354
224 Hull East	739,627	307,419
225 Hull West	587,794	261,897
226 Jarrow	334,685	143,382
227 Keighley	226,557	88,936
228 Leeds East	616,755	252,977
229 Leeds North	723,124	306,815
230 Leeds North West	410,147	172,485
231 Leeds South	257,377	110,404
232 Leeds West	338,689	148,522
233 Middlesbrough	1,026,303	425,264
234 Newcastle East	454,491	182,511
235 Newcastle St. James	525,249	215,269
236 Newcastle West	438,236	175,608
237 North Shields	390,196	150,718
238 Northallerton	91,357	40,935
239 Peterlee	250,323	92,217
240 Pontefract	201,917	83,894
241 Redcar	311,270	148,091
242 Rotherham North	175,258	74,687
243 Rotherham South	564,677	240,470
244 Scarborough	173,879	73,487
245 Scunthorpe	387,991	160,841
246 Seaham	83,609	36,983
247 Sheffield North East	1,001,949	421,737
248 Sheffield North West	747,022	307,967
249 Sheffield South East	492,593	217,012
250 Sheffield South West	640,112	279,536
251 Skipton	33,041	15,239
252 South Shields	497,337	189,676
253 Stanley	325,259	132,229
254 Stockton	703,498	291,002
255 Sunderland North	886,503	347,239
256 Sunderland South	616,496	257,864
257 Wakefield	373,674	149,086
258 Wallsend	283,647	119,726
259 Wath-On-Dearne	374,631	138,894
260 York	352,256	141,570

	Allocations for 1990-91	
	Loans	*Grants*
5. North West region		
261 Accrington	204,623	93,480
262 Ashton-under-Lyne	277,604	123,720
263 Barrow In Furness	169,344	77,954
264 Birkenhead, North	666,601	272,998
265 Birkenhead, South	373,485	130,710
266 Blackburn	378,438	170,376
267 Blackpool, North	324,418	141,648
268 Blackpool, South	154,875	70,151
269 Bolton	627,695	258,347
270 Bootle	560,330	213,961
271 Burnley	409,019	183,285
272 Bury	363,527	161,759
273 Buxton	30,909	14,765
274 Carlisle	194,182	87,281
275 Chester	252,427	102,669
276 Crewe	254,849	108,969
277 Crosby	407,998	167,601
278 Ellesmere Port	238,181	92,348
279 Farnworth	228,455	101,785
280 Hyde	349,041	138,223
281 Kendal	35,865	16,218
282 Kirkby	714,315	280,876
283 Lancaster	361,004	145,709
284 Leigh	279,701	117,667
285 Liverpool, Belle Vale	432,800	164,778
286 Liverpool, Breckfield	707,347	261,170
287 Liverpool, City	437,022	167,649
288 Liverpool, Edge Hill	697,433	265,786
289 Liverpool, Garston	369,258	137,483
290 Liverpool, Huyton	740,200	269,777
291 Liverpool, Norris Green	336,992	125,114
292 Liverpool, Toxteth	822,747	335,043
293 Liverpool, West Derby	208,591	93,733
294 Macclesfield	93,947	42,625
295 Manchester, Central	229,587	91,530
296 Manchester, Cheetham	401,293	170,787
297 Manchester, Chorlton	370,326	175,788
298 Manchester, Failsworth	483,861	185,628
299 Manchester, Longsight	465,942	208,763
300 Manchester, Openshaw	346,700	148,427
301 Manchester, Rusholme	583,071	252,027
302 Manchester, Wythenshawe	525,353	201,068
303 Middleton	262,766	129,129
304 Northwich	249,582	102,959
305 Oldham	465,958	200,449
306 Penrith	27,100	12,467
307 Preston, North	352,949	136,007
308 Preston, South	251,721	108,335
309 Rochdale	355,345	149,074
310 Rossendale	124,502	54,800
311 Sale	341,567	145,619
312 Salford, North	477,736	176,463
313 Salford, South	266,863	112,616
314 Skelmersdale	401,292	168,253
315 Southport	132,172	58,017
316 St. Helens	621,769	240,523
317 Stockport, North	351,744	143,432
318 Stockport, South	334,290	143,903
319 Wallasey	436,925	176,081
320 Warrington	483,835	195,430
321 Whitehaven	117,164	48,365
322 Widnes	695,020	283,478
323 Wigan	568,224	247,273
324 Wilmslow	63,766	29,744
325 Workington	160,510	71,327

	Allocations for 1990-91	
	Loans	*Grants*
6. Scotland region		
326 Aberdeen, North	389,836	157,042
327 Aberdeen, South	303,003	130,415
328 Airdrie	664,888	270,611
329 Arbroath	167,484	79,699
330 Ayr	763,604	307,842
331 Bathgate	621,697	230,488
332 Bellshill	497,399	196,076
333 Campbeltown	42,656	17,345
334 Clydebank	511,285	194,248
335 Coatbridge	483,849	193,985
336 Cowdenbeath	157,924	71,563
337 Cumbernauld	484,608	215,874
338 Dumbarton	471,984	197,033
339 Dumfries	236,055	102,314
340 Dundee, East	468,982	194,877
341 Dundee, West	410,089	160,963
342 Dunfermline	232,799	100,062
343 East Kilbride	286,051	125,844
344 Edinburgh, City	534,342	228,824
345 Edinburgh, East	487,145	207,923

[Mr. Scott]

	Allocations for 1990-91	
	Loans	*Grants*
346 Edinburgh, North	429,790	173,655
347 Edinburgh, South	452,597	184,293
348 Edinburgh, West	453,427	185,682
349 Elgin	174,277	72,784
350 Falkirk	632,230	258,908
351 Fort William	[illegible]9,063	34,422
352 Galashiels	166,965	78,833
353 Glasgow, Anniesland	777,527	289,226
354 Glasgow, Bridgeton	470,674	207,084
355 Glasgow, City	576,518	251,010
356 Glasgow, Craigton	927,243	352,205
357 Glasgow, Cranstonhill	102,093	37,212
358 Glasgow, Lauriston	871,164	399,624
359 Glasgow, Maryhill	722,959	301,734
360 Glasgow, Parkhead	893,552	368,635
361 Glasgow, Partick	410,354	169,712
362 Glasgow, Provan	1,166,302	422,841
363 Glasgow, Rutherglen	1,091,995	429,900
364 Glasgow, South Side	886,036	355,600
365 Glasgow, Springburn	1,021,888	385,773
366 Greenock	671,632	268,914
367 Hamilton	1,086,857	448,077
368 Inverness	346,912	155,765
369 Irvine	771,281	324,492
370 Johnstone	344,543	139,560
371 Kilmarnock	438,362	172,231
372 Kirkcaldy	439,964	178,730
373 Lerwick	23,403	9,925
374 Leven	175,951	66,652
375 Motherwell	669,430	269,221
376 Oban	50,720	22,057
377 Paisley	843,983	327,572
378 Perth	216,259	89,471
379 Peterhead	142,134	65,022
380 Port Glasgow	412,960	167,084
381 Stirling	419,371	165,012
382 Stornoway	77,892	37,676
383 Stranaer	98,957	47,972
384 Wick	98,462	43,692

	Allocations for 1990-91	
	Loans	*Grants*
7. Wales and South West Region		
385 Aberdare	292,246	126,417
386 Abertillery	122,815	50,443
387 Aberystwyth	101,119	44,424
388 Ammanford (Group)	86,211	40,233
389 Anglesey	193,360	83,791
390 Bargoed	239,069	95,859
391 Barnstaple	180,870	83,396
392 Barry	220,434	85,681
393 Bath	205,626	90,208
394 Blackwood	145,959	60,105
395 Bournemouth	296,414	130,273
396 Bridgend	312,631	126,137
397 Bridgwater	148,426	58,337
398 Bristol Central	281,824	122,603
399 Bristol East	321,337	141,282
400 Bristol Horfield	174,421	72,675
401 Bristol South	435,683	176,408
402 Bristol West	131,417	57,358
403 Caernarfon	143,126	57,191
404 Caerphilly	353,475	149,789
405 Cardiff Central	311,244	131,546
406 Cardiff East	545,058	220,650
407 Cardiff West	404,017	171,803
408 Carmarthen	91,885	34,671
409 Cheltenham	201,960	87,241
410 Chippenham	83,244	41,227
411 Colwyn Bay	182,791	77,355
412 Cwmbran (Group)	355,308	146,890
413 Deeside	149,140	72,095
414 Devonport	366,311	156,290
415 Ebbw Vale (Group)	218,600	87,735
416 Exeter	448,559	197,972
417 Gloucester	379,535	161,600
418 Haverfordwest	194,187	85,873
419 Launceston	93,389	40,319
420 Llanelli	248,524	101,093
421 Merthyr Tydfil	291,999	109,641
422 Morriston	333,615	146,482
423 Neath	170,133	70,510
424 Newport (Gwent)	718,053	289,714
425 Newtown (Group)	102,887	45,191
426 Pembroke Dock	125,391	52,778
427 Penzance	164,370	68,240
428 Plymouth	426,936	184,309
429 Pontypridd	238,395	107,241
430 Poole	239,791	105,215
431 Port Talbot	193,296	87,004
432 Porth	144,542	61,825
433 Porthmadog/Dolgellau	83,162	33,952
434 Rhondda West	236,167	95,407
435 Rhyl	281,126	122,373
436 Salisbury	125,910	54,850
437 St. Austell	208,197	84,672
438 Stroud	122,800	53,074
439 Swansea	614,499	277,251
440 Swindon	257,626	110,045
441 Taunton	197,265	89,178
442 Torbay	419,229	182,774
443 Trowbridge	104,374	42,567
444 Truro	251,571	119,544
445 Weston-super-Mare	147,372	63,449
446 Weymouth	141,387	65,622
447 Wrexham (Group)	392,943	156,436
448 Yeovil	110,169	52,097

Points of Order

4.14 pm

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You may have seen alarming reports in the press this weekend with headlines such as, "Ridley backs Third World aid to Soviets". Apparently the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is to press in the Cabinet for funds to be diverted from the world's poorest people to eastern Europe. If this is correct, Mr. Speaker, it is a most appalling suggestion. Britain is already——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not know whether the report is correct. What is the point of order for me?

Mrs. Clwyd: If the reports are correct, Mr. Speaker, it is an appalling suggestion. Britain is already one of the most miserly aid donors in western Europe. The value of official development assistance to the Third world has dropped by a quarter since 1979.

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is enormous pressure on time today because so many right hon. and hon. Members wish to participate in the debate on the Budget. I cannot answer the questions which the hon. Lady has put to me. I have not received a request for a statement. I am sure that what she has said will have been heard. The Leader of the house is present.

Mrs. Clwyd: I am coming to the request that I have for you, Mr. Speaker.

Given the considerable influence of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is unfair on the hon. Lady's colleagues. She is raising matters which have nothing to do with me. I cannot entertain her point of order; she has made her point.

Mrs. Clwyd: Further to my point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: What is the point of order for me?

Mrs. Clwyd: If you would allow me to finish, Mr. Speaker, I shall make that clear. I request a statement from the Government on what they intend to do in terms of the Third world budget.

Mr. Speaker: I am sure that that has been heard by those who are sitting on the Government Front Bench.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to ask your advice on something that touches upon a constitutional matter.

Over the weekend we heard that the Archbishop of Canterbury had announced his retirement. A new appointment would usually fall to be made by the Prime Minister under the procedures laid down. However, the House has an interest in this matter, which I have expressed both to you, Mr. Speaker, and in other ways. What I want to know simply is this: is it in order for a Member of Parliament to put a question to the Prime Minister on a matter that falls within the prerogative? Also, is it in order for me to raise this matter in the Adjournment debate tomorrow? If hon. Members were excluded from raising questions, not about the name but about the procedure, it would neutralise us and prevent us from raising matters of legitimate concern to the community.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that it is our practice to ask questions of the Prime Minister on the royal prerogative, but I am sure that, with a certain amount of sophistication, the right hon. Gentleman might make his point during the Adjournment motion tomorrow.

Mr. Benn: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your answer, but I had hoped that you would not feel it necessary to give an immediate decision. If the Prime Minister cannot be questioned on the exercise of powers that are entrusted to her by virtue of the fact that she is Prime Minister, this House is paralysed and cannot pursue matters that can be answered only by the Prime Minister under the arrangements governing relations with the Church of England.

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the right hon. Gentleman wishes to table a question, he should go to the Table Office where advice on this matter will be given to him.

Safety in Children's Playgrounds

4.16 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to lay down safety standards for equipment, layout and surfaces in children's playgrounds.

I introduced a Bill during the last Session that, because of lack of parliamentary time, was not successful. I wish to explain why I now wish to introduce this similar, although not identical, Bill.

Anyone who has been to a children's playground or has taken a child to one knows why the Bill is necessary. For example, most playgrounds have hard surfaces underneath the swings. The latest statistics available from the Department of Trade and Industry show that 70,000 children were taken to hospital because of accidents in playgrounds, 30,000 of them with swings.

To show how serious some accidents can be I wish to highlight one that happened in Northern Ireland. In August 1989, a nine-year-old boy fell off a swing in Hillhall. He did not deserve to fall on to a concrete kerb. He need not have broken his arm and severed two arteries. He does not deserve the fact that he may never fully regain the use of that arm. He did not deserve the fact that Lisburn council waited until after that tragedy to pledge that money was no object in keeping children safe. The question for the House is how many children's playgrounds are in that state of disrepair.

My Bill last Session resulted in one piece of good fortune for me and my children. After the playground in London to which I take my daughters had appeared several times on television—when the broken kerbs, the uneven concrete and the lumps of metal sticking out of the ground were highlighted—the local authority magically discovered that it needed to put down safer surfacing. I am grateful for that, but I should also be grateful if local authorities would think about how many more playgrounds need safer surfacing.

It is difficult to get a ten-minute Bill through Parliament, but, having had the temperature of debate raised not only by my Bill last Session but by the many people who have campaigned throughout the country wanting to know what would happen to their children's playgrounds, local authorities decided to revise their policies and to lay down safer surfacing, provide new equipment and generally uprate their playgrounds. Progress has been slow. I regret that some local authorities have even run away from the problem. They have been able to do so because some scientific data are misleading.

One report produced by Karen King and David Ball, who worked for the Greater London council scientific services and now are in business on their own, have suggested that safer surfacing is not as good as it should be and that its safety cannot be measured. The data used by those people are not only sometimes out of date, but many are foreign, and so cannot be checked. Advice on safer surfacing and other safety matters is best left to the British experts. In this area, as in so many, British industry and British experts lead. Clearly, safer surfacing can make a dramatic impact on preventing accidents in children's playgrounds.

The Bill that I introduced last year had other effects. The Government have decided that a new code of guidance shall be introduced, and I am grateful to the Minister for Sport who will introduce it later this year. Once again, local authorities will have it brought to their attention that they need to do something about children's playgrounds. It is important that they should look at the good work done by our experts.

Last year's Bill was comprehensive. It would have changed children's playgrounds completely in about five years. Within that time, local authorities would have had to fit new safer surfacing and equipment. This Bill is much less draconian. Some people may worry about the expenditure ramifications, but local authorities will not need to spend more money than necessary. However, they must ensure that they buy the right equipment.

The main effect of last year's Bill was that, in revising their policy, many local authorities spent a great deal of money on new equipment and safe surfacing and thereby stretched the capacity of British industry. Some imports do not comply with the relevant British standards. In this Bill I am asking the House to approve that all equipment sold for use in public playgrounds should conform with British standard 5696, part 2, and the fitting advice in part 3. Where that British standard does not apply, the equipment should comply with the relevant standards laid down by DIN or other British standards. That would help and guide local authorities which are not entirely clear what they should buy. The legislation would help to prevent needless injury to many children in our playgrounds.

We cannot run away from the problem, or pretend that children's playgrounds are supervised, as some local authorities contend. The time is right, the technology and the information are there, so we should act now. I commend my Bill to the House. It is needed now and will stop many children being injured in playgrounds.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Robert G. Hughes, Mr. Paul Boateng, Mr. James Cran, Mr. Michael Jack, Mr. Ian McCartney, Mr. Graham Riddick, Mr. Ian Taylor, Mr. Matthew Taylor and Mr. Patrick Thompson.

SAFETY IN CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUNDS

Mr. Robert G. Hughes accordingly presented a Bill to lay down safety standards for equipment, layout and surfaces in children's playgrounds: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 4 May and to be printed. [Bill 110.]

Orders of the Day

WAYS AND MEANS

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [20 March].

AMENDMENT OF THE LAW

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That it is expedient to amend the law with respect to the National Debt and the public revenue and to make further provision in connection with finance; but this Resolution does not extend to the making of any amendment with respect to value added tax so as to provide—

(a) for zero-rating or exempting any supply;
(b) for refunding any amount of tax;
(c) for varying the rate of that tax otherwise than in relation to all supplies and importations; or
(d) for relief other than relief applying to goods of whatever description or services of whatever description.—*[Mr. Major.]*

Question again proposed.

Budget Resolutions and Economic Situation

[Relevant documents: European Community Document No. 9487/89 on the Annual Economic Report 1989-90 and the un-numbered Explanatory Memorandum submitted by HM Treasury on 31st January 1990 on the final version of the Report as adopted by the Council.]

Mr. Speaker: Before the House resumes the Budget debate, I must point out that resolution 26 on page 3421 of the Order Paper contains an error which occurred in production. The word "unquoted" in paragraphs *(a)* and *(b)* should be omitted. The resolution will be duly moved in the correct form.

As I said earlier, in view of the pressure on time, I propose to put a limit on speeches between 7 o'clock and 9 o'clock this evening, and I hope that that limit will be borne in mind by the hon. Members on the Front Benches as well as by Privy Councillors.

4.25 pm

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Michael Howard): The last seven years have seen unprecedented growth in employment and the longest and largest continuous fall in unemployment since the war. That is the reality of the economic performance of this Government. It is a record which the economic strategy set out in the Budget is designed to sustain and reinforce.

The scale of what has been achieved is far too often taken for granted. In fact, our record on jobs is unequalled in Europe, and the envy of much of the world. There are now 27 million jobs in the United Kingdom—more than ever before—3·4 million more than in 1983. Jobs have grown three times faster than the European average—faster than in France, faster than in Germany, faster even than in Japan.

We have seen unemployment falling steadily for 43 months running. At 1·6 million, it is now half what it was in 1986. Our unemployment rate of 5·6 per cent. is a full three percentage points below the European Community average. Long-term unemployment has been falling even faster than the total number of unemployed which is down 780,000 since 1986.

Some hon. Members may recall that, in the general election of 1987, the Opposition promised a reduction in unemployment of 1 million within two years. We did it in less than two—with the very economic policies which the Opposition opposed and vowed to overturn. Where would those 3·4 million extra jobs be now if the Opposition had had its way and pursued its policies of high spending and high taxation?

The Budget statement continues to give the first priority to the control of inflation, because nothing is more calculated to undermine competitiveness and sap industrial and business confidence. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer made it clear last Tuesday that we cannot afford to take risks with inflation. Of course, no one—neither the small business nor the home owner—likes high interest rates.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman not missing out a fundamental point? When the Government came to power, unemployment was just over a million. It went up rapidly—at an unprecedented rate—to just short of three million. A decrease from that figure is bringing down unemployment which this Government caused.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is leaving out the fundamental issue—the fact that there are one and a half million more jobs now than there were in 1979. That is a fundamental fact that the hon. Gentleman would do well to recall.

Neither new businesses nor home owners like high interest rates, but it would be wrong to relax the tight monetary and fiscal framework at this point or to reduce interest rates prematurely. If we can get inflation under control, the prospect is for renewed economic growth, increased business confidence and more jobs. But that means maintaining interest rates at high levels for as long as necessary.

What happens to jobs in the short term depends on those who are negotiating pay settlements. If unions seek, and managements concede, pay increases which are not warranted by the competitive position of their firms, or the local labour markets in which they operate, the result will be higher production costs, declining competitiveness, and ultimately job losses.

One of the most important factors in the unprecedented growth in employment over the last seven years has been the enthusiasm of investors in other countries to put their money into British businesses. That is one of the most significant differences between the economic record of this Government and the record of the last Labour Government, and one of the most influential factors in bringing about that change has been the transformation in British industrial relations since 1979.

No one can dispute the extent of that transformation, because it is a matter of record. In the 1970s, this country lost, on average, some 13 million working days a year through strikes. The average through the last four years has been just over a quarter of that figure. In each of the last two years, the number of strikes—at 675 in 1989 and 781 in 1988—has been the lowest since 1935, and the number of strikes in January this year was the lowest January figure for over 60 years and the lowest figure for any month since September 1934.

There is one comparison which, better than any other, sums up the contrast between Labour's strike record and

[Mr. Howard]

the position today. In only two months of Labour's winter of discontent—January and February 1979—this country lost 5·4 million working days because of strikes. In those two months alone, more working days were lost than in the whole of 1988 or in the whole of 1989.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): If the number of strikes is lower than ever before, and if unemployment is going down, with the result that the economic situation is so much better, why are the Government in such an economic mess?

Mr. Howard: I am sure that the whole House will welcome the voice of the ghost of the winter of discontent. What that voice uttered was wholly misconceived and wholly mistaken.

The lesson of the 1970s was clear: strikes destroy jobs. Britain's reputation for strikes, overmanning and restrictive practices exported job after British job to other countries. Since 1979, that trend has been decisively reversed.

I do not claim that the transformation of industrial relations is the result of our trade union legislation alone. What I do claim is that this transformation would never have been possible without our trade union legislation. It would never have been possible if trade union law had remained as it was in 1979, with virtually unlimited immunity for organising strikes, protection for the flying picket and power for union leaders to order their members to strike without a ballot and under threat of fines and expulsion from their union if they disobeyed.

It is all the more remarkable, therefore, that the Opposition are now committed to repealing the legislation of the last 10 years and returning, in all essential respects, to the legislation which gave this country the reputation for the worst industrial relations in the western world. They are committed to a massive extension of the scope for lawful strikes. They are committed to legislation which would once again put trade unions above the law.

I have several times challenged the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) to spell out the details of his proposals for trade union legislation. I do so again now. If it is made impossible for an employer to get a court order to stop an unlawful strike, what sanction would there be against a union which failed to hold a strike ballot? If trade unions have absolute protection against the possibility of sequestration, what action could a court take if a union refused to pay a fine or damages?

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): The right hon. and learned Gentleman has just referred to an important point. He infrequently attends the proceedings in Standing Committee on the Employment Bill. He is therefore unaware that some of his hon. Friends have said in Committee that it is right and proper to stage a dispute if life and limb are at stake. How can one hold a ballot when life and limb are at stake? Action has to be taken immediately. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree with what his hon. Friends have said?

Mr. Howard: Even the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) cannot think that the measures to which I refer, and the questions that I put to the hon. Member for Sedgefield—his party's principal employment spokesman—apply to disputes involving danger to life and limb. The disputes about which the hon. Member for Sedgefield has consistently failed to answer germane questions are those that lay at the heart of our dismal performance throughout the 1970s. The hon. Member for Sedgefield knows that a court that cannot enforce its own orders is just like a talking shop. He knows that laws that cannot be enforced are not worth the paper on which they are written. Nothing more clearly illustrates the Labour party's failure to learn the lessons of the past, or its determination to return to the policies that crippled our economy in the 1970s.

Within the overall economic framework of the Budget are a number of specific measures to promote enterprise and remove barriers to the effective matching of people with jobs. With my particular responsibilities for small firms, I know that there will be a widespread welcome for the exemption from value added tax of bad debts, for the raising of the VAT threshold to the maximum permitted by the European Community and for the simplification of the rules for VAT registration. Those are the unglamorous bits of the Budget to the general public, but they are worth around £200 million to business in a full year, and will save small firms countless hours in dealing with red tape and bureaucracy.

The Budget changes to corporation tax will also give a fillip to small and medium-sized businesses that are growing. Some 20,000 companies will benefit, and as a result many smaller companies will be able to retain more profits for investment. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said, those changes mean that we will have the most favourable structure of corporation tax rates for small companies in the European Community.

It is no accident that the first thing that visitors from eastern Europe want to know is how we have been so successful in promoting enterprise and stimulating the growth of small firms. In 1989, the number of new small firms registering for VAT was 80,000—virtually the same number as for the whole of the five years from 1974 to 1979.

The measure to exempt from tax the value of workplace nurseries and playgroups has been widely welcomed. Since I assumed my present office, I have probably been questioned and lobbied more on that issue than on any other. The change will encourage employers to set up nurseries and help to remove what is sometimes a daunting obstacle for those mothers who wish to go out to work. However, it is important that employers should continue to examine other ways of helping women who want to come back to work—through more part-time work, more job sharing, special arrangements for school holidays and similar measures. Current projections suggest that 90 per cent. of the growth in the labour force during the 1990s will be among women. That means that employers must find ways of encouraging those women who wish to do so to return to work. I am confident that the Budget measures will give an important boost to that process.

There are also important measures in the Budget to encourage share ownership. I take particular pleasure in the part played by the privatisation of the water industry in bringing the number of individual shareholders to 11 million—that is, one in four of the adult population. Since 1979, 29 major businesses and about 800,000 jobs have been returned to the private sector. That is good for the productivity and efficiency of those companies, and it is good for the competitiveness of the economy as a whole. It is also to the benefit of the employees of those companies, many of whom have bought shares in the companies concerned. That has increased their involvement in those companies, and given them a direct stake in their productivity and profitability. The measures in the Budget to give roll-over relief from capital gains tax for sales of shares in employee share ownership plans will give a further boost to that process.

Finally, let me deal with training. No one in the House would seriously dispute that our continuing economic success also depends on developing a work force that is second to none in its skills and competence. If we are to compete with the best in the world, industry must strive for the best: in quality, in innovation, in customer care and in its willingness to adapt to changing demands and new technology. That means more and better training: above all, it means more people being ready to train to higher levels of skill, and to continue upgrading their skills throughout their working lives.

The Labour party delights in constantly diminishing what the people of this country have already achieved in raising their skill levels. It likes nothing better than to exaggerate the gaps between our performance and those of our European neighbours. We shall no doubt hear more of it today from the hon. Member for Sedgefield. However, we lag behind our international competitors in some areas of education and training largely because of the policies promoted by the Labour party during the 1960s and 1970s. It was its policies which reduced standards in education and sought to bring everyone down to the same level of mediocrity; it reinforced trade union restrictive practices in training and it raised levies on the best companies to subsidise the worst. Several generations of people leaving school and entering the work force were damaged by those policies. We are all still living with the consequences.

In the past 10 years, we have begun to put right the mistakes of the previous 20. We have carried through a fundamental reform in education designed to raise basic standards and to prepare school leavers better for the demands of working life. We have swept away the training levies and the training bureaucracies. We have reduced the power of the trade unions to maintain restrictive practices. We have put the emphasis in education and training back where it should be—on standards, achievement and excellence.

The results speak for themselves. We now have record numbers of young people staying on in full-time further education beyond 16; more students than ever before in higher education—more than 1 million in 1989—and a higher proportion of young people with degrees than in France, West Germany or Japan. In addition, more than 400,000 16 and 17-year-old school leavers are receiving training each year under the youth training scheme with the opportunity to acquire recognised qualifications, and a further 420,000 unemployed adults are training each year under employment training gaining new skills to help them get back to work.

Perhaps the best news is that employers themselves are responding to the demands for skilled labour in the economy. Our latest figures show that, in 1987, employers' investment in training was at a record £18 billion; and employers trained 70 per cent. more employees in 1989 than in 1984. The benefits to the economy are to be seen in the fact that, despite an unprecedented period of economic growth, reported skill shortages in 1989 were running at about half the level of the last comparable period in 1973.

For the future, we are setting up training and enterprise councils in every part of the country—possibly the most important change in the way in which training is planned and delivered for nearly 30 years. The councils will be led by senior business leaders with responsibility for developing training and small business support in their local areas. They will have substantial resources from Government at their disposal, but their prime task will be to mobilise employers in tackling their own skill needs.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced in the Budget that, for the next five years, company donations to the councils would qualify for tax relief. That is a major vote of confidence in training and enterprise councils and a measure of their central importance in the Government's strategy for raising skill levels.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that, despite the complaints from Opposition Members, industry and commerce spend £15 billion a year on training their work forces, which is approximately five times as much as the Government do, and that what was announced in the Budget, which he has reinforced today, will encourage futher training and answer many of the complaints that we hear from the Opposition? Will he confirm that Britain is taking positive steps towards improving the quality and strength of our work force?

Mr. Howard: I entirely agree with the substance of my hon. Friend's remarks, but if he will forgive me for saying so, he has underestimated the amount spent by employers on training, which was £18 billion in 1987 and has grown since then.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): What is the comparable figure for West Germany?

Mr. Howard: It is not altogether easy to make direct comparisons with other countries, but the hon. Gentleman ought to take some pride in the amount that has been spent in Britain. We can clearly identify the substantial sums that were invested in 1987 and have increased since then.

The new tax concession that my right hon. Friend announced for training and enterprise councils is urgently needed, because the initiative is running two years ahead of schedule. More than 600 business men and women on 66 TECs around the country are already drawing up business plans for their local areas. I hope very shortly to announce that the first councils have had their plans approved and are fully operational.

With the help of the training and enterprise councils, we shall be pursuing three major priorities in the coming year. First, we shall continue to encourage stronger links between business and education so that schools and colleges are more responsive to the needs of industry and turn out young people who are better prepared for work. My Department will be investing over £400 million in this process in the next three years through the technical and vocational education initiative and our support for local partnerships between business and education. That is in addition to the work of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science in reforming the curriculum.

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): That is a very different story from that which we used to hear from the Secretary of State's predecessor, who described Britain's training

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performance as "mind-boggling", and said that we had a mountain to climb. Is the new Secretary of State disowning that analysis?

Mr. Howard: I am concentrating on addressing myself to the tasks which Britain faces. We would all do better to concentrate on those tasks rather than what the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends are so keen to do—at every moment to denigrate Britain's performance.

We shall also be looking to the training and enterprise councils to set targets for the training of 16 and 17-year-old school leavers which reflect the needs of the local labour market and raise the overall level of skills in the work force. We shall also expect them to look at how we can motivate more young people to want to train and to expect training as a normal part of their employment. A total of £2·5 billion will be available from Government over the next three years to support that process. In addition, we are looking to the TECs to draw out substantial and increasing employer contributions.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): Perhaps I can help the Secretary of State to follow the interventions by my hon. Friends. I understand that there are about 800,000 engineering apprentices in West Germany. What would be the right hon. and learned Gentleman's target in Britain?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman is quite right to recognise that his hon. Friends needed help, but I do not consider that facile comparisons are the best way of addressing the problem. We have to make sure that we are providing the training which meets the needs of employers in our country and in the local areas in which they operate. That, above all, is what the training and enterprise councils will achieve.

Mr. Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): Does my right hon. and learned Friend realise that Conservative Members are sick of comparisons with 10 years ago, which are unnecessary as 10 years ago we had nothing in anything? All the Opposition can do now is selectively choose foreign countries where they can find something that comes near to Britain. Opposition Members have referred to Germany. Representatives from our textile industry went to Germany to look at training there and found it producing nothing but industrial peasants incapable of change and flexibility. The only thing to commend it to anybody, and especially to the Opposition, was that it was extremely expensive.

Mr. Howard: I would not presume to comment on the blunt point made by my hon. Friend. It needs no elaboration from me.

We shall be looking to TECs to widen the opportunities for adults to develop and upgrade their skills, particularly skills that are in short supply. Again, the Government will support this process with over £1 billion in each of the next three years. We shall expect the councils to focus this public support on retraining unemployed people, on improving training in small firms, and on other gaps in the labour market. Above all, we shall continue to look to employers to make the major contribution in developing the skills that industry needs.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne) *rose*——

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): My right hon. and learned Friend has been talking about the very important contribution made by the training and enterprise councils. Can he confirm that the Government are minded to look favourably on the whole idea of individual training allowances, which have been suggested by many people who have studied this matter as a good way of giving extra support to individuals who want to help themselves?

Mr. Sheldon *rose*——

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend may be aware that that matter is being looked at. I am afraid that, at this stage, I cannot give him the outcome of our deliberations.

What I have described is a coherent strategy, which offers the prospect of creating a skilled work force for the 1990s. Perhaps we shall hear today from the hon. Member for Sedgefield how much of this strategy the Labour party is prepared to support. Will he acknowledge, for example, that the Government are spending about three times as much, in real terms, on training as did the last Labour Government? Will he now publicly support our programmes for training young people and unemployed adults, and encourage Labour local authorities to participate? Will he today make a commitment to retain the training and enterprise councils in their present form, with the leadership of senior business people?

Above all, will the hon. Gentleman acknowledge, and apologise for, the totally negative attitude taken by his party to every one of the training initiatives introduced by this Government in the past 10 years? No doubt the hon. Gentleman—who is turning his head away—would prefer to forget the fact that five out of the last eight Labour party conferences passed resolutions attacking the youth training scheme; that its 1988 conference declared its total opposition to employment training and called

"on all Labour Councillors and Labour controlled local authorities to boycott the scheme in every possible way";

and that several Labour councils have obeyed that injunction to the letter. How dare the Labour party lecture us on training when that is its record of shame.

Mr. Sheldon *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. If the Minister does not give way, the right hon. Gentleman must not persist.

Mr. Sheldon: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Howard: No, I am not giving way.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) had the effrontery to say last week that training had been

"grossly neglected in the past decade".—*[Official Report*, 21 March 1990; Vol. 169, c. 1131.]

The right hon. and learned Gentleman has a certain reputation for mastery of the language. He certainly has an odd definition of the word "neglect". Given that the Government of which he was a Cabinet member spent three times less, in real terms, on training, I wonder what word he would have used to describe his own Government's performance. I shall give way if he would like to intervene.

Mr. Sheldon *rose*——

Mr. Howard: I will not give way to the right hon. Gentleman.

The Leader of the Opposition told the House earlier in this debate:

"there is a consensus that there has to be increased investment . . . in training".—[*Official Report*, 20 March 1990; Vol. 169, c. 1033.]

He does not seem to have told his hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett), who told the House on 13 February that the only Labour promises were for increases in pensions and child benefits. Everything else, she said, is

"something that we hope to do as resources allow."—[*Official Report*, 13 February 1990; Vol. 167, c. 179.]

Well, perhaps the hon. Member for Sedgefield will enlighten us. Is training, as the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East said,

"the area that stands out above all others"?—[*Official Report*, 21 March 1990; Vol. 169, c. 1132.]

Or is it just one of many areas where Labour "hopes" to do more?

Mr. Blair: If the Minister cares so much about training, perhaps he will now explain why £300 million is being cut from the youth training budget over the next three years.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman may have overlooked the fact that, over the period to which he refers, there will be a substantial reduction in the number of young people coming on to the labour market. He may have overlooked the fact that employers have increased their contribution to youth training sixfold in the last two or three years and are expected to continue to increase that contribution. In overlooking those facts, he simply comes back with the knee-jerk reaction of the Opposition—that if any extra money is to be spent, it must come out of the taxpayer's pocket. That is the knee-jerk reaction that the Opposition always manifest when they make points of this kind.

Mr. Robert Sheldon: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Howard: No, I am answering the right hon. Gentleman's hon. Friend, whose question would have considerably more force if he were prepared to tell us whether training is indeed a priority, as suggested by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East, or simply one of the matters about which his party hopes to do more.

There was a fascinating revelation in the House last week. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), under pressure from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, was forced to concede that the explicit pledge in the Labour party policy review to burden every enterprise in Britain with a training levy of 0·5 per cent. of payroll—in other words, a jobs tax—still stands as Labour policy. His remarks are reported in column 1259 of Volumne 169 of the *Official Report* for 22 March.

I hope that the hon. Member for Sedgefield—who might have the courtesy to listen—will therefore explain to the House in a moment why that pledge is not mentioned anywhere in his latest policy document on training, "Investing in Britain's Future". Did he forget to put it in? Does he think that an extra burden of at least £1 billion a year on British industry is not important? Or does he disagree with his shadow Cabinet colleague that it still represents Labour policy?

Just to help the hon. Gentleman, let me remind him of what the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East said:

"of course the policy review proposals . . . are still this party's policies. The policy review was passed by the party's annual conference."—[*Official Report*, 22 March 1990; Vol. 169, c. 1259.]

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Everything has been changed since then.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Member says that everything has been changed since then. Perhaps his hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield will tell us whether it has been changed since then.

Will the hon. Member for Sedgefield go on the record today to make it clear that the Labour party is still committed, as the policy review states at page 19, to setting up an enterprise training council with guaranteed trade union representation at every workplace? Does he believe that, as the review says at page 19, creating over 1 million quangos stuffed with trade union snoopers to "guide" and "monitor" every company's training policies will really help the competitiveness of British industry?

Will he explain why his new training policy document not only omitted both these policy review commitments but also, unaccountably, left out the pound sign? Perhaps it was merely a printer's error. Perhaps he will tell the House today how much Labour would spend on training. If his party has any claim to being taken seriously, it will give clear answers to these questions.

The Budget strategy set out by my right hon. Friend offers the clear prospect of controlling inflation, of renewed growth, and of a productive economy capable of competing with the best in the world. It provides the long-term framework for business growth and for falling unemployment. It is therefore a Budget that has the best interests of all the people of this country at heart. I commend it to the House.

4.59 pm

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): After that speech, the only promotion lying in wait for the Secretary of State is the chairmanship of the Conservative party. It was a quite remarkable speech of complacency. The right hon. and learned Gentleman failed to realise that the most significant political event last week was not the Budget but the crushing defeat of the Government and their policies by the Labour party in the Mid-Staffordshire by-election. That is a reflection on not merely the heavyweight nature of our victory but the lightweight character of the Budget.

The Budget took refuge in small problems, because it shrank from the challenge of the large problems. Where it succeeded, it did so on issues that, although important, are not essential, and where it failed it did so fundamentally. That is why the cheers for it from Conservative Members were not echoed in the country. The gap between the popularity of the Budget in the Conservative party and its credibility in the country merely reminds us how great is the distance between the Government and the people whom they govern.

We all support measures to help the blind, the Football Trust, the few children in workplace nurseries and the value added tax relief for small businesses, but the questions that the people asked the Chancellor were more profound. They asked why, if privatisation was supposed to mean lower prices, they are facing unnecessary and large price increases for water and electricity. They asked why, when many believed the talk of economic miracles two years ago and budgeted, planned and borrowed on

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that basis, they now face the agony of rocketing mortgages and cuts in their living standards. They were promised that the Government's rating reform would be fairer and simpler, but they now see this Tory tax—the poll tax—as so unfair that it disgusts even those who gain from it and so chaotic to administer that even long-serving Conservative councillors have resigned rather than implement it. They asked why, but they received no answers to those questions, except a concession on the poll tax which was so incompetently handled that the Chancellor must be the first in history to give away £100 million but be politically worse off as a result.

Business and industry demand an explanation of how, after 11 years of this Government, we have the worst balance of payments deficit in our history—a deficit in new and old industries—the highest interest rates in the western world, the highest inflation of any of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries and why they are being told by Ministers of the hard road ahead and the tough medicine that we should take, as if they were newly elected and not in the second decade of continuous government.

The Chancellor's forecasts show that unemployment may rise and that it is bottoming out at 1·6 million, or closer to 2 million on the old statistical basis. People recall that the Conservative party took office 11 years ago promising a reduction in unemployment, which was about 500,000 fewer than it is today. It should never be forgotten that this Government, alone among our competitors, have had the unsought bonanza of North sea oil. The money that could have been used in planning the seeds of our future prosperity was wasted.

Our central charge is not just that the Government have squandered the opportunities of North sea oil and that they have committed serious errors of economic management but that, at best, they have neglected and, at worst, undermined Britain's industrial base and the long-term investment necessary for it.

That is evident above all in training. It is generally agreed that the key to Britain's success as a wealth-producing nation will lie in the quality of the knowledge base of the economy—the training and skills of its work force. The balance of payments gap is a reflection and product of the skills gap. Compared with our competitors abroad, that huge gap is widening. In Germany, 90 per cent. of 16 to 19-year-olds are in full-time training, in Belgium the figure is over 80 per cent. and in the United States over 80 per cent. and in Japan almost 80 per cent., but in Britain it is between 65 and 69 per cent.

There is an enormous gap between Britain and its competitor countries in the number of 16-year-olds who remain in full-time education. A report from the Confederation of British Industry found that British children are two years behind Japanese children in basic mathematical competence, that they have fewer foreign language skills than French or German children and that one third of our school leavers have no quaifications to show for their 11 years of education. In France and Germany, 90 per cent. of school leavers obtain some qualification of a standard higher than our O-level. Thirty five per cent. of French students achieve university entrance level. The figure in Germany is 30 per cent., yet in Britain it is 15 per cent.—less than half that of France or Germany.

In Britain, about 100,000 young people leave school each year and take up work without any proper training. In many competitor countries, that would be unlawful and practically unthinkable. We demanded answers to those questions from the Budget.

Not long ago, the Conservative party said that manufacturing industry mattered little and that we could get by without it. We no longer hear that said. France and Japan train two or three times as many people in mechanical, electrical and construction occupations as Britain. We need 50,000 craftspeople a year simply to catch up, but the gap is increasing. What is the Government's response? They want to curtail the activities of the engineering industry training board. In Germany, 2,000 more people obtain degrees in engineering, there are 15,000 more technicians and three or four times as many craftsmen—120,000, compared with our 35,000. My hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth) mentioned apprenticeships. In Germany, the number of apprenticeships over the past 10 years has risen to over 800,000, whereas in Britain they are down by one third. This weekend, an analysis was published by the National Computing Centre which shows that by 1995 Britain will have a 50,000 shortfall in the skilled people necessary for information technology.

The hon. Member for Calder Valley (Mr. Thompson) said that, in the textile industry, the Germans were industrial peasants. I shall read a report on textiles from the National Institute for Economic and Social Research. It compared the performances of Germany and Britain and concluded:

> "Over 80 per cent. of the German machinists in the plants we visited had completed a two or three-year day release course leading to an examination qualification similar to our City and Guilds course for skilled clothing employees. About 10 times as many pass such examinations each year in Germany as in Britain."

Mr. Donald Thompson: We found that the Germans' courses were inflexible, incapable of training and inadequate for Britain's needs.

Mr. Blair: The institute found that the courses produced higher qualifications than in Britain.

In case Conservative Members think that that applied only to manufacturing or textiles, I carefully considered the position on retailing, about which a comparison has been made between France and Britain. In retailing in France and Britain—the service sector which the Conservative party says will provide this country's future—the institute found that standards were lower in Britain. Nine times more people obtained qualifications in retailing in France than in this country, and the qualifications obtained in Britain were lower. The same position can also be found in the hotel industry, another service industry.

A recent study compared Britain with Germany, where similar numbers are employed in the hotel industry. It found that in the last decade, 35 per cent. of the staff in the hotel industry in Germany had craft-level qualifications, but in Britain only 14 per cent. of staff had them. Again, the qualifications in Germany were higher, broader-based and externally set and marked. Those qualifications gave rise to not merely a greater sense of qualification among those in Germany, but greater job satisfaction. It helps in every way to have the right type of training.

Training is important not just in manufacturing or services, but in management. According to the most recent studies, management training is of a lower standard in Britain than in West Germany. It is proper to make such comparisons because that is the very sort of country against which Britain is competing. If we are unable to compete on the basis of greater skills, it is axiomatic, and accepted on both sides, that we shall lose the race in the 1990s as surely as we lost it in the 1980s. Therefore, it is no wonder that the head of the Training Agency, Mr. Roger Dawe, has admitted:

> "At every level we are towards the bottom of the training league table, whether in education, youth training, higher level skills training or management."

The Labour party does not decry the activities of British employers who train. Within our constituencies we all know employers who train excellently, but only a few months ago the Confederation of British Industry said:

> "Britain's skill levels are lower than those in most of its competitor countries and the gap is widening."

It talked of a "quantum leap in skills" or what is called "a revolution" in skills. That is not the language of complacency, but the language of challenge, which was absent from the Secretary of State's speech.

Even the former Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), described Britain's training position as "mindboggling" and said, as was headlined in *Employment News* a few months ago:

> "We have a mountain to climb".

No wonder he did so; that BI report on training in Britain showed that almost half the work force expected to receive no further training in their working lives, two thirds of all employees said that they had received no training in the past three years and 20 per cent. of employers gave no training. Therefore, according to the Government's own study, one in five employers are not training. When asked to describe the drawback of training, 38 per cent. of employers said that it was employees leaving for other jobs. The training study found that only one in four employers had a training plan and there was little evidence of planning in training.

The position that confronts us today is, first, that we have a massive skills deficit; secondly, that deficit is in manufacturing, retailing, services and management training; thirdly, it is a deficit not merely in the quantity of training, but the quality; fourthly, the deficit is growing, not decreasing; fifthly, there are major deficiencies in attitude in certain sections of employees and employers. It is in those circumstances, and against that background, that we examine the Budget to discover what it provides to achieve a training revolution.

The Budget offers a tax concession for employers who make charitable donations to training and enterprise councils. That is so modest a proposal that, where its cost should be listed in the Red Book, there is an asterisk because the cost is negligible. Less than £5 million is lost to the Exchequer through increasing the limits of the business expansion scheme, which is much less than the £120 million given away through the abolition of stamp duty on share transactions, and less than the £5 million cost of unchanged duty on pipe tobacco, the most expensive political joke in history.

What is the Government's response to the call for a training revolution? On 6 December, the previous Secretary of State made a speech setting out what he called the "targets" that the Government should adopt for the training problems faced in Britain. That speech was entirely in keeping with his description of the training position in Britain as mindboggling. He said:

> "By the end of 1992 no young person should be employed without training, two thirds should get to national NCVQ level 2 and one quarter of them to level 3, by 1995 all of them should be at least at level 2, half at level 3."

At page 10 of his speech he said:

> "Unless we set ourselves those kinds of stretching targets, we shall not meet the need for upgrading and multi-skilling in a decade of continuing rapid change."

We therefore asked the Minister to say how we were progressing towards those targets under the new Secretary of State. I received the following reply on 8 March:

> "My predecessor offered a framework of objectives for the development of training in the 1990s. Progress on meeting the objectives depends primarily on action by organisations outside Government; they cannot be specific Government targets."—[*Official Report*, 8 March 1990; Vol. 168, c. *804*.]

That was the first response of the new regime, and we heard it again today, which is why I intervened earlier.

It is perfectly clear that we are now experiencing the classic Tory trick. When the Government come up against a problem that they cannot solve, they deny its existence. There has been a subtle but important change of rhetoric, and the Government are now talking about how well they are doing, whereas the previous Secretary of State accepted, as did many others, that the problem was serious, indeed mindboggling.

The Government's second response is to cut the training budget. It is scarcely credible that against that background, and with the need for a training revolution, the Government should cut the training budget for young people by more than £300 million in the next few years —£150 million next year, £120 million the year after and £60 million in 1992-93. We are told that the reason for that is the falling number of young people and the fact that employers are carrying more of the cost. Surely we should see the falling number of young people as an opportunity not to cut spending, but to improve the quality of the training we provide. We should view the demographic changes as an opportunity to upgrade the level of Britain's skills, not cut them. Many training and enterprise councils will start by having cuts in their funding, cuts in spending per trainee and even cuts in spending per trainee week. It is not merely a cut in the overall budget, but a cut in expenditure on each trainee.

Mr. Howard: What has the hon. Gentleman been doing since 13 February, when his hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) said that the Labour party had only two firm spending pledges, pensions and child benefit, and for all other sectors it would merely have to hope and do as resources allow? Why does not he have a word with his hon. Friend?

Mr. Blair: The right hon. and learned Gentleman should have read the speech more carefully. My hon. Friend called on the Government to restore the cuts in training. The last thing that any responsible Government should do is to cut training. How do we address the revolution in training by cutting training? In addition to youth training, we must also consider adult training. Adult training is critical because it is estimated that 80 per cent. of what will be the work force in the year 2000 are working now.

At the business and cities conference on 6 December, the former Secretary of State for Employment said that by the end of 1995 all employers of whatever size should have

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the seal of approval of the CBI for such things as training plans and upgrading the skills of their work forces. He added:

> "By not later than 31 December 1992, there should be in place a comprehensive and effective framework of sector training organisations capable of establishing and monitoring standards and capable also of providing information and advice to employers in their sectors about labour market and occupational trends and training techniques and technologies in use or development both at home and abroad."

That would seem to be an enormous task.

Mr. Robert Sheldon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me an opportunity to raise the question that I wanted to put to the Secretary of State earlier. It was a pity that the Secretary of State would not respond to me. When a new programme is announced, the Public Accounts Committee likes to know the clear objectives and, at the end of the programme, to compare the objectives with the achievements. I want to know how the Secretary of State plans to do that. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) was saying, an attempt will be made to compare objectives with achievement within a set time scale.

Mr. Blair: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. It was extraordinary that in a Budget debate the Secretary of State would not give way to my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) who is a Privy Councillor and the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. The Secretary of State was prescient in not giving way because the answer to the point raised by my right hon. Friend is that the Government are dumping the targets that the former Secretary of State set out in his important speech.

We have been looking at the sector training organisations and we have used some of the parliamentary answers secured by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) who is the Chairman of the Select Committee on Employment. We have examined the comprehensive bodies that are supposed to provide a wide range of advice across the spectrum. The notion that we can provide such a sector training strategy with the kind of organisations listed in a written answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East on 5 March is frankly laughable.

We have been checking up on some of the sector training organisations to discover what resources are available to them. Earlier I said that by the middle of the 1990s, we would have a shortfall of 50,000 in information technology. At present, the computer services industry training council covers 44,000 people and that number will soon increase to almost 300,000. At present, that council has five full-time staff. The national retailing training council, which covers 2·5 million people, has only five full-time staff, but that is more than many other councils. The United Kingdom Agricultural Supply Trade Association has only 1·25 people covering the whole association. Only 0·6 of a person covers the National Association of Master Bakers, Confectioners and Caterers. The idea that that amounts to a comprehensive sectoral strategy is, as I said, laughable.

That is the background against which the Government are abandoning targets, making cuts and trying now to deny the extent of the problem because they lack the will to solve it. That is the context in which the Budget's negligible contribution should be set.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman has been addressing the House for nearly 25 minutes. Conservative Members have been waiting patiently for him to answer the questions that I put to him during my speech. When will he tell us whether the jobs tax still forms part of Labour party policy? When will he tell us what the Labour party would do?

Mr. Blair: We would not be cutting the training budget when we should be investing more. We would be providing every young person with an entitlement to train. We would be integrating post-16 education and training, upgrading our qualifications and skills and ensuring that we have a proper legislative framework to ensure that training occurs in this country. We would ensure that there are sanctions against employers who do not train, because that is important. It is important that we set the kind of targets that are now being undermined by this Government's strategy.

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman has just made an extremely important statement. He has told us that the Labour party would impose sanctions on employers. What will those sanctions be?

Mr. Blair: They are in the policy review. We will require a training investment contribution from employers that are not training.

Mr. Howard: That is a jobs tax.

Mr. Blair: If the Secretary of State believes that the mood of the country is one of complacency towards employers that are not training, he is wrong. It is vital that we have a policy to deal with the one in five employers who do not train. That is why the TECs were appalled at the decision to cut training funding.

Of course employers must do more. To answer the Secretary of State's specific point, it is excellent that employers are showing more signs of commitment. However, as the employers admit, their contribution is in addition to, and not in substitution of, the Government's contribution. If TECs are seen simply as the means of the Government disengaging from their responsibilities, the whole project will fail.

That is why the Budget does nothing for training. It does nothing for the plight of the millions of low-paid people. It does nothing for the problems of families living on reduced child benefit and it does nothing to alleviate the hardship of millions of our citizens who face the poll tax.

As constrained as the Chancellor of the Exchequer was by the errors of the past——

Mr. Hind: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blair: No.

We were entitled to look in the Budget for some recognition of the long-term structural problems facing British industry. We now have a better chance than at any time in recent history to create the training revolution that we need. There is support for that everywhere; in industry, among the unions and, most crucially, among young people and those already in work.

We, therefore, have a great challenge and a great opportunity. It is not the poverty of aspiration among the

British people that we need fear, but the poverty of aspiration of the Government. As the Conservative party's position crumbles and Conservatives begin to fight the Tory party's internal battles because they have lost the battle for the electorate, the Labour party will look forward with enthusiasm to meeting the challenges ahead, not as critics in a Labour Opposition, but as Ministers in a Labour Government.

5.29 pm

Mr. Nigel Lawson (Blaby): I shall be brief. Partly for that reason, I shall not follow the debate that we have just heard about training, but will talk about matters more closely related to the Budget which we are debating today. I have to say on the subject of training that there is agreement on both sides of the House of its importance —there is no doubt about that.

I have to confess that I was astonished by one omission throughout the speech by the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair). Not once did he mention the vital correlation between the amount of training done by business and industry and the profitability of business and industry. Those things are intimately connected. It was the abysmal levels of profitability of British industry in the 1970s that led to the very low level of training at that time. It is the recovery in profitability which has occurred during the 1980s and which will continue, I trust, during the 1990s which is so important for all our aspirations in the future.

I should like to commend my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on his Budget. I commend it not least because of his rejection of the clamour that there was in some quarters for a massive increase in taxation. That would have been wholly misguided. He was right to resist it. I would like to quote his words from the Budget statement:

"fiscal policy is not . . . a flexible instrument which should be altered to meet short-term contingencies. Fine-tuning fiscal policy is not only disruptive to the public sector, but business, and to taxpayers, but its effects on the economy are uncertain and often destabilising."—*[Official Report*, 20 March 1990; Vol. 169, c.1015.]

I entirely endorse that judgment.

After all, in this country—let nobody forget it—we have a very strong fiscal position indeed—one which is the envy of most of the rest of the world. Given the inheritance, it took us quite a long time to get to that position. Having got to that position, we must and will stick to it. Within that context, tax changes should be driven by long-term supply side considerations and not by the short-term requirements of so-called demand management. Tax reform, which is of such importance, has a beneficial effect on economic behaviour and economic performance only to the extent that it is believed that the changes that are made will endure. That is why my right hon. Friend is right. But, in that context, of course, it follows that the task of bearing down on inflation must continue to rest, as it has rested before, with monetary policy. Again that is something which my right hon. Friend fully acknowledged, but I have to say that that is where my doubts creep in.

Let me hasten to say that I am not referring to the incentive for the expansion of broad money which my right hon. Friend introduced, bearing in mind the fact that broad money is principally composed of deposits in banks and building societies. I have no quarral with that, even though I know that one or two of my hon. Friends might find that somewhat paradoxical. No, the danger—the concern—lies with the exchange rate, for it is the exchange rate which threatens to undermine the strength of the Government's monetary policy, the strength of the discipline imposed by uncomfortable but necessary levels of interest rates.

Again, that is something which I know my right hon. Friend himself fully acknowledges. He himself said in his Budget statement that he favoured a strong exchange rate policy—quite right. It was a very important statement, but it may be that words alone will not be enough.

We have already seen that, since interest rates were raised to 15 per cent. as far back as last October, the exchange rate—the index—has lost about 5 per cent. of its value, and any further drift would clearly imperil the strength of the Government's commitment against inflation and their anti-inflationary policy. That is the one area of concern which I have.

What is the solution? Where do we go? Again, my right hon. Friend, in his Budget statement and again in his broadcast yesterday, very firmly restated the Government's commitment to sterling joining the exchange rate mechanism of the EMS. But my concern is that the timetable which is envisaged by the Government might be somewhat too leisurely for the circumstances in which we find ourselves. In my judgment, it is a pity that we did not join some time ago, but we did not, and that is that. But now we really cannot afford to take the risks involved in a leisurely timetable.

It may be that we should initially join within the framework of the wider bands before subsequently moving to the narrower bands, but the whole of the Government's commitment against inflation is potentially at risk. There is an exposed flank, and that is why I could favour the early entry of sterling, as I said, possibly initially with the wider bands, into the exchange rate mechanism of the EMS.

There is a further reason, too, Incidentally, it is far less important even than the increased influence that we would gain within the Community—influence which is particularly important in the context of the debate on European monetary union, in which I wholly and unreservedly support the Government's stand. It is important, too, as we come up to the intergovernmental conference, to discuss this in December of this year.

But there is another reason, too. As I listened, as many hon. Members did, to the speech by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) on an earlier day of this debate, it was abundantly clear that the Labour party has no alternative coherent policy whatever —none whatever. Yet the right hon. and learned Gentleman is seeking to conceal it and, to some extent, he has been successful with the media. He is seeking to conceal it by regular repetitions and incantations about the EMS and joining the exchange rate mechanism of the EMS. It is by removing the fig leaf from the Opposition that the true nakedness of their policy and the ugliness of what is revealed will be seen by all. That is devoutly to be wished.

We, of course, have a clear and coherent policy which, despite current difficulties, has brought the people of this country unparalleled improvements over the past 11 years. It must continue to do so, and it can continue to do so, but it will continue to do so only if that exposed flank of the exchange rate is protected. That means early entry into the exchange rate mechanism of the EMS. Of that I have no doubt whatever.

5.38 pm

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): I am sure that the whole House and many people outside will have listened to the very interesting speech by the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), the central portion of which I enthusiastically agree with. My hon. Friends and I have been arguing for some time that our early membership of the exchange rate mechanism is necessary for Britain's proper economic management. It is even more necessary now. As the right hon. Gentleman said, there is a great hole in the centre of the Budget, and that constitutes the exposed flank of the whole budgetary strategy.

As the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) has said, it seems odd to reflect that the Budget was less than a week ago—so much has happened in between. Returning to the Budget debate after last week's events seems a little out of kilter with the mood. However, that is not the whole case, because at the heart of the Budget debate is a lack of any commitment to the strong economic policies that the Government have talked about in the past. That is the same lack of confidence, lack of direction and confusion that has characterised the Government's policy in the past few weeks, and for which they paid a heavy penalty on Thursday and continue to pay a heavy penalty in the opinion polls.

That is not to say that we do not recognise the difficult circumstances in which the Chancellor had to frame his Budget. It was a difficult calculation. Britain stood and remains on a knife edge between high and possibly double-digit inflation on the one hand and a recession on the other. The speech of the right hon. Member for Blaby might have been better received if he had shown a little humility about leaving his successor a legacy of serious problems to address.

Those legacies can be put in the form of three questions. First, who runs the economy? Is it No. 10 or No. 11 Downing street? We all know that that is the subject upon which the right hon. Member for Blaby offered his resignation. Secondly, what is the Government's policy? That matter has been left confused and unclear in the past few months and is, in large measure, the reason why there has been a good deal of uncertainty in the money markets about the Government and the exchange rate. The third question is, what will the Chancellor do to address the problems that are the legacy of the past 10 years and, at least in part, of his right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby? What will the Government do, for instance, about the fact that, far from a Thatcher economic miracle, we are close to a Thatcher economic nightmare?

We have the highest inflation of any of the major OECD countries. We have a record that goes back for the past 11 years in which, far from tackling inflation, our rate of inflation has been higher than the average of the EC countries, inside and outside the EMS, for seven of those 11 years; it has been higher than the average of the OECD countries for eight of those 11 years, and higher than those of our major competitors for 11 out of those 11 years. If the Government are making the case that inflation is the judge and jury, they are guilty of having totally failed to tackle it.

One might also judge the country's economic position by the fact that wage rises here are now racing ahead of inflation and are rising much faster than those of any of our major competitors. One might also judge the economy by the fact that, as a percentage of GDP, investment briefly blipped, to use a favourite word of the right hon. Member for Blaby, above its level in 1979—a full 11 years ago—for just a few months last year but, according to all accounts, is now plunging hard under the high level of interest rates. By the by, our interest rates are higher than those of any of our competitor nations and are very close to a record for this nation.

Presiding over all that is the fact that, throughout the past decade, Britain's share of world markets has continued to decline at a rate not dissimilar to that experienced throughout the two previous decades. We now have a balance of trade deficit of record proportions. Those were the problems that the Budget had to address.

If the Budget sought to answer those three questions —who runs the economy, what is the Government's policy and what firm action will they take to address the serious problems now facing the British economy—it provided an answer that was at best confused and at worst unconvincing.

The Government's policy is still unclear. I cannot see any thread running through it, except for the Chancellor's rhetoric that he wants to keep inflation down. But that was immediately followed by an admission that inflation would increase in the next few months. We heard only a few vague promises and prophecies beyond that. We have learnt to mistrust the Government's prophecies about inflation or anything else, because they are all remarkable for the fact that they are all breached by substantial margins.

Who runs the economy? Is it really the case, as the right hon. Member for Blaby said, that in his heart of hearts the present Chancellor believes that we should join the exchange rate mechanism now? The resignation speech of the right hon. Member for Blaby was splendid. It was one of the best speeches that I have heard in the House. In it we learned that the right hon. Gentleman had consistently argued around the Cabinet table for joining the exchange rate mechanism and that the Prime Minister was the one who had said no. We had a hint a moment or two ago that the same conditions obtain around the Cabinet table today, and that the Prime Minister is preventing that important lacuna in the Government's policy from being filled. If that is the case, the question of who runs our economic policy remains as unanswered now as it was in the days of the previous Chancellor.

If the Government's major thrust is to tackle inflation, I fear that, as has been said, the Chancellor is playing with very high risks. Whatever happens externally, his present strategy leaves him no room for manoeuvre, except to raise interest rates. In short, where we needed a Budget that was tough, with a broad thrust that the public and the markets could understand, we got a Budget that was full of minor measures, which, unless the Government are very lucky, will fail to face up to the major problems that now confront us.

The reality of the Budget was very different from the hype and the descriptions that preceded it. We were told that we would get a lion of a Budget; but the Chancellor produced a mouse. The inadequacies of that mouse of a Budget were cruelly exposed by the reaction of the City and the foreign markets.

Of course the minor measures were welcome—who would not welcome some of the things that the Chancellor did? We had been calling for some of them for some time, as had his own Back Benchers and the Opposition. I refer especially to measures to encourage women back to work. I found it odd that in pouring some scorn on that the hon. Member for Sedgefield——

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): Barbie dolls.

Mr. Ashdown: If the hon. Lady would like to intervene, I shall be happy to give way to her.

Mrs. Beckett: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. I find it difficult to square his wise words about the value of women in work with his most ungenerous remarks about my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mrs. Heal).

Mr. Ashdown: I am not quite sure what that has to do with the debate, but as the hon. Lady has questioned me about this—as I suspected she would—I ask her to look again at my comments. I was not making a comment about that hon. Lady; I was commenting on the disgraceful way in which the Labour party would not allow a Labour candidate to speak for herself. She was treated as a Barbie doll by Walworth road. The sexist comments and approach of that manifesto are a disgrace; they completely undermine the Labour party's rhetoric about being in favour of women in society and in politics.

However, if I was to go further down that line, no doubt you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would call me back to order. Therefore, I turn to the central question of the welcome steps taken by the Chancellor.

As I was saying, it is odd that the hon. Member for Sedgefield said, somewhat contemptuously—I tried to note his exact phrase—that the Chancellor's measures would bring back to work only "a relatively small number" of women, because not many workplaces have nurseries. Unless I am mistaken, the Chancellor has precisely followed Labour's policy on this matter. Presumably, therefore, if the Chancellor's measures will bring only a few women back to work, the Labour party's measures would bring only a small number back as well.

Mr. Blair *rose*——

Mr. Ashdown: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, but I ask him to consider what my party has proposed, which is to issue vouchers that could be used whether or not there are workplace nurseries. Will he do that? I happily give way to him.

Mr. Blair: The right hon. Gentleman keeps saying that I treated the provisions on workplace nurseries contemptuously. That is entirely untrue. I was merely saying that they do not affect many people.

Mr. Ashdown: Then the criticism that the hon. Gentleman levels against the Government must be levelled against his party's policy, in which case it is odd for him to make it.

The Chancellor's proposals on savings are also welcome, although TESSA has a 1960s or 1970s flavour. According to the last figures that I saw, the level of debt has gone up from about 1·5 per cent. of average household income to 8 per cent. of average household income, whereas savings have dropped from around 12 per cent. to about 5 per cent. Therefore, I wonder how much money there is around to be put into new saving instruments and to what extent TESSA will be used simply to transfer savings from one account to another. The move and the instrument are welcome, but will they achieve what the Chancellor wants? If it did, that would be advantageous, but I doubt whether it would. Let us wait and see.

The Budget failed significantly in its central thrust. As the right hon. Member for Blaby said, the hole in it is its lack of entry into the ERM. That could, and should, be the rock upon which the Government base their anti-inflation policy. It is the mechanism by which the Government could give themselves room for manoeuvre. It is true that, were we to join the ERM, that might take the pressure off the pound and enable us to bring down high interest rates, which would be beneficial. However, it would also release money into the economy, which might be inflationary. That is why my right hon. and hon. Friends and I have recommended that the Government should be prepared to alter national insurance contribution rates and mortgage interest tax relief rates, so as to take about £2 billion out of the economy.

The Government have argued that we cannot afford to join the ERM because our inflation rate is too high. It is a matter of fact that our underlying inflation rate is around 6·2 per cent. of the RPI, whereas the average rate of countries within the ERM is around 5 per cent. Spain went in, on the broad band rate suggested by the right hon. Member for Blaby, with an inflation rate of around 7·1 per cent. There is not a serious problem—it is an excuse for the Prime Minister to prevent us from joining the ERM because of her personal prejudice and passion against anything European, and in particular the ERM. As somebody else has said, it is simply an elegant way of saying no. I have a strong suspicion that the timing of entry into the ERM will be tied to the timing of the removal of the right hon. Lady. It will not happen until she goes.

Again, the Labour party shows a depressing lack of understanding and clear commitment about what it wishes to do about the ERM. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) has said that the Labour party would like Britain to enter the ERM, but the Labour party's conditions for that remain unchanged. It has given us no idea what those conditions now amount to. It has said that we need to go in at a competitive rate. Perhaps the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) will tell us what that competitive rate will be. Is it a devaluation?

The second condition made by the Labour party is that there should be reflationary policy. It knows perfectly well that such a thing is simply unacceptable under the present conditions of the ERM, and the Bundesbank would never buy it for a moment.

Mr. Radice: What a load of rubbish.

Mr. Ashdown: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to intervene, I am happy to give way.

Mr. Radice: My party has made it clear that we are talking about negotiating objectives. If we were in government now, we would immediately want to negotiate our way into the ERM. That is a different position from that of the Government, who are not prepared to go in at all—certainly not while they have the present Prime Minister.

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman is making it clear that his party—I suspect that he has different views—wants to turn the ERM into a reflationary club. None of the other members of it would tolerate that.

[Mr. Ashdown]

The position of the Government and of the Opposition are almost exactly the same. The Government argue that they will not go into the ERM until inflation is down to the level of that in Germany, while the Labour party argues that it would not go into the ERM until the Germans risk putting their inflation rate up to the same as ours. There are equally clear ways to say, "We ain't gonna do it." It is inadequate and untruthful for the Labour party to claim that it has a stronger desire than the Government to go into the ERM.

Mr. Flannery: The right hon. Gentleman will never have to face this problem, because he will never lead a Government.

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman ought to realise that the biggest failing of his party is that, although it has become successful in opposing, it says nothing about the policies that it would introduce were it in government. The hon. Gentleman and his party are failing Britain today, although they have a real opportunity to remove the Government. They lose that opportunity by the day, because they fail to put forward proper policies. Anybody who heard the Leader of the Opposition last Friday on the "Today" programme explaining what his economic policy would be and could divine from that extraordinary collection of platitude and waffle anything that constituted something like an economic policy was capable of a divination of a high degree. The Labour party has a real opportunity to defeat the Government, but it will not do so by putting forward vacuous policies that amount to nothing.

The Budget fails in other areas. It does not realistically address the necessary steps open to the Government to protect the environment. From this Budget, I have come to the conclusion that the environment was an electoral toy with which the Prime Minister has played around and in which she has now become disinterested. The Chancellor claimed that this is a fiscally tough Budget, but we have to ask whether the £500 million that the Chancellor is taking out of the economy by bringing more people into the higher band of taxation is not more than compensated for by the £1,000 million that will be released into the economy by independent taxation. That is the moot point.

This is a weak Budget and, unless the Government are very lucky, it will be inadequate to solve the problems that confront us. The Budget does not deal seriously with these problems. It shows complacency. It is built on hope, not on solid policies. If the Government were true to their rhetoric, they would be taking risks with the Conservative party's support in the short term so as to ensure the country's stability in the long term. Instead, the Chancellor has taken risks with the economy in the long term in a vain attempt to restore the Conservative party support in the short term. We now need a party committed to free enterprise, to a just competition policy and to taking the necessary hard actions to tackle inflation. We need a party that understands the importance of Europe in that strategy, and in particular the importance of the ERM.

There was a day when some—not all—of those attributes could be claimed by the Conservative party, but not after this Budget. In it, the Chancellor takes high risks with the future. He has hoped that everything will come right. This Budget makes the point at which the Conservative party lost its nerve. If it now loses its luck as well, the price of the Budget will be high for the Conservative party, but higher still for Britain.

6 pm

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): The right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) made an extraordinary speech. All that he has to offer is immediate entry into the European exchange rate mechanism. He ended his remarks by falling out with the Opposition, not with the Government. It was an extraordinary performance and I might come back to it later.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the presentation of his maiden Budget. I think that hon. Members in all parts of the House will agree that his presentation was perfect. I believe that he gave us the right Budget. It has been overlooked that my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) left a legacy of separate taxation of husbands and wives. That will benefit about 3 million people. I am sure that none of us will forget the achievements of my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer had a difficult decision to take. He could have gone for overkill or underkill. In the event, he presented a roughly neutral Budget. He did not opt for overkill because, obviously, he did not want to risk recession. The Budget achieved about the right balance. I agree that the City's reaction was not all that favourable, but I am sure that hon. Members who have connections with the City will agree that there seems to be too much computerisation. Far too much time is spent looking at "boxes". When the programme says sell, they sell. When it says buy, they buy. Sensitivity, on other occasions a lack of sensitivity, and instant statements have an effect on our currency.

The hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) did his best to denigrate the economy, but it cannot be all that sick when we consider the amount of foreign investment that comes into the country weekly. The Japanese, the Germans and the Americans, for example, are confident in investing in Britain. We must not over-react to the fears that some express. We must not panic ourselves into entering the exchange rate mechanism. There are those who suggest that the ERM is the panacea for all our ills, and the right hon. Member for Yeovil is at the fore of that group. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer was right when he said in his Budget statement that we shall join it. It is only a question of when. There are more complications now, because we do not know what will happen with monetary union in East Germany and West Germany. The ostmark will be made convertible with the deutschmark or will be swapped with it. Helmut Kohl apparently took the decision to promise to swap and the Bundesbank did not want to have anything to do with it. So much for the so-called independence of the Bundesbank.

There is no doubt that the policy of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer of a 15 per cent. base rate has slowed down spending and had an effect on the price of housing. Hon. Members on both sides of the House must accept that. No one has mentioned the fact that our exports are increasing. They increased by 11 per cent. year on year and imports reduced by 1 per cent. three months on three months. We shall not see a miracle overnight, but the trend is favourable.

The Opposition are keen on credit controls as a means of controlling expenditure. How we could have credit controls without a reintroduction of exchange control is beyond me and, I should think, beyond most people. If the Opposition say that they want credit controls, that means that they are committed to the reintroduction of exchange control, and that goes against the EEC. One of the Madrid conditions of the United Kingdom's joining the exchange rate mechanism is the abolition of exchange controls throughout the Community. If the United Kingdom is to introduce credit controls and then have to reintroduce exchange control, how is it credible for the Opposition to say that they would join the EMS? Their position is illogical.

I welcome the repayment of the national debt. About £25 billion has been repaid over the past two or three years, which has saved us about £2·5 billion a year in interest payments. I suggest to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer that we should not over-rush the repayment. That would make credit far too easy for any Government. My right hon. Friend has discouraged borrowing to spend and I welcome, as did the right hon. Member for Yeovil, the concept of the tax-exempt special savings account. I believe that it will prove to be a success. Personal equity plans are extremely valuable, but there has been a tremendous switch from various forms of investment into PEP.

There was some new money, but not as much as was wanted. The catchment area for savings that we should target is the person with an income between £20,000 and £30,000 a year. That sort of person will find TESSA extremely good. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has said, in effect, "If you want to spend money and you do not have that money, the cost of borrowing it will be high." That has stopped a good deal of spending, but there are those who do not have to borrow to spend, and those people will find TESSA especially attractive. There is tremendous potential, especially when we consider that there are about 11 million shareholders. Two out of every three families own their own house. There are many more people now, compared with 1979, who have something to conserve.

I regret that action was not taken on disincorporation. A family business pays capital gains tax on whatever assets it may sell. When the family tries to get the money out of the family company, it has to pay capital gains tax again. It is double taxation. I remind my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer that about two years ago a discussion paper was produced. It has been discussed, and I understand that many representations have been submitted to the Treasury. I hope that my right hon. Friend will let me know what is happening.

I am struck by the absence of suggestions or options from the Opposition. It is worthy of an entry in the "Guinness Book of Records". During the by-election campaign in Mid-Staffordshire the Labour party did not hold a public meeting. No answer was given to any question asked. Surely the Opposition do not think that they will be able to adopt the same stance at a general election. Do they think that it will be sufficient merely to make vague statements attacking the Conservative party's policies? That would be a con trick on the electorate.

Before 1979, many U-turns were made to the detriment of the economy and, incidentally, to the detriment of the Conservative party politically. We must go for the long-term future of the country. Of course, we are extremely unpopular at the moment, but there is no point in trying to relax polices just to gain votes. There are some rough seas ahead, but my right hon. Friend is on the right track. If he stays on course, we will succeed.

6.10 pm

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): The hon. Member for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark) thinks that the Budget judgment is just about right. It is hard to get a Budget judgment just right, and the Chancellor bears an awesome responsibility for that.

I share one sentiment with the right hon. Gentleman, which is his admiration for Iain Macleod. My view on the Budget judgment follows that of Iain Macleod. His beliefs are not mine, but his approach to political life and the standards that he held earned him the respect and regard of many people outside his party. It is more than 20 years since he said that the Budget that was cheered on the day that it was delivered tended to look rather different later. I and many others made similar points, even before that occasion. I am sure that we could go back to the last century and find similar views. However, rarely have we seen the waving, cheering and shouting that occurred at the end of the Budget statement last week, which was then repudiated by so many the following day. The poll tax remained a problem and there was a failure to deal effectively with the pound, which resulted in Bank of England intervention.

The Chancellor was generous to his right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson). He did not blame him for his inheritance—and in these rather less scrupulous times, he earned the respect of some of us for that. The right hon. Member for Blaby thought that the exchange rate mechanism was enormously important. The reduction of inflation is the Government's principal objective, which the Chancellor confirmed in his Budget statement. The right hon. Member for Blaby thought the main way to achieve that objective was through the exchange rate mechanism. Having been denied the use of that method, it was honourable of him to resign. The present Chancellor may face a similar problem in due course.

I wish to pose two questions about the Budget. First, was it tough, and secondly, was it directed towards a general election in 1991 or 1992 or towards our economic problems? The answer to the first question came the following day with the problems of a declining pound. All Chancellors face that problem because to show toughness towards those on whom they depend to retain the value of the pound means that they frequently have to do things that they do not like. Pressures were constantly placed upon the last Labour Government to increase prescription charges. That was unimportant economically, but it showed that we were anxious to satisfy the market and do those things that we disliked most. The parallel for this Government is an increase in income tax. It may not have meant a great deal in terms of withdrawing sums of money from demand, but doing what they disliked would have shown the seriousness of the Government in their attack on inflation.

[Mr. Robert Sheldon]

In view of the Government's difficulties in trying to engineer a recession, it did not make political and economic sense to have the pre-election boomlet in 1988. It could not be avoided because the decision was taken in the light of other matters about which the then Chancellor could not convince the Government. The Government's difficulty was simple—they wanted to engineer a recession but could not do it. They have been trying to do that for more than 18 months. In the past, the simplest way to achieve that would have been to increase taxation and Excise duties and so reduce demand, but they did not do that. I understand the difficulty with VAT, because it is a simple tax of 15 per cent. It is not as easy to change it as it was to change purchase tax. However, income tax was readily available, but the Government did not know how to deal with the ghosts of the past.

The Government were left with just one club because all the others had been thrown away. Credit restraint might have sent the right signals. Although it might not have meant a great deal in theory, we should not underestimate the importance of such actions in practice on markets and individuals. Having been trailed for more than 18 months —and I believe that we are now heading for a real recession—such action may not now be worth resurrecting. It would have been available, but the opportunity was missed.

Only the day after the Budget, I received another massive credit offer, almost geared to the Budget, asking me to borrow some more money. The problem is that we are relying on interest rates, which also increase the income of savers. Although those who borrow lose during the time of high interest rates, those who save gain. We are not sure of how much those who gain then spend.

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is a terrible condemnation of the Government that, even with such high interest rates, which mean high interest for savers, the Government still had to give tax subsidies to savers?

Mr. Sheldon: The Government were in a dilemma. Everyone knows that they should have increased income tax. They could also have done more with Excise duties last year, but that time has now passed. It is usual to increase taxes if we want to reduce levels of inflation and demand. The Government were boxed in; they had only the one club and they did not use it wisely.

Borrowers spend less, but lenders may spend more because of the increased interest on their savings. The problem with soaring house prices is that more and more people spend up to the level of their income, fully satisfied that they can afford it. Many people feel that they need less money for a rainy day because the value of their house represents the savings that people used to make in the Post Office, with saving certificates, and so on. They now believe that they have a valuable cushion, so if they find themselves temporarily short of money, they borrow against their house to maintain their standard of living. The more the Chancellor tells them that there are good times around the corner, the more readily can they justify that borrowing, which they will believe will be short term.

The medium-term financial strategy states that the central objective is the defeat of inflation. I have the 1980-81 financial report—which I treasure—by the right hon. Member for Blaby. The very first sentence states:

"The Government's objectives for the medium term are to bring down the rate of inflation."

The Government have been in office for 11 years. What is a medium-term financial strategy? According to the current Red Book, it will be another four years before inflation significantly reduces. It is the longest term medium-term financial strategy that I have ever known.

The proposed solutions are similar to what they were 10 years ago. The Government produced the figures for the money supply decreasing year by year until the magic year four years on. It is now four years on and the figures are the same. Who believes them now? The price rises in 1974, about which the Prime Minister makes something every Question Time, were due to the quintupling of oil prices. Page 11 of the Red Book states:

"Reductions in marginal tax rates have increased incentives to work and save, and improved the quality of investment."

I wish that were true. Not long ago I went to the opening of a bank that had carpets up the wall. Another bank had leather lining the whole of its office space. Banks get the same investment and capital allowances as anybody who buys plant and machinery. They get a 25 per cent. reduction in the first year. Plant and machinery is worth more than that. That is the problem.

Page 11 talks about

"A firm fiscal policy . . . Frequent . . . changes . . . are harmful."

I am not sure that that is so. The right hon. Member for Blaby pointed out that tax changes should be rare, and, presumably, always downwards. Why should he have that view about tax changes? What is so holy about them? Why should they not be used for short-term alterations in people's perceptions? Why should that be left to interest rates? We never heard such an argument previously. Perhaps the Chancellor of the Exchequer will deal with that.

The Chancellor has said that he does not want to reduce interest rates because he may have to increase them again. Why should they not be used in accordance with varying circumstances? We know that he believes in short-term changes, so why should he deny himself this particular opportunity? When in the Red Book he says that monetary growth is excessive with

"too much money chasing too few goods,"

it sounds suspiciously like demand management as I used to know it. Indeed, I cannot see any difference between that formulation and demand management. With all those qualifications for money supply, is there a monetary policy at all? It is like reading tea leaves. If we see a forest or a baby in the tea leaves, we can justify it. The justification for the money supply is the same.

My second question was whether it was a Budget for the economy or for the next election. It was a balancing act and I am not sure that the Chancellor will reach the end of the tightrope safely. In 1988 the goodies were handed out too early to the Government's friends. It is a pity that they were not handed out more fairly. It is normal to hand out goodies nearer to a general election. If the Government did that for political reason, they got it wrong, and if it was for economic reasons, they also got it wrong. The inheritance —the Chancellor is kind not to refer to it—meant that the boom came at the wrong moment.

With a deficit of £21 billion a year, we have to appear a safe haven for overseas borrowing. That meant a hard Budget, but with an election only two years away it also meant that politically the Buget could not be as harsh as those who lend us money would like. Therefore, the answer to whether this is a harsh Budget is that it is not hard enough for overseas investors, and the markets expressed their anxieties.

In his Budget statement, the Chancellor said:

> "I favour a strong exchange rate."

That is not a ringing declaration, if one is trying to calm the nerves of those who deposit money here. Overseas investors look at these matters day by day because they know that once that commitment is not expressed, it is time to withdraw their money.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. John Major): I appreciate the graciousness with which the right hon. Gentleman makes his remarks. Is he aware that, although it is true that sterling fell the day after the Budget, it has since risen and is now higher than when I rose to deliver the Budget speech?

Mr. Sheldon: We must see first the amount of intervention by the Bank of England, and secondly, the long-term reaction of the markets as the Budget affects them.

In his Budget statement, the Chancellor said:

> "I am confident that the period of low growth will be short-lived—not least because of the permanent improvements in the underlying economy in the 1980s."—[*Official Report*, 20 March 1990; Vol. 169, c. 1011-14.]

Comparing 1979 with 1990, what are the permanent achievements? In the last full year of the Labour Government the balance of payments stood at plus £5 billion, whereas last year it was minus £21 billion. The non-visible balance is disappearing. In May 1979 inflation was 10·3 per cent., whereas in 1980 it was 21·9 per cent. That was not because of the quintupling of oil prices, but partly because of the doubling of VAT. Is there a permanent improvement? Inflation will increase to 9·5 per cent. as against the Labour Government's 10·3 per cent. Since the 1950s output has fallen only under this Government. In Tameside and Stockport we had 20,000 skilled engineers; now we have only 5,000. Questions about skills remain supremely relevant. Where is the permanent improvement?

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us the productivity of those 5,000 engineers compared with the 20,000? In most cases they now have multiple-headed machines and computerised lathes which have increased output.

Mr. Sheldon: The difficulty is that total output has fallen in those engineering companies. Their output is not what it used to be. More important, companies are crying out for skilled engineers. There is a shortage.

If there is a permanent improvement in the standard of living, how is it achieved? North sea oil revenues are £85 billion which has an effect on the balance of payments. We have to borrow to maintain our standard of living and sell our assets—£5 billion a year—to maintain our standard of living. Is that a permanent improvement? What happens when there are no assets to sell? The average family paid 35 per cent. in income tax in 1979, whereas now it is 37 per cent. Is that a permanent improvement? In 1979 unemployment was just over 1 million whereas today it is 2 million.

According to the Prime Minister recently, France is an economy to aspire to. In 1979 we would have been insulted if it was suggested that we should aspire to the French economy. We now find that, according to the European Commission and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Italy has a greater level of production than Britain. Will we have to aspire to Italy? Are we going to continue to go down and to aspire to the performance of countries that we thought we had long since overtaken, in the 17th and 18th centuries? The permanent improvements, in the underlying economy which the Government boast about do not exist. Industry has suffered. There is no doubt that it has suffered in my constituency, and I feel it greatly.

If we had made those sacrifices for the benefit of permanent improvements, we could have borne them and accepted them willingly, but we find that the sacrifices have been in vain. We have wasted years and this Government will shortly come to an end.

6.30 pm

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing): I join those hon. Members who have congratulated my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on his presentation of the Budget. He is a new Chancellor, the Budget was being televised for the first time, and he had remarkably little scope for manoeuvre in the Budget, but he performed his task with considerable distinction and he put forward his proposals with great cogency. I join those hon. Members who have wished him well.

In his opening remarks the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) referred to a statement by the late Iain MacLeod—with whom I had the privilege of sitting on the Opposition Front Bench and on the Government Front Bench before his untimely death—to the effect that if a Budget looked good on Budget day it was often viewed differently by Second Reading. He also said that it worked both ways, and that if a Budget did not look good on Budget day it might look better by Second Reading. Since my right hon. Friend's Budget was received with reasonable appreciation, it will continue to be so received in future.

I welcome a number of my right hon. Friend's proposals, in particular the abolition of the composite tax rate for building society accounts, which will mean that many of my poorer constituents who have previously been paying income tax in that form but in no other will no longer be subjected to it. Those people who ought to pay the full rate of tax will do so.

I welcome what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said about savings and the proposals that he made on that subject. I also welcome the fact that he raised the lower threshold for income tax but not the higher rate threshold. That shows a regard for people on low pay, despite the fact that many people, in anticipating the Budget, did not believe that he would do such a thing.

I welcome the increases that my right hon. Friend has made in indirect taxation, particularly on tobacco and alcohol. On social grounds there is a case for that increase. Those taxes were not increased last year. My right hon. Friend has more than adequately coped with inflation since then. Also his action is a clear sign to the European

[Mr. Terence L. Higgins]

Community that we do not propose to go along with its proposals for the harmonisation of indirect taxation. My right hon. Friend's decision was a clear move in the opposite direction, and I welcome that because, as the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee has pointed out, there is no argument for going along that road, particularly in regard to value added tax, to achieve the benefits of the single market in 1992. Therefore, the increase in indirect taxation should be welcomed as much for the implication of the change as for the change itself.

The major change taking place in the United Kingdom with the introduction of the community charge is in the system of local government finance—both in taxation and in expenditure. Clearly a number of anomalies exist that need to be straightened out in the light of experience. Some of them arise because local authorities have been given too much authority, for example, over the level of tax that should be applied to second homes. Some of the definitions of second homes have been nothing short of bizarre. Other anomalies need to be straightened out.

One matter which gives particular cause for concern is the substantial increase in local government exenditure. It is shown in the Red Book as a clear increase in the percentage of public expenditure in relation to gross domestic product, despite the fact that the estimate for GDP has been raised. That gives considerable cause for concern. It is uncertain to what extent the increase has been balanced by an increase in local government taxation in the form of the community charge, but its effects, in terms of controlling public expenditure, give cause for concern. Whereas previously the extra money would have come out of reserves, both expenditure and taxation are now increasing as a result of local authorities' actions. We have to consider that carefully. I hope that the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee, when it studies the Budget and takes evidence from my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, will be able to consider that unfortunate development and its implications for the Treasury's control of the economy.

The community charge sets the context in which the Government's overall budget is made. The changes I have mentioned in regard to the community charge may have a significantly greater impact than the Budget. Protests about the community charge have had considerable publicity, and it has been extremely difficult for anyone to put over the positive case for the tax. I strongly believe that it is a much fairer tax than the old rating system. Previously only 18 million of the electorate of 36 million paid any local taxation, and that was unfair. The community charge is a significant improvement.

A slogan appeared outside my town hall a little while ago saying, "The duke and the dustman pay the same". That is not the case. People at the bottom of the income scale will have substantial relief from the community charge. People with higher incomes may pay just the community charge, but they will still pay far less than the cost of the services provided to the community by the local authority. That is not an unfair arrangement. More than the cost of local services will be paid by people who are better off, for the simple reason that, taking the country as a whole, only a quarter of the cost of the services comes from the community charge, a quarter comes from business and something like a half from general taxation, which is levied on a progressive basis.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and his colleagues will be able to get across the fundamental arguments in favour of the change. Frankly, those arguments have not been adequately explained.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Higgins: No, because there is little time and I wish to make a number of other points.

On the Budget judgment, the way in which the grant system works also gives me grave concern. That is part of the problem. I greatly welcome the transition from rates to the community charge, but I have serious doubts about the way in which the grants system works. The change in local government finance is subject to Higgins first law of politics, which states that when there is any economic change the people who suffer will scream much louder than the people who benefit will cheer. That is a fact of political life and there is nothing we can do about it. However, we need to emphasise the fundamental case for the charge, and suggest that if people use local authority services they should pay something towards the cost. If people pay the community charge but not general taxation, they will still pay way under half of the cost of those services, but even that will improve accountability.

The Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee has had difficulty in finding suitable catch phrases for the Budget judgment. When the Chancellor of the Exchequer last appeared before the Committee, he suggested that he was a surfboarder in perilous waters. We have long used the analogy of balancing on a tightrope between inflation and recession. I believe that this time my right hon. Friend's Budget judgment was right. But not only is he on a tightrope; he is also on a tightrope in a very thick economic fog. This means that caution is an appropriate response.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Higgins: No. I am sorry, I do not have much time left.

The statistics upon which my right hon. Friend had to rely in formulating his Budget were in many ways seriously defective, in particular the retail sales figures. No one doubts that the high streets are considerably depressed by the action that my right hon. Friend has taken. That is, rightly, having an impact on the economy. However, it is not coming through yet in the statistics. That is creating real problems for him.

Apart from the impact of the change from rates to the community charge and the corresponding increase in public expenditure, the change is also likely to have an uncertain impact on consumption. Those who gain from the transition may save the proceeds, whereas those who now have to pay something towards the cost of local services will not have money to spend on something else. The precise impact on the economy is at this stage uncertain.

Finally, it is likely that there will be increased pressure on interest rates worldwide. Recent Japanese experience has suggested that that will be so. The transition in Germany, with the integration of the two currencies, may also raise the general level of interest rates. In those circumstances, I doubt whether my right hon. Friend, who until now has, rightly, resisted further interest rate increases in the United Kingdom, will be able to continue to do so, if interest rate increases overseas are significantly large. If that happens, it will have a significant depressing effect on the United Kingdom economy.

Against the uncertain background that I have described, and in the face of this potential threat, if my right hon. Friend had introduced a tough Budget of the kind that some City commentators wished him to introduce, there would have been a serious risk that in two or three months we should have been driven into a severe recession, with considerable implications for output and unemployment. That would have been particularly dangerous, at a time when wage settlements continue to be significantly inflationary. The two opposing forces would project a conjuncture not dissimilar from that in 1980-81, when the consequences for unemployment were very serious.

My conclusion is that, in the circumstances, my right hon. Friend's judgment was right. On reflection, I believe that it will be recognised as having been a sensible judgment. It might have been much easier to introduce the Budget in three months' time, by which time many of the present uncertainties may have been resolved, but no Chancellor of the Exchequer has such an option. I hope, therefore, that the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee will be able to investigate the matter in detail.

My right hon. Friend referred to the passages on funding policy in the Red Book. As the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne said, it is difficult to appraise just how tight or tough the Budget is and precisely what is the fiscal stance. At all events, however, we are still running, and are projected to run, a massive Budget surplus compared with previous times. It is important to take into account the fact that up to now the Government's policy of so-called "full unfunding" has meant that much of the money that was taken out of the economy has been put back by back-door means. With a surplus, therefore, my right hon. Friend has considerable scope for tightening the reins, if that seems appropriate in the weeks and months to come.

In all the circumstances, what my right hon. Friend has done is right. He has introduced many excellent specific measures, as well as taken an overall view of the economy, which is the right one to take in present circumstances.

6.44 pm

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): I am delighted to follow the right hon. Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins), who is such an excellent Chairman of the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee. I want to follow up what he said about the poll tax and the Budget judgment, but I shall not do so at the moment. I noted his remark about the Chancellor of the Exchequer being on a tightrope in an economic fog. If one is on a tightrope in an economic fog, there is a great danger that one will fall off. Perhaps the right hon. Member for Worthing was warning the Chancellor that he is about to fall off the tightrope.

I felt some sympathy for the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he spoke on Tuesday. By any standards, he has been dealt an exceptionally weak hand. He inherited from his predecessor an economy which is severely out of balance, with a high inflation rate, relative to our competitors, a large balance of payments deficit and crippling interest rates. However, he was also faced with a difficult political situation. The Chancellor's dilemma was compounded by the Government's political plight. It is difficult to make the right economic decisions if one is already 20 points behind in the opinion polls, with only two years to go before the next general election.

Until last Tuesday I thought that the Chancellor, at least in terms of style, was not making too bad a job of it. Sensibly, he has adopted a demeanour that is far more appropriate to the current problems than was the brash approach adopted by his predecessor. The right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) was never a credible Chancellor of the Exchequer of the bad times. At least the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr Major) has had the nous to admit that mistakes have been made, something which his predecessor could never bring himself to do. In contrast to the previous Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon consulted relatively widely when preparing his Budget. However, we all waited to find out whether the Chancellor's economics were as good as his style. Sadly, his Budget proved to be a disappointment —so much so that on Tuesday it was rejected by the Scots, on Wednesday by the markets and on Thursday by the voters of Mid-Staffordshire.

The Chancellor would be able to shrug off the hostile reception as a short-term setback if he could convincingly demonstrate that his strategies are likely to be successful in the longer term. I very much doubt, though, whether he can. To be effective, the Chancellor's policies have to achieve the following objectives. They must slow down the economy, reduce inflation and shift resources from imports to exports without, at the same time, clobbering output and investment and undermining productive potential, thus leading to new unemployment. In the meantime, the Chancellor must keep the markets happy, despite our relatively poor inflation record, our very large balance of payments deficit and a very uncertain European and international situation. Finally, because the Chancellor is a politician, his policies must succeed enough for him to be able to present the voters with at least a passable prospectus in time for an election in late 1991 or in 1992.

My judgment is that the Chancellor's Budget strategy will not achieve those objectives. It will not do enough to get the economy back into balance, it will fail to satisfy the markets in the longer term, and, because it will continue the pain without producing satisfactory evidence that it is working, it will also be a resounding political failure. In short, we shall get the worst of all worlds.

The Chancellor's policy is flawed in three crucial respects. It relies far too heavily on interest rates; it is not supported—as was pointed out by the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson)—by a credible exchange rate strategy; and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) said in a notable speech, it ignores the long-term requirements of the economy.

Like the previous Chancellor, the right hon. Gentleman has confirmed his faith in interest rates as "the key lever". However, the Chancellor's lever is a very blunt instrument. In his column in *The Independent on Sunday* yesterday, Christopher Huhne quoted Professor Paish's description, which is worth repeating:

> "It is like pulling a brick across a table top with a piece of elastic: nothing happens for ages, and then the brick hits you in the eye."

[Mr. Giles Radice]

That is the problem with high interest rates. As we all know, there are also some unpleasant side effects on the way. Quite apart from the impact on mortgage holders, there are already signs that the welcome investment boom of the past two years is being choked off. Inevitably, mortgage rate increases will be reflected in wage bargaining, thus adding to the inflationary spiral. In other words, the result of slowing down the economy through high interest rates is likely to be unpredictable and disruptive.

There is a case to be made for alternative monetary measures. The Chancellor is belatedly urging the financial institutions to restrain their marketing of credit facilities. It is about time. Page 18 of the Red Book contains a note on the practice in France and Germany of imposing minimum reserve asset ratios.

However, the case that I wish to make concerns not the alternative monetary arrangements, but the fact that the Chancellor should have been prepared to use fiscal policy in his Budget. Like his predecessor, the Chancellor says that he is against fine tuning. I suspect, however, that his apparent opposition in principle amounts to little more than a debating point. Despite the previous Chancellor's unprovable assertions about the improvements to the supply side, he was not averse to some fiscal fine tuning in the form of tax cuts in the run-up to the 1987 election—or, indeed, in 1988.

A more serious counter-argument is that the economy is already heading towards recession, which was the point made by the right hon. Member for Worthing. A tighter fiscal stance, it is argued, would merely pile on the agony, and it is better to wait and see what happens. That appears to be the Chancellor's strategy. In my view, such fiscal Micawberism is mistaken. Like the right hon. Member for Worthing, I predict that the Chancellor will be forced to raise interest rates again quite soon, partly in reaction to what is happening in Germany and Japan. That would be disastrous. A further rise in interest rates will clobber the real economy and bring in its wake precisely the recession that the Chancellor says that he is trying to avoid.

If the Chancellor had been prepared to act on the fiscal front in the Budget, he would have been in a better position to resist recession in the coming months. Even a modest increase in the tax take—between £1 billion and £2 billion—would have been a psychological signal both to the market and to consumers. And, because it would assist in dampening demand directly, raising taxes would help pave the way for a reduction in interest rates at the right time, and thus relieve pressure on companies and enable them to concentrate on winning orders in export markets. In that way it would be possible to maintain output, investment and employment, while at the same time bringing the economy back into balance more speedily by reducing inflation and cutting the trade deficit.

I suspect that the real reason why the Chancellor did not feel able to raise the overall yield from taxes by more than £500 million was that the Government have almost totally lost their political authority. An administration who were foolish enough to introduce the uniquely unpopular poll tax this year could not afford at the same time to increase national taxes.

Mr. Ashdown: I have listened to the hon. Gentleman's speech with some interest. He is making more sense from the Opposition Back Benches about what the Government might have done than any Opposition Front-Bencher whom I have heard. Can he tell the House whether raising taxation is Labour party policy?

Mr. Radice: I was speaking for myself; I do not commit my Front Bench. It is easy enough for the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) to speak for himself, because there are not many people behind him; indeed, at the moment there is no one alongside him. There are proposals in Labour's alternative Budget to raise taxes —for instance, on company cars—such as the Chancellor introduced. There are also some green Budget proposals——

Mr. Major: In not committing his Front Bench to anything the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) is wise, and he is following precisely the practice of his own Front Bench. I have here a quote from a distinguished economic correspondent, who said that my

"decision to go for a broadly neutral budget was finely judged, but a good one.

The extra £1 billion or so of fiscal tightening the City had been calling for would have made little difference . . . Major was probably right to resist such tightening, which would have been fine-tuning of the worst sort."

That was written in yesterday's *Sunday Times* by Professor David Currie, who has from time to time advised the Labour party Front Bench.

Mr. Radice: Different advisers give different views. In the Treasury Select Committee we have a wide range of advice from advisers giving different views on different matters, but the majority of commentators argue that the Chancellor should have taken tough fiscal measures in his Budget.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): The question is whether the Government are prepared to use any of the weapons available to them. If the view is taken that for political reasons the Government are not prepared to use the interest rate weapon, it may be necessary to use a less attractive weapon, namely taxation.

Mr. Radice: I entirely agree. We must get away from the mumbo-jumbo that says that the fiscal weapon cannot be used in the short term. That is the doctrine enuciated by the previous Chancellor, and it is wrong. It is time to get away from it. We must examine the position seriously, which is what I have been trying to do.

The Chancellor ducked the issue because he lacked the political authority. This was primarily a political and not an economic judgment.

Mr. Robert Sheldon: It is No. 10.

Mr. Radice: It may be No. 10.

Mr. Budgen: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Radice: I will not give way. I have already given way four times, which is unusual for a Back Bencher.

The Government's lack of authority is also a problem in financial markets. Most City commentators—rightly, I think—expect the value of the pound to continue to drift down during 1990. As the right hon. Member for Blaby said, that will make it more difficult to reduce inflation.

If the Chancellor had been able to announce that Britain would be joining the exchange rate mechanism in the near future, he might have been able to keep the pound steady over the next few months. However, as everyone knows, the Prime Minister has veteod British membership. I do not know whether she will gradually succumb to pressure from the Chancellor and his right hon. Friends over the coming months. She may, or perhaps—as the right hon. Member for Yeovil suggested—it will be necessary to get rid of the Prime Minister before changing the policy. Only the Conservative party can answer that conundrum.

British membership of the exchange rate mechanism is not a panacea, but it would greatly assist a British Chancellor to maintain a stable exchange rate in difficult circumstances. It would also provide a useful counter-inflationary discipline for both industry and Government. In time, as our inflation rate came down to nearer to the German level—as the French rate has done—it would probably lead to a reduction in interest rates as well. So it would have positive advantages and the sooner we join the better.

The Chancellor's strategy also ignores the long term. Apart from a token gesture towards training, neither the Autumn Statement nor the Budget offers anything constructive to improve education and training, to strengthen our research and development or to reduce our regional imbalance. Yet the skill, research and all-round effort of people in the north as well as in the south represent the real supply side of the economy. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield said, we neglect those areas at our peril. I suspect that this year's Budget will be remembered—if it is remembered at all—as a short-term Budget with short-term objectives by a short-term Chancellor.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. We are now into the 10-minute limit for speeches and wise hon. Members should keep an eye on the clock for themselves so as not to allow the Chair to ruin the last minutes of their speeches by the inevitable guillotine that will be imposed by me.

7.1 pm

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): Every Opposition Member who has spoken has suggested increasing the rates of income tax. I know that that is the result of their experience in government as that was their custom, but there is one considerable difference between the position today and that under successive Labour Governments: we do not have a financial deficit; in fact, we have had a substantial financial surplus for the past two years, and that is unique in the experience of the past 20 years or longer.

The case for increasing income tax has not been made because our position is fundamentally different. Moreover, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor was not averse to putting up taxation, because, as hon. Members have recognised, he raised the excise duties by more than the rate of inflation. That does not show any lack of authority, still less any lack of courage, on the part of my right hon. Friend.

I know that many in the City felt that the Budget should have done more to take demand out of the economy, and many of them sought increases in direct taxation. I recollect that 365 economists wrote a letter to *The Times* in 1981, after the Budget of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, saying that it would result in rapid inflation, but they were all proved wrong. The proposition put forward by those in the City and by economists that we should have taken more out of the economy by increasing direct taxation was also wrong. I do not believe that we have a choice between increasing direct taxation and reducing interest rates. Our interest rates are extremely competitive, and it is by no means certain that had we increased taxation we should thereby have been able to reduce interest rates later. I very much doubt whether that would have been the case. One has only to look at what is happening now in Japan, and to a similar extent in West Germany, to realise the truth of that observation.

I do not know what the House thinks will happen as we all have different views, but I suggest that the demand for money in eastern Europe will be extremely large in the foreseeable future. The effect of that demand will be similar to the large transfer of resources that occurred during the last hike in oil prices when so much money went to the middle east. It is no longer the case that we can envisage a gradually growing world economy in which interest rates accommodate a flow of money from surplus countries to debtor countries. There is bound to be a huge demand for money and for funds which will be attractive to investors all over the world. That brings me to the exchange rate mechanism.

The conditions we have set for joining the exchange rate mechanism are that the French and Italians should discard capital controls and that we should more nearly approximate to the rate of inflation and the interest rate in West Germany. Naturally, many people consider that that will happen over a period in which our inflation rate falls and our interest rate falls with it, but I suggest that, because of the extra demand for funds in eastern Europe, interest rates in West Germany are likely to be rather higher than one would normally expect as perhaps will be the rate of inflation, for however temporary a period. West German interest rates at 9·5 per cent. for long-term funds are extremely high, historically speaking, and it is by no means certain that the limit has yet been reached. So, by a curious twist which was in no sense expected, the convergence between our inflation rate and interest rate and those in West Germany will now occur because the West German rates are likely to increase and we expect ours to fall somewhat.

We must also consider the effectiveness of our monetary controls. I must tell my right hon. Friend the Chancellor that I have enthusiasm for almost every part of the Budget save only that part dealing with monetary policy. It may well be that I am shamefully out of date in these matters, but MO does not register with me as an indication of anything except for banks and notes in circulation and as a snapshot of the economy at any particular moment.

Mr. Budgen: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sir Peter Hordern: No. I have very limited time.

We should have proper monetary targets for broad money and for narrow money, as almost every other European country has, and we should stick to them. It is not difficult or impossible to do so if the will and determination are there, although I accept that many sacrifices will have to be made. It is no use thinking that the exchange rate mechanism is an alternative to strict monetary policy. It is no such thing.

I recognise that Britain has to face peculiar difficulties as it is the centre of so many money movements across the exchange rates and has such a wide comprehensive

[Sir Peter Hordern]

financial market. However, it would be of great benefit to Britain if we were to have a separate and strengthened Bank of England responsible for monetary policy. I have thought that for some time, and I hope that my right hon. Friend will be able to pursue a study which I understand my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) set in train.

I wholly congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on scrapping the composite rate of tax for depositors in buidling societies and for creating the new tax-exempt special savings account. I understand that £1,000 billion out of a total personal wealth of £1,860 billion is tied up in housing. Although I defer to nobody in my enthusiasm for the property-owning democracy, so much of our personal wealth being stored in bricks and mortar is not producing the supply-side revolution of which Britain is capable. I should like relief similar to the £30,000 mortgage taxation relief for those who want to start a personal savings scheme or to encourage entrepreneurs to set up in business. Taking the long-term economic view, I think that it does not make sense to freeze such a large proportion of our national assets in this way. I do not think that it is done in other countries to anything like the same degree. If one looks at the matter independently and in a reasoned way, one can only come to the conclusion that the proposition that we ought to set out to achieve such a situation is very strange.

There is competition for money because of the demand for investment in eastern Europe. That demand will certainly be met. We can expect to see in eastern Europe an increase in productivity and in production such as has not been seen since the start of the industrial revolution in the United States, when hundreds of thousands of people moved from western Europe to set in motion the biggest industrial revolution of all time. We have in prospect an economic revolution limitless in scope such as we have not seen since the beginning of the European Community. With wider European boundaries, we in western Europe can expect to see a substantial improvement.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his Budget and wish him success.

7.11 pm

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): The hon. Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) has made a very interesting and a very sensible speech. Unfortunately, because of the time limit, I am unable to respond to many of his arguments.

The Government have been desperately anxious to describe this as a tough Budget. Treasury Ministers repeated the phrase with Pavlovian predictability. The current Leader of the House, who was the first Chancellor of the Thatcher era, and has now acquired something of a reputation as a bull terrier of monetarism, was wheeled out a few days before the Budget to say in a speech that it was likely to be a tough Budget. I wondered at the time how he knew. I know now that he did not know. In fact, it seems that he was fed some dud information.

This is a timid Budget. I am sorry to say that it is the Budget of a frightened Chancellor. I do not blame him for being frightened. He is frightened by his economic inheritance—if "inheritance" is the right word—he is frightened by his Back Benchers, and, quite properly, he is frightened by the British electorate. The Tory party was elected in 1979 mainly to defeat inflation. This it has failed abysmally to do. At the moment, inflation, as measured by the RPI, stands at 7·5 per cent., and it will probably go up to 9·5 or 10 per cent. in the next few months. That is three times as high as the rate of our principal competitors in Europe—France and Germany. The French have managed to get their inflation down almost to the German level. But the rate in Britain is three times as high as the average for the seven major economies of the world.

The Prime Minister owes the British public an explanation, but they will not get it. The right hon. Lady really ought to explain to the British public why her Government, having invested so much in the defeat of inflation, cannot do as well as the French, the Germans and our other competitors. Perhaps when she next goes to the EC Council of Ministers the Treasury could arrange for her a little seminar with Chancellor Kohl of the Christian Democrats and President Mitterrand of the French Socialists. They know the trick; perhaps they could explain how what they have done might be done in Britain.

The Budget has all but abandoned monetary targets and has loosened an already-loose fiscal stance. All monetary targets, except little MO—notes and coins in circulation—have been jettisoned. Indeed, the range of increase in MO this year is to be the same as for last year. Although, according to the last Budget, the range of increase was to be reduced from 1 to 5 per cent. to 0 to 4 per cent., it is above the 1 to 5 per cent. range already. Even last year it was above 5 per cent. Does anyone seriously believe that if, over the next few months, the Chancellor sees MO again exceeding the target of 1 to 5 per cent. he will increase interest rates? Of course he will not. The pound may go down. At the end of the day, interest rates would be increased to stop a run on the pound. But if the pound goes down slowly and gradually, the Treasury will sit back. There will be benign neglect. If it looks as if the slide is getting out of control, the reserves will be thrown at it. Ultimately, if the reserves do not do the job—because they are running out—interest rates will go up. But only then will this Chancellor put interest rates up. Only then will he use monetary methods.

As a result, I do not see that the Government have any alternative, on the monetary side, to eventually joining the exchange rate mechanism of the EMS. To put it brutally, that means allowing Herr Otto Poehl of the Bundesbank to run our monetary policy. The Prime Minister may not like it. She may kick and scream, but she will have to accept it. In the end, she will have nobody but herself to blame for the failure, over 10 years, to establish a proper and sensible monetary policy.

Then there is fiscal policy. The Chancellor tells us that fiscal policy is meant to bolster—I think "bolster" is the word he used—monetary policy.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): It was "buttress".

Mr. Davies: I was about to say that it was a pretty soft bolster; perhaps I should say, instead, that it was a pretty thin and wobbly buttress.

So far as I understand it, the Government define fiscal policy as comprising three elements: the budget surplus, tight control of public expenditure, and taxation policy. Let us look at the budget surplus. It, too, is beginning to look pretty wobbly. In the last financial year it was supposed to be £14 billion, but it turned out to be £7 billion. In the next financial year it is to be £6·9 billion. But if the privatisation proceeds are taken out of that—and there is a very good case for doing so—the figure is down to £1·9 billion. Apparently it will disappear altogether in the following year. So that element of the triad of fiscal policy does not look too sound.

Let me come now to control of public expenditure. As many commentators, including Mr. Gavin Davies, of Goldman Sachs, and others have pointed out, things are not looking too good on that front either, in respect of the medium-term strategy. On the basis of forecasts of last year, public expenditure over the next three years will be up by £7 billion, £9 billion and £15 billion respectively. That is a total of £31 billion. But it is not real resources, not real money. Those are inflationary increases. So things do not look too good even on the public expenditure side of this fiscal policy.

On the taxation front, the Budget raises an extra £430 million. When the £1 billion that is already going back into the economy, as a result of independent taxation, is taken into account, we have a minus figure. So the fiscal stance is not very tough. It does not seem to buttress very well the monetary policy, which itself is a shambles.

The Chancellor and the Government are now in a very tight corner—and the Chancellor knows it. If he introduces tough measures to get inflation down, the next election will be lost; if he does not introduce tough measures to get inflation down, the next election will be lost anyway. He is in a corner, and he cannot get out of it.

Mr. Major: What would the right hon. Gentleman do?

Mr. Davies: Opposition Back Benchers do not have to make recommendations. Indeed, I commend the Opposition Back Benches to the Chancellor—it is a very comfortable place.

The present Government have had one of the easiest and most favourable 10-year periods since before 1914. They could have used those 10 years to build a foundation for the much more difficult 10 years that Britain will face in the 1990s. They neglected to do so, and for that reason, if for no other, they deserve to lose the next election, and they will do so.

7.20 pm

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): The point made by the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), who, unfortunately, is no longer present, about short-termism was entirely answered last week by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. He pointed out that since the war we have had 17 years of Labour government and 27 years of Conservative government. Under Labour Governments, our living standards increased by 14 per cent. and under Conservative Governments by 78 per cent. There could not be a better indication of how the fiscal and financial policies of Conservative management have brought achievements of lasting benefit to our nation.

The abolition of the composite rate of taxation is welcome. It will benefit the lowest paid in society, who hitherto have been prevented from recovering the tax that they pay on building society accounts. They find such accounts useful and convenient places to deposit their money. It will also be of much benefit to children and grandchildren. More than a few grandparents have opened accounts for their grandchildren, and hitherto they have been prevented from recovering the tax paid on those accounts.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor said that he is mindful of the administrative and enforcement problems that abolition of the composite rate will create. Having been a director of a building society, I should point out to him that, annually, building societies send a voucher of the interest paid to each account holder. I cannot see why that should not become a tax credit voucher, which would minimise the administrative disruption that abolition will cause the Treasury.

I was pleased to hear my right hon. Friend the Chancellor express concern about how the credit and finance institutions have encouraged people to take on further debt. At a recent meeting, the archdeacon of the Isle of Wight, Tony Turner, told me that he had monitored the amount of unsolicited mail that he had received in the past year. He received 41 letters, all encouraging him to get deeper into debt. That is a matter of considerable concern, and I have suggested to my right hon. Friend that the finance industry should make some contribution to debt counselling agencies. That would be particularly welcome, and I do not think that there is a downside to that suggestion. Brewers make considerable funds available for alcoholism counselling. No one suggests that the brewing industry causes alcoholism, so I do not see why the finance industry should not make some contribution to debt counselling.

The point made by the hon. Member for Sedgefield about training in British industry is entirely answered by an article in *The Echo* on 13 March. Its headline read "Open Doors for Women". It announced that an additional 400 jobs will be created for women in my constituency by—and this is a name to be conjured with within the Conservative party at the moment—Westland Aerospace. It has £16 million worth of new orders from

> "McDonnel Douglas of the USA, Dornier of West Germany, and Hispano Suiza, part of the French based aero engine group."

The tax allowance on training and enterprise councils and the concession for women on workplace nurseries will be welcomed. Curiously, the abolition of VAT on inshore rescue particularly affects my constituency. The Royal National Lifeboat Institution builds all its inshore rescue craft in my constituency and employs many women in its factory at east Cowes.

I should not like to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on making a tax concession for TECs without placing on record my grateful thanks to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) for granting my constituency a TEC. My constituency fell outside the original parameters for TECs, but his intervention and representations from industrialists led to that decision being made.

Will my right hon. Friend the Chancellor solve a long-running conundrum about national savings? I have no ideological problem with national savings, but, having been a director of a building society and a member of the Conservative party all my life, I cannot understand how we believe in the free enterprise economy but continue to have a state mechanism for savings. Perhaps my right hon. Friend will sit me down on his knee and give me a cup of Treasury cocoa——

Mr. Major: I shall certainly give my hon. Friend the cocoa.

Mr. Field: My right hon. Friend might not like what I am about to say. I noticed buried in the Budget a requirement to fall in line with EEC legislation and to allow EEC tax inspectors access to information on my tax affairs. I cannot accept that a Sicilian tax inspector, with all his Mafioso connections, is an ideal candidate to receive information from the Inland Revenue. This morning, I was told by chief valuation officers of the Treasury that they are unable to obtain information from the Inland Revenue when considering valuations based on profit. It is a cornerstone of our constitution that Inland Revenue information is not passed to others. I view with the greatest alarm the prospect of an Inland Revenue inspector, or his equivalent in Sicily, being aware of the returns of hon. Members.

I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has addressed the problem of companies' dual residence. He will not allow companies to escape capital gains tax by claiming to be resident here but operating from another country. In future, will that prevent the highly geared bid that we saw for DRG and other companies? If so, that will be a welcome aspect of the Budget that has not been highlighted by the financial press.

On 13 March, in response to a written question, the Treasury told me that the yield from stamp duty on a regional basis was £145 million in 1985-86 in the south-east, with an average house price of £46,392, and that by 1988-89 it had increased to £360 million on an average house price of £80,249. The housing market is the means to unlock skills and to allow greater mobility in society. Given those variations in yield, there must be a case for regional stamp duty. That would be an unexpected windfall.

In the current political climate, it may be unpopular to say in the House that the hike in mortgage rates is understandably translated into votes and electoral prospects. One of the Government's great achievements has been to make 65 per cent. of the nation home owners. However, the point that has been missed is that mortgage rates are a good regulatory mechanism against inflation. Literally thousands of pounds have been taken out of the economy and taken away from people's purchasing power, which has a far more deflationary effect than anyone has yet realised.

7.30 pm

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): Shortly after what has just been described as the Chancellor's Sicilian Budget speech, one of my colleagues said that he had admired the simplicity of its language. With characteristic generosity, I replied, "Yes, it would be churlish not to recognise that the Chancellor found that point at which ignorance and simplicity converge. Don't you think it was a pity that the steps which he outlined to deal with the immense problems facing the British economy were inversely proportionate to the tedium and length of his 75-minute speech?"

The Chancellor's lack of understanding in his slight, irrelevant Budget was adroitly summed up in an editorial in that rabid Tory newspaper the *Evening Standard* on 21 March. The editorial writer said:

> "the Budget is unlikely to make any significant impact on the increasingly severe economic problems which Britain now faces. The Chancellor's silences in this regard are worse than embarrassing: they are dangerous. Part of Mr. Major's Budget Judgment sounded like extracts from a student's essay in O Level economics."

In like manner, on television yesterday, the Chancellor referred to

> "constant waves of demand causing inflation".

I find it disturbing to have to listen to such juvenile Keynesianism from a Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The markets did not like the Budget and within hours of it they signalled their horror by pushing the pound down to its lowest ever level against the mark. Despite the Chancellor's intervention, it can be only a matter of months before the markets wreak their retribution on the Budget and he will learn, like other Chancellors before him, that those who live by the markets die by the markets.

The pundits were equally contemptuous of the Budget. Christopher Johnson, the chief economic adviser to Lloyd's bank, said that the Budget

> "may not be enough to prevent the pound falling and interest rates rising as inflation rises to nearly 9 per cent. next month."

In the UBS Phillips and Drew Budget special, Bill Martin was merely accentuating the obvious when he observed:

> "1990 goes down as Major's annus miserabilis."

He added that the Chancellor had a major credibility problem. Kevin Darlington and Joe Roseman finished their article in the UBS Phillips and Drew Budget special by stating:

> "The implications for John Major are obvious. If the economy does not stagnate this year, he may well not be in a position to restore the government's reputation for competence in economic management in time for the next election. The electorate may then conclude that Mr. Smith offers a more palatable alternative."

Mr. Major: I shall not take up too much of the hon. Gentleman's time, but since he quoted Phillips and Drew, I shall also quote that firm, which said in the middle of February:

> "The latest indicators suggests that policy is delivering the sharp demand slowdown necessary to take the inflationary sting out of the economy."

If that was true then, it is even more true today.

Mr. Sedgemore: I shall come to just how much sting has been taken out of the economy, but it is clear that, post-February, Kevin Darlington and Joe Roseman are hedging their bets. If I were a gambling man, I would do exactly the same. They realise that the economy is suffering from the irresponsibility of the previous Chancellor and the present Chancellor.

There has been a vertiginous collapse in the growth of overall domestic demand in the economy, from a peak of 10 per cent. in early 1988 to minus 0·5 per cent. by the end of 1989. That is bound to take us back to increasing unemployment and cuts in real wages. That is the horror story of the Budget.

Budget 1990 also gives the lie to the Tory claim that it is the party of sound money and stable prices, which believes that the currency should represent a store of value, because it shows that it is the party of unsound money. The pound in everyone's pocket will be diminished by the Budget. Above all else, the Budget is inflationary: it is a Budget of inflation, by inflation, for inflation. The Chancellor has got us to the top of the inflation league and intends to keep us there.

It is extraordinary that a Government whose first priority was to bring down inflation saw the annual increase of 13 per cent. in 1979 soar to 18 per cent. in 1980 and touch 22 per cent. on a year-on-year basis. After a temporary blip in 1986, inflation is about to rise to 9 or 10 per cent. on a year-on-year basis. That is the cause of the Chancellor's credibility gap. It is also a sad epitaph for the Mickey Mouse monetarism of the past 10 years.

I understand that there is now a conflict between the Treasury and the Bank of England over the future of monetarism and the monetary aggregates. The bank is still keen on them but, for the Treasury, the Chancellor says that M0 is up the spout, M1 is down the shute, M2 is in a corner, M3 is in a jam, M4 is on the run and M5 is out of sight. Although the Chancellor set a target for M0, he has said that it will be ignored, and should M0 come within the target range, that will be pure accident and nobody will be more surprised than him.

The Chancellor now says that he will replace monetary targets with an even more ludicrous concept, a highly abstract artifice which he deigns to call "his judgment". To paraphrase Christopher Fry, the Chancellor's critical judgment is exquisite, it leaves us with nothing to admire except his opinion, and that, as we all know, is worthless. Those of us who are members of the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service know that the Chancellor's judgment on the size of the balance of payments deficit was mindbogglingly in error. We also know that his judgment on inflation was wrong, like that of other Treasury Ministers over the past five years.

The Chancellor managed to keep a straight face when he introduced the Budget by telling us that it was fiscally neutral. What nonsense! What tripe! We are told that the medium-term objective is a balanced budget, yet that objective is set to be reached by 1992-93, at least a year earlier than envisaged in the 1989 Budget, and the public sector debt repayment objective for this year and next has been halved. That is a major relaxation of fiscal policy in every conceivable sense.

The Budget shows that the Tory party is not only the party of high inflation, but the party of high taxation. Paragraph 2.50 of the Red Book states:

> "The Government's objectives for taxation are to reduce tax rates and bring down tax as a percentage of GDP."

However, table 2.5 describes North sea taxes, national insurance contributions and the community charge as a per cent. of non-North sea money GDP. It states that in 1978-79, taxes under Labour, as a percentage of GDP, were 34 per cent. By 1981-82, they had rocketed up to 38·5 per cent. They are projected for 1990-91 to be way above their level under Labour, at 37·75 per cent. Looking as far as the human eye can see, to 1993-94, they are projected to be way above what they were under Labour, at 36 per cent.

We see that Labour is the party that lets people spend their own money and the Conservative party is the one that taxes us to death. If, as some Conservative politicians argue, taxes are theft, the three biggest crooks in this country in the past 20 years have been the last three Conservative Chancellors of the Exchequer. The present Chancellor is almost certain to win the Ronald Biggs award for daylight robbery.

When the Chancellor introduced the Budget he was extremely sad that he had three cheap paragraphs on international monetary relations. He talked as though Britain was a self-sufficient island and told us nothing about the problems of the American, Japanese and German economies and the impact that they would have on the British economy. He did not consider the problems of the big world surpluses.

The Japanese surplus is disappearing and West Germany's surplus will almost certainly have to be used to finance investment in East Germany. How will the international monetary system be able to pay for the big British deficit and the huge American deficit? It is an astonishing shame that the Chancellor did not have the vision or depth of understanding of the world's monetary problems to address those issues.

7.39 pm

Mr. Michael Morris (Northampton, South): It would have been more honest for the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) to give the percentages of direct taxation rather than the total taxation figure. If he had done so, he would have found that the Conservative party believes in reducing direct taxation and the percentage figures would have demonstrated that amply in comparison to the Budgets presented by Labour Chancellors.

It is interesting to note that Opposition Members suggested that there should be an increase in direct taxation, but they said that they were worried about the prospects of a recession. There is no more direct way of producing a recession than to increase direct taxation. It was surprising that the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) and the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), both of whom I respect, and both of whom represent industrial constituencies as I do, should suggest such a policy.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on bringing a few smiles to the Government Benches. For once there was a clear strategy which hon. Members and also the public could understand. I found it particularly refreshing last weekend to visit my constituency, talk to my constituents and find that they understood what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor was about. I am a mere politician who once read economics. The City scribblers quoted ad lib by the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch may deal in the City, but perhaps they have not read economics.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor faced three different scenarios when he wrote his Budget. Under one scenario, interest rates are kept high enough to bring inflation down steadily. Fiscal policy could be tightened only gradually and personal savings were not going to increase. Under that scenario, we would surely have had a sag in domestic investment. The current account balance would have improved a little, but as the domestic recession took hold, we would have become uncompetitive and there would have been a reduction in our exports. My right hon. Friend rightly rejected that scenario.

Under another scenario, fiscal policy might have been tightened only gradually and personal savings might not have increased very much. Under that scenario, the market might have concluded that more investment was needed and that the Chancellor would give way and reduce interest rates and that that would gradually depreciate the currency. Again my right hon. Friend rejected that scenario.

My right hon. Friend chose a scenario with which some economists find favour. He decided that there should be a marginal tightening of fiscal policy which should be accompanied by an increase in the savings ratio. The one message to come from the Budget is that the Chancellor is going to have a real crack at increasing the personal savings ratio and my colleagues have congratulated him on what he has done in that respect.

[Mr. Michael Morris]

The introduction of TESSA will come about when the Chancellor hopes that interest rates will begin to fall. Under that strategy personal savings should increase when perhaps interest rates will come down and people will have marginally more money to spend. I believe that that strategy is absolutely right.

One of the fundamental planks of my right hon. Friend's policy was to see exports continue to increase. That is right. The hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) suggested that our share of world trade is declining. However, he did not paint a true picture. We are holding our share of world trade and over the past 18 months that has increased marginally. While it is true that the pound has depreciated, particularly in relation to the deutschmark, and that helps exports in the short term, we must ask whether we are doing enough.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor should call for a report from the Department of Trade and Industry. While he may be considering the macro side of exports, there is something going on at the DTI which may affect exports adversely. The DTI has chosen June as the time to bring about an overhaul of the Export Credits Guarantee Department. For medium-term credit insurance, particularly against the riskier markets, but against all markets in general, there will be an increase in premiums. This is not an opportune time at which totally to revamp the ECGD. There is also a proposal within the reforms that there should be a restriction on geographical markets where we already have heavy exposure on the accounts of the ECGD. This is not the right time for that kind of exercise.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor is determined that the balance of payments deficit will be no more than £15 billion. To achieve that, good sound export insurance is vital. It is not good enough to suggest that we will negotiate with the Commission to ensure that the Italians, French and Germans come into line. We want to ensure that they are in line before we alter any of our dimensions.

Five conditions were laid down at Madrid for our entry into the European monetary system. It is clear that four of those conditions will broadly be met by the autumn of this year. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will be brave and recognise that we must move forward and enter for positive reasons. It is good for a Budget to anticipate change and help it along. I believe that we have had a major Budget, but in a minor key. The Budget is very much a turning point.

It is too easy to forget that sentiment and attitude are key factors that affect the financial and political markets. I feel that my right hon. Friend has pitched his Budget absolutely right. It is reassuring to find that at the grass roots, in our constituencies, people understand the strategy and know what is going to happen. In response to the sceptics on the Opposition Benches, anyone who has been to the City over the past day or so will see that the views have changed from the immediate reactions to the Budget. The general view of economists in the City now is that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has got it about right, and I congratulate him on that.

7.48 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The House will expect me to say something about the Budget storm that descended on the Government on the question of poll tax savings limits, and I would not wish to disappoint the House.

The political position of the Secretary of State for Scotland has been fatally weakened by the events of the past week for four reasons. First, the events demonstrate the marginal position that he occupies in Cabinet. He was not even consulted about the change before the morning of the Budget. Secondly, the Secretary of State for Scotland was completely unprepared for the change that the Chancellor was about to announce. He was so dozy that he did not have the wit to speak up in Cabinet last Tuesday to insist that a caveat was inserted in the Budget speech to take care of the Scottish position. Thirdly, the Secretary of State's position is damaged because of the insensitivity with which he greeted the outcry from Scottish Members of Parliament, describing our indignation for a full 24 hours as a matter of "bogus" political point scoring. Fourthly, there was a craven surrender within the next 24 hours as the Secretary of State for Scotland scrambled desperately to save his political skin.

Given this demonstration of political weakness by the Secretary of State for Scotland, it was all the more remarkable to see him reinterpret the past week in the Scottish Sunday press as an example of a macho Secretary of State for Scotland boldly defending Scotland's corner in the Government. In the immortal words of Zsa Zsa Gabor, men who claim they are macho usually aren't mucho. So it is with the Secretary of State for Scotland.

The Sunday papers made interesting reading. We had a bold statement, described as a "declaration of political independence," from the Secretary of State when, according to *The Observer*, he said:

> "I came into politics before Mrs. Thatcher became leader of the Conservative Party and no doubt I will still be in politics when she is no longer leader of the party."

However, an article in the *Glasgow Herald* this morning states:

> "Mr. Rifkind said all he meant was that he was 43, and the Prime Minister was 63".

That is a rather ungallant climbdown from the tough comments over the weekend. In the same article in *The Observer* the Secretary of State for Scotland declared that, on poll tax capital limits, the Prime Minister

> "has fallen into line with my better judgment."

Yet again this morning the Secretary of State backed down from that rather rash remark by saying that it was

> "a frivolous reply to a frivolous question".

Having suffered mental paralysis last Tuesday when the issue arose, the Secretary of State for Scotland is now in a state of schizophrenia. He cannot decide whether he is macho man defending Scotland's interests to the Government or macho mouse defending the Government's interests to Scotland. For some understanding of the Secretary of State's mental condition, I advise hon. Members from English constituencies to read a column in today's edition of the *Glasgow Herald* in which Mr. Brian Meek, who is a leading Scottish Conservative and probably the Secretary of State's foremost confidant, gives some advice to his friend. The article states:

> "Malcolm, however, would do well to remind the electors from time to time that he is not Mrs Thatcher's monkey. In fact she needs him a lot more than the other way round.

Mrs Thatcher is beginning to look increasingly mortal, and there is no need for any Cabinet Minister to be rubbished by her or by Mr Bernard Ingham. He will not be around the day after she departs."

One difficulty for the Secretary of State for Scotland is that there is a great deal of material from the past week for Mr. Bernard Ingham or anyone else in Downing street to rubbish. One such example appeared in yesterday's edition of the *Sunday Mail*. An article describing the poll tax climbdown states:

"an aide to Mrs. Thatcher said: 'If Malcolm Rifkind can find money from within his own budget to solve a political problem, he can do that.

'You (the Scots) have got no new money at all.'"

Although I seldom agree with aides to Mrs. Thatcher, that is a reasonable estimate of what happened over the previous week. We have had the spectacle of a Secretary of State for Scotland implicitly or explicitly threatening resignation to win the right to reshuffle money within his own budget which he has always claimed that he was in sole charge of anyway. Such a pathetic sight calls to mind the comment by one of my predecessors in east Aberdeenshire, Bob Boothby, when he dismissed the office of the Secretary of State for Scotland as "the scullery maid of the Cabinet". There can be no doubt that the present incumbent is well fitted to that description.

The lesson that the people of Scotland will draw from the events of last week is not about the falling political stock of the Secretary of State for Scotland. The real lesson will be simple, and it is that this Government will bend, break and crack under political pressure. Political pressure will be intensified over the next year, and an early opportunity will be presented in the regional elections, when the objective will be to remove every single Conservative councillor from Scottish politics. Moreover, the target of the non-payment campaign, which is growing in Scotland, will be to remove the poll tax altogether.

In opening today's debate, the Secretary of State for Employment gave a hostage to fortune when he said that an unenforceable law does not justify its position on the statute book. The poll tax in Scotland is well on the way to being a voluntary tax. It will be totally unenforceable as the non-payment army grows in 1990 from the present 500,000 members. The target of the campaign is not the amelioration or modification of the poll tax but the total removal of this evil tax from the statute book.

My hon. Friend the Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) has specifically referred to one tax change in the Budget—the doubling of the blind persons' tax allowance, which is a welcome change, but, as my hon. Friend would point out, it will benefit only a small proportion of visually handicapped people. The tax allowance is payable only to blind people who are registered blind with the Department of Social Security and also have an income that is sufficiently high to be taxed. The Royal National Institute for the Blind estimates that only about one third of blind people will be on incomes that are high enough to make use of that special allowance and that many more blind people will be reliant on social security benefits than make use of the allowance. I hope that the Treasury Bench will take note of that point when disability benefits are next considered.

The Budget and the Chancellor's speech are at best irrelevant to Scottish economic conditions. It will be of no great surprise to the Treasury Bench that the Budget will not enjoy the confidence of Scottish Members of Parliament. What is perhaps more revealing is the vote of no confidence that was passed on the Government's economic policies by the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Business Ltd. at its annual general meeting at Inverness last week.

The growing dissatisfaction among small business with the Government's policies has been based on the realisation that Scotland is suffering from economic policies that may or may not be appropriate to the overheated economy of the south-east of England and that are most certainly not appropriate to the Scottish economy with substantial underused resources. It is bad enough to have to suffer from penal rates of interest when the economy is overheating, but it adds considerable insult to substantial injury to have that medicine applied when we do not even suffer from such an economic disease.

The fundamental weakness of the Budget is that it has done nothing to tackle social and geographical imbalances within the United Kingdom economy. The Chancellor did nothing to redeem the disgraceful move by his predecessor in cutting higher rate taxes. He has done nothing whatever to ameliorate the socially regressive impact of the poll tax. From a Scottish point of view, the key factor is that the Budget does nothing for Scottish economic requirements. It is only through constitutional change in Scotland and, in particular, the achievement of Scottish independence within the European Community that we can have an economic policy that is designed and suitable for the Scottish economy and, just as important, a social policy which is amenable to the Scottish desire for social equity and economic justice. The lesson that Scotland has learnt from the Budget is that the Prime Minister, the Chancellor and the Government are now on the run, and we intend to keep it that way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. In view of hon. Members' excellent co-operation and the fact that some hon. Members who applied to speak have withdrawn, I am now prepared to relax the 10-minute limit on speeches—not to take it off, but to relax it.

7.59 pm

Mr. David Davis (Boothferry): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am not quite sure to what extent I shall take advantage of that relaxation, but we shall see.

I am sure that the House will forgive me if I do not follow the new claim for Scottish independence that was put forward by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond). I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) is not in his place. Like him, I am a fan of the late, great Iain Macleod and I should like to correct the right hon. Gentleman's quotation. If my memory serves me right, Iain Macleod said of Budgets,

"A Budget that is praised in the spring will be dammed in the autumn"—

not, "A Budget that is praised today will be damned tomorrow."

I suspect that this Budget will exactly reverse that first maxim, which will be an interesting demonstration of another aspect of short termism for the Opposition Front Bench.

In the past few days the City, its pundits and the financial media commentators have criticised the Budget as not being tough enough. That is an extraordinary criticism when one looks back over the last couple of months to see what they themselves have said. Only two or three months ago they were advancing cases that would

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have produced exactly this Budget. Indeed, that is the case that was put by their unexpected proxy in the House this evening, the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore). I am sorry that he is no longer in his place to hear my points.

If we are generous, we can say that the commentators' comments must have had something behind them. If we are generous, we could look to see what changed the mood of the City over what constituted a sufficiently tough Budget. One presumes that those in the City took their change of mood from the national public statistics of the past few months. I refer especially to the balance of payments and the balance of trade figures, which showed a deficit of £2 billion in January, and to the retail sales figures, which showed a nominal growth of 2 per cent. last month on the year-on-year basis. If that is what changed their mood and led to their judgment of the Budget, which has been replicated by Opposition Members in the past few days, one is bound to say that, at the very least, that judgment is childish.

One hopes that even the teenage scribblers among them are old enough to look back at the history books and to consider the reliability of the statistics such as those from which they have taken their cue. If they were to look back to a few historic crises that Opposition Members will remember well, they would see that in the 1960s and 1970s, when we had trade and other crises such as that involving the International Monetary Fund, there were even errors in the GDP judgment, which is the most stable and the biggest number and, therefore, one would think, the easiest to get right. Nevertheless, there were errors in that of between 4 and 6 per cent.,—or of between two and four years' growth in those days. Those were the errors on an annual figure, let alone on a quarterly or a monthly figure.

Commentators could also look back to see errors in the trade balance. Invisibles have been a key issue in the developments of the past few months, but there was a £1 billion error in the invisible figure in 1976, which changed the amount from £2 billion to £3 billion positive, when it was adjusted. That was important, given the IMF crisis at the time. Sir Leo Pliatzky, an adviser to the Labour Government in those days, has pointed out that those errors in the national accounts led the major policy misjudgments at the time. He picked out another number —the £2·5 billion overestimate of public expenditure in the late 1970s.

Therefore, the set of figures that seemed to change the mood of the City in the first few days after the Budget seem extraordinarily thin pieces of data on which to base a judgment, especially when the City itself is surrounded by anecdotal data. I refer to the summary in *The Sunday Times* at the weekend, which said

> "Retail squeeze tightens its grip",

which is exactly the opposite message to that adduced from the national accounted figures. Every story that was summarised under that headline was at least a week old. The article referred to the various retail consortia that were having trouble because sales, margins and volumes were under pressure. In reaching a conclusion on the Budget on that basis, the City therefore made a poor judgment.

We know that such national accounting figures lead to poor judgments and, to some extent, they lead to the sort of problem that we have seen time and time again in post-war economic management. I refer to putting a brake on the economy long after it has started to decelerate—indeed, long after it has already achieved some deceleration. In effect, the City is calling for a reinstatement of "stop-go". That is extraordinary and the City would deny it, but in effect that is what it has said about the Budget. It has said, "We want a tougher Budget because we have been frightened by a few numbers in the past few days."

That is not the only error that the City pundits and their proxies on the Opposition Benches have made—*[Interruption.]* I am glad that the cap fits. I hope that Opposition Members are getting their fees. The City has also made the error of making a judgment of risk and saying that when facing an inflationary problem, the tougher Budget is the less risky one. In effect, the City has said, "If we are looking at a grey area in which to cast the Budget, the toughest, the most fiscally sharp and the tightest money Budget is the safest one." However, that is not the case.

Again, we have evidence that that strategy has failed in the past. The easiest way to understand it is to consider the workings of a virtuous spiral in a healthy economy. Let us consider economies that we should like to emulate, such as those of Japan, Korea and West Germany and this economy before the crash of 1987 knocked it somewhat off line. All those economies have high growth. That high growth makes it easy to get high productivity.

That is statistically well established, everybody knows it and it is also easy to see anecdotally how that comes about. If one is running a factory and one has a 10 per cent. increase in output, it is easy to get a 10 per cent. increase in productivity. All that one has to do is to hold the manpower steady and to solve a few technical problems. If, on the other hand, one has a constant output and one is trying to get a 10 per cent. improvement in productivity, one has to sack people. That is miserable, unpleasant and difficult and as well as technical problems, there are negotiating problems. Therefore, when there is low growth, there is a poor productivity record. Irrespective of the micro-economic changes that the Government have brought about in the past 10 years, that growth is needed to generate high productivity improvements.

In a healthy virtuous spiral, that productivity improvement allows high wage increases to be paid. In a couple of the past five years, we have seen 8 per cent. increases in wages; 7 per cent. improvements in productivity and a net 1 per cent. increase in unit costs. Therefore, our competitiveness was also well defended which, in turn, created a new growth boost for the virtuous spiral. We were on that spiral from 1986 until the beginning of 1988. That is the spiral that any good Chancellor should seek to be on again.

Let us consider what would happen if we were to do what the City and its proxies have demanded. Too hard a check would be put on growth and the productivity improvements would evaporate. Therefore, when we are inevitably faced with the 8 per cent. or more wage claims, which we saw even on the morning of the Budget, and they are granted by a British management which, I am sorry to say, is still not very strong and does not get the "mucho macho" award, to which the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan has referred, the increase in costs works its way straight through to the retail prices index.

Monetarists among my hon. Friends will say, "You can choose whether to take that as an increase in costs or an increase in unemployment", and they are right about that. However, the reality is that after such a check on growth one is facing a tougher decision. That hard check leads to a combination of an inability to compete—because of higher costs and retail price inflation—and unemployment. Therefore, we have both unemployment and inflation. It is a recognisable scenario, which we used to call stagflation. That would be the outcome of a tougher Budget policy than the one that we are pursuing today.

Mr. Ashdown: The Government have predicted economic growth at 1 per cent., although how on earth they can tell it will be 1 per cent., which is well within the margin of error and well beyond the Government's errors of prediction, I do not know. With economic growth stagnant, and inflation the highest in Europe, the present conditions could only be described as stagflation.

Mr. Davis: The right hon. Gentleman is old enough to remember real stagflation in the late 1970s, when his party, in conjunction with another party, was a supporter of policies that led to inflation at 28 per cent. and rapid increases in unemployment. That is not what we are seeing today. He is right, but he should study his error margins more carefully because we always underestimate GDP and I suspect that 1 per cent. will turn out to be rather more.

The right hon. Gentleman should appreciate the point that I am making, which is that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has to find his way through a narrow channel. On the one side, he has the tide race of accelerating inflation, and on the other the rocks of recession and stagflation. The Budget would best be described as a "steady as she goes" Budget. That does not make a very good headline or a battle cry for a by-election, but it makes a first-class recommendation for a Government facing difficult decisions in difficult days but taking the best judged way through to get us on to that virtuous spiral.

8.11 pm

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): Despite the sacrifices of 11 years of Thatcherism, the North sea oil revenues and the receipts from privatisation, none of the problems of the British economy has been solved. We are going straight back into the old stop-go cycle. A number of hon. Members think that they have found a panacea for this problem—joining the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system. Because I think that there is no intellectually credible evidence for this, I shall devote my speech to this one point.

In a market economy, nothing is fixed in perpetuity. Prices change every day, as do the terms of trade between countries. The exchange rate is simply the price of a currency in terms of other currencies. Like other prices, it will change over time. It is a misunderstanding to imagine that it can be fixed by fiat, or by passing a resolution. Futile attempts to deal with balance of payments deficits or internal price levels by fixing the exchange rate are like trying to control the weather by fixing the barometer. There has been a movement of 4 per cent. in sterling's trade weighted index since the beginning of the month. Its price against a basket of currencies is 85·5 per cent. of what it was in 1980. It has moved 14·9 per cent. against the deutschmark since March of last year. In March 1985, there were 258 yen to the dollar, and at the moment there are 154.

All that demonstrates that if countries have divergencies of economic efficiency and productivity, and different rates of inflation, then the value of their currencies will vary. That simple fact of economic life should be evident to all. If country A has higher productivity and a lower rate of inflation, and country B has lower productivity and a higher rate of inflation, and if their nominal exchange rates are fixed vis à vis each other, what happens, de facto, is that country A's currency is gradually devalued in real terms and country B's is revalued upwards. Country B's goods then become even less competitive and it develops balance of payments deficits, while country A's goods become even more competitive and it piles up large surpluses. A good example of a country A is West Germany, while Britain looks like country B. While we may try to fix the nominal rate, we cannot fix the real rate, and unless the nominal rate is allowed to reflect the real rate, we suffer massive economic dislocation.

The rate of exchange is a measure of the terms of trade with the rest of the world. Those terms change every day with every change in the world economy, and it makes sense to accommodate those changes through the rate of exchange rather than through piling up large deficits or surpluses or changes in the levels of output and employment. Currently, Britain has a horrendous balance of payments deficit, running at some £20 billion per annum, mainly with the Common Market and particularly with Germany. This deficit accounts for 20 per cent. of our import bill and 25 per cent. of our exports. It is very silly to suggest, as did the previous Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), that this does not matter. This deficit has to be reversed if we are to prosper. To imagine it can be done by linking the pound to the deutschmark, which is what joining the ERM means, strains credulity too far.

To fix the sterling rate in these circumstances would push us into recession, cause unemployment to grow, destroy growth, make the payments deficit endemic, and lead to a sterling crisis. To appreciate the damage that a wrong and uncompetitive exhange rate can do we need only recall 1980-82, when a quarter of British manufacturing industry was destroyed. If it is said that joining the ERM does not mean a fixed exchange rate, then there is no point in joining. The last Labour Government, in 1978-79, deliberately refused to join the ERM and set out the arguments in a 1978 White Paper. In 1986 the Labour party said that it would join the ERM only if four important preconditions could be obtained. They were: first, entry at a competitive rate; secondly, greater central bank swap arrangements; thirdly, a collaborative growth strategy to combat unemployment; and, fourthly, a greatly expanded regional and structural policy to offset the German surplus. In the policy review document "Meet the Challenge: Make the Change" we said:

> "We believe that the European monetary system, as at present constituted, suffers from too great an emphasis on deflationary measures as a means of achieving monetary targets and that it imposes obligations which are not symmetrical. We oppose moves towards a European Monetary Union which would further impede progress in this area.
>
> Substantial changes would therefore be required before the next Labour Government could take sterling into the European Exchange Rate. There must be less reliance on interest rate adjustment and more on co-operation between central banks. There would have to be an EC-wide trade policy which contributes to balance of payments stability for

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individual members. There must be a co-ordinated EC-wide growth policy. The pound would have to enter at a rate and on conditions which ensured that British goods became and remained competitive."

Those are Labour's preconditions. They are substantial and far-reaching. The question is: are they possible or available?

First, what would a competitive rate be? It is too high at the moment, and it should be lower. We could negotiate, but the experience of Spain is not too encouraging. It had to enter at the existing market rate for the peseta. The problem here is that, even having found the right rate, it would be a fallacy to think it could be safely fixed. What is the right rate at one moment will probably be wrong 18 months or two years later. Labour wants conditions to see that it remains competitive. What are they? Further changes could be accomplished only amid political controversy with our partners and by unanimous agreement, not by our independent decision. Full economic and monetary union, which is the aim, would rule that out altogether.

Then there is the condition of adequate central bank swap arrangements. Some hon. Members mistakenly think that we should thereby obtain the support of the central bankers to defend sterling and also protect us from speculative flows or runs on the pound. There are already facilities through the G7 and the IMF. What else would there be in the ERM? It is utterly naive to believe that, in future, we could all relax because the Conservative central bankers would rush in with unlimited resources to bail out sterling and wish our problems away. First, any help would be through loans, which we should have to repay. Secondly, no more than the IMF would these banks ladle out billions without laying down conditions—that is, dictate to a British Government what their policies should be.

That was demonstrated in 1983, when France borrowed 4 billion ecu, but on terms that insisted on a deflation, which destroyed the programme on which the Mitterrand Government had gone to the electorate. Mitterrand was given a choice between socialist policies and the EMS. He chose the latter. So the central bank swap facilities are not an easy option for a Labour Government. It would be unwise to imagine the bankers would give us unlimited funds to finance socialist policies.

Then what about symmetrical obligations—the equal obligation of surplus countries as well as deficit countries to take action to eliminate imbalances? This sounds nice, but there is no way in which it could happen in the real world. In practice, the burden of adjustment falls more heavily on the central banks whose currencies are weak. There are greater pressures for a tightening of monetary policy—that is, higher interest rates for a weak currency—than a relaxation for a strong currency. Can anyone see the Bundesbank loosening monetary policy to help an ailing sterling? Further, the weak currency has no bargaining power. It is the supplicant asking to borrow someone else's reserves.

So, in practice, there are no symmetrical obligations in the ERM system but an inbuilt deflationary bias instead. Nor would it, as some people fondly imagine, mean lower interest rates in Britain. Without the option of letting the exchange rate take the strain, high interest rates would have to be used to keep the pound within the ERM band.

What about the other Labour party condition of co-ordinated economic expansion and the elimination of inter-Community deficits and surpluses? Anyone with eyes to see can observe there is nothing remotely like this in sight.

Then there is the condition of effective regional and industrial policies. This would effectively mean recycling the surpluses earned by the successful countries back to the deficit countries. In other words, the Germans would be expected to make a present of billions of pounds, or rather marks, to Britain every year. Is it even worth wasting breath on so unlikely an idea? At the moment, we are donating £2 billion net to the Community budget. There is no suggestion that the Community should have a regional policy to recycle its surplus funds. Of course it is unpleasant to have movements in the rate of the pound, but there is one aspect of that which should be of interest to politicians. When there have been such movements in recent years—the most dramatic of temporary depreciations was in 1985—there has been no political crisis and no political drama. How unlike the regular traumas and sterling crises during the period 1945 to 1972 under the Bretton Woods rules and as it would be in the ERM. Do we really want to go back to that? I should have thought that that was the last thing that particularly a Labour Government would want.

It is sometimes said that accommodating a depreciating currency is inflationary. Of course, it increases the price of imported goods. This simply reflects the change in the terms of trade and has the effect of restraining imports, which is now a prime need. It also has the effect of lowering the price of British exports and thus helping to right the balance of payments. Price rises are, however, not automatic. Experience shows that previous depreciations in 1931, 1949 and 1967 led not to price explosions but to corrections of the current account deficits. Perhaps the reason is that allowing the currency to depreciate to its right level, first, reduces the value of the money stocks in terms of foreign currency, secondly, encourages the outflow of hot money by the lower interest rates that it makes possible, and, thirdly, reduces the cost of both public and private debt. The effect of depreciation of prices has to be measured against alternative policies for correcting imbalances, particularly the current high interest rates, which are pushing up costs and prices. The essential difference is that what I advocate would allow an increase in output and employment, whereas higher interest rates reduce output and employment. It is clear from what I have said that, looked at objectively and dispassionately, joining the ERM, instead of solving our problems, would damage and impede our efforts and rob us of control of our domestic affairs.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I understand that the Front Bench replies will begin at 9 pm. There are still four hon. Members—two on each side of the House—who hope to be called to speak. I hope that they will agree to divide the remaining time between them.

8.26 pm

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): I congratulate the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton). If I had closed my eyes and forgotten about his accent, I would have assumed that about 60 per cent. of his speech came from the erstwhile right hon. Member for South Down, Mr. Enoch Powell. It was truly Powellite in part of its construction. I genuinely congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the part of his speech which dealt with the exchange rate mechanism. Such a speech was long overdue from the Opposition Benches. The hon. Gentleman has stated his position clearly. It would add to our debate in this place if those on the Opposition Front Bench were as clear, given their apparent recent wedding to the idea of the ERM.

The fourth condition which the hon. Member for Newham, North-East laid down took me back to the days when the Labour party had a policy on such matters. He said that there should be appropriate adjustment through regional policy, and we all know what will happen to regional policy within the EEC over the next few years. We are in for a turbulent period.

Regional policy for the next few years will mean soft loans to a major extent for the East German economy. The paymasters of the EEC have, correctly, set their policies. They wish to help their brothers, sisters, cousins—their fellow countrymen—in an economy which has been stuck in a time warp for a long time. For East Germany it is now 1947, such is the state of its infrastructure and housing stock, its lack of an enterprise culture and the general nature of its clapped-out economy. Regional policy in Europe means billions of deutschmarks and billions of ecu being nobly and laudably deployed to help 17 million people in beleaguered East Germany. The fourth condition, on which the hon. Member for Newham, North-East did not place too great emphasis, will be even more difficult to deliver than it was back in 1985-86.

Those who have argued for a European central bank have forgotten that the recent justification for redesigning such a mechanism is to take it out of the hands of those objective people who run the Bundesbank and to place the decision making in the hands of the individual Finance Ministers, who in committee, in their cabals and in their smoke-filled rooms, and for much more politicised reasons, would gear and run monetary policy across the European Community. We might find in those circumstances that pan-European monetary policy would be in for an especially turbulent period.

Like the hon. Member for Newham, North-East, I feel that we have been treated today to a number of panaceas that have not been examined properly in the House. The right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) has argued yet again, in a coded fashion—that is a device that has been used hitherto by Conservative Members, but now it appears that the Labour party has to speak in code—that there should be increased taxation, as that would be an easier option than high interest rates.

I recall a well reasoned argument in an article in *The Sunday Times* during 1985-86 entitled "Who is selling the Snake Oil?" It examined the proposition that supply side economics really did work. In answer to questions from Opposition Members, we found that, as the top rate of tax came down, not only did the total tax intake increase, but the proportion contributed by the better-off section of our community also increased. Supply-side economics really does work, and reducing taxation is an effective way of adding to the Chancellor's income and allowing us to spend on programmes that the House generally welcomes, such as social services and the reduction of our national debt. I do not think that increased taxation is any better an argument today than it was when we successfully tested supply side theories in the early and mid-1980s.

Again, in coded observations, the right hon. Gentleman said that he was in favour of investment allowances. Those of us who, in previous incarnations, witnessed capital spending programmes in the private sector know that in February or March, towards the end of the financial year, the capital investment programmes of most companies suddenly had a huge surge because company secretaries and chief accountants were trying to increase their spend on capital goods at the last minute and so reduce their tax bills.

That might have been a laudable objective for accountancy purposes, but the quality of investment on that basis often left a great deal to be desired in the return on capital compared with our European counterparts, especially Germany, the Netherlands and the low countries. I do not believe that investment allowances would be a better way to proceed. It was not then, and it is not now.

I am a staunch adherent to the "manufacturing matters" tendency. I believe that the west midlands will again become the locomotive engine of this country. It is export-based, it is manufacturing-based and it has leavened its employment with imports of service sector activities from the south-east and other parts. It has a strong economy, it is strong in manufacturing and exports, and the return on capital in that region will exceed that of most other regions. I am delighted to say that the competence of our manufacturers remains high.

The third panacea put forward by the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne was our old friend credit controls. We have yet to hear from the Opposition just how they would introduce credit controls without the commensurate necessity to introduce exchange controls to insulate us from cross-border movements of capital. The markets are now very sophisticated. Those who lend money either to the corporate sector or to individuals would find it easy to bring in money from outside and reintroduce it into our economy at precisely the time that the Opposition would want to prevent such a tactic from being deployed.

The Chancellor was astute in that matter, because, if his objective is to take money out of circulation, the introduction of TESSA—which asks savers to leave their capital sum in one place for five years—is an effective way to achieve that. The reform has been comprehensively under-estimated by the City, by the chattering classes and by the much-vaunted scribblers who have already been referred to during the debate.

The fourth panacea is our old friend the exchange rate mechanism. Our debate on the ERM became obsolete the moment that the people of East Germany, on 18 March, voted for a Christian Democratic Union-based profile to their political representation. From that moment on, we knew that there would be an especially turbulent period in German and pan-European monetary policies.

No one has yet answered the question, what if the United Kingdom were to join the ERM prematurely—for example, now—at a time when its interest rates are 8 per cent. higher than those in Frankfurt? Once in the ERM, corporate borrowers could go to Frankfurt and borrow money without the need to hedge, thereby sucking in a large amount of cash income that would ricochet around the economy and increase the money supply at precisely

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the time that we would not want that to happen. My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer said that we would join the ERM when the time was right, and that phrase has a clear and real meaning. If we join the ERM prematurely, we will undermine the fight against inflation for the reasons that I have given.

Germany is hoping to build its new wirtschaftswunder, and to do so on the basis of real money. If it is 1947 in East Germany, the East Germans have a choice—they can either take the Attlee solution, the SPD solution—keep their controls and public utilities in public hands—or the Euchen-Erhard solution of real money. They have gone for the real money. That is why they will have their wirtschaftswunder, but in the meantime all movement in Europe towards integration of our financial systems must remain on hold. That is the best service that we can do for our friends in Germany.

The four panaceas suggested by the Opposition will not work. I congratulate the hon. Member for Newham, North-East on the candour with which he delivered his speech. I sincerely hope that we shall hear equal candour from his hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) when she replies to the debate.

8.36 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): This is the first time that I have spoken in the House since 20 February, as I have been away on an official visit to India. What I said on that day—as reported in column 836 of *Hansard*—was the subject of comment in my absence. The statement that I made on that day was made in good faith, but I sincerely regret any confusion that it may have caused. I am happy to put the record straight on this first opportunity to do so.

Few Chancellors have had the luxury of having their Budget statements tested before the electorate while the Budget is being discussed in the House. I know that other hon. Members have said that the verdict on the Chancellor's Budget was evident in the result of the Mid-Staffordshire by-election when it was announced on Friday morning. If the voters of Mid-Staffordshire had had the opportunity to read the Red Book, they would have noted that paragraph 1.01 makes the cardinal statement of this Government's economic strategy:

> "The objectives of the Government's economic policy are to defeat inflation and to promote output growth and the creation of jobs."

The utter rejection of the Government's policy was evident in the by-election result.

I listened carefully to the speeches of hon. Members on both sides of the House. I do not think that the people of Mid-Staffordshire, of Leicester or of any other place are concerned with the jargon of TESSA, the exchange rate mechanism or the money supply. They are concerned with their ability to pay their mortgages, to provide a decent life for their children and to have sufficient funds to make ends meet. For millions of people, their expectation of the Budget was an end to what they had suffered during the past 11 years. The Budget provides no strategy to help them out of their misery.

I wish to focus on a number of points during the limited time available. I welcome the changes in tax on workplace nurseries. The Opposition have fought that campaign for many years. Last year I tabled an early-day motion in which I commented on the excellent work being done by Leicester city council and its workplace nursery, the Val Jones nursery. When I visited the nursery, mothers told me that they wanted the tax abolished, and I am delighted that that has happened. I hope that the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Education and Science will go a small step further during the next few months and will ensure that the universal principle of free nursery education for the under-fives is put on the statute book. If they do that, the limited changes announced in the Budget will be worthwhile.

I also welcome the additional money to be given to the Football Trust. I sat for many hours on the Standing Committee that considered the Football Spectators Bill. It became an Act, but was shelved by the Government following the Taylor inquiry. I only wish that some of the money for which we asked had been made available during the passage of that Bill.

I am sure that, like me, other hon. Members have constituents attending their surgery who say that they cannot pay their mortgage. I have constituents, specifically from the outer estates of Leicester, who last year purchased a house and cannot keep up with their mortgage payments this year. Mortgage holders in the east midlands are having to pay £127 a month more than they paid a year ago. That is an additional £1,500 a year.

As a monument to the Government's high interest rates policy one has only to look at the Hamilton estate which was supposed to be built in the eastern part of Leicester. Support for the estate comes from both the city and county councils and it was supposed to be the showplace for new houses. A total of 4,000 houses were to be built by the end of the 1980s, but only 150 have been built, half of which are empty because people cannot afford to move into them. Yet 11,000 people are on Leicester's housing waiting list.

There were expectations in Leicester and the east midlands that child benefit would be increased and the Treasury would make additional resources available for that. Over the past three years, families in the east midlands have lost more than £60 million because the Government have refused to increase child benefit.

We hear a great deal about tax cuts. As the House knows, only families that earn more than £275 a week have gained to any extent under the Government's legislation of the past decade. Yet 70 per cent. of families in the east midlands are on incomes below that figure. We have some of the lowest paid in the country and the Budget has done nothing to help them.

We have heard a great deal about the poll tax and even Tory Members justifying their support of it. In the debate that follows and in further debates this week we shall see how many Tory Members rebel against their Government. On Saturday more than 1,000 people gathered in Leicester town hall square to oppose the poll tax. I was presented with a petition which was signed by more than 2,000 people. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) has comments to make. I hope that he will take part in the debate and represent his constituents' opposition to the poll tax.

The average family in my constituency will have to pay a poll tax at 52 per cent. above what it previously paid in rates. Leicester city council is not extremist. It is a moderate council with an excellent record on spending, yet because of the Government's policy it has had to impose a poll tax of more than £400. The city councillors tried extremely hard to lower the figure, but they were forced to impose it because of Government cuts in local authority assistance. If the Government are serious about helping those who have to pay the poll tax, specifically pensioners and others on low income, I hope that they will come forward with additional proposals, which they euphemistically call transitional payments, to help those people.

Two vital industries are embellished on the social history of my city—the textile and footwear industries. The Secretary of State for Employment referred to the textile industry. Earlier this year I conducted a survey based on the job losses in those industries. We worked out that two jobs were lost in the footwear and textile industries every hour. By the time the debate has finished, a further 10 jobs will have been lost. Since Christmas 1,500 jobs have been lost in Leicestershire and since June 1989, 16,000 jobs have been lost nationally. T. W. Kempton made 750 people redundant. Today in Leicester it has been confirmed that Paisley Hyre is to make 750 people redundant and G and K, 50 people. Twin Textile have made 70 people redundant and Whytes have made 20 redundant. They are household names involved in the history and development of Leicester and the east midlands. Now they are names on the tombstones of the textile industry.

The same applies to the footwear industry. In the past two years, 2,000 jobs have been lost in the footwear industry in Leicester. That is more than one third of the work force. Since Christmas one of the greatest names in the footwear industry, Glovese, which used to be a leading manufacturer of ladies boots and shoes, has made 300 people redundant and closed its premises. Portland Shoes, Co-op Footwear and Lawson-Ward are further examples.

Tory Members representing Leicester make statements in the press, especially to the *Leicester Mercury*, about how hard they are fighting for the footwear and textile industries. Yet in the House they vote for Government policy and support the Government on the multi-fibre arrangement which will devastate these two industries. Who is to blame for the devastation? The Government are to blame. The high level of interest rates, the level of exchange rates and the current volume of imports, especially from the far east and Portugal, are crippling these essential industries. In addition, the unified business rate, which is the poll tax that will be imposed on small businesses, will cause further closures. By the time the Chancellor presents his next Budget the industries will have been cut in half because of Government policies.

Budgets are supposed to create the climate and conditions for economic growth. This Budget does nothing of the sort. It is complacent and will preside over the final destruction of this uncaring Government.

8.46 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) on his splendid exposition of an alternative Budget and financial strategy. His position was endorsed largely by my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher). If we had a low pound, we could have low interest rates. Production costs would be lower, so our exports would cost less. We could then have a lower balance of payments, if we decided that that was important. As a result the burden on mortgage payers would be reduced. That cycle has been well explained by other hon. Members.

I greatly welcome the proposals that will assist mothers to care for their children in workplace nurseries while they go out to work. They apply to a relatively small number of women, about 3,000. At the weekend I heard my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment say that he thought that that provision would be extended to nurseries other than those at the workplace and that employers could pay for that help somewhere other than on the immediate work premises. I hope that when my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer replies, he will make that clear, because that will be equally welcome by many women.

A couple of weeks ago, I previewed that type of proposal in my ten-minute Bill. I have had the most amazing support for it across the country and across parties. The National Union of Teachers, the National and Local Government Officers Association and the Stockbridge and Deepcar Child-minders Association have written to me. There would be tremendous support if my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer expanded the provision to include a wider range of tax relief for people who need help with domestic responsibilities. I have had a lot of letters from people who have to go out to work and leave elderly relatives at home. They could do with that kind of tax relief on the cost of providing someone to care for those elderly relatives.

An extenstion of that tax relief would tie in with three strands of Government policy: the campaign to get more women back to work; the proposal to extend nursery care, which is popular throughout the country but which could be achieved by making care tax deductible rather than putting more Government money into it; and the recent proposal to help older people remain with the family instead of moving them into a home. If we allow tax relief to children caring for elderly parents, they may be prepared to keep their parents with them. People would like to do that if they could get tax relief on the cost of providing care in the home rather than having to give up their job to stay at home themselves.

The extension of that tax relief would enormously benefit the Treasury because of the savings that it would make on social service provision. It might help to meet the increasing demand for nursery care, and the increasing need for women in the workplace, which we have discussed at some length. It might create a new industry on the caring side of society, which would look after people in their own homes. That would be more cost effective than social services departments giving out large sums of money directly out of the taxes. It would cause an enormous surge in the child care business, whether at nursery level or for care before and after children are at school. Children often need care at those times of day and it would be important and useful.

One teacher wrote to me to say that, although she had gone back to full-time teaching, after she had paid for full-time childcare for her children at home she netted only £200 a month out of her salary. That is hardly an incentive to get people back to work.

The National Union of Teachers tells me that there are 400,000 trained teachers—mostly women—at home who do not go out to work because there is not a great enough incentive to do so and to provide for care in the home. We need that enormous pool of teachers back in the labour force. By extending that provision to include a wider range of beneficiaries, the Government would be doing themselves and all of us a favour.

[Mrs. Teresa Gorman]

In addition to the House considering this issue, the other two great fora of public debate, "Any Questions?" and "Question Time", have also placed it high on their agenda in the past few weeks. I heard the Financial Secretary to the Treasury say at the weekend on "Any Questions?" that the Government's role should be neutral in this issue. By allowing such a concession on workplace nurseries, the Government have breached that neutrality. They have accepted the principle that Government should make allowances in certain cases. Therefore, I ask the Government to extend that concession to a wider spectrum of people.

The hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) was on the same programme. She pointed out that some women do not earn enough money to benefit from the tax allowance. I am sure that she would agree that we could have both provisions. We could not preclude one to provide the other. I am sure that she will support me when I say that women who earn enough to have the allowance should be able to benefit. Everyone who has to provide care at home should be able to benefit from the extension of that principle. I hope that in Committee on the Finance Bill or on Report we may be able to consider an amendment to extend the tax relief to a wider group of people.

In addition to the support of all those groups that I have mentioned, I have the support of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. She was a junior Minister in the House in 1968 when she gave an interview to *Good Housekeeping* in which she said that she considered that her children had benefited from their mother going to work. She said:

> "My children like me working; they can see and do things they never would otherwise."

She also said that it would make a tremendous difference if part of the expense of employing others to run her home was allowed against tax. The *Good Housekeeping* article said:

> "she has fought fervently for this very thing".

With the support of the Prime Minister, parties across the political spectrum, mothers and fathers who work and people who have to care for the elderly, for the principle of extending tax relief, I hope that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will give serious consideration in Committee to extending that provision.

8.55 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): I supported the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) in her Bill to improve child care and domestic tax relief. However, I think that we should go further. There should be proper public provision. The Government are guilty of cutting that provision. They have put a squeeze on local authorities. By freezing child benefit, they have in effect cut it by 24 per cent. I go along with what the hon. Lady said, but we need a lot more.

When the Chancellor got up to speak last Tuesday, there was a glimmer of hope. He started his speech by saying that he was going to abolish two taxes. Instead of abolishing two virtually irrelevant taxes to help share dealers, the abolition of one tax would have done—the poll tax. That is a grossly unjust tax and a huge burden on families, which will push many people into bankruptcy and may make them lose their homes.

The poll tax is 33 per cent. higher than the rates this year and it is highly inflationary. It is no wonder that it is hated across the nation, in Tory areas as well as in Labour areas, and that the Government are reaping the whirlwind because of it. The Chancellor should abolish that tax.

The Chancellor said that inflation is common to all nations, but it is a bit more common to the United Kingdom under a Conservative Government than it is to our major industrial competitors. Inflation here is more than twice the rate in West Germany, for example. Now we have the poll tax and record interest rates. Rents are set to rise by 20 per cent. If councils do not put up rents by 20 per cent. the Government will take away housing subsidies. The CBI said that the new business rate will put 1 per cent. on the retail prices index this year. Prescription charges, fares, electricity, gas, water and the exchange rate devaluation have also contributed to inflation.

I had to laugh when the former Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), said at the Conservative party conference that it was not the party of devaluation. The exchange rate has been devalued, and has been sinking into free fall, and will continue to do so. The Tory party is the party of devaluation. That has had an effect on inflation. We have had all that from a Government who promised to bring down inflation.

The Budget was a non-event in terms of the country's economic problems. I received a written answer last week which shows that debt has increased by 515 per cent. since 1979. Those who are trying to buy their own homes are particularly badly hit. The number of people who are in arrears with their mortgage payments has risen by about 30 per cent. in the past year. I should prefer an increase in mortgage interest relief, particularly if it were targeted to those who are facing repossession, those on low incomes and first-time buyers, particularly in areas where house prices are high. The Government are making ordinary people pay for their mistakes. That problem was not addressed in the Budget. Personal debt is set to rocket.

The trade deficit is £20 billion per annum; manufacturing output has sunk below the 1979 level; unemployment stands at around 2 million. The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that growth would be only about 1 per cent. next year. That will mean higher unemployment. Public services are underfunded. The National Health Service, community care, public transport and the environment are hugely underfunded, despite the fact that this Government have enjoyed North sea oil revenues amounting to £70 billion. No other Government have enjoyed such huge revenues.

Privatisation proceeds stand at over £30 billion. Harold Macmillan described it as selling off the family silver. As a result of the consumer boom, the Treasury's tax revenues have soared. However, they have all been wasted. Only the rich have benefited. The money has been invested abroad instead of in the United Kingdom. Defence spending has also increased. I also had to laugh when the Chancellor referred to a public sector overshoot of £2·5 billion and then blamed local government. The Ministry of Defence, however, is reported to have overspent by £2 billion on nine projects.

The Chancellor dressed up his tough old mutton Budget as lamb by describing it as a Budget for savers. He did not have to do anything for the big savers; high interest rates are doing that. However, small savers and those without savings are being punished by increased bills. To say that this is a Budget for savers is just a Government cover-up. The Government have not invested properly, so the Chancellor could introduce only a boxed-in Budget. He cannot give anything away to people; if he did, they would spend it, which would result in more imports.

The country is vulnerable. Germany and Japan are able to force the Government's hand by means of higher and higher interest rates and by one run after another on the pound. The crisis has been caused due to a shortage of United Kingdom-produced goods. Only a Labour Government can rectify that problem. High interest rates will not solve it. There have to be other measures, which must be targeted on the rich. They have benefited from previous Tory Budgets. They ought to pay. The poor, who do not create excess demand, should be protected.

The Government are engaged in a short-term fiddle for their own political interest. They want to create the image of a rosy economy just before the next general election. Interest rates will come down then, albeit temporarily. The Government have paid off borrowing in previous years, as in this year, so that they will be able to borrow again and bribe people next year. They are not interested in the nation's economic prosperity; they are interested only in conning the people before the next election. However, it will not work.

The Government have gone too far by plunging into debt. They have not run the economy sensibly for the future. Their bluff is being called, as we saw in the Mid-Staffordshire by-election. People will not forget. They want and deserve better economic policies. Only Labour can produce them.

9.3 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): Many excellent speeches have been made in this debate, as in the three preceding debates on the Budget, on both sides of the House—not that I agreed with everything that was said.

The Budget was presented in a different and quieter style—more in the style of the present Lord President of the Council than that of the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson)—although we had a refresher course today when the right hon. Member for Blaby made it plain that, whatever he has lost, he has retained his arrogance intact.

Moreover, the present Chancellor managed to give the impression of being relaxed, almost of enjoying himself. That goes to show that he is a much better actor than he is given credit for. No Chancellor of the Exchequer in his right mind, or out of it, could enjoy presenting a Budget and forecast in which he tried to explain away the worst trade deficit in our history, rising inflation and peak interest rates, especially when the Government have been in power for 11 years.

I had come reluctantly to the conclusion that I would never hear Ministers stop answering embarrassing questions about their own record by talking about what the Labour Government did 12 or 13 years ago. However, I was wrong. I freely admit my error, and apologise to the Conservative Members whose ingenuity I underestimated so profoundly. They have found a new way of not talking about their own record: they have moved triumphantly and seamlessly from talking about the record of the last Labour Government to inventing a record for the next.

Let me turn to the overall balance and judgment that the Budget represents. Is it, as some commentators have suggested, short-term panic, because we are nearer to recession than the Government admit? Or is it long-term boldness—a gamble on everything turning out all right after all?

There is of course a third option, which is appearing more and more in the views of commentators: that the Budget does not address the long-term prospects of the economy, but—as we feared and warned—addresses the shot-term prospects of the Conservative party. It is the Budget that Conservative Members needed to restore their morale, instead of the Budget that the country needed to restore the economy.

The gamble—if that is what it is—depends for its success on the electorate's failing to recognise its nature. That is why the Chancellor is so annoyed with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), who has suggested that he may be aiming for a boomlet in 1991-92. Not that that is not true; predictions of the speed and scale of the resumption of growth shown in the Red Book imply a pre-election boom. What really upsets the Chancellor is the fact that, if the electorate realise what he is up to, he may have risked our future for little short-term gain.

To be charitable, there may be another, slightly different, reason for the Chancellor's annoyance. Perhaps since those predictions were made he has realised—as the economy deteriorates before our very eyes—that perhaps he cannot engineer a pre-election boom; so, making a virtue out of necessity, he claims credit for what he may not be able to escape.

This is, of course, an intensely political Chancellor. We are told by some—perhaps even, implicitly, by the right hon. Member for Blaby today—that the Chancellor is not as brilliant as his predecessor, but has a lot more sense. He is not going to come to the Dispatch Box and tell us that we are just too stupid to understand his brilliance; he picks his words as carefully as he picks his excuses. That was already apparent when he addressed the Treasury Select Committee. He carefully won its sympathy, first by being polite—which it was not used to—and secondly by selecting the range of lesser economic crimes to which he would plead guilty, making a frank and open statement of error but confessing only to minor crimes, and only when he could shuffle off the blame.

Some commentators have expressed surprise at the nature and scale of the Chancellor's gamble. I am not sure why. He may have been, if not the silent partner, at least the quieter one, but he was the partner in the great gamble of 1988, for which we are paying such a heavy price today. That 2p off income tax, and the letting rip of the economy that went with it, is now matched by today's heavy increase in interest rates. The present Chancellor was a partner when, together, he and his predecessor gambled and lost. Now he is going for double or quits.

Those with gambling fever, often quiet souls, may applaud the right hon. Gentleman's daring; more prudent souls—and Labour Members are very prudent because of the stock from which they spring; by definition, there is no one to pick up the pieces if it all goes wrong—will worry about the extent to which the Chancellor is risking our future. Nor is the gamble the only real resemblance between this Chancellor and his predecessor. There is never enough money to do everything that we might wish, but it is when the room for manoeuvre is least that we see most clearly the nature of the choices made—and the nature of those choices differs not one whit from the nature of the choices made by his predecessor.

[Mrs. Margaret Beckett]

For all the kind words for small businesses, the cost of the Chancellor's measures for them pales into insignificance beside the cost of his gesture to the City. He told us that the abolition of stamp duty on stocks and shares will cost £120 million in 1990-91. He did not mention that it will cost £800 million in a full year. The Chancellor has introduced tax relief for charitable giving up to £5 million. That is very nice, but how much is intended to give extra encouragement to private donations to city technology colleges which help a tiny minority of the nation's children at the expense of the rest? The concessions on workplace nurseries, the composite rate of tax and poll tax rebates are all welcome, but the Chancellor is only alleviating the burdens imposed by the Government.

The concession on the poll tax will help fewer than 1 per cent. of poll tax payers, and in any case the figures were wrong. The clawback of such help as is given will be severe, assuming that people are earning 20 per cent. on their capital, and the shambles over Scotland exposed once again the incompetence and the injustice of Government policy.

Let me give the House an example of someone who assumes that he will get help from the Chancellor's concessions on the poll tax. Someone with savings of £13,000 would have been debarred by the capital limit under the old system. The assumption of the income from that capital means that a person facing a poll tax of £400 who is eligible for the maximum rebate of 80 per cent. and had to pay £6·15 a week would find that it was offset by the potential income of £6, so there would be no rebate whatsoever.

People will have to apply for the concession on the poll tax. As always, under the means-tested schemes introduced by the Government, help is what they call targeted only on those in the greatest need. Speaking of prudence, I contrast that with the help given in last year's Budget to people such as the Prime Minister to subsidise their private health insurance. That was not targeted on people in any need and will be given automatically and people will not have to apply for it. Perhaps the Chancellor will tell us about the prudence of that.

I now turn to the Budget analysis of the state of the economy. In the Chancellor's speech and on the succeeding four days we have heard about the Government's brilliant record in economic management —the record that led us to the biggest balance of payments deficit and the highest mortgage rates in our history, inflation higher than that of our major competitors, and falling investment.

One of the claims repeatedly made in defence of what we are told is a temporary setback is that, under the present Government, we have seen the longest period of expansion in 50 years. Sometimes we are told that it has been the longest period of expansion in our history. That sounds good, but unfortunately it is not true. Before the OPEC price increase in 1973, all the usual measures of growth in gross domestic product show steady growth under all Governments, including the last Labour Government—from at least 1958 to 1973, or, if one chooses the measure of disposable income, from 1948 to 1973. There were stop-go cycles then, but what are we experiencing now? Without the cushion of North sea oil, we would probably have seen an earlier example of stop-go under the present Government, as balance of payments constraints would have occurred far earlier.

We are told about the remarkable growth in output after 1982, greater than that in Germany, France and Italy. However, if one examines the entire period from 1979 to 1989—the period during which the Government have had responsibility—the growth in output was average. We were out-performed by Italy, and relatively our position in the OECD, Europe and the G7 countries declined. We are told that exports stabilised as a percentage of world trade after falling for decades. Yet the volume of exports grew less than the volume of world trade in all but the two years 1982 and 1987, and the volume of imports grew massively more in every year except 1980 and 1985 and was roughly the same in 1989.

We are told that total investment has grown since 1980 because of the growth of business confidence, and that total United Kingdom investment has grown faster than that of any other European country. In fact, from 1980 to 1986, gross domestic fixed capital formation as a percentage of gross domestic product was lower than in 1979. In 1981, it fell to the lowest level since 1959. Even in the boom year of 1989, it did not reach the post-war record achieved in the period 1968-70 under a Labour Government.

In any case, manufacturing investment—the engine of recovery—was lower in every year between 1980 and 1987 than it had been in 1979, and from 1981 until 1983 it was at levels not seen since the mid-1950s. As for the claim that it grew faster than in any other European country, one can only say that it evidently needed to recover. In fact, in the period 1979-89 the growth of investment in this country was exceeded by Spain, Portugal, Finland, Turkey and Norway—and that is only in Europe. Moreover, all this growth in investment still leaves us near the bottom of the league—18th out of 23 OECD countries—in levels of investment as a percentage of GDP. And we had the benefits of North sea oil.

The Government claim also that, since 1983, they have created more jobs than any other European country— sometimes they say, more than all the others combined. Again, that is just not true. According to the most recent reliable figures, we made up a quarter of the total number of jobs created in the EEC Twelve—not more than all the rest put together. Percentage gains in employment were greater in Italy, the Netherlands, Denmark, Luxembourg, Greece and Portugal.

We staged the strongest recovery after 1983, but between 1979 and 1983 we lost more jobs—1·8 million out of a total EEC job loss of 2·8 million. In addition, all the figures for jobs created in this country include Government schemes. If the numbers of people employed on Government schemes are stripped away, one finds that the number of jobs created in the 1980s was much the same as the number created in the 1970s, when we had no oil —indeed, we had a huge hike in the price of oil—and when we had less favourable terms of trade. Yet we claimed no miracle.

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): How does the hon. Lady contrast her figures with the 5·6 per cent. average in the United Kingdom and the 8·8 per cent. average in the EC? Is it not a fact that, in terms of employment, we in this country are better off?

Mrs. Beckett: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was listening, and I do not know what figures he is quoting. I have just said that the Tory Government claim to have created more jobs in the 1980s than ever before, and that is simply not true.

Even if all these claims could be made without qualification—and they cannot—to boast of their achievements, as this Government continuously do, without mentioning oil is like someone claiming credit for having prospered more than his neighbour without mentioning that he had won the pools.

But the Government do not make misleading claims just about their overall record. They claim, most misleadingly of all, that the underlying problems of our economy—our lack of competitiveness and our low rate of growth in traded goods and services, what we sell abroad to make our living—has been resolved. Again, the figures give the lie to that claim. Manufacturing output fell by 19 per cent. between 1979 and 1981 and since then it has grown roughly in proportion to total GDP. So, while GDP grew by 24 per cent. in that period, overall manufacturing output grew by only 13 per cent., and is again flat. No wonder we remain 17th out of 20 OECD countries for the rate of growth in output over the period.

The significance of that low place lies also in the fact that, with growing internationalisation and interpenetration of markets, we need to hold on to our market share at home, as well as sell abroad, if we are to succeed. We all know that this is one of our major problems. The export volume may have risen by almost 50 per cent. between 1979 and 1989, but the import volume rose by 110 per cent. While our output growth has been 13 per cent., our expenditure on manufactures has risen by 30 per cent. Hence, again, we have the deterioration in our trade balance in manufactures, from a £2·7 billion surplus in 1979 to a deficit of nearly £17 billion in 1989—the first deficit in manufactured trade in our history, and it appeared under this Government.

The Government used to argue that this was all totally unimportant, as the income from invisibles—from traded services—would keep us going. The forecast now is for a surplus of £1·5 billion on invisibles, compared to £2·5 billion in 1989 and £6 billion in 1988. This suggests that perhaps last month's deficit was not quite the aberration that we were told it was.

The export volume of all services rose by under 15 per cent., and of those financial services contributed by far the greatest growth. We have seen a collapse in earnings from merchant marine and tourism, from which, as usual, the Government have stood aloof, and we are all now reaping the consequences. While the export growth of traded services rose by 15 per cent. between 1979 and 1989, the import growth of traded services rose by over 50 per cent. Although our service trade balance has not yet disappeared, it has fallen as a percentage of gross domestic product.

Tragically, it appears that the Government are not ready even to recognise that problems exist, let alone that they have any duty to help to remedy them. We called in our pre-Budget background briefing, as my hon. Friends have done in the debates, for support for investment, training, research and development and the inputs that have made, and are making, the performance of our competitors superior to ours—the inputs without which we approach 1992 with not one but both hands tied behind our backs.

What did the Chancellor say about training or research and development? In effect, that everything was wonderful. In an unbelievably complacent speech, the Secretary of State for Employment said the same. My hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) demolished that argument this afternoon.

The Chancelllor said that spending on business research and development had risen by 50 per cent. in the past five years. That is good, because between 1981 and 1985, the last period for which good international comparisons are available, we had the lowest rate of growth in total research and development expenditure in real terms of all the OECD countries, except Yugoslavia. We were the only OECD country, except Turkey, to experience a fall in total research and development as a percentage of gross domestic product.

Within those figures, the rate of growth of business-financed research and development was the worst of all OECD countries, except Australia and New Zealand. We were one of only three countries—the others being New Zealand and Eire—in which Government-financed research and development declined in real terms. Since then, Government support has been cut further, while our most successful competitors continue to spend a higher proportion of wealth on research and development than us.

The danger in which that places us is highlighted by two recent press reports. The first appeared yesterday in the *Mail on Sunday* and is only the latest in a series of articles on the brain drain from this country of qualified scientists and technologists. Until recently, the Government refused to acknowledge that the brain drain existed, and have taken no steps to resolve it.

The second article appeared in *The Guardian* on a report from the IFO Institute in Munich, that some 40 per cent. of all manufacturing products that will be internationally traded in 1995 are not yet in production. The pace of innovation in products is quickening, and if we are to remain competitive, there must be more investment and research. Manufacturing investment is falling, and the Government's Budget predictions show that they expect it to fall, yet they continue to stand aside.

The international comparisons made for the Japanese company Yamaichi are bad enough for this year. They show us at the bottom of the growth league, at the top of the inflation league and with the highest trade deficit in Europe. More worrying, they show no change in the position in their forecasts for 1990 or 1991.

Mr. David Lightbown (Lords Commissioner to the Treasury): This is depressing.

Mrs. Beckett: I agree—it is depressing.

There is no vision in the Budget, nothing to prepare us for the 1990s and no fiscal incentives, however minor, for good environmental policies, apart from the differential on lead-free petrol. There is nothing for those struggling to pay the extra charges that the Government have imposed on them. The excess price increases in electricity, water, fares and rents have all been imposed as a consequence of Government policy.

There is nothing for the small business or mortgage payer to alleviate, by even the smallest degree, the burden of interest rates, and nothing to create the conditions in which they might be lowered. All we get is a series of little exhortations—"no gain without pain", as the Chief

[Mrs. Beckett]

Secretary said. That makes one wonder what Treasury Ministers are reading these days. I have a theory: the Prime Minister has embroidered a couple of samplers with those mottoes, and the Chancellor and the Chief Secretary have been forced to hang them over their desks and read them each morning.

As I contemplate the Government's continued reliance on their one-club interest rate policy, the proverbial blunt instrument approach, I am strongly reminded of the descriptions I remember from school history lessons of the mediaeval practice of medicine—what I believe later and wiser generations called "heroic medicine". It seems that what we are experiencing at the hands of the Government is heroic economics.

I see the Chancellor as a sort of economic equivalent of the mediaeval barber surgeon, someone who knows only a limited range of drastic remedies to cleanse the system—all that purging and cupping, cures that were frequently applied with such ferocity that they killed more people than would have succumbed to the disease. Who can doubt that the mediaeval barber surgeon would have said to the patients and their anxious families, as he drained that last fatal pint which weakened the patient beyond the point of recovery, "If it isn't hurting, it isn't working."

Almost every Opposition speaker, from whichever party, and even some courageous souls on the Conservative Benches, have identified the Budget as yet another missed opportunity for the nation, perhaps even a missed opportunity for the Conservative party. The truth is that we are all paying for the sins of 1987, 1988 and 1989, and those who benefited least are paying most.

There is a clear attempt to put much of the blame on the right hon. Member for Blaby, but most of the Government's policies have, with a few honourable exceptions, been not just supported, but supported wholeheartedly—as many hon. Members made clear in the Budget debates—by all Conservative Members, including all the potential contenders for leadership. I see that no one seems to want to take a bow. Collectively, they have frittered away the greatest windfall that this country has ever seen, not just in our lifetime, but for many generations. They have frittered away £83 billion, at today's prices, of income from the North sea. They have frittered away our opportunities, our children's opportunities and our grandchildren's opportunities, as well as their own.

In the words of the most destructive, damaging and unjust piece of legislation that even this Government have passed, we intend to hold them, one and all, "jointly and severally liable".

9.27 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. John Major): The hon. Member for Derby, South (Mr. Beckett) ended the Opposition's contribution to this debate in much the same manner as her right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) opened it on Wednesday. Her speech was amusing, occasionally opaque, statistically selective, strong on criticism, but almost totally devoid of any detailed alternatives.

In the hon. Lady's statistical selections there were, alas, some facts that she missed. She missed the fact that between 1980 and 1989 this country grew faster than any major European country except Spain. She missed the fact that, even with slower growth forecast for 1990, the United Kingdom will have recorded higher growth in the past 10 years than either France or Germany. She missed the fact that, since 1980, the United Kingdom's manufacturing output has grown faster than that of either France or Germany, in stark contrast with the 1960s and 1970s when the United Kingdom was bottom of the growth league. Those are just a small selection of the facts that the hon. Lady missed.

Opposition Members have now been in opposition for a decade or more. After such a lengthy period, it is a little puzzling that they have so little constructive to say about the future. Either they do not have policies or they will not say what those policies are. I know that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East is an intelligent and perceptive politician and, therefore, after 11 years of being an intelligent and perceptive politician he must have policies. If he does not have policies after 11 years, he is too incompetent to be in government. If he does have policies and he will not say what they are, he is too shady to be in government. The Opposition are now secretive to the point of deception.

There is a new tendency in the Labour party. The "don't say, won't say" tendency is now running the Labour party from the Opposition Front Bench. That tendency is led by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East —a distinguished Queen's counsel—and under his guidance the Labour party has opted for the right to silence, for fear that it will incriminate itself by telling people its policies.

Labour Members are not silent only in the House. These days they are also silent in the media. When did we last see a significant interview with the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East, with the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) the Leader of the Opposition, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) or any of the Opposition Front Bench in which they have exposed themselves to discussion of their policies? Not having seen such an interview for some time, can we ever expect to see one again?

Over the past few days, we have had a wide-ranging debate. There have been a number of compelling speeches to which I wish to refer. Today there were a number of outstanding speeches to which a reply is merited. My right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) made two specific points in a compelling speech. First, he said that a tax increase at present would be unwise and I will refer to that later, as the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) and others also referred to that issue. Secondly, my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby called for early entry into the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system, and that call was echoed by my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern) and others.

I reaffirm to my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby and to my colleagues that progress is being made towards entry and that we will enter the exchange rate mechanism when the conditions that we have set out are met fully. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby will be aware, we wish to see inflation fall before we enter the mechanism. That concern is not shared simply by us; it is shared also by the governor of the Bundesbank. When sterling enters the exchange rate mechanism, it may well be turbulent not only for us, but for our European partners.

There should be no doubt that join we will, when the conditions that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister set out have been met.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby also referred to the Opposition's policy—or lack of it—on the exchange rate mechanism. Of course the Opposition say, "We will join the exchange rate mechanism", although the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton), in a speech that I was sorry to miss, apparently has a different view about that. The Opposition's promise is so hedged by codicils as to be almost meaningless. They are not so much proposing to join the exchange rate mechanism as to abolish it. Their conditions for entry would drive a coach and horses through the existing system.

Last year the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East told the House that the conditions that the Labour party attaches to joining the mechanism, apart from the difficult condition of joining at the effective rate—which he did not identify—are that there should be adequate swap arrangements between the central banks, a well-organised regional policy within the Community and that the thrust of economic policies within the Community should be for growth not for deflation.

As Brian Walden pointed out to the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould)——

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): Brian Walden is the Government's friend.

Mr. Major: Mr. Walden was a distinguished member of the Opposition Benches.

Mr. Walden said that Labour's terms for entry are much tougher than the Government's. For instance, he said that Labour wants a huge regional policy. It wants a guarantee that weaker currencies will be defended much more effectively than at the moment. Labour wants the whole purpose of the exchange rate mechanism to be changed.

The truth is that Labour's commitment to the mechanism is a sham. It is an attempt to take a soft option, but the exchange rate mechanism is not a soft option. As my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham made clear, it is a discipline, not a soft option. Financial discipline is something that the Labour party never has understood and never will understand. We understand it, and, in due course, we will join the exchange rate mechanism.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Will the Chancellor say here and now whether we will join as long as the right hon. Lady is Prime Minister?

Mr. Major: For the hon. Gentleman, that question is uncharacteristically cheap. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made the decision that we would join and, in Madrid, set out the terms under which we would join.

My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark) also made a powerful speech in which he particularly welcomed the introduction of the tax-exempt special savings account. I was sorry to learn recently that my hon. Friend will retire at the end of this Parliament. Conservative Members will miss him and his contributions to our debates. As he said, the new tax-exempt savings scheme represents a considerable incentive for saving. We have already seen the success of personal equity plans, the brainchild of my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby, in encouraging saving in shares. TESSA offers similar incentives. It is tailored for savings with building societies and banks which, for many people remain, and will remain in future, the most convenient and popular vehicle. I hope that the tax privileges of TESSA will get many people started on the saving habit and enable many more people to feel that it is worth building up savings for the future. I am glad to see that banks and building societies have responded positively to this innovation. For example, the Royal Bank of Scotland said:

> "This is what the banks and building societies have wanted for years. It will do a great deal to encourage the small saver and we will be aiming to introduce the TESSA account as soon as possible."

I hope that many others will follow that lead and that many people will take up the new savings incentive to build security and independence for themselves and their families.

During the span of the debate, a number of Opposition Members have chosen to quote relatively disobliging remarks from brokers' circulars and from other sources. Tempting though it is, I will not respond by quoting what some of those very same people recommended just a few days before the Budget, but it is striking how warm a welcome the Budget has received from business and industry.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): What about the electors of Mid-Staffordshire?

Mr. Major: The trouble with the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) is that he fears that the strategy will work, and he is right—it will.

The particular help that the Budget offers for smaller businesses has been acknowledged not only by Opposition Members but by the Association of British Chambers of Commerce, which welcomed

> "the combination of a powerful boost to savings with control of inflation."

It added:

> "the business community should be well pleased with it."

The Confederation of British Industry, the Institute of Directors and others have offered their full support for the determination to bring down inflation.

There was support, too, from many business leaders such as Sir Denys Henderson of ICI, Mark Boleat of the Building Societies Association, and many others, including Peter Morgan of the IOD. Most of those people know that, in present circumstances, we cannot offer this as a giveaway Budget, nor do I think at present that business would thank us for one.

Businesses know that the one overriding risk to our economy and to everyone in it would be to give up the battle against inflation. They remember only too well that rapidly rising prices in the past have destroyed planning, investment and motivation, and, above all, industrial relations, because inflation is the mother and father of industrial conflict. They know, too, that that was in the 1970s—not the 1980s—when the Labour Government were in power.

Business men know that with increasingly open markets and tough competition in the future, Britain simply cannot afford that sort of self-inflicted wound. That is why business understands and approves both a tight fiscal stance and a tight monetary stance. I offer my right hon. and hon. Friends the promise that that is precisely what we will keep—in the short term, in the medium term and in the long term, because we are determined to bring inflation down and to keep it down.

[Mr. Major]

British business does not contain many adherents of the sado-masochistic school of economic policy—those who think that the first Budget to put up taxes since 1981 did not put them up enough. It is not surprising that that doctrine has more supporters among those whose business is writing than among those whose business is business. Not many people in British industry would derive much comfort from a gratuitous helping of fiscal austerity.

City fashions come and they go. At the moment, the fashionable view may be that the fiscal brakes should be jammed in an emergency stop. However, that ignores all the evidence of recent years about the way in which fiscal policy works, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby made clear. If one looks at our economic history, it is clear that when Governments have attempted to fine-tune fiscal policy to beat the cycle, more often than not that has turned out to be precisely the wrong thing to do at precisely the wrong time. Contrast that with the highly beneficial effects of stable or falling tax rates on the supply side of the British economy. It does not make any sense to set them at risk by a panicky fiscal reaction which, in retrospect, might turn out to be overdone.

I make no apology whatsoever for the fiscal judgment that I made when I framed the Budget. The right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne spoke in his usual thoughtful and gracious way. In doing so, he questioned both the Budget judgment and the fiscal judgment and referred to market difficulties, as did the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice). In so doing, they did not mention—although I reminded the right hon. Gentleman of this—that even as they spoke sterling was higher than when I delivered the Budget speech last Tuesday. When I pointed that out to the right hon. Gentleman in an intervention, he said that we must await the longer term. Of course that is right—and perhaps the Budget's critics would be wise to wait for the longer term as well before making their criticisms.

In all our debates, the one substantive criticism has been that fiscal policy was not tight enough. The right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) made that same point. I agree neither with the right hon. Gentleman nor with the critics. Sometimes the right thing to do is to stand still with a neutral fiscal Budget. That is what I chose to do on this occasion. If I had judged that it was necessary to raise taxes, I should have raised taxes, but I did not reach that judgment. My right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) shares that view. He accurately pointed out the difficulties of making such a judgment at present, not least difficulties with the statistical base, which I am considering how to improve.

Let us consider the fiscal position and record. In recent years, the country has been repaying its debts year after year. No. G7 country, except Japan, either is doing that or has been doing it in recent years. Moreover, the sheer scale of our repayments has already made a sizeable inroad into our public sector debt.

As for the future, under the fiscal judgments that have been reached, fiscal policy will knock out a further £17 billion of debt over this year and the next two years. As a result of that, we shall have reduced national debt, which stood at the beginning of this year at around £160 billion, by massive sums in total. That is the reality of the fiscal judgment. Our fiscal strength also means that debt as a proportion of GDP will continue what has been a headlong fall—from 50 per cent. in 1979, to 32 per cent. in 1989 to a forecast of 28 per cent. in 1990. It is now down to levels not seen since the beginning of the first world war. It is hard and intellectually indefensible to suggest that the fiscal position is neither satisfactory nor tight.

It is tight for other reasons, too, for we plan to repay £7 billion this year—and £7 billion next year. Even though this year has had the benefit of cyclically stronger growth than next year, the debt repayment next year will remain the same. The reason why it turned out at £7 billion and not £14 billion this year was not because fiscal policy was artificially relaxed. There has been no change in tax rates or structure. It was the one-off effect of the corporation tax shortfall as a result of the build-up of allowances for high investment, of the results of the national insurance rebates, as so many people took out personal pensions, costing the PSBR £2·5 billion, of the result of slightly lower privatisation proceeds than we had imagined and of the result of truly massive overspending of local government as councils sought to avoid new capital controls. To call that a loosening of policy is a perversion of logic. It may fill the columns of newspapers, but it ought not to fill minds as being the reality of what has happened. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] If Opposition Members listen, they may learn something.

Mr. Boateng: We need no lectures from you.

Mr. Major: It is, I grant, unlikely that they will listen, but we shall try.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing pointed out what advocates of higher taxation would say if such taxation generated either lower growth or higher wage demands. He was, as ever, both perceptive and right. My right hon. Friend also welcomed a number of other measures in the Budget and especially the abolition of composite rate tax, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field). As my right hon. and hon. Friends know, composite rate tax was introduced because it brought substantial administrative savings. The Inland Revenue did not have to check the interest on millions of accounts to collect what were often small amounts of tax. Instead, tax was automatically deducted at source. I have no doubt that we are right to abolish the composite rate. I can think of no other example where tax is collected from people who have no liability to pay it and where, in no circumstances, can it be reclaimed once it has been deducted. Once independent taxation comes into force, as many as 14 million people would have paid tax that they did not owe on their interest.

However, let me say a word about the scale of the task of abolition. There are some 34 million interest-bearing bank and building society accounts and, during the year, many of the people holding them will change from being taxpayers to being non-taxpayers. Therefore, we shall need to negotiate with the banks and building societies with the aim of introducing a simple scheme of self-certification to allow non-taxpaying savers to receive their interest gross. Those who cannot self-certificate for any reason will be able to reclaim tax. Such arrangements are not easy to introduce and it will be a great challenge to have them in place by next April. Many felt that it would take at least two years to put them in place. It is for this reason, and for this reason only, that composite rate tax cannot be abolished immediately. If it had been possible to do so, I would have done so.

A number of the measures that I introduced in the Budget last week have been widely welcomed throughout the House and outside. I am especially pleased by the widespread welcome that has been given to the proposal for a reduction in pool betting duty to contribute to the cost of safety improvements at football grounds. As we have been in the business of quotes today, particularly from Opposition Members, I shall quote the chief executive of the Football Association, who called it

> "the start of a new era for football".

I hope that that is true, especially in terms of the conditions in which fans have to watch the game.

It is surely a measure of success that the Opposition appear to be queuing to take credit for having thought of the scheme. I have no objection to that and no party points to make about it. At Wembley yesterday, with the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), who may not care to admit to the company that he was in, and with the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell), it was clear that the change is widely appreciated by both fans and administrators. The House may wish to know that the Football Trust and the pools companies will be meeting tomorrow to discuss the arrangements. I hope that they can agree on the details speedily so that we can reduce the duty without delay.

There has been a considerable welcome from charities for the new gift aid scheme. A number of charities have said that they receive a substantial number of one-off gifts of £600 and over. In future these gifts will carry the bonus of tax relief for the charity. This alone will increase their income, but I have no doubt that if the scheme is promoted actively many more people will be encouraged to give generously to a range of good causes. As the director of the Charities Aid Foundation commented:

> "This package of measures is the best ever by any Government."

He added that the package should be worth £50 million a year if charities pull themselves together and market it properly. I hope that he is right. The CAF was joined in its welcome by the Imperial Cancer Research Fund, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, the Charities Value Added Tax Reform Group, the National Arts Collection Fund and the Royal National Lifeboat Institution. We now have a proper structure for charities and for giving. There are covenants for the regular giver over years, a payroll giving scheme to be deducted and paid weekly or monthly, and gift aid to provide, for the first time, for one-off gifts of cash. It is the best system of charitable giving, I suspect, of any nation in the European Community.

The measure to exempt the benefit of workplace nurseries from income tax has been widely welcomed. I have been informed today that a number of employers are responding already by announcing plans to open workplace nurseries for their employees. For example, it is reported that BP will be setting up workplace nurseries for its 30,000 staff following the Budget. There are a number of other employers who will be doing likewise, notably the Midland bank, which is proposing to set up 200 workplace nurseries. That is an extremely sensible response to the labour market conditions that many employers now face. I hope that the scheme will be taken up widely.

I made it clear in my Budget speech that I wished to encourage savings and I introduced incentives to do so. I know very well the difficulties that many people face with interest rates. I wish that it were possible to promise that interest rates would come down again soon. I cannot promise that they will do so and nor can I rule out a further rise if I judge that necessary. If they have to rise, they will rise. I can promise the House, however, that interest rates are working. They are encouraging saving and discouraging spending and borrowing. I have no doubt that they will get the economy back on track, and in the time scale that I set out in the Budget judgment. Opposition Members who doubt that should not underestimate the crucial importance of savings. Higher saving is not merely a short-time objective. On the contrary, I believe that high levels of saving will be extremely important throughout the 1990s if the British economy is to compete as it should.

If there is a high level of savings, we can sustain a high level of investment, which we all wish to do. The tax changes add considerably to the armoury of measures already in the system to encourage saving, and which have already resulted in massive culture changes in British society. Some 11 million shareholders and millions of other people will, I hope and believe, be able to save free from the victimisation that they suffered under the policies of the Labour Government. I find it ironic that Opposition Members mock the savings incentives in the Budget. Let people be warned—if there is ever a Labour Government again, the savers can forget about keeping up with inflation or obtaining a decent return on their money.

We hear a great deal about how the Opposition have changed. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East and his loyal lieutenant the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East tell us, in every newspaper that we open, that Labour has changed and that as they lunch their way around the City, as they do day after day, they are finding a very appreciative audience. *[Interruption.]* They look very good on it. They sit on the Front Bench, the house pets of the board room in the 1990s. I have no doubt that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is an extremely entertaining lunchtime companion. We have never questioned his entertainment value, but I wonder whether he is deluding himself about the esteem in which he is held. I was amused by an article by the City firm Goldman Sachs—which is not exactly run by closet Conservatives—entitled:

> "Meeting the Challenge?—Labour's Policy".

Goldman Sachs said that it did not very much like what it had seen of the right hon. and learned Gentleman's policies. It said:

> "Monetary, fiscal and exchange policy will be used to promote the competitiveness of British industry . . . This implies a willingness to depreciate."

They are devaluers today just as they always were. Indeed, the policy review states that Labour will end the reliance on high interest rates and an uncompetitive currency. Goldman Sachs concludes:

> "this seems to undermine Labour's commitment to join the exchange rate mechanism of the EMS and to threaten its counter inflationary policy."

Indeed it does. Labour has no counter-inflation policy.

The problem with Labour's economic policy is the lack of any means to control inflation. There is no incentive for people to control costs. Labour is now in the age of glitznost—let the glitter be the substance. There has been a great deal of fraud and a few facts during the debate. My right hon. and hon. Friends should make no mistake—we

[Mr. Major]

have seen all that we are going to see of Labour's plans to deal with inflation. On that they are implementing Labour's election strategy—smarten up and shut up.

How many basic rate tax payers will be worse off? Labour Members will not say. How many people will suffer from the increase in the national insurance ceiling? They will not say. How much will people lose by the loss of the married couples allowance? They will not say. That is the reality. They will not vote for a policy that will reduce inflation and recreate growth. In this Budget we have a policy to bring down inflation and to create growth. I commend it to the House.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 338, Noes 228.

Division No. 139] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney

Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian

Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*

Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*

Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Alistair Goodlad and
Mr. Tony Durant.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim *(Pontypridd)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That it is expedient to amend the law with respect to the National Debt and the public revenue and to make further provision in connection with finance; but this Resolution does not extend to the making of any amendment with respect to value added tax so as to provide—

(a) for zero-rating or exempting any supply;

(b) for refunding any amount of tax;

(c) for varying the rate of that tax otherwise than in relation to all supplies and importations; or

(d) for relief other than relief applying to goods of whatever description or services of whatever description.

Mr. Speaker: I am now required under Standing Order No. 50(3) to put successively, without further debate, the Question on each of the ways and means motions, on the motions for procedure and the money resolution on the Finance Bill.

2. Spirits

Resolved,

That, as from 6 o'clock in the evening of 20th March 1990, the rate of duty specified in section 5 of the Alcoholic Liquor Duties Act 1979 shall be increased from £15·77 per litre of alcohol in the spirits to £17·35 per litre of alcohol in the spirits.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

3. Beer

Resolved,

That, as from 6 o'clock in the evening of 20th March 1990, the rate of duty specified in section 36 of the Alcoholic Duties Act 1979 shall be increased from £0·90 per hectolitre for every degree by which the original gravity of beer exceeds 1,000 degrees to £·97 per hectolitre for every such degree.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

4. Wine and made-wine

Resolved,

That, as from 6 o'clock in the evening of 20th March 1990, the rates of duty under sections 54 and 55 of the Alcoholic Liquor Duties Act 1979 shall be as follows—

Description of wine or made-wine	Rates of duty per hectolitre
	£
Wine or made-wine of a strength less than 2 per cent.	11·03
Wine or made-wine of a strength exceeding 2 per cent. but not exceeding 3 per cent.	18·38
Wine or made-wine of a strength exceeding 3 per cent. but not exceeding 4 per cent.	25·73
Wine or made-wine of a strength exceeding 4 per cent. but not exceeding 5 per cent.	33·09
Wine or made-wine of a strength exceeding 5 per cent. but not exceeding 5·5 per cent.	40·44
Wine or made-wine of a strength exceeding 5·5 per cent. but not exceeding 15 per cent. and not being sparkling	110·28
Sparkling wine or sparkling made-wine of a strength exceeding 5·5 per cent. but not exceeding 15 per cent.	182·10
Wine or made-wine of a strength exceeding 15 per cent. but not exceeding 18 per cent.	190·20
Wine or made-wine of a strength exceeding 18 per cent. but not exceeding 22 per cent.	219·40
Wine or made-wine of a strength exceeding 22 per cent.	219·40 plus £17·35 for every 1 per cent. or part of 1 per cent. in excess of 22 per cent.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

5. Cider

Resolved,

That, as from 6 o'clock in the evening of 20th March 1990, the rate of duty specified in section 62(1) of the Alcoholic Liquor Duties Act 1979 shall be increased from £17·33 per hectolitre to £18·66 per hectolitre.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

6. Tobacco products

Resolved,

That, as from 23rd March 1990, the rates of duty on cigarettes, cigars and hand-rolling tobacco specified in Schedule 1 to the Tobacco Products Duty Act 1979 shall be increased—

(a) in the case of cigarettes, to an amount equal to 21 per cent. of the retail price plus £34·91 per thousand cigarettes;

(b) in the case of cigars, to £53·67 per kilogram; and

(c) in the case of hand-rolling tobacco, to £56·63 per kilogram.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

7. Hydrocarbon oil

Motion made, and Question put,

That, as from 6 o'clock in the evening of 20th March 1990—

(1) The rates of duty specified in subsection (1) of section 6 of the Hydrocarbon Oil Duties Act 1979 shall be increased—

(a) in the case of light oil, from £0·2044 a litre to £0·2248 a litre; and

(b) in the case of heavy oil, from £0·1729 a litre to £0·1902 a litre.

(2) Subsection (2A) of that section (special rate of duty on petrol below 4 star) shall cease to have effect.

(3) The rates of rebate of duty specified in subsection 11(1) of that Act shall be increased—

(a) in the case of fuel oil, from £0·0077 a litre to £0·0083 a litre; and

(b) in the case of gas oil, from £0·0110 a litre to £0·0118 a litre.

(4) The rate of rebate of duty specified in section 13A(1) of that Act (unleaded petrol) shall be increased from £0·0272 a litre to £0·0299 a litre.

(5) The rate of rebate of duty specified in section 14(1) of that Act (light oil for use as furnace oil) shall be increased from £0·0077 a litre to £0·0083 a litre.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.—*[Mr. Salmond.]*

The House divided: Ayes 340, Noes 13.

Division No. 140] **[10.18 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baldry, Tony
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cartwright, John
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney

Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Staml'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John

Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*

Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Page, Richard
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*

Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Alastair Goodlad and
Mr. Tony Durant.

NOES

Corbyn, Jeremy
Cryer, Bob
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Kilfedder, James
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Nellist, Dave
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Wigley, Dafydd

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Andrew Welsh and
Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones.

Question accordingly agreed to.

8. VEHICLES EXCISE DUTY (RATES)

Resolved,

That the Vehicles (Excise) Act 1971 ("the 1971 Act") and the Vehicles (Excise) Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 ("the 1972 Act") shall have effect, in relation to licences taken out after 20th March 1990, with the amendments set out below.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

(1) In Schedule 3 to each Act (annual rates of duty on haulage vehicles)—

(a) in paragraph 1 of Part I, for the words from "according" to the end there shall be substituted the words "be the rate specified in relation to vehicles of that description in the second column of that Part."; and

(b) for the Table set out in Part II there shall be substituted the Table set out below:

Description of vehicle	Rate of duty
	£
1. Special machines	16·00
2. Haulage vehicles, being showmen's vehicles	90·00
3. Haulage vehicles, not being showmen's vehicles	330·00
4. Recovery vehicles	50·00

(2) For the Tables set out in Part II of Schedule 4 to the 1971 Act there shall be substituted the Tables set out below:

TABLE A

RATES OF DUTY ON RIGID GOODS VEHICLES EXCEEDING 12,000 KILOGRAMS PLATED GROSS WEIGHT

GENERAL RATES

Plated gross weight of vehicle		Rate of duty		
(1) Exceeding	(2) Not exceeding	(3) Two axle vehicle	(4) Three axle vehicle	(5) Four or more axle vehicle
kgs	kgs	£	£	£
12,000	13,000	450·00	470·00	340·00
13,000	14,000	630·00	470·00	340·00
14,000	15,000	810·00	470·00	340·00
15,000	17,000	1,280·00	470·00	340·00
17,000	19,000	—	820·00	340·00
19,000	21,000	—	990·00	340·00
21,000	23,000	—	1,420·00	490·00
23,000	25,000	—	2,160·00	800·00
25,000	27,000	—	—	1,420·00
27,000	29,000	—	—	2,240·00
29,000	30,490	—	—	3,250·00

TABLE A(1)

RATES OF DUTY ON RIGID GOODS VEHICLES EXCEEDING 12,000 KILOGRAMS PLATED GROSS WEIGHT

RATES FOR FARMERS' GOODS VEHICLES

Plated gross weight of vehicle		Rate of duty		
1. Exceeding	2. Not exceeding	3. Two axle vehicle	4. Three axle vehicle	5. Four or more axle vehicle
kgs	kgs	£	£	£
12,000	13,000	270·00	280·00	205·00
13,000	14,000	380·00	280·00	205·00
14,000	15,000	490·00	280·00	205·00
15,000	17,000	770·00	280·00	205·00
17,000	19,000	—	490·00	205·00
19,000	21,000	—	595·00	205·00
21,000	23,000	—	850·00	295·00
23,000	25,000	—	1,295·00	480·00
25,000	27,000	—	—	850·00
27,000	29,000	—	—	1,345·00
29,000	30,490	—	—	1,950·00

TABLE A(2)

RATES OF DUTY ON RIGID GOODS VEHICLES EXCEEDING 12,000 KILOGRAMS PLATED GROSS WEIGHT

RATES FOR SHOWMEN'S GOODS VEHICLES

Plated gross weight of vehicle		Rate of duty		
1. Exceeding	2. Not exceeding	3. Two axle vehicle	4. Three axle vehicle	5. Four or more axle vehicle
kgs	kgs	£	£	£
12,000	13,000	115·00	120·00	90·00
13,000	14,000	160·00	120·00	90·00
14,000	15,000	205·00	120·00	90·00
15,000	17,000	320·00	120·00	90·00
17,000	19,000	—	205·00	90·00
19,000	21,000	—	250·00	90·00
21,000	23,000	—	355·00	125·00
23,000	25,000	—	540·00	200·00
25,000	27,000	—	—	355·00
27,000	29,000	—	—	560·00
29,000	30,490	—	—	815·00

TABLE B

SUPPLEMENTARY RATES OF DUTY ON RIGID GOODS VEHICLES EXCEEDING 12,000 KILOGRAMS PLATED GROSS WEIGHT USED FOR DRAWING TRAILERS EXCEEDING 4,000 KILOGRAMS PLATED GROSS WEIGHT

GENERAL RATES

Plated gross weight of trailer		Duty supplement
Exceeding	Not exceeding	
kgs	kgs	£
4,000	8,000	130·00
8,000	10,000	130·00
10,000	12,000	130·00
12,000	14,000	360·00
14,000	—	360·00

TABLE B(1)

SUPPLEMENTARY RATES OF DUTY ON RIGID GOODS VEHICLES EXCEEDING 12,000 KILOGRAMS PLATED GROSS WEIGHT USED FOR DRAWING TRAILERS EXCEEDING 4,000 KILOGRAMS PLATED GROSS WEIGHT

RATES FOR FARMERS' GOODS VEHICLES

Plated gross weight of trailer		Duty supplement
Exceeding	Not exceeding	
kgs	kgs	£
4,000	8,000	130·00
8,000	10,000	130·00
10,000	12,000	130·00
12,000	14,000	360·00
14,000	—	360·00

TABLE B(2)

SUPPLEMENTARY RATES OF DUTY ON RIGID GOODS VEHICLES EXCEEDING 12,000 KILOGRAMS PLATED GROSS WEIGHT USED FOR DRAWING TRAILERS EXCEEDING 4,000 KILOGRAMS PLATED GROSS WEIGHT

RATES FOR SHOWMEN'S GOODS VEHICLES

Plated gross weight of trailer		Duty supplement
Exceeding	Not exceeding	
kgs —	kgs —	£ 80·00

TABLE C

RATES OF DUTY ON TRACTOR UNITS EXCEEDING 12,000 KILOGRAMS PLATED TRAIN WEIGHT AND HAVING ONLY 2 AXLES

GENERAL RATES

Plated train weight of tractor unit		Rate of duty		
1. Exceeding	2. Not exceeding	3. For a tractor unit to be used with semi-trailers with any number of axles	4. For a tractor unit to be used only with semi-trailers with not less than two axles	5. For a tractor unit to be used only with semi-trailers with not less than three axles
kgs	kgs	£	£	£
12,000	14,000	440·00	440·00	440·00
14,000	16,000	440·00	440·00	440·00
16,000	18,000	500·00	440·00	440·00
18,000	20,000	500·00	440·00	440·00
20,000	22,000	780·00	440·00	440·00
22,000	23,000	780·00	440·00	440·00
23,000	25,000	1,150·00	570·00	440·00
25,000	26,000	1,150·00	570·00	440·00
26,000	28,000	1,150·00	1,090·00	440·00
28,000	29,000	1,680·00	1,680·00	1,050·00
29,000	31,000	1,680·00	1,680·00	1,050·00
31,000	33,000	2,450·00	2,450·00	1,680·00
33,000	34,000	2,450·00	2,450·00	1,680·00
34,000	36,000	2,750·00	2,750·00	2,750·00
36,000	38,000	3,100·00	3,100·00	3,100·00

Table C(1)

Rates of Duty on Tractor Units Exceeding 12,000 Kilograms Plated Train Weight and Having Only 2 Axles

Rates for Farmers' Goods Vehicles

Plated train weight of tractor unit		Rate of duty		
1. Exceeding	2. Not exceeding	3. For a tractor unit to be used with semi-trailers with any number of axles	4. For a tractor unit to be used only with semi-trailers with not less than two axles	5. For a tractor unit to be used only with semi-trailers with not less than three axles
kgs	kgs	£	£	£
12,000	14,000	265·00	265·00	265·00
14,000	16,000	265·00	265·00	265·00
16,000	18,000	300·00	265·00	265·00
18,000	20,000	300·00	265·00	265·00
20,000	22,000	470·00	265·00	265·00
22,000	23,000	470·00	265·00	265·00
23,000	25,000	690·00	340·00	265·00
25,000	26,000	690·00	340·00	265·00
26,000	28,000	690·00	655·00	265·00
28,000	29,000	1,010·00	1,010·00	630·00
29,000	31,000	1,010·00	1,010·00	630·00
31,000	33,000	1,470·00	1,470·00	1,010·00
33,000	34,000	1,470·00	1,470·00	1,010·00
34,000	36,000	1,650·00	1,650·00	1,650·00
36,000	38,000	1,860·00	1,860·00	1,860·00

Table C(2)

Rates of Duty on Tractor Units Exceeding 12,000 Kilograms Plated Train Weight and Having Only 2 Axles

Rates for Showmen's Goods Vehicles

Plated train weight of tractor unit		Rate of duty		
1. Exceeding	2. Not exceeding	3. For a tractor unit to be used with semi-trailers with any number of axles	4. For a tractor unit to be used only with semi-trailers with not less than two axles	5. For a tractor unit to be used only with semi-trailers with not less than three axles
kgs	kgs	£	£	£
12,000	14,000	110·00	110·00	110·00
14,000	16,000	110·00	110·00	110·00
16,000	18,000	125·00	110·00	110·00
18,000	20,000	125·00	110·00	110·00
20,000	22,000	195·00	110·00	110·00
22,000	23,000	195·00	110·00	110·00
23,000	25,000	290·00	145·00	110·00
25,000	26,000	290·00	145·00	110·00
26,000	28,000	290·00	275·00	110·00
28,000	29,000	420·00	420·00	265·00
29,000	31,000	420·00	420·00	265·00
31,000	33,000	615·00	615·00	420·00
33,000	34,000	615·00	615·00	420·00
34,000	36,000	690·00	690·00	690·00
36,000	38,000	775·00	775·00	775·00

TABLE D

RATES OF DUTY ON TRACTOR UNITS EXCEEDING 12,000 KILOGRAMS PLATED TRAIN WEIGHT AND HAVING 3 OR MORE AXLES

GENERAL RATES

Plated train weight of tractor unit		Rate of duty		
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
Exceeding	Not exceeding	For a tractor unit to be used with semi-trailers with any number of axles	For a tractor unit to be used only with semi-trailers with not less than two axles	For a tractor unit to be used only with semi-trailers with not less than three axles
kgs	kgs	£	£	£
12,000	14,000	440·00	440·00	440·00
14,000	16,000	440·00	440·00	440·00
16,000	18,000	440·00	440·00	440·00
18,000	20,000	440·00	440·00	440·00
20,000	22,000	440·00	440·00	440·00
22,000	23,000	440·00	440·00	440·00
23,000	25,000	570·00	440·00	440·00
25,000	26,000	570·00	440·00	440·00
26,000	28,000	1,090·00	440·00	440·00
28,000	29,000	1,680·00	640·00	440·00
29,000	31,000	1,680·00	640·00	440·00
31,000	33,000	2,450·00	970·00	440·00
33,000	34,000	2,450·00	1,420·00	550·00
34,000	36,000	2,450·00	2,030·00	830·00
36,000	38,000	2,730·00	2,730·00	1,240·00

TABLE D(1)

RATES OF DUTY ON TRACTOR UNITS EXCEEDING 12,000 KILOGRAMS PLATED TRAIN WEIGHT AND HAVING THREE OR MORE AXLES

RATES FOR FARMERS' GOODS VEHICLES

Plated train weight of tractor unit		Rate of duty		
1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
Exceeding	Not exceeding	For a tractor unit to be used with semi-trailers with any number of axles	For a tractor unit to be used only with semi-trailers with not less than two axles	For a tractor unit to be used only with semi-trailers with not less than three axles
kgs	kgs	£	£	£
12,000	14,000	265·00	265·00	265·00
14,000	16,000	265·00	265·00	265·00
16,000	18,000	265·00	265·00	265·00
18,000	20,000	265·00	265·00	265·00
20,000	22,000	265·00	265·00	265·00
22,000	23,000	265·00	265·00	265·00
23,000	25,000	340·00	265·00	265·00
25,000	26,000	340·00	265·00	265·00
26,000	28,000	655·00	265·00	265·00
28,000	29,000	1,010·00	385·00	265·00
29,000	31,000	1,010·00	385·00	265·00
31,000	33,000	1,470·00	580·00	265·00
33,000	34,000	1,470·00	850·00	330·00
34,000	36,000	1,470·00	1,220·00	500·00
36,000	38,000	1,640·00	1,640·00	745·00

TABLE D(2)

RATES OF DUTY ON TRACTOR UNITS EXCEEDING 12,000 KILOGRAMS PLATED TRAIN WEIGHT AND HAVING 3 OR MORE AXLES

RATES FOR SHOWMEN'S GOODS VEHICLES

Plated train weight of tractor unit		Rate of duty		
1. Exceeding	2. Not exceeding	3. For a tractor unit to be used with semi-trailers with any number of axles	4. For a tractor unit to be used only with semi-trailers with not less than two axles	5. For a tractor unit to be used only with semi-trailers with not less than three axles
kgs	kgs	£	£	£
12,000	14,000	110·00	110·00	110·00
14,000	16,000	110·00	110·00	110·00
16,000	18,000	110·00	110·00	110·00
18,000	20,000	110·00	110·00	110·00
20,000	22,000	110·00	110·00	110·00
22,000	23,000	110·00	110·00	110·00
23,000	25,000	145·00	110·00	110·00
25,000	26,000	145·00	110·00	110·00
26,000	28,000	275·00	110·00	110·00
28,000	29,000	420·00	160·00	110·00
29,000	31,000	420·00	160·00	110·00
31,000	33,000	615·00	245·00	110·00
33,000	34,000	615·00	355·00	140·00
34,000	36,000	615·00	510·00	210·00
36,000	38,000	685·00	685·00	310·00

(3) The Tables set out above shall also be substituted for the Tables set out in Part II of Schedule 4 to the 1972 Act, but with the following modifications—

(a) for the words "plated gross weight", in each place where they occur, there shall be substituted the words "relevant maximum weight", and

(b) for the words "plated train weight", in each place where they occur, there shall be substituted the words "relevant maximum train weight".

(4) In paragraph 2 of Schedule 4A to each Act (annual rates of duty on vehicles used for carrying or drawing exceptional loads) for "£3,100" there shall be substituted "£3,250".

9. VEHICLES EXCISE DUTY (EXEMPTIONS)

Resolved,

That, as from 21st March 1990, section 4 of each of the Vehicles (Excise) Act 1971 and the Vehicles (Excise) Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 (exemptions) shall have effect with the amendments set out below.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

(1) In subsection (1) the following paragraph shall be inserted after paragraph (c)—

"(ca) veterinary ambulances;".

(2) In subsection (1) the following paragraphs shall be inserted after paragraph (k)—

"(ka) vehicles (other than mowing machines) neither constructed nor adapted for use nor used for the carriage of a driver or passenger;

(kb) vehicles (other than ambulances) used for the carriage of disabled persons by bodies for the time being recognised for the purposes of this paragraph by the Secretary of State;".

(3) The following subsections shall be inserted after subsection (1)—

"(1A) The Secretary of State shall recognise a body for the purposes of subsection (1)(kb) above if, on application made to him in such manner as he may specify, it appears to him that the body is concerned with the care of disabled persons.

(1B) The issue by the Secretary of State of a nil licence in respect of a mechanically propelled vehicle shall be treated, where the document is issued by virtue of paragraph (kb) of subsection (1) above, as recognition by him for the purposes of that paragraph of the body by reference to whose use of the vehicle the document is issued.

(1C) The Secretary of State may withdraw recognition of a body for the purposes of subsection (1)(kb) above if it appears to him that the body is no longer concerned with the care of disabled persons.

(1D) The reference in subsection (1B) above to the issue by the Secretary of State of a nil licence is a reference to the issue by him in accordance with regulations under this Act of a document which—

(a) is in the form of a vehicle licence, and

(b) has the word "NIL" marked in the space provided for indicating the amount of duty payable."

(4) In subsection (2) the following definitions shall be inserted before the definition of "road construction vehicle"—

"'ambulance' means a vehicle which—

(a) is constructed or adapted for, and used for no other purpose than, the carriage of sick, injured or disabled persons to or from welfare centres or places where medical or dental treatment is given; and

(b) is readily identifiable as a vehicle used for the carriage of such persons by virtue of being marked 'Ambulance' on both sides;

'disabled person' means a person suffering from a physical or mental defect or disability;

'veterinary ambulance' means a vehicle which—

(a) is used for no other purpose than the carriage of sick or injured animals to or from places where veterinary treatment is given; and

(b) is readily identifiable as a vehicle used for the carriage of such animals by virtue of being marked 'Veterinary Ambulance' on both sides;".

10. VALUE ADDED TAX (REGISTRATION)

Resolved,

That—

(1) The Value Added Tax Act 1983 shall be amended as follows.

(2) for paragraph 1(1) to (3) of Schedule 1 (registration) there shall be substituted—

"(1) Subject to sub-paragraphs (3) to (5) below, a person who makes taxable supplies but is not registered becomes liable to be registered—

(a) at the end of any month, if the value of his taxable supplies in the period of one year then ending has exceeded £25,400; or

(b) at any time, if there are reasonable grounds for believing that the value of his taxable supplies in the period of thirty days then beginning will exceed £25,400.

(2) Where a business carried on by a taxable person is transferred to another person as a going concern and the transferee is not registered at the time of the transfer, then subject to sub-paragraphs (3) to (5) below, the transferee becomes liable to be registered at that time if—

(a) the value of his taxable supplies in the period of one year ending at the time of the transfer has exceeded £25,400; or

(b) there are reasonable grounds for believing that the value of his taxable supplies in the period of thirty days beginning at the time of the transfer will exceed £25,400.

(3) A person does not become liable to be registered by virtue of sub-paragraph (1)(a) or (2)(a) above if the Commissioners are satisfied that the value of his taxable supplies in the period of one year beginning at the time at which, apart from this sub-paragraph, he would become liable to be registered will not exceed £24,400."

(3) In paragraph 1(4) of Schedule 1 after "(1)(a)" there shall be inserted "or (2)(a)".

(4) In paragraph 1(5) of Schedule 1 after "sub-paragraph (1)" there shall be inserted "or (2)".

(5) In paragraph 1(6) of Schedule 1 after "sub-paragraph (1)" there shall be inserted "or (2)".

(6) For paragraphs 3 and 4 of Schedule 1 there shall be substituted—

"3.—(1) A person who becomes liable to be registered by virtue of paragraph 1(1)(a) above shall notify the Commissioners of the liability within thirty days of the end of the relevant month.

(2) The Commissioners shall register any such person (whether or not he so notifies them) with effect from the end of the month following the relevant month or from such earlier date as may be agreed between them and him.

(3) In this paragraph "the relevant month", in relation to a person who becomes liable to be registered, means the month at the end of which he becomes liable to be registered.

4.—(1) A person who becomes liable to be registered by virtue of paragraph 1(1)(b) above shall notify the Commissioners of the liability before the end of the period by reference to which the liability arises.

(2) The Commissioners shall register any such person (whether or not he so notifies them) with effect from the beginning of the period by reference to which the liability arises.

4A.—(1) A person who becomes liable to be registered by virtue of paragraph 1(2) above shall notify the Commissioners of the liability within thirty days of the time when the business is transferred.

(2) The Commissioners shall register any such person (whether or not he so notifies them) with effect from the time when the business is transferred.

4B. Where a person becomes liable to be registered by virtue of paragraph 1(1)(a) above and by virtue of paragraph 1(1)(b) or 1(2) above at the same time, the Commissioners shall register him in accordance with paragraph 4(2) or 4A(2) above, as the case may be, rather than paragraph 3(2) above."

(7) Section 33(1A) (registration of transfereee of business) shall cease to have effect.

(8) In consequence of the amendment of paragraph 1, in section 28(1) (registration of local authorities) for "1(a)(ii)" there shall be substituted "1(1)(a)".

(9). Paragraphs (2) to (5) and (8) above shall come into force on 21 March 1990.

(10) Paragraphs (6) and (7) above apply in relation to persons who become liable to be registered after 20 March 1990.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

11. VALUE ADDED TAX (SUPPLIES TO GROUPS)

Resolved,

That, in relation to transfers of assets made on or after 1st April 1990, section 29A of the Value Added Tax Act 1983 shall have effect with the following amendments—

(1) In subsection (1) for "and (3)" there shall be substituted "to (3A)".

(2) The following subsection shall be inserted after subsection (3)—

"(3A) Subsection (4) below shall not apply to the extent that the chargeable assets consist of capital items in respect of which regulations made under section 15(3) and (4) above, and in force when the assets are transferred, provide for adjustment to the deduction of input tax."

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

12. VALUE ADDED TAX (DOMESTIC ACCOMMODATION)

Resolved,

That provision may be made about the definition of "input tax" in relation to goods or services used or to be used in connection with the provision by a company of accommodation used or to be used for domestic purposes by a director of the company or a person connected with a director of the company.

13. VALUE ADDED TAX (GOODS SHIPPED AS STORES)

Resolved,

That provision may be made restricting section 16(6) of the Value Added Tax Act 1983.

14. INCOME TAX (CHARGE AND RATES FOR 1990-91)

Resolved,

That income tax shall be charged for the year 1990-91, and—

(a) the basic rate shall be 25 per cent.;

(b) the basic rate limit shall be £20,700;

(c) the higher rate shall be 40 per cent..; and

(d) section 1(4) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 (indexation) shall not apply.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

15. INCOME TAX

(OPERATIVE DATE OF INDEXATION FOR PAYE)

Resolved,

That in sections 1(5) and 257C(2) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988, for the words from "between" to the end there shall be substituted the words "during the period beginning with 6th April and ending with 17th May in the year of assessment."

And it hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

16. RELIEF FOR BLIND PERSONS

Resolved,

That—

(1) In section 265(1) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988, for "£540" there shall be substituted "£1,080"

(2) This Resolution shall not require any change to be made in the amounts deductible or repayable under section 203 of that Act (pay as you earn) before 18th May 1990.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

17. RELIEF FOR INTEREST (LIMIT FOR 1990-91)

Resolved,

That, for the year 1990-91, the qualifying maximum defined in section 367(5) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 (limit on relief for interest on certain loans) shall be £30,000.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.—

18. CORPORATION TAX (CHARGE AND RATE FOR FINANCIAL YEAR 1990)

Resolved,

That corporation tax shall be charged for the financial year 1990 at the rate of 35 per cent.—

19. CORPORATION TAX (SMALL COMPANIES)

Resolved,

That for the financial year 1990—

(a) the small companies' rate shall be 25 per cent., and

(b) the fraction mentioned in section 13(2) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 shall be one-fortieth.—

20. BENEFITS IN KIND (CARS)

Resolved,

That—

(1) For the year 1990-91 and subsequent years of assessment, Schedule 6 to the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 (taxation of directors and others in respect of cars) shall have effect with the substitution of Part I (tables of flat rate cash equivalents) of the following—

PART I

TABLES OF FLAT RATE CASH EQUIVALENTS

TABLE A

Cars with an original market value up to £19,250 and having a cylinder capacity

Cylinder capacity of car in cubic centimetres	Age of car at end of relevant year of assessment	
	Under 4 years	4 years or more
1400 or less	£1,700	£1,150
More than 1400 but not more than 2000	£2,200	£1,500
More than 2000	£3,550	£2,350

TABLE B

Cars with an original market value up to £19,250 and not having a cylinder capacity

Original market value of car	Age of car at end of relevant year of assessment	
	Under 4 years	4 years or more
Less than £6,000	£1,700	£1,150
£6,000 or more but less than £8,500	£2,200	£1,500
£8,500 or more but not more than £19,250	£3,550	£2,350

TABLE C

Cars with an original market value of more than £19,250

Original market value of car	Age of car at end of relevant year of assessment	
	Under 4 years	4 years or more
More than £19,250 but not more than £29,000	£4,600	£3,100
More than £29,000	£7,400	£4,900

(2) This Resolution shall not require any change to be made in the amounts deductible or repayable under section 203 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 (pay as you earn) before 18th May 1990.

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

21. CHARITIES

Resolved,

That, for the year 1990-91 and subsequent years of assessment, section 202(7) of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 (which limits to £480 the payroll deductions attracting relief) shall have effect with the substitution of "£600" for "£480".

And it is hereby declared that it is expedient in the public interest that this Resolution should have statutory effect under the provisions of the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act 1968.

22. EMPLOYEE SHARE OWNERSHIP TRUSTS

Resolved,

That provision may be made in relation to—

(a) assets acquired with consideration provided on disposals to trustees of employee share ownership trusts;

(b) property representing such assets, directly or indirectly.

23. INSURANCE COMPANIES AND FRIENDLY SOCIETIES

Resolved,

That further provision, including provision having retrospective effect, may be made about the taxation of insurance companies and friendly societies.

24. COLLECTIVE INVESTMENT SCHEMES

Resolved,

That provision may be made about collective investment schemes and investors in them.

25. SECURITIES

Resolved,

That charges to income tax, capital gains tax and corporation tax (including charges having retrospective effect) may be imposed by provisions about securities.

26. CAPITAL GAINS (OIL INDUSTRY ASSETS ETC.)

Resolved,

That provision may be made for the purpose of capital gains tax and corporation tax on chargeable gains—

(a) excluding from an election under section 96(5) of the Finance Act 1988 certain shares deriving value, directly or indirectly, from certain assets and rights associated with oil exploration or exploitation; and

(b) limiting or extinguishing the amount of the losses on certain disposals of, or of interests in, such shares and other assets associated with the oil industry.

27. CORPORATION TAX (EFFECT OF REPAYMENT OF PETROLEUM REVENUE TAX)

Resolved,

That provision may be made with respect to the effect of a repayment of petroleum revenue tax on the computation of a company's income from oil extraction activities or oil rights.

28. DUAL RESIDENT COMPANIES

Resolved,

That provision may be made about companies resident in the United Kingdom but regarded for the purposes of double taxation arrangements as resident in a territory outside the United Kingdom.—

29. EUROPEAN ECONOMIC INTEREST GROUPINGS

Resolved,

That provision (including provision having retrospective effect) may be made about the taxation of income and gains in the case of European Economic Interest Groupings.

30. CAPITAL GAINS (ANNUAL EXEMPT AMOUNT)

Resolved,

That provision may be made as to the operation of section 5 of the Capital Gains Tax Act 1979 for the year 1990-91.

31. DEBTS AND GUARANTEES

Resolved,

That provision may be made about debts and guarantees.

32. CAPITAL ALLOWANCES

Resolved,

That provision may be made about capital allowances.

33. ERRORS IN THE INCOME AND CORPORATION TAXES ACT 1988

Resolved,

That provision (including provision having retrospective effect) may be made correcting errors in the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988.

34. LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Resolved,

That provision may be made about the meaning of "local authority".

35. RELIEF FROM TAX (INCIDENTAL AND CONSEQUENTIAL CHARGES)

Resolved,

That it is expedient to authorise any incidental or consequential charges to any duty or tax (including charges having retrospective effect) which may arise from provisions designed in general to afford relief from taxation.

PROCEDURE RESOLUTIONS

PROCEDURE (INFORMATION FOR TAX AUTHORITIES OF MEMBER STATES)

Resolved,

That, notwithstanding anything to the contrary in the practice of the House relating to the matters which may be included in Finance Bills, any Finance Bill of the present Session may make provision for giving effect to the Directive of the Council of the European Communities dated 19th December 1977 No. 77/799/EEC and any Directive of the Council which extends that Directive to other taxes.

PROCEDURE (LOANS BY PUBLIC WORKS LOAN COMMISSIONER)

Resolved,

That, notwithstanding anything to the contrary in the practice of the House relating to the matters which may be included in Finance Bills, any Finance Bill of the present Session may contain provision with respect to the limit by section 4 of the National Loans Act 1968 in relation to loans made by the Public Works Loan Commissioners in pursuance of section 3 of that Act.

PROCEDURE (FUTURE TAXATION)

Resolved,

That, notwithstanding anything to the contrary in the practice of the House relating to the matters which may be included in Finance Bills, any Finance Bill of the present Session may contain the following provisions taking effect in a future year—

(a) provision amending the Taxes Management Act 1970;
(b) provisions amending sections 7, 10, 11, 79, 393 and 396 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988;
(c) provisions about group relief;
(d) provisions amending the Capital Allowances Act 1990; and
(e) provisions about interest on repayments of petroleum revenue tax.

FINANCE BILL *[Money]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—
Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Finance Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(a) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of sums payable by virtue of any provision of that Act enabling provision to be made about repayment of sums paid by way of fees and charges, and
(b) any increase in the sums payable out of or into the National Loans Fund which is attributable to any provision of that Act increasing to £55,000 million, with power to increase by order to £70,000 million, the limit imposed by section 4 of the National Loans Act 1968 in relation to loans made by the Public Works Loan Commissioners in pursuance of section 3.

Ordered,

That a Bill be brought in upon the foregoing resolutions: And that the Chairman of Ways and Means, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Waddington, Mr. Secretary Ridley, Mr. Secretary Parkinson, Mr. Secretary Wakeham, Mr. Secretary Newton, Mr. Secretary Patten, Mr. Norman Lamont, Mr. Secretary Howard, Mr. Peter Lilley and Mr. Richard Ryder do prepare and bring it in.

FINANCE BILL

Mr. Peter Lilley accordingly presented a Bill to grant certain duties, to alter other duties, to amend the law relating to the national debt and the public revenue, and to make further provision in connection with finance: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 109.]

Community Charge

10.30 pm

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): I beg to move,

That the Personal Community Charge (Relief) (England) Regulations 1990 (S.I., 1990, No. 2) dated 2nd January 1990, a copy of which was laid before this House on 5th January, be revoked.

Mr. Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to consider the following two motions:

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Personal Community Charge (Relief) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 1990 (S.I., 1990, No. 402), dated 2nd March 1990, a copy of which was laid before this House on 5th March, be annulled.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Personal Community Charge (Relief) (Wales) Regulations 1990 (S.I., 1990, No. 288) dated 16th February 1990, a copy of which was laid before this House on 19th February, be annulled.

Mr. Gould: At times, it is hard not to feel sorry for the Secretary of State and his Ministers as they wrestle with their poll tax inheritance, but sympathy for them must be strictly limited when we consider the plight of those millions of people who deserve it much more— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Would hon. Members who are not remaining for the debate please leave quietly, particularly those beyond the Bar?

Mr. Gould: Our sympathy for the Secretary of State, who I am sorry does not appear to be present, must be strictly limited when we consider the plight of millions of people who will pay the price for his convolutions and incompetence and for the iniquitous scheme that he and the Government are imposing on them. I am delighted to see that the Secretary of State is now present, although I am sorry that he will not be opening the debate for the Government.

The saga of the poll tax has been increasingly marked by a desperate search for expedients and bolt holes and by increasingly implausible resort to inventions and fictions to try to mask and to conceal what has been done. We are dealing tonight with a prime example of that.

Viewed in retrospect, perhaps one of the most poignant moments in the development of the poll tax was in October, at the Tory party conference, when the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities announced the introduction of the transitional relief scheme, under which, he assured Tory Members and councillors, no one would pay more than £3 above their rates bill. As alarm and anxiety had been expressed by Tory Members and councillors, they were mightily relieved by that assurance. They allowed themselves—they deserve no criticism for this—to be lulled into a false sense of security. Their fears were allayed; they were bought off by that assurance.

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. David Hunt): It would be helpful if the hon. Gentleman would quote the exact words that I used and the exact words used by my noble Friend Lord Hesketh on the same day, when he made it clear that the pledge about people paying no more than £3 above their rates would apply only if the council concerned spent in accordance with Government spending guidelines.

Mr. Gould: I shall come to the point raised by the Minister. If he is already conceding that the promise which he appeared to give was vitiated by the false assumption which he made, that is exactly the point that Opposition Members, and many Conservative Members, will wish to press.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I wish to kill this point straight way. Two weeks ago on our television screens we all saw the briefed and educated Tory candidate for Mid-Staffordshire tell people that their poll tax would not be more than £3 a week more than their rates. He gave that impression because that was the impression that everyone else was supposed to get.

Mr. Gould: It is for the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities to explain himself to the House when he addresses us.

Like so much else in the poll tax saga, and so many of the measures designed to smooth off the rough edges, the relief scheme has turned out to be a massive and fraudulent disappointment. The scheme excludes many of those who might otherwise have been expected to benefit, and offers only an illusion of help to many others. Even for those who, in principle, fall within it, many will pay much more than £3 per week extra, but will not qualify, and many others will qualify for transitional relief but will end up paying more than the £3 per week extra.

We are entitled to ask how a Government promise, so solemnly made to their own supporters, was so comprehensively broken so soon. The answer lies first in the scheme's structure. Many people are, by the scheme's rules, excluded from it. Like the transitional relief scheme for the uniform business rate, many people whose circumstances change after the scheme's introduction will lose its benefit.

That is true for those who turn 18 after 1 April 1990. It is true of those who cease to be exempt, for whatever reason—for example, those who hitherto have been mentally ill, but then recover and rejoin the community after 1 April 1990. They will not be entitled to the scheme's benefits. Those who move house and change their address, even within the same local authority district, after 1 April 1990—of whom there will be many in the ensuing three years—will not qualify. Those who fail to qualify in the first year will be disqualified in successive years, even if their poll tax bill goes us sharply in those successive years.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, on the advice of the Department of the Environment to local authorities, one group of people wholly excluded from transitional relief will be pensioners living in sheltered housing schemes, such as those provided by Anchor Housing? As their rates were paid by the housing association, and by them to the housing association, they will not be classed as ratepayers and the Department is advising local authorities not to pay relief.

Mr. Gould: What the hon. Gentleman said about that case is more generally true, but for slightly different reasons, for many of those living in buildings in multiple occupation.

The scheme's structure also makes it unlikely that two further and large classes of people will benefit to any great degree. Single poll tax payers living by themselves are virtually certain not to qualify, because to do so they would have had to have a rates bill in the current financial

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year £156 lower than the assumed poll tax bill they will shortly receive. That is a virtually impossible requirement in most local authority districts. It would require a ridiculously low rates bill for the current year.

For example, in Pendle, it would require a rates bill of £16 or less, in York, one of just £30 or less, in Hyndburn, just £25 or less. Another way of putting the same rather implausible point is that, in Leominster, the notional poll tax would have to rise by 1,770 per cent. above the rates bill before anyone would qualify for transitional relief.

For different reasons—I refer here to a point related to that made by the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) a moment ago—poll tax payers in large families or in buildings in multiple occupation are unlikely to gain much, if any, benefit from the scheme because the scheme is calculated on the basis of a notional poll tax paid by two members of a household only. However, the relief that they may or may not be entitled to is divided among the number of householders, and that may be three, four, five, six or more.

For all those reasons, the scheme is not what it seems. Like the uniform business rate transitional relief scheme, and perhaps even more like the relief offered to those claiming rebates but hitherto disqualified because of the savings limit, the measures taken by the Government have promised much more than they have delivered.

However, we have not yet considered the main reason why so many expectations have been disappointed. The reason why the scheme so signally fails in its stated purpose is that it is based on a fairy tale. It is vitiated by the same deliberate error that underlay the Government's ill-fated attempt to pursuade local government and the British people that somehow or other their poll tax bills were going to average just £278. Transitional relief is based on the amount by which rates bills plus £156 fall short of what is quaintly called an "assumed" poll tax. That is not the actual poll tax bill that will fall through letter boxes in a week or so's time; it is an assumed poll tax.

What is the assumed poll tax? I received a letter this morning from the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), the chairman of the Tory party, in which he addressed that question. I do not know whether he meant to describe the assumed charge in exactly these terms, but he certainly gave the game away. He wrote that the assumed charge

"is an assumption, not a prediction or guarantee."

Many millions of people who might have hoped to qualify for transitional relief will now know that he spoke the truth—on that occasion, at any rate. The reality is that the assumed poll tax bears virtually no relationship to the size of the actual poll tax bill. We know why that assumption is wrong.

Mr. Hunt: Perhaps I might assist the hon. Gentleman. Barking and Dagenham council is in his constituency. He just said that the assumed charge bears no relationship to the actual charge. In Barking and Dagenham the assumed charge is £278, and the actual charge is £280.

Mr. Gould: I am delighted to congratulate my authority on its ability to meet the Government's prediction. However, that is not the case for the vast majority of local authorities, and the reason for that is understood by Conservative Members as well as by everyone else.

The Government underestimated, and assumed a level of local government spending £1·6 billion lower than the actual level for the current year. They then assumed that no new commitments would be undertaken by local authorities, including new commitments imposed on them by the Government, such as the costs of collecting the poll tax. They also assumed that 100 per cent. of the poll tax would be collected. Not one Conservative Member can tell me that that is the assumption on which his or her district or borough treasurer is operating. The most ludicrous assumption of all is that inflation is running at 3·8 per cent. Again, I ask any hon. Member to tell me whether that is an accurate forecast or assumption.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, in the Suth Derbyshire district, which covers most of my constituency, the assumed charge offered by the Government is £301, which is a 13 per cent. increase over the average rates charged in the area in the previous year? The South Derbyshire district has increased its budget by 9·9 per cent. The reason why our local community charge is 45 per cent. above that figure is the free-spending idiots in Derbyshire county council.

Mr. Gould: I had hoped for a moment, as the hon. Lady rose in her place, that she was about to draw my attention to a little local miracle in South Derbyshire—that she was going to tell me that, in her constituency and in her local authority district, somehow or another, exempt from the inflation rate that applies throughout the rest of the country, inflation was only 3·8 per cent. I noticed that she somehow forbore making that claim.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gould: Here is an hon. Member who is going to make such a claim.

Mr. Tracey: May I bring the hon. Gentleman's attention back to Barking and Dagenham? The leader of the hon. Gentleman's council was quoted in the newspapers as saying that he had no complaints about the grant that he had received from the Government, and that his community charge was arrived at by good management, which had been going on for a number of years. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to confirm or deny that quote. If he confirms it, will he tell us why other Labour councils cannot achieve the same level of efficiency?

Mr. Gould: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman could tell us why so few Tory council leaders have been able to make a similar claim. The reason is that, in their local authority districts, inflation is running at 7·5 per cent., which is twice the Government's assumption. That is why there is no relation between the assumed poll tax and the real poll tax. That is why, according to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy surveys, the average poll tax bill is 34 per cent. above the Government's projections. That is why Conservative local authorities throughout England and Wales have set their poll tax bills 31 per cent. higher than the Government said they would. That is why the average poll tax bill is £90 greater than the Government's assumed poll tax bill.

It is on that £90 average that no relief whatsoever is available under the transitional relief scheme. Because that £90 average conceals gaps which, in some cases, are much greater and which in theory could be unlimited, the Government have so signally failed to keep their promise. That is why so many people will now be required to pay more than the £3 a week extra that they were told was their maximum increase. That is why people are not protected in the way that the Government have promised. That is why the transitional relief scheme is so fatally flawed.

The scheme has at its heart a myth that the Government hope to get away with, but that myth has now been fully exposed. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition said last week, nothing can remedy the basic unfairness of the poll tax, but, when a Government make promises—not least to their own supporters—we, and I hope they, are entitled to see that those promises are kept.

If Conservative Members are serious, if they are honestly trying to mitigate the worst effects of the poll tax, and if they want to be able to say to their constituents that they have done their best by them, they should not accept the shamefully broken promise. They can vote the regulations down. If we vote the regulations down, the consequence will be that the Government will have to take the regulations away and come back with a better scheme that would be a more accurate attempt to fulfil the promise that they have made.

We want to see whether Conservative Members will join us in insisting that the Government keep their promises.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South) *rose*——

Mr. Gould: No, I shall not give way as I am about to conclude.

If Conservative Members do not take that action, it is they, as well as their constituents, who will have been revealed as the victims of a cruel poll tax hoax.

10.49 pm

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. David Hunt): The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) made an unworthy speech. If he had wanted credibility in the House, he should not only have quoted the promise that he alleged that I made, in the terms incorrectly advanced by him; he should also have quoted and referred to *Hansard* for the other place, because the details of the scheme were carefully set out by my noble Friend Lord Hesketh on 11 October 1989.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Will the Minister confirm that he mentioned the figure of £3?

Mr. Hunt: Yes.

When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and I took over the responsibility of local government in the Department of the Environment eight months ago, we found that there was no scheme to protect ratepayers from the consequences of the change to a new system. We felt that circumstances suggested that such a scheme should be introduced. We also found that a safety net would last for four years and decided that we should give our right hon. and hon. Friends an indication that the period for contributions to the safety net would last for only one year. In the first year, half the gains would flow through, and in the second year the full gains would flow through.

We decided that rather than abolish the first year of the contributions to the safety net, we would use the money to bring in a transitional relief scheme. At that time, we quoted figures of just over £600 million for a transitional relief scheme that would last for three years. We chose our words extremely carefully, which is more than the hon. Member for Dagenham has just done. We said that we would introduce a transitional relief scheme that would protect ratepayers from the consequences of the changes in such a way that, provided the council spent in accordance with the assumptions made by the Government, ratepayers would not be more than £3 per week worse off.

Mr. Gould: When the hon. Gentleman expressed himself in those terms, did he have any inkling that in almost every case the assumed poll tax figure would fall so far short of the real poll tax figure? If, as I expect, he had no such inkling, how did he expect those who were listening to him to realise that the promise that he was apparently giving them was conditional on an assumed figure turning out to be right?

Mr. Hunt: If the hon. Gentleman refers to the statement made in the House of Lords on that day and to the speeches made subsequently, he will see that it was made absolutely clear at all stages that the assumed charge would be based—*[Interruption.]* No, let me answer the hon. Gentleman—that the assumed charge would be based on the precept levied by the council from the ratepayer, plus grants from the Government and the business rate, increased by 4·64 per cent. Those figures were published in full on 6 November. The hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) is nodding his head. Those figures were known on 6 November, and were published on 11 January——

Mr. Battle: They were different.

Mr. Hunt: Only in respect of the adjustments made as a result of the grant settlement consultation. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the differences, he will see that they were minimal.

We also met the local authority associations, almost immediately after the announcement of the transitional relief scheme was made. We explained to them the basis on which the Government figures were to be assumed, and the fact that external finance for local authorities would be increased in the coming financial year over this financial year by 8·5 per cent. and that the total amount of standard spending assessment would be increased by 11 per cent. We said that, in those circumstances, we hoped that local authorities would reach community charges in accordance with the level of spending that increased by an amount within the rate of inflation. As it so happens, local authorities have decided to increase their spending by much more than the rate of inflation. Because the level of the community charge depends very much on the local spending decisions of each council, that has immediately increased the community charge.

When I announced the scheme at the party conference, and my noble Friend Lord Hesketh announced it in the other place, we estimated that the total cost of it would be, in the first year, £300 million, that the total amount would be £600 million over three years, and that in the first year 6 million people would benefit. These are important figures which show that we have not gone back on any promise that we have made—the accusation that has been levelled.

We have since revised the figures, and, based on the same commitment, we now find that it will cost not £300 million but £350 million in the coming year, that not just

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6 million but 7·5 million people will benefit, and that the total cost of the scheme will not be £600 million but, over three years, £810 million.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Would it not have been a great help to my hon. Friend if more councils had copied the example of Rochester upon Medway, which has set a community charge of £248, which would have been even less if we had not had to make arrangements to bail out councils elsewhere by contributing to the safety net?

Mr. Hunt: That is a helpful comment because it enables me to point out something on which the Labour party has sought to mislead the public—this is a serious accusation. This misleading statement has been picked up, quite incorrectly, by many in the media. It was made by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), who said that those in overspending council areas would lose their right to transitional relief. That is untrue. It is important to say this because that statement has been repeated several times by Opposition Members. Once the transitional relief figure has been fixed, in accordance with the assumed figures, not one penny or pound of it is lost, even if the recipient of that relief is in the area of an overspending Labour council.

Mr. Gould: The point that my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) made was that there would be no relief for the gap between the assumed figure and the real figure. If the Minister will look at column 750 of *Hansard* for 6 November, he will see the record set out clearly. Unlike the wriggling to which the right hon. Gentleman treated us when he gave his assumptions about the level of poll tax charges, he purported to give us specific figures about the cost of the transitional relief scheme and the numbers who would benefit. Does he agree with paragraph 2 of the report from the working party on the community charge, from his own Department? It says that the figures that he has quoted and the figures on which he bases his argument are "indicative" rather than "precise forecasts".

Mr. Hunt: It is an indicative forecast of how much the relief will cost in the first year and how many people will receive it. I have upgraded the figures from £300 million to £350 million and the receivers from 6 million to 7·5 million. I stand by those figures.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that there is much uncertainty and anxiety. Will he upgrade the assumed community charge, which in Leeds was £257, to the assumed target average of £278? That is one of the reasons for a sense of injustice. Will he consider extending the period of transitional relief so that the unwinding of it in conjunction with the unwinding of the safety net does not produce substantial losses in northern town after northern town?

Mr. Hunt: The assumed level of spending is based on last year's spending plus 4·64 per cent. That applies throughout the country, and it does not bear a direct relationship to what my hon. Friend was talking about when he referred to the standard assessment. It is designed purely to cover the consequences to a ratepayer for a change in the system and not to cover changes in the spending pattern of his local authority. That is key, and that was the basis on which the scheme was announced.

I must take issue with the hon. Member for Dagenham. I cannot recall being accused—perhaps the hon. Gentleman has levelled this accusation at others—of misleading the House. Let there be no misunderstanding about this: what the Labour party has said about transitional relief is entirely untrue and has led to much uncertainty in the country. There are many who believe that they will not be entitled to transitional relief because of statements made by Opposition Members when they will be entitled to it.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): We are grateful to my hon. Friend for the relief that has been made available, but there are many hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people who are faced with considerably higher bills than they had last year. Some of them are relatively low paid, yet they are faced with increases of up to £8 a week. Many pensioners are still concerned about the rate of attrition of their savings. Can my hon. Friend tell the House—many of his hon. Friends are deeply anxious—that the Government will be introducing further support and relief this year for those who are most hard pressed?

Mr. Hunt: We are debating a transitional relief scheme which, despite the accusations of the Opposition, has not been changed one jot from the moment when we announced it, although its scope has increased. My hon. Friend has drawn attention to a serious circumstance in which local people are facing the consequences of their local councils deciding to increase their spending by substantially more than the rate of inflation. I can offer no immediate sustenance by means of the scheme to deal with that. The level of the community charge depends much on the spending decisions of a local authority. The scheme provides transitional relief at a cost of £350 million in the first year to 7·5 million people to cover the changes in the system. It is nothing to do with the change in the system that there have been spending decisions that would mean an increase in rates of 33 per cent. That is nothing to do with the change in the system. It has everything to do, however, with the way in which spending decisions have been made.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): I ask a question as a naive constituency Member without an understanding of the variety of figures which have been quoted. I have a letter from one of my constituents, Amanda Dawn Singleton, who has received a document which tells her that she will have to pay £42·90 a month on the introduction of the community charge. She receives £44 and a £10 training allowance per week. She writes:

> "I cannot afford to pay this amount. I am in a desperate situation, could you please please help me."

I have her community charge bill with me. It states:

> "Less your Government transitional relief ... 0·00
> Less your Government rebate ... ... 0·00"

What can I say to my constituent?

Mr. Hunt: I always dislike trying to deal with complicated cases across the Floor of the House. I do not know the particular circumstances. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to put those facts to me, I shall consider them. Transitional relief is intended to benefit those who are currently ratepayers or members of ratepaying couples and we have singled out pensioners and disabled people who do not fall into that category and given them special relief, which means that they will pay a community charge of £158 in the hon. Gentleman's area and £156 in Wirral.

Mr. Keith Speed (Ashford): Does my hon. Friend agree that the burden of the Opposition's case is that they endorse local government expenditure increases of 35 per cent. and expect the taxpayer to underwrite them?

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. I ask the Minister to respond to each intervention. We cannot have one on top of another—*[Interruption.]* I should like a little less noise from the Benches below the Gangway.

Mr. Hunt: My hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Speed) is absolutely right. The transitional relief scheme covers and protects ratepayers and members of ratepaying couples from changes in the system. My hon. Friend has clearly demonstrated that what is now arising is the result not of the change in the system but of spending decisions that would have meant a 33 per cent. increase in domestic rates.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Am I right in believing that in my hon. Friend's constituency ratepayers had a choice between the lower Conservative community charge and that suggested by the Liberals, which was higher? Would it not have been an enormous advantage to the citizens of Lancashire if they could have chosen between the additional £123 million of expenditure by the Labour party and the reduction of £60 million by the Conservative party?

Mr. Hunt: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. In Wirral the Conservatives proposed a community charge, and so did the Liberal-Democrats, but the Labour party refused to put forward a figure——

Mr. Gould *rose*——

Mr. Hunt: Wait a moment; let me answer my hon. Friend. The Labour party decided not to propose a charge, although it is believed that if it had it would have been about £450. Some 12,500 people voted in the telephone poll—64 per cent. opted for the Conservative suggestion.

Mr. Den Dover (Chorley): I listened carefully to my hon. Friend's speech at Blackpool. It was my opinion—shared, I am sure, by the many thousands present—that each individual in a married couple would benefit to the tune of £3 a week. Many of my constituents now think that there has been an act of bad faith. They are now told that it is £3 a week maximum—assuming that the spending levels are adhered to—shared between two or more people. Can my hon. Friend assure us that that was never the intention? My constituents are very concerned about this matter.

Mr. Hunt: I said clearly at the party conference that, with the proviso I made about spending by local authorities, the new scheme would ensure that in areas where local authorities spent sensibly no ratepayer or ratepaying couple would be more than £3 a week worse off when the community charge was introduced, whatever their income. I can add that we shall now single out pensioners and the disabled for special treatment, whether or not they pay rates.

> "If the local authority decides to spend above Government guidelines, it is right that the full amount of the excess"

—these are my exact words at the party conference—

> "should fall to be met by the local charge payer".

Mr. Rooker: Does the Minister appreciate that, if that statement had been made where it could have been tested by questioning—for example, in the House—the misinformation and false promises would not have been planted in people's minds? It was reading that from the conference platform that caused the difficulty. I have one general question.

Mr. Hunt: May I get this absolutely straight? The hon. Gentleman was not listening. I said that my comments at the party conference were repeated in the other place at almost exactly the same time by Lord Hesketh. It may well be that the hon. Gentleman has some criticisms of his hon. Friends in the other place, but on 11 October 1989, at column 344, Lord Hesketh——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sure that the Minister is a sufficiently practised parliamentarian to paraphrase that for me.

Mr. Hunt: If the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) checks the facts, he will see that there was no misunderstanding whatever.

Mrs. Currie: May I refer my hon. Friend to the Library research note No. 477 of 3 November 1989, almost immediately after we returned to the House, in which the details that he has set out on the transitional relief, which will go to 10,000 families in my constituency, are set out precisely? The only difference since then has been that the allowance for inflation has been raised. Does my hon. Friend agree that, if Labour Members did their homework in the Library, they would not have made the mistakes that they have made tonight—unless they are doing it deliberately?

Mr. Hunt: The Labour party has done its homework, but it has chosen to ignore the facts.

Mr. Gould *rose*—

Mr. Hunt: Just one second. That has caused much misunderstanding throughout the country. The circumstances of this scheme have not changed one little bit, except in one respect: whereas before we thought that the total scheme over three years would cost £600 million, it now will cost £810 million.

Mr. Gould: I am grateful to the Minister for at last giving way. *[Interruption.]* Before his hon. Friends attempted to rescue him, he was making an interesting point about the special relief, as he termed it, which would be available to elderly and disabled people. He will know that in the regulations relief takes the form of a limit to what they must pay of £156 plus Z, Z equalling the difference between the assumed poll tax and the real poll tax. He will accept that Z on average throughout England and Wales amounts to £90. That means that the average bill for an elderly and disabled person will be £246 a year. As we are talking about elderly and disabled people who

[Mr. Gould]

hitherto have paid nothing whatever, how can he describe an obligation to pay £246 as special help and transitional relief?

Mr. Hunt: It is special help under the transitional relief scheme. The individuals have full entitlement to rebate, if they fall within the guidelines.

Mr. Barry Porter: The hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) talked about mist. There is no mist surrounding the rebates available to pensioners and the disabled in the Wirral. I am glad that my hon. Friend gave us the figures for those groups. The mist is when Labour Members talk of honesty, seriousness, promises and a better scheme. That is more than a mist; it is a complete fog. I have heard nothing. Perhaps my hon. Friend can enlighten me.

Mr. Hunt: My hon. Friend is right to emphasise yet again that transitional relief is just a part of the picture. The scheme has not changed one little bit since we announced it last October. It is in no way related to people's means. It would have been impossible for us to give a blank cheque and to say that we would cover the difference between this year's rates bill and next year's community charge whatever the level. I do not think that anyone in his right mind could have expected that. So we announced the scheme, and we have fulfilled our pledge.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) is right to point out that there is also a rebate system, which is another part of the same picture. He is equally right to point out that in Wirral no pensioner or disabled person who is a ratepayer or a member of a ratepaying couple will be worse off by more than £156.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): I am convinced that my hon. Friend means the transitional relief to effect exactly what he has said it will effect. Will he, most kindly, assure me that he will continue to consider its operation very carefully, since neither he nor I can be comfortable when, in one of the lowest-spending boroughs in England—West Devon borough—not one single person will qualify for transitional relief, and very few couples —perhaps a few thousand—will qualify. That means that three quarters of the people in West Devon borough will pay more than £3 extra a week.

Mr. Hunt: I would just say—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] Give me a chance. I do not believe that there is no one in my hon. Friend's area who could claim transitional relief—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Bell: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Could you confirm that you heard, as we heard, the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) say earlier that 10,000 of her constituents——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order.

Mr. Hunt: It may well be that my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West did not mean nobody in her area, but meant no single person in her area. That may well be the case. The whole purpose of this scheme is to protect the ratepayer and the ratepaying couple from changes in the system. In the main, the system benefits single people.

The hon. Member for Dagenham said a few moments ago that one of the defects of the system was that it did not give relief to single people, for instance, in a borough such as Wandsworth. That was a direct quote from the press release by his hon. Friend the Member for Brightside which said, "e.g. Wandsworth". The reason why single people do not benefit—except pensioners or disabled people who do not presently pay rates or are not part of a ratepaying couple—is that the majority of them are generally better off. In Wandsworth they will pay £148 and therefore they will pay only three—*[Interruption.]* Wandsworth gets the second lowest amount of Government help of any inner London borough. In Wandsworth the charge is £148. As the scheme protects people against a payment of £156, that is why single people in Wandsworth do not benefit.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry South-East): The Minister says that single people will be better off. Is he aware that in Coventry those under 25 who earn more than £70·85 a week do not qualify for any form of rebate and will have to use between a month and a month and a half of their wages just to pay the poll tax? According to yesterday's opinion poll in *The Sunday Correspondent*, 7·6 million people, including a third of all those under 34, will refuse next Monday to pay this Tory tax.

Mr. Hunt: One of the sad features of what the hon. Gentleman has just said is that he appears to show no shame for having said it. He has the privilege of being a Member of Parliament. In using that privilege, he should be aware that people listen to Members of Parliament when they say something about whether they should obey the laws of the land. By urging people throughout the country not to pay, which is what he is doing, he is putting an increased burden on the remaining people in his constituency who will have to pay for the free ride that he is seeking and that he is urging others also to seek.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Hunt: It is about time that, instead of turning silently away from the hon. Gentleman and pretending that his words had not been spoken, the Opposition Front Bench—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Hunt: It is about time that those individuals there——

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hunt: It is about time——

Mr. Wilson *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I request the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) to resume his seat.

Mr. Hunt: We on this side will never stop demanding that the Opposition Front Bench should condemn that sort of law breaking. It is about time that they spoke out. I commend the regulations to the House.

11.23 pm

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I intend to make only a few points, just to give the Minister a chance to calm down.

Twice as many people will pay the poll tax as paid the rates. According to the Government, the same amount of money will be collected. People do not understand why so many people will qualify for relief. That has to be explained. It was never explained while the legislation was being considered. I remind the Minister that it was pushed through the House by a party which got only 42 per cent. of the votes at the last election and which used the guillotine. The legislation was never fully and properly discussed. We were unable therefore to consider every possible defect that was alluded to either in the other place or in this House. I suspect that many more defects have still to come to light.

The Minister discovered a few months ago that transitional relief would be needed for all the losers. How can hundreds of millions of pounds be required when only the same amount of money is to be collected from twice as many people? Ministers must explain that, outside the House.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): May I help the hon. Gentleman? As a Birmingham Member, he will know that Birmingham city council's approved budget for last year—1989-90—was £622 million. The budget for the coming year has risen to £744 million: that is why we are paying more. He will have observed, in his travels around the city, that Birmingham has not spent this year's budget. That is clear from the fact that it is repairing roads, and doing a number of other things that it should do in any case.

Mr. Rooker: As the hon. Gentleman knows, next year's increase in new money and new spend for Birmingham is £17 million—2·38 per cent.—of which £13 million is going to education and social services. We make no apology for that. The Government have manipulated the figures so that the amount can be made to look like more than £100 million, but for the purposes of the people of Birmingham who will experience any improvement in services it is £17 million. I defend that, and will continue to do so; what I do not defend are the funny-money figures that the Government have foisted on Birmingham.

I do not wish to detain the House: I want to hear Conservative Members make the explanations that they must make. However, I will give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike).

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Even when viewed in the most favourable light, do not the Government's proposals mean that a married couple must be more than £6 a week worse off before they can receive a penny of transitional help? To many people, that is a tremendous amount.

Mr. Rooker: Precisely.

The Minister has said that the Labour party is to blame for giving the country false information. The last time that I looked up the figures, the Government employed 800 press and information officers; to the best of my knowledge, the Labour party employs fewer than can be counted on the fingers of one hand. How can we have managed to put all that false information around the country? It does not make sense.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): My hon. Friend has mentioned false information. The Minister appeared to approve the assumption of the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) that 10,000 families in her constituency would receive poll tax relief. If that is the case —unless the circumstances are extremely unusual—the prediction of 7·5 million beneficiaries and a figure of £350 million is surely a gross underestimate.

Mr. Rooker: We need to look at the figures to find out how many people, on average, will benefit in each constituency, but we shall not know for certain until the bills come through the letter boxes. The real row about the poll tax has not started yet. I know that Croydon, for example, has already sent out its bills—without any rebate details—but until all the bills arrive I do not think that the country will wake up. The Government may think that there is trouble now; let them wait until next month and the month after.

11.28 pm

Sir Rhodes Boyson (Brent, North): I know that many hon. Members wish to speak, so I shall be very brief.

Conservative Members are grateful for the transitional payment arrangements. The Minister has made no attempt to misrepresent the facts; he has always been not only courteous but accurate, and any disagreement between him and me has nothing to do with misrepresentation. The transitional arrangements will be helpful, but they do not go far enough. That is the problem. I consider that four categories require help.

First, it is wrong to take away the safety net in the second, third and fourth years and not the first year. In the first year, the built-in safety net will be at great cost to many careful Conservative boroughs where up to £70 per person is being transferred to what they consider to be spendthrift Labour boroughs. That will stick in the gullets of people there.

The second category was also affected by last week's Budget—a husband has to pay his wife's poll tax if she is at home. At the same time as the Government have separated taxation between the husband and wife, they have brought it back in the poll tax. That will cause great resentment in the country. If a wife stays at home to look after her children, her husband will have to pay her poll tax although they are taxed separately.

The third category is pensioners. If pensioners live in their own homes or with their relatives, they have to pay the poll tax, or their families have to pay it for them. If they live in residential homes, they do not have to pay the poll tax. That is another anti-family measure that was introduced, not without thought, but without considering the possible reactions to it, and some help should be provided.

Mr. Beith: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Rhodes Boyson: I shall not give way, as I know that other hon. Members wish to speak.

My fourth and final point is that I quite understand why my hon. Friend the Minister said that, if an authority spends more than what the Government intend, the charge payers in that area will have to pick up the bill. But that is hard luck on Conservative voters in Conservative areas swamped within Labour boroughs. They have voted Conservative all their lives, as in Brent where 19 out of 21 councillors are Conservatives. We cannot get many more

[Sir Rhodes Boyson]

than that. We have tried to get 23, but so far we have not achieved it. I have some sympathy with those Conservative voters in such areas, because they are doing all they can, yet they are penalised without any transitional help.

I make only those four points, as I know that other hon. Members wish to speak.

11.31 pm

Mr. Ronnie Fearn (Southport): I shall be factual, but not too brief.

I begin with a quotation:

> "If your actual community charge bill is more than the assumed community charge bill the relief will be calculated on the basis of the assumed charge."

That is a quotation from the Department of the Environment press release of 7 March when it announced that 7·5 million people, rather than 6 million people, will get transitional relief.

The press release highlights so well the Government's inability to estimate or forecast anything correctly. It is worrying that the entire poll tax system is based on estimates and assumptions. It is quite clear that the Government have got their assessments totally wrong and it is not surprising that the country is now in uproar.

It was not long ago that the Government, desperate to sell the poll tax system to the electorate, were suggesting that no one would have to pay an increase of more than £3 a week. It is abundantly clear that that figure is no more than fiction, as are most of the other figures that we have heard tonight.

The Government have hugely underestimated the cost of vital services. That is probably due to their ignorance of the needs of local people, the elderly, children in state schools and those less able than themselves to participate fully in our communities and to their ignorance of the recreation needs of children and adults in small and large communities.

The Department of the Environment's statement in the press release that I quoted is without explanation or apology and does not spell out that more than 90 per cent. of local authorities are setting poll tax rates well above the assumed charge. That means that the 7·5 million who are entitled to relief will not get the full amount.

This lack of clarity is reprehensible. It is clear that the Government hope to ride out the storm and that they hope that, once the system is up and running, people will get used to it and complain less. With other kinds of policies, that attitude may work, but I am afraid that it will not work with this one.

People were misinformed about this tax, and they are still being misinformed. They believed that the Government had guaranteed that increases would be no more than £3 a week, but they are finding that they have to pay far more, without any means of relief, but also without fully understanding why. On top of that, many people did not realise that in households where there are more than two people the relief will be calculated on the basis of only two persons, and the amount of relief will be shared between all the poll tax payers in that household.

Mr. David Hunt: I may not have dealt properly with that point when I responded to my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Dover), so I am grateful for this further opportunity.

Before making our announcement, we consulted the local authorities. They told us that if they were to come anywhere close to completion of the scheme in time—and at that time they thought that it might not be possible to complete all the administration, and so on—there would have to be an automatic allocation of relief for households with more than two people. We considered that view very carefully, and, in response to local authority pressure, we conceded the point and allowed the relief to be spread equally between all occupants. But that does not prevent the pensioner or the disabled person who has not been a ratepayer, or part of a ratepaying couple, from claiming his special relief in addition to the automatically allocated relief. I hope that that explains the position.

Mr. Fearn: I am very grateful for the Minister's explanation. The point was not explained fully in the response to the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Dover).

Mr. Beith: The Minister still has not explained why this relief is not available to pensioners living in sheltered housing, whose rates were paid through housing schemes. They are not allowed to qualify for the special relief, because they previously contributed to the rates through their payments to the housing association.

Mr. Fearn: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. So far, the Minister has nodded twice to that question. No doubt he will have an answer later.

I want to refer now to the problems of young people on low incomes. Often these people come from low-earning families. They are less likely to be able to move out of their homes or to do what their better-off neighbours do. The number of such people is increasing as Government policy impairs moves by young persons to become independent by finding their own homes. These people are to be penalised even further. They are not being treated as deserving of full participation in the transitional relief scheme. They are, however, seen as being deserving when it comes to paying the poll tax. They are not entitled to a rebate—they will pay in full. A young person earning less than £3,750 per year will have to pay as much as 11 or 12 per cent. of net income.

As I said earlier, the whole poll tax system is based on assessment and assumption, which is bound to create anomalies. But of even more concern to local authorities is that, for many counties, the notional expenditure level to be used in the calculation of transitional relief is significantly below the standard spending assessment. The Association of County Councils requests that, for the purposes of calculating transitional relief, the 1990-91 community charge calculation be based on the higher of the notional spending level and the standard spending assessment.

It would be even better if the Government were to take this opportunity to increase their benchmark figure of £278 for standard spending, which was calculated and set many months ago—before there was any concrete evidence of the real spending levels of local councils for 1990. I note that the Government have promised £21 million to cover the cost of administration. I believe that, so long as the full amount is distributed in such a way that the councils get the benefit and that part of it is not clawed back into the Treasury, local authorities will consider the amount to be reasonable. But I wonder whether the Minister has any idea of the sheer weight and physical effort that will go into the administration of the poll tax scheme. The massive volume of paperwork, claims and rebates will lead to long delays, and that will result in hardship for many of those least able to manage.

Already, 40,000 people have applied to Sefton council's finance department for rebate forms, 10,000 have applied to the social services department, 20,000 to the housing department and a further 5,000 to the Department of Social Security. So far, a total of 75,000 applications have been made. Since Budget day and the doubling of the limit on savings, there has been a further deluge.

Mr. Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): Is that more or fewer applications than for housing benefit?

Mr. Fearn: More.

Sefton council received 3,500 Government-sponsored newspaper coupons, which proved to be almost useless because they made no distinction between rented and owner-occupied accommodation. Those coupons have been returned for people to explain the information that they put on them. That is a further example of ratepayers' money being wasted. I find it hard to comprehend, given those figures for a not unusual local area, that the Government could possibly have accounted for all administration costs. I am certain that they have not considered the hardships of many people, who will suffer from the inevitable delay in the production of forms.

The poll tax is unfair, unworkable and expensive to run. The poll tax, not the statutory instruments that we are discussing, should be revoked.

11.40 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): When the debate began, the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) sought to suggest that the transitional relief announced by my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities at the Conservative party conference was different from the scheme now before us. As he sought to explain his remarks, and after the reply from the Minister, it became abundantly clear that the comments of the hon. Member for Dagenham were in line with most comments that we have heard from Labour Members: they simply were not based on facts. Labour Members were trying once again to mislead the public that the scheme is other than what it is. It is disgraceful for them to pretend that people are being denied relief when it was never offered.

Is it reasonable that the transitional relief scheme should be available for use by any Labour council that wants to set an excessive community charge, irrespective of the needs of the borough? I say that for a particular reason. Despite the humbug that we have heard from Labour Members, we have never heard, in this debate or in others on the rating system, any suggestion that transitional relief would be available for people who have suffered enormous rates increases at the hands of Labour councils. What about Labour councils that year after year caused misery to thousands of people by increasing rates in excess of inflation?

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Will the hon. Gentleman consider the case of a pensioner couple in my constituency who before the poll tax paid £84·20 in rent and rates but this year will have to pay £91·24? Does he agree that that is £7·04 more a month, not £3? Does he expect his constituents to be equally worse off, or will this be another example of people in England being better off?

Mr. Hughes: I shall be happy to consider that matter provided that the hon. Lady will consider all those people in the London borough of Ealing who, last year, had rate increases of more than 50 per cent., all those older people who were denied money for food and heating because they had to pay excessive bills to a Labour council. It is that sort of point, coming from Labour Members, which does the Labour party no credit because Labour Members shed crocodile tears when it is they who take money from people's pockets to pay for excessive spending. I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), who can explain some of those matters.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I can explain the suffering of some of my constituents. The constituents of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) do not know they are born. If they lived in Ealing they would suffer. In Ealing, we have had a rate—a local tax—increase of 264 per cent. in four years, when inflation was only about 20 per cent. What about that for Labour wickedness?

Mr. Hughes: My hon. Friend's intervention points up my case.

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Hughes: I shall not give way to scabs who make other people pay for their community charge.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will want to withdraw that remark.

Mr. Hughes: If you, Madam Deputy Speaker, advise me that the remark is unparliamentary, of course, I withdraw it, but it is no worse than anything that anyone who is going to be—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. It is a most objectionable word, and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his courtesy.

Mr. Hughes: What the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) is doing to those people who will have to pay for the services that he enjoys on his high salary simply defies description. What makes it worse is that anyone who follows his lead and does not pay the community charge will be dragged through the courts. He can sit behind his privilege as a Member of Parliament and not be dragged through the courts; he is making people do things that he will not have to do.

Mr. Nellist *rose*—

Mr. Hughes: I have already told the hon. Member that I will not give way to him.

The transitional scheme is generous and will come to the aid of those people who have to pay more money as a direct result of the new scheme of local taxation. That is what it is designed to do and what the Government promised it would do. If the Labour party wants to talk about councils which charge a high community charge, it must come up with the explanation of why people have to pay more money. It is no good the Labour party criticising, when it refuses not only to come up with a scheme of its own, but to come up with the answers to any of the questions posed by Conservative Members. Labour

[Mr. Hughes]

Members may want to act like deaf mutes, but in the end they will not get away with that, because the electorate will rumble them.

11.47 pm

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): The Council of Welsh Districts' proposed transitional relief as a less administratively complicated system than that for England. However, since the Welsh Office revealed the final details, the Council of Welsh Districts, the architect of the transitional relief scheme, has expressed deep concern that the Welsh Office has not gone far enough, either in the period of relief—three years, not five—or in the extent of the relief.

Many Welsh communities will not receive transitional relief—541, nearly seven out of 10, will not. Only 323 will receive transitional relief. There are anomalies in the system. Due to the way that community boundaries are drawn, people living on opposite sides of the road, using the same services, may receive different levels of relief. For example, residents in part of Trehafod in the Rhondda will receive £41 relief, but their neighbours whose homes are in Taff-Ely will receive no help. Similarly in north Wales, residents in Llanfynydd in Alyn and Deeside will receive no transitional relief while their neighbours in Brymbo in Wrexham Maelor will receive £8 relief.

With regard to anomalies, the professionals in local government finance in Wales believe that the Government are less than competent in deciding what area should have relief. The anomalies set area against area and it is clear that the Government have not done their homework. The arbitrary use of areas means that thousands of people are losing.

The average community charge in Wales will be £232, which is almost £60—or one third—more than the Government's figure of £173. A comparison between the average rates bill for the current year for adults and the community charge starting next month shows that poll tax payers in Blaenau Gwent, in Cynon Valley and in Rhondda will pay more than £100 more per person once transitional relief ends.

No council in Wales—be it Labour, Conservative or independent—has levied a poll tax at the Welsh Office figure. The introduction of transitional relief smacks of panic by a Government who have recognised the enormity of the opposition to the poll tax among ordinary people and the size of electoral disaster that threatens to engulf them. The Government have dug themselves such an immense hole that they need more than transitional relief stepladders to get out of it.

If Welsh authorities are charge-capped, who will do the capping? Will that be the last act of the present Secretary of State for Wales or the first act of the present Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities? That question should be answered. Should there be charge capping, the Secretary of State should make a statement in the House. We are tired of statements of importance to Wales being made outside this place. We are tired of Government by press release.

The poll tax is unpopular in Wales. We believe that it will create more debt in the Principality. We fear that it will divide families and that young people may leave home because of the tension and debt that it will create within homes. We regret that people looked after by carers or relatives must pay the poll tax, while those in institutional care will not. We also believe that the Government have greatly underestimated the administrative costs of this iniquitous tax. No council treasurer in Wales believes that there will be 100 per cent. collection of the poll tax.

We in Wales believe that the poll tax is unjust. It is not related in any way to ability to pay. Nobody would deny that Wales is a mature political democracy. However this despised tax is dubbed and however it is tarted up, the Welsh people will continue to believe that the poll tax is unjust and entirely unacceptable. When the poll tax demands go through letter boxes in Wales next week, the shame will be that the poorest of our people will be hit the worst. That is why the Opposition oppose what the Government propose.

11.55 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Ian Grist): It is extraordinary that the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) accords such importance to this subject that, at the last sitting of the Welsh Grand Committee, instead of debating this subject, we debated the effect on Wales of the Channel tunnel. That demonstrates the hon. Gentleman's depth of feeling.

I assure my right hon. and hon. Friends that we have the operation of the community charge very much in mind and we are aware of their concerns about it. We listen to what is said, and that is why we have the regulations and why they are in the shape they are. The Government will go on listening and taking note of what happens on the ground, and we will act accordingly. We could, of course, do absolutely no less. I certainly make that promise to my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson).

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Grist: I shall not give way.

The regulations are designed to ease the passage from one system to another—they are not permanent crutches. Indeed, the three years over which they are to operate give local authorities, if they have any concern for their poorer citizens, time to moderate their expenditure ambitions and thus to keep their community charge at a reasonable and moderate level. Certainly, as we have seen north of the border, after the initial disgraceful burst when the new system was set up last year, local authorities have begun to moderate this year as those who pay the charge come to understand the system a little better.

What is clear is that many councillors, mainly supporters of the Opposition, enjoy spending other people's money. As my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) pointed out, their motto is "Spend, spend, spend." Of course we are still in the dark about just how Labour Members would raise the money that they are going to spend. Will it be from income tax, a roof tax, or from some sort of capital values? Will rates be revived? We never hear the answer. We always hear how to spend money, never how to raise it. It beggars belief that they should propose such expenditure; the effect on inflation and interest rates would be catastrophic.

A major purpose of the community charge is that local councils will be answerable to local electors. Electors will quickly see in their bills the results of councils' inefficiency or empire building. The effects of local authority overspending were outlined very clearly in the earlier speech by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The regulations for Wales have been welcomed by Welsh local authorities and by the financial adviser to the Welsh counties, who said that they were extremely well targeted. They are clear, easily understood, and cheap to operate. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members from England could not have been listening to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside. He accepted that the Welsh system is easily understood, and so it is. It has benefited about 750,000 people by between £1 and £93. It is based on communities, or parishes as they are called in England, and compensates all those who——

Mr. Barry Jones: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Grist: No.

It compensates all those who, on the basis of last year's rates, uprated by the retail prices index and allocated per head, find themselves paying £18 or more than the Welsh Office's target figures. Any payment above that figure is the result of the local authorities dunning their own citizens. As a result of the transitional scheme, 324 communities out of 860 in Wales will benefit and 35 out of 37 districts contain communities that will benefit from the relief.

Already community charge bills incorporating this scheme have been sent out. Were the regulations to be defeated, all those authorities and communities involved would have to cancel their current bills and send out higher, and in some cases much higher, fresh bills—at heaven knows what expense—and to the dismay of beneficiaries and local authorities. That, of course, applies to England as well as Wales.

In the Welsh context, it is noticeable that 14 district authorities and two counties have increased budgets by 10 per cent. or less from 1989-90. If they were able——

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question pursuant to Order [23 March]:*

The House divided: Ayes 233, Noes 305.

Division No. 141] **[12 midnight**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin

Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Nicholas
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Ray Powell.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hat'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John

Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Alastair Goodlad and
Mr. David Lightbown.

Question accordingly negatived.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Personal Community Charge (Relief) (Wales) Regulations 1990 (S.I., 1990, No. 288), dated 16th February 1990, a copy of which was laid before this House on 19th February, be annulled—*[Mr. Barry Jones.]*

The House divided: Ayes 229, Noes 297.

Division No. 142] **[12.13 am**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Win Golding and
Mr. Ray Powell.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter

Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Raffan, Keith
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Alastair Goodlad and
Mr. David Lightbown.

Question accordingly negatived.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

That the draft Redundancy Payments (Local Government) (Modification) (Amendment) Order 1990, which was laid before this House on 20th February, be approved.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING

That the Town and Country Planning (Compensation for Restrictions on Mineral Working) (Amendment) Regulations 1990, dated 22nd February 1990, a copy of which was laid before this House on 1st March, be approved. *[Mr. Durant.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102(5) (Standing Committees on European Community documents).

ACCOUNTS OF INSURANCE UNDERTAKINGS

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 9903/89 relating to the accounts of insurance undertakings; and welcomes it as an important step towards the liberalisation of the European insurance market.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

Question agreed to.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Ordered,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Personal Community Charge (Relief) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 1990 (S.I., 1990, No. 402), dated 2nd March 1990, a copy of which was laid before this House on 5th March, be annulled.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

PETITIONS

M25 (Disturbance Compensation)

12.26 am

Sir Geoffrey Pattie (Chertsey and Walton): I beg to present a petition:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The Humble Petition of the residents of Ongar Road, Addlestone, sheweth

That the Government consider the question of compensation awarded through a rate reduction arising from the disturbance caused by the M25. That this reduction should be continued with the introduction of the community charge.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House urge the Secretary of State for the Environment to recognise the disturbance from the M25 and continue to allow a rebate in the community charge as for the rates.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

The petition is signed by George Elliott and other residents of Ongar road.

To lie upon the Table.

Human Embryos

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): I should like to present a petition to the House from my constituents:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.

The humble petition of the parishioners of St. Mark's Church, Fernhill, Rutherglen, sheweth that we affirm that the newly fertilised human embryo is a real, living human being.

The petition welcomes the Warnock report's statement that the embryo of the human species should be afforded protection in law, opposes any practices which discriminate against the embryo, and prays that legislation be enacted which forbids human embryos being used as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned).

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

I express my strong support for the petition.

To lie upon the Table.

Cammell Laird

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

12.28 am

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): The Defence Select Committee recently published a report on a large subsidy which was recently paid to Harland and Wolff. I am sure that the Minister will be reassured that I have no wish to debate that report in detail, nor do I expect him to reply to me in this debate. As a member of the Select Committee, I would think that that was the wrong procedure. However, I hope that the Minister will allow me to take the salient points from the Select Committee's report so as to build up the case that my hon. Friend, as I shall call him tonight, the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter) wishes to support—the knock-on effect that this has had on Cammell Laird.

According to the Select Committee's report, the story begins in the middle of 1983 when the Ministry decided to replace an old aviation training ship by converting a large merchant vessel. Harland and Wolff and Cammell Laird were asked to submit bids. Although the bids were substantially different, the Ministry did not investigate why they were so different. A contract was awarded to Harland and Wolff in March 1984 for £49 million.

The reason for the haste in making that commitment was that the Government wished to spend that money before the end of the financial year. Neither I nor the hon. Member for Wirral, South complain about that. Cammell Laird once benefited from the need for money to be spent before the end of the financial year. One understands the accounting procedures.

I do not intend to detain the House by listing the reasons why Harland and Wolff was unable to meet the contract for the set price of £49 million. They are set out in the report. The point is that Harland and Wolff was unable to fulfil the contract at that price and there was a dispute between the Ministry and the shipyard. The Ministry offered an additional £5 million, but Harland and Wolff asked for an additional £26 million.

At some stage the Ministry of Defence decided that a rapid settlement was needed not because the end of the financial year was approaching but because the privatisation of Harland and Wolff was on the horizon and very much part of the agenda. I do not wish to probe the political sensitivities of that move. It is not important to the case that I intend to put forward.

What is important is that a £49 million contract ended up as a £71·5 million contract. If Harland and Wolff were the only shipyard in the world, there would be no point in holding this debate, but apart from not being the only shipyard in the world it is not the only shipyard in this country. There is one on the Mersey, in my constituency.

It is wrong for Government spokesmen to say that there was a happy ending to the story. Although it was a happy ending for Harland and Wolff, it was a less than happy ending for Cammell Laird, the other yard that made a bid for that work. Recently, 800 workers at that yard have been told to get on their bikes. That is very serious for them and for the shipyard as a whole.

The Government's decision to place an order that they must have known was underpriced and then to bail out Harland and Wolff in that way has had an important knock-on effect on Cammell Laird which can easily be explained. The Minister knows as well as every other hon. Member who is participating in the debate that a shipyard is governed by the normal rules of business—that fixed costs have to be spread over the order book. Therefore, every order gained is an order over which the fixed costs can be spread. More orders mean that present production will be at lower average costs, and they allow future work to be bid for at lower average costs.

Since the Government did the deal to stitch up the privatisation package for Harland and Wolff, Cammell Laird has bid for two important orders for type 23 frigates, both of which it failed to secure. No one could say that those bids would have succeeded if the original tender had been successful; all that can be said is that they would have been more successful than they were, because the costs would have been lower. The result of that failure has been the breaking up of a successful work force.

Let me end as I began, by representing the interests of a shipyard whose interests I am proud to represent. It is no ordinary shipyard, as the Minister knows—not only from the visit that he kindly made last year, but from its history. Not so many years ago, a small group of people decided that, with the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) as Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the way in which to get orders out of the Government was to stage a sit-in. The decision was put to three mass meetings in the yard, and was decisively rejected. Another small group then decided that they could get the decision through if they held a ballot in one of the yard's many shops: they obtained a majority, and an official strike was called.

I do not suggest that the yard immediately sprang to defeat that abuse of the democratic process; indeed, if all the workers had shown such apparent bravery, it could almost be said that they could not be described as brave. People are brave because it is difficult to do things, and it was difficult for the men and women in that yard to turn their backs on what they had thought to be proper, traditional trade union practice—such as the rule that picket lines should not be crossed in the event of an official strike—by holding a vote outside the picket line and returning to work. But they did that, and the yard survived.

The Wirral Members have been at pains to put to the workers—men and women, management and employees alike; we make no distinction, because this is a yard that works—that, although they have acted so courageously, they cannot expect special treatment from the Government, and orders will be placed on the basis of fair competition. I disagree with Government policy in that I believe that when industry is becoming more efficient it needs incentives to take the next step, and the Government perhaps expect it to take that step too quickly; nevertheless, that is the line that we have sold. However, on our recent visit to the yard—after the publication of the report—we were asked, rightly, how the preaching of hon. Members that the Government placed orders on the basis of fair competition could be justified through the Select Committee's findings.

Do not the Government owe a debt to Cammell Laird? Their policy of fair competition has not been fully implemented throughout all shipyards. There has been a "noble exception"—noble, that is, if one represents Harland and Wolff; far less noble if one represents Cammell Laird, because Cammell Laird lost out. I have already explained to the Minister about the likely knock-on effect. Cammell Laird now faces redundancies. I hope that we shall hear about the programme of work that is coming up—a programme that the yard was told must be won on the basis of fair competition. We want a Government guarantee that there will indeed be fair competition. We should also like the Minister's comments on whether the Government are not now in the debt of Cammell Laird, which it has damaged severely in its attempt to ensure the privatisation of Harland and Wolff.

The work force at Cammell Laird is not asking for special treatment for turning back those militants who were out to destroy our yard; it is not asking for special treatment for crossing the picket line and going into work, although many people were beaten up by the thugs on the picket line. The women who work in that yard are not asking for special treatment for undergoing all the verbal sexual abuse from rent-a-gang on that picket line to keep the shipyard open. They are asking—and expect from the Government—special treatment in the next round of orders, and we hope that the Minister has something to announce this evening.

I now invite the hon. Member for Wirral, South to join in the debate.

12.39 am

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): That invitation is gratefully accepted. First, I always support my own Member of Parliament, the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), so far as I can and when he is not making party political points—and he rarely does that. Secondly, it is not unknown that I take a great interest in the affairs of Northern Ireland. I am a member of the Trade and Industry Select Committee which visited Harland and Wolff prior to privatisation and played some part in persuading the Government—if persuasion were needed—that certain moneys should be paid prior to that privatisation. I make no complaint about that. It was entirely appropriate that those moneys should be paid and that the yard should be privatised.

One of the reasons why I take an interest in the affairs of Northern Ireland is that I believe in the union of the United Kingdom and that all its parts should be treated equally. I know that the Province has particular problems and that there are particular reasons why it should be treated differently, but that should not be so differently that other parts of the United Kingdom are put at a disadvantage.

We all know why the money was given to Harland and Wolff and nobody complained about that, but, as my own Member of Parliament said, Cammell Laird should not be placed at a disadvantage, for the reasons that the hon. Gentleman gave. The work force and management have done everything that the hon. Gentleman described. They went through an enormously difficult period, they crossed vicious picket lines and did everything that workers on Merseyside are supposed not to do. The Government should bear in mind what they did for Harland and Wolff and what the workers and management of Cammell Laird did for themselves. We do not ask for special treatment; we ask for parity and equality and that is not much to ask in the circumstances.

12.43 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Michael Neubert): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) on securing the Adjournment debate as it yet again testifies to his tireless concern for his constituents who work in the Cammell Laird shipyard at Birkenhead. Those workers at the yard will also be grateful for the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter), who takes a close, consistent and informed interest in these matters.

I hope that the hon. Member for Birkenhead will forgive me if I do not follow his argument about what the position and viability of Cammell's would now be if, in 1984, the yard had won the contract for the aviation training ship. While his reasoning undoubtedly seems logical, it is none the less hypothetical. Furthermore, I doubt whether the outcome of a single competition would have had quite the influence that the hon. Gentleman believes and whether it can be blamed for as much as he has claimed. I was very heartened to see, when I visited Cammell Laird in his company last autumn, the spirit of co-operation and partnership that has now grown up between work force and management.

I am grateful that the hon. Gentleman does not expect me to anticipate now the formal response that the Government have yet to give to the Defence Committee's report on the supplementary estimate that referred to the payment that was made to Harland and Wolff plc in settlement of the outstanding claim on the aviation training ship prior to the privatisation of that yard last year. As the hon. Gentleman, from his experience on the Select Committee, has acknowledged, that formal Government response is being prepared, and will be issued in the usual way. On that aspect, therefore, I can do more than rehearse the facts as the Ministry of Defence witnesses presented them to the Committee in the published evidence. Having done that, which I shall do on the basis of the memorandum submitted to the Committee, which is published on pages 25 and 26 of its report, I shall, if I have time, look to the future of Cammell Laird.

The history is significantly different from the version presented tonight by the hon. Member for Birkenhead. The background is as follows. In 1984, a replacement was needed for the aviation training ship then in service with the Royal Navy, RFA Engadine. The vessel was near the end of her useful life, was too small to operate modern anti-submarine helicopters, and had severe limitations for deep-water operations in bad weather. Our requirement for the replacement vessel was that it should have a larger flight deck than Engadine, be able to operate six Sea King helicopters—three of them simultaneously—and be able to operate in motion in all but the most severe weather. We therefore needed command and control facilities for operating helicopters safely. These facilities, together with others, such as a self-defence system, an action information organisation and communications, were collectively known as the weapon system. This is important to the later stages in the story.

Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd. undertook a concept study for us, and we decided that it would be feasible to meet the requirement by converting a merchant vessel. As the ship had to be able to operate six Sea King helicopters, as well as ferrying 12 Sea Harrier aircraft, a

[Mr. Michael Neubert]

vessel of some 15,000 tonnes was needed. VSEL identified three ships that might be suitable for conversion, including the Contender Bezant, a vessel built in Italy in 1981. We invited firm price bids covering two options—the purchase and conversion of an existing vessel, and a new build—so that we could consider and evaluate the cost-effectiveness of both.

Tenders were submitted by Harland and Wolff plc and by Cammell Laird. As Cammell Laird was then part of the nationalised British Shipbuilders, both yards were in the public sector and were thus on an equal footing. Both companies proposed to buy and convert Contender Bezant, and we concluded that the Harland and Wolff proposal was the more cost-effective way of meeting the requirement. We accordingly placed a firm price contract on Harland and Wolff in March 1984 to buy and convert Contender Bezant at a cost of some £49 million. Harland and Wolff bought the ship later that month and began work soon after.

For the weapon system, we produced a cardinal point specification in April 1984, and Harland and Wolff ran a subcontract competition, which Racal Marine Systems won. Harland's placed the contract on that company for the ship weapon system authority in December 1984. It was thus identified as the prime contractor for both the ship and its weapon system. This change extended the build period of the vessel by nine months and raised the contract price by some £11 million. Other approved alterations, worth some £3 million, brought the final price to £63 million, with a contract acceptance date of December 1986.

Converting Contender Bezant was a major task. It involved stripping out and refurbishing and extending many of her systems, as well as major changes to her structure to change her from a roll on-roll off container ship to one with a flight deck, hangar and the services needed for helicopter operations. Harland and Wolff accepted liability for any consequential work arising from her condition. Much rectification work turned out to be needed, including major refurbishment of the main engines. The ship was eventually accepted into service as RFA Argus in March 1988, some 14 months later than the revised contract acceptance date. She was well finished and fully meets the Royal Navy's requirement. Argus became fully operational with commander in chief fleet in January 1989 and has since then been available for flying training operations. Argus is a very good ship.

In February 1987, Harland and Wolff submitted an interim claim for reimbursement of some £26 million. It claimed that those were extra costs incurred up to December 1986 for reasons that it alleged were the Ministry of Defence's responsibility. We prepared a detailed rebuttal of the claim. After inconclusive discussions, the company filed a final claim for £45·3 million in August 1988. In general, the company claimed that this represented extra spending that it had to make because of actions by the Ministry of Defence. We recognised that a small part of the delay and dislocation and extra cost resulted from finalising certain requirements for communications equipment, but not to the extent that could justify the sum claimed. We also held that the claim was not supported by factual evidence, as required by the contract.

While that large and complex claim was being considered, proposals for privatising Harland and Wolff began to emerge. The Government regarded it as a matter of urgency to achieve a viable private sector solution, and one of the many issues that it was felt important to resolve before the transfer of the business to the private sector was the outstanding claim on the aviation training ship. The Ministry of Defence had a particular interest in the successful privatisation of Harland and Wolff because the firm was the prime contractor for the design of the auxiliary oiler replenishment vessel and is now building the first of class, RFA Fort Victoria. As outlined in the Select Committee's report, we considered it right, taking into account the wider circumstances of the privatisation and the need to safeguard the AOR programme, to make a settlement of the claim. We finally settled on a figure of £22·5 million to be paid to Harland and Wolff plc. That was entirely without prejudice to our legal position and without admission of liability. That payment of £22·5 million appeared in the supplementary estimate, into which the Select Committee inquired.

It is clear from that account that the £22·5 million payment is not a subsidy to Harland and Wolff and it certainly has no bearing on the original competition some six years ago. The settlement of £22·5 million was made with the public sector Harland and Wolff plc to clear the way for privatisation and will be used by that company to repay grants from the Northern Ireland Department of Economic Development. It is therefore not funding for the private sector firm Harland and Wolff Shipbuilding and Heavy Industry. While it is possible to argue, as the hon. Member for Birkenhead has, that, had Cammell Laird won the ATS competition, it would not have made the same claims on the Ministry of Defence in respect of the ATS, it is equally possible that it would have, or that Cammell Laird would have made claims that Harland's did not. It is all quite hypothetical.

Mr. Barry Porter: I am sorry to interrupt my hon. Friend, and I am delighted that he is reading the brief from the Ministry so splendidly. It is the perceived view that Harland and Wolff has been treated more generously by the Government than other shipyards, including Cammell Laird. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is a fact? The hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) and I do not object to that; we are saying that Cammell Laird deserves the same treatment.

Mr. Neubert: I do not dispute that it may be the perceived view, but I hope that my hon. Friend will ensure that it is not taken as a fact.

What is not hypothetical is that the Ministry is not subsidising Harland and Wolff. The contract for RFA Fort Victoria was won competitively and was carefully scrutinised by consultants to ensure that it was unsubsidised. When the yard was privatised, the contract was totally assigned by the public sector Harland and Wolff plc to the private sector Harland and Wolff Shipbuilding and Heavy Industry, and there was no relaxation in the terms of that contract. The ATS contract was won by Harland and Wolff in competition at a price that the MOD considered at the time, and still considers, to have been realistic. Although, in the event, costs did overrun on the aviation training ship, there was no reason at the time to believe that the Harland's tender was unrealistic. I have explained the background against which some costs were incurred. The Northern Ireland Department of Economic Development was assured by Harland and Wolff that the tender was on a full-cost basis including profit, and no losses were expected on the contract.

I now turn to the prospects for Cammell Laird. I should first confirm that our procurement policy for warships, as for all other equipment, is founded upon value for money and competition. Commercially competitive bids will win our work. Cammell Laird should, if it wishes, be able to bid for a wide range of MOD work—major surface vessels and conventionally-powered submarines in particular. As I said during the debate on the Royal Navy on 5 February, we have plans to run competitions for our requirements in several categories, and we would expect Cammell Laird, as part of the VSEL group, with its combination of design ability and physical capacity, to be able to be among the competing firms.

The redundancies that the yard has recently announced are certainly to be regretted, but I must stress that employment levels at defence contractors are a matter for them and not for the MOD or, for that matter, of any other Government Department. Equally, it is not for me to advise the warship yards on their commercial strategy, but we would always welcome diversification by defence contractors into areas of civil work. Not only does that allow the best use to be made of defence-related technology, but it broadens the customer base of our suppliers, so strengthening their ability to undertake our work cost effectively. So I am pleased that Cammell Laird is actively pursuing some merchant order prospects, and I wish it every success in those efforts.

Although I do not wish to trespass on the territory of my hon. Friends the Minister for Industry and the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, my hon. Friend the Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham), I can assure the House that the Government will not provide any special support to the privatised Harland and Wolff beyond the terms of the privatisation package, apart from intervention fund aid on merchant contracts and other grants normally available to other private sector companies in Northern Ireland. The Government have given no guarantees about future levels of employment at Harland and Wolff. I can appreciate that the hon. Member for Birkenhead, and even perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South, who is well informed about Northern Ireland matters, may find Harland's continued access to intervention fund aid unfair.

Mr. Frank Field *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Neubert: However, it is not and I am glad that the hon. Member for Birkenhead agrees. He will recall that the restructuring of British Shipbuilders in 1985 provided that yards designated for privatisation as warship yards would not be eligible for intervention fund support. It was on that basis that Cammell Laird was privatised and the buyers knew this. But Harland and Wolff was privatised as a merchant yard, and it is not able to compete with the warship yards for front-line ships, such as frigates and submarines, even though it can build support vessels such as the AOR.

Cammell Laird has a future, despite the recent redundancies, but that future is wholly in the hands of the firm itself, not of the Government. The future of Cammell Laird lies, as the hon. Member for Birkenhead said, in the continuing drive for efficiency to which management and work force are both committed. That is to their credit, and I wish them well.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes to One o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 27 March 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL BILL *[Lords]*
Read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Grant-maintained Schools

1. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many schools have now been given grant-maintained status.

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. John MacGregor): I have approved 34 of the 46 proposals for grant-maintained status which have so far reached me for a decision. More schools have now been approved for grant-maintained status than the number of secondary schools in over half the English local education authorities.

Mr. Pawsey: I thank my right hon. Friend for that extremely helpful reply. Does he agree that even more schools would apply for grant-maintained status if they could appreciate the benefits that would flow from such status—they would fill staff vacancies much more quickly, they could use their funds to purchase additional books and classroom equipment and, above all, it would lift the dead hand of the local educational authority from the life of the school so that the school could decide what was best for its pupils?

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with all my hon. Friend's points. By way of illustration, he will have noticed that one grant-maintained school has increased its spending on books and equipment by 58 per cent. in its first year because of the flexibility that such status has given it. In addition, grant-maintained status is good for teacher morale because, with the governors, teachers are in full charge of their schools. Such status is popular with parents, as can be seen from the considerably increased number of parents who want to send their children to grant-maintained schools.

Ms. Primarolo: Why has the Secretary of State still not acted on the court judgment which, five weeks ago, declared that his action in relation to Beechen Cliff was illegal? When will he stop flouting the law and accept his responsibilities to all children in the Bath area?

Mr. MacGregor: I am urgently reconsidering the proposals in the light of the High Court judgment. I cannot make any comment on their substance today as I am still considering them. However, the court judgment relates to only one set of proposals; the principle of the grant-maintained option being available to schools is not in question.

Primary School Teachers

2. **Mrs. Maureen Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assessment he has made of the additional time which teachers in primary schools will spend on administration as a result of the introduction of the national curriculum and assessment at seven and 11 years.

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): We are awaiting the School Examinations and Assessment Council's advice about the administrative implications of the assessment arrangements for seven-year-olds in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, in the light of the pilot assessments being conducted in 2 per cent. of primary schools this summer.

Mrs. Hicks: During the past term I have taken every opportunity to visit as many primary schools as I can in my constituency to hear the views of teachers at first hand. Although I have been encouraged by the enthusiastic response to the national curriculum and assessments, does my hon. Friend agree that there must be some foundation to the concern felt by many teachers about the increasing amount of administrative work imposed on them by local authorities and by the Government? That is especially the case in primary schools, where teachers do not have free periods for planning. Will my hon. Friend assure me that she is listening carefully to those anxieties and that it will not be a question of saying, "I hear what you say", and then doing nothing?

Mrs. Rumbold: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those comments. Like her, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have visited a number of primary schools and made similar observations. We appreciate the extremely hard work that primary school teachers have put into introducing the national curriculum, especially in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. Our major concern is that some primary school teachers have taken their responsibilities so seriously that they are trying to introduce assessments without the proper guidance that will be brought forward in the autumn. I hope that some of them will wait for that advice rather than trying to construct their own assessments in an effort to do their best.

Mr. Win Griffiths: The Minister will no doubt recall that when the Education Reform Bill was in Standing Committee there was a great deal of discussion about the amount of non-teaching time needed fully to implement the national curriculum. At the time a figure of 10 per cent. was talked about. Given that since then we have had the Elton report on discipline, which also imposes work and duties on teachers, will she confirm that primary school teachers will have at least 10 per cent. non-teaching time to carry out all the essential functions associated with the national curriculum and the Elton report on discipline?

Mrs. Rumbold: Primary school teachers are delivering and introducing the national curriculum and, rightly, taking time for in-service training to ensure that they deliver the national curriculum correctly. I am sure that they will also find time to do other work within the 1,265 hours that they have under their contracts.

Mr. Burt: Will my hon. Friend note the anxieties of Conservative Members who are sympathetic to the extra work and burdens placed on all teachers? Is she aware of our anxiety at the decision by the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers to call for a one-day strike? Will she explain that the best way for teachers to put their case over to the Government is not by strike action but by building on the sympathy and understanding of the general public which they are putting at risk?

Mrs. Rumbold: My hon. Friend is right. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I were deeply disappointed by the decision of the NAS/UWT to take action. That decision was taken by a small percentage—about a third—of the members of the union. We believe that the decision will deprive children of necessary education deeply disappoint their parents. It will not fulfil the expectations of the general public, which over the past three years have been improving greatly. A respect for teachers and their work has been building up which the action will destroy at a stroke.

Ms. Armstrong: When answering my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths), the Minister failed to mention that section of Her Majesty's inspectors' report which says that, by some route or other, 10 per cent. of non-contract time must be allowed for each teacher for administration. Is she aware that the report says that otherwise it will be impossible for primary schools, particularly small ones, to implement the national curriculum, testing and reporting of testing?

Mrs. Rumbold: I am well aware of the amount of time that primary school teachers spend with their children. They have always spent most of the school day with their children. But that does not comprise the full 1,265 hours to which they are committed to work under their contracts. They have non-contract time outside teaching time for in-service training and other duties, and teachers undertake those duties willingly.

Mr. Favell: On the national curriculum, does my hon. Friend believe that more and more people from all backgrounds will in later life buy personal pensions, buy their own homes and be share owners? Is she satisfied that schools are equipping people for what, after all, will be a fairly complicated financial life?

Mrs. Rumbold: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to that. We hope that one of the most important common themes running through the teaching of the national curriculum will be economic awareness of matters that will be a feature of everyone's life in the future.

School Buildings

3. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action he is taking to ensure that schools are in good repair, prior to the enactment of local management of schools.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Alan Howarth): It is the responsibility of local education authorities to carry out necessary repairs to county and voluntary controlled schools. Governors of voluntary-aided schools receive grant aid from the Department for necessary external repairs.

Mr. Mullin: Is the Under-Secretary aware that next financial year the capital allocation from his Department for Gateshead city technology college is three times that for all 145 schools in Sunderland put together? How can that be justified when many of the schools in my constituency and elsewhere are falling to pieces?

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman may be aware that officials from my Department recently had a meeting with officers of Sunderland local education authority. We are anxious to look as helpfully as we can at the capital needs of Gateshead. The capital guidelines issued to authorities are based on objective criteria and standards that are well understood by the authorities. If the bid from Sunderland failed to match our national priorities it is the responsibility of the authority. We are anxious, however, to look with the authority at its needs.

I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is not prepared to welcome the establishment of a city technology college in his area which will provide a magnificent educational opportunity for children in Sunderland. It is sad that such a negative, grudging attitude should be shown to the generosity of the sponsors and the willingness of the Government to establish the highest standards of educational provision for all children in his area.

Mr. Sayeed: Is my hon. Friend aware that I recently visited St. George's school in my constituency, which is operating the full local management of schools system and which is extremely happy with it? Is my hon. Friend aware that that school now gets its repairs done speedily by outside contractors which cuts down the costs to the school and that, next year, it will be able to carry over £70,000 of its budget? Will the Minister tell my right hon. Friend how pleased that school and other schools are with the 100 per cent. carry-over rules now permitted by the Department?

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The flexibility that LMS will allow head teachers and the chairmen of governors to enable them to get work done is enormously welcome. Those people have welcomed LMS because it offers them an enhanced opportunity for responsibility and to get things done at a practical level. Many head teachers have told me how difficult it has been to have every decision that they needed to take about repairs and maintenance of their schools second-guessed by their authorities. They are pleased to have the opportunity for flexible, rapid response.

Mr. Fatchett: Is not it clear that LMS will cause problems in relation not just to school buildings and repairs, but teacher jobs? What action will the Department take to protect the job of Mrs. Barbara Symes—a constituent of the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker)—a mathematics teacher who is threatened with redundancy from Redlands first school? What educational justification can there be for making redundant an experienced and senior maths teacher? Is not that educational vandalism and a demonstration that all that we have said about LMS and the security of teachers' jobs is correct?

Mr. Howarth: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman is not prepared to recognise the fair principle that every child of a given age should attract an equal unit of resource. As teaching costs are far the largest component of educational spending, it follows that the formula for a school's budget must reflect the average cost of employing a teacher. We have, of course, said that we are prepared to look sympathetically at the problems of schools facing difficulties in the transition from actual to average salaries. Three quarters of schools will gain from the flexibility that we have allowed for small schools. Larger schools that have the prospect of a reduction in their budgets of more than 1 per cent. during the four-year transitional period will be considered sympathetically and may have the opportunity of a longer transitional period.

It is for the governors of the school mentioned to think carefully about what they are doing. I am certain that the authority will want to help it to analyse the problem to see whether it is necessary to make Mrs. Symes redundant.

Sir Cyril Smith: Is the Minister aware that a major problem in education is not the method of funding, but the amount of money available after the method has been determined? Is he aware that many schools are in a state of disrepair and that it is estimated that £3 billion is needed to bring schools up to standard? Will he assure the House that, by September 1991, regulations on the standard of school buildings which were suggested in 1981 will be capable of being enforced?

Mr. Howarth: Between 1976 and 1979, when the hon. Gentleman and his party supported the Labour Government, there was a 50 per cent. cut in capital spending on school buildings. Since then, under this Government, there has been a 10 per cent. increase in the amount spent per pupil on school buildings. Nationally, there has been a 42 per cent. increase in the amount spent per pupil in our schools. The amount of resources that we can make available for education depends on the progress of the economy. With the successful development of the economy under this Government, increased resources are going into education.

Mr. Soames: Is my hon. Friend aware of the circumstances in West Sussex, where terrible damage was inflicted on temporary hutted classrooms during the recent storms? Will my hon. Friend pay close attention to those difficulties to see whether financial assistance can be given to those schools?

Mr. Howarth: We were concerned to do what we could as quickly as possible to help schools that suffered serious damage in the storms earlier this year. The House was shocked and distressed at the deaths and injuries to children. Fortunately, the standing instructions that local education authorities have in force enabled schools, with the good sense and resourcefulness of head teachers and other teachers, to minimise the risk to people. We immediately made it clear that money to help would be available under the emergency Bellwin rules. Since then, my Department has written to all authorities asking them to review their procedures that they undertook to ensure that minimum damage occurs as a consequence of the storms.

Grant-maintained Schools

4. **Mr. Lofthouse:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement on the guidelines for approval of grant-maintained status for schools.

Mr. MacGregor: In considering proposals for grant-maintained status, steps are taken to ensure that I have all the necessary information to enable me to decide the proposals on their merits.

Mr. Lofthouse: The Secretary of State will be aware that of the 65 schools that voted to opt out, 60 per cent. had been involved in the reorganisation or closure programme. Does not that show that the reorganisation programme is being used to assist the opt-out policy? Notwithstanding the Secretary of State's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo), how many High Court cases will he lose before he scraps the disastrous opt-out policy?

Mr. MacGregor: I totally reject the idea that this is a disastrous policy, as do all parents who will benefit from it. Among the grant-maintained schools on which we have information, applications for next September seem to be up by 40 per cent. on this year. That shows what parents want, and that is what the hon. Gentleman wants to deprive them of. I hope that it will be noted that he does not believe in parental choice. I have already rejected applications from 11 schools that did not satisfy me about their viability. All were in the circumstances that the hon. Gentleman described—subject to closure by their local education authorities at the time of the parental ballots or just afterwards.

In some cases, parents decided not to pursue grant-maintained status. They had obviously looked at the matter in the round.

Mrs. Peacock: Will my right hon. Friend ensure that all school governors are aware of the guidelines on grant-maintained schools and the advantages that such schools afford local schools, local children and future education?

Mr. MacGregor: In the past week we have prepared a leaflet that is available to all schools and parents explaining what grant-maintained schools are about, the process of applying to become a grant-maintained school and so on. As my hon. Friend will know, a charitable body, Choice in Education, exists to show schools the benefits of grant-maintained status. What will make the case for grant-maintained schools above all will be the enthusiasm and morale of the teaching staff, the tremendous support of the governors and the fact that parents want to send their children to them.

Mr. Straw: Does the Secretary of State recall making clear and categorical promises that grant-maintained schools would be treated in the same way as local authority schools when it came to funding? In view of those promises, will he explain why the so-called charity, Choice in Education, which is no more than a Conservative front organisation run by a Conservative councillor, Andrew Turner, has been writing to schools considering opting out as follows:

> "The possibility of better funding is by far the most important factor leading to a decision to opt out . . . the

budgets set for Grant-Maintained schools indicate first year funding levels of between 15 per cent. and 26 per cent. higher than the historic level"?

If the policy is so popular, why is it necessary for the Secretary of State and a front organisation to resort to bare-faced bribery?

Mr. MacGregor: Current funding is entirely on all fours with the maintained sector. The hon. Gentleman has ignored the fact that grant-maintained schools can have that proportion of funding for the services that are provided centrally, normally by local education authorities. That funding is made available on a strictly comparable basis for grant-maintained schools. That has meant that we have made provision for services which were previously provided centrally—on average about 15 per cent. of the direct costs of the schools. That puts the funding on all fours with the maintained sector. The great benefit to the grant-maintained school is that priorities are decided on the expenditure itself. That is being proved already to be of benefit to children.

Mr. Harry Greenway: Is my right hon. Friend aware that teachers are queuing to apply for every job that is available in grant-maintained schools which is a sign of the great success of those schools? Does he agree that those teachers are unlikely to strike on 4 April and damage children's education? Will he do all that he can to dissuade all teachers from striking on 4 April? That act would only damage the education of children and further damage the teaching profession.

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend is right. I have visited a number of grant-maintained schools and met many teachers from them. I know that the morale, enthusiasm, dedication and commitment of those teachers is high. I am sure that the great majority of teachers throughout the country share that dedication and commitment. That is why I deplore the attitude of a small minority of teachers, reflected in the NAS-UWT decision to strike for a day. As my hon. Friend says, that is damaging to children and, in the eyes of the public, to the teaching profession as a whole. That is why I am grateful to the other teaching unions for taking a responsible attitude on these matters and saying that such action serves no useful purpose. It merely diminishes the teaching profession.

Research

5. **Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the dual support system for research in universities and polytechnics.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Robert Jackson): Research is sponsored by research councils in universities and polytechnics by grants from the councils. Under the dual support system the universities also receive block funding for research from the UFC.

As my right hon. Friend announced on 9 January, the Department has issued a consultative paper proposing changes in the method of supporting such research. The paper proposes new arrangements which would clarify the boundary between what costs are met from research council grants and what costs are met by higher education institutions. The consultations are continuing.

Mr. Worthington: Is not this a device to transfer £70 million to the research councils and further centralise research and diminish the authority of the universities? Instead of moving the deckchairs, and changing the administrative arrangements, should not we be increasing the amount of research that is undertaken?

Mr. Jackson: It is obvious that the hon. Gentleman has not noticed the substantial increase in the science budget over the past 10 years, and the past two years especially. The proposals, which follow a recommendation of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils, are still being consulted upon, so I cannot confirm the figure that the hon. Gentleman has given. There is a widespread view that it is desirable to make the transfer to achieve greater clarity in the arrangements and the costs of funding research, and to enable research to be better managed by the research councils and within the higher education institutions.

Mr. Latham: Why do we need a dual system at all? If an organisation has a professor and awards degrees, why should it not call itself a university? Is not it about time that polytechnics were allowed to do that?

Mr. Jackson: I think that my hon. Friend is confusing dual systems. The dual system of research, which is the subject of the question, is a principle to which Government adhere. We believe that it achieves a desirable balance between the ability of research councils to manage the deployment of research funds on a national basis and the ability of institutions and people who work in them to initiate proposals for research and to conduct research in a free and autonomous manner. We believe that that dual system still has many advantages but that it is desirable to clarify the boundaries between the two different funding systems. That is the subject of our proposal.

Dr. Bray: If the research funding at the disposal of universities and polytechnics falls, are not there bound to be greater instability and frictional losses in the research activity of particular institutions because there will not be the continuity of research council funding?

Mr. Jackson: As usual, the hon. Gentleman raises a point of substance which will have to be taken into account in the consultations on these matters. Balances have to be struck, but we believe that there are advantages in clarifying the boundaries in this fashion, as the advisory board recommended. One of the advantages, incidentally, will be to ensure that research funding goes increasingly to those institutions—and to the individuals in them—capable of doing the best work.

Mr. Rhodes James: Does the Minister share my enthusiasm for the votes in the House of Lords yesterday on the Education (Student Loans) Bill?

Mr. Jackson: I am delighted to note my hon. Friend's enthusiasm. The Government are still considering their position in relation to those amendments and no doubt my hon. Friend will be informed in due course of any conclusions that the Government have reached.

Standard Spending Assessments

6. **Mr. Spearing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what criteria he adopted for determining expenditure on secondary education within the standard spending assessment of each local education authority.

12. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science on what basis the 1990-91 standard spending assessments for education were calculated.

Mrs. Rumbold: The education component of the standard spending assessment is distributed among authorities principally on the basis of the number of pupils and students in each block of the assessment. The distribution also involves certain other factors that take account of the different circumstances of different authorities. In the case of secondary education, the relevant group comprises pupils aged 11 to 15 in each authority. Full details can be found in the revenue support grant distribution report.

Mr. Spearing: Does the Minister agree that the SSA exercise is unrealistic in any case? Is she aware that the London borough of Newham has had to cut expenditure viciously to approach its SSA figure but has nevertheless had to spend £7 million in what the Secretary of State would call excessive expenditure? Is she aware that Norfolk education committee has also had to spend £7 million of what the right hon. Gentleman would call excessive expenditure? Is not it time that the right hon. Member for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor) and the hon. Member for Newham, South got together and took the advice of the respective friends, local parents and teachers urging them to protest against the Secretary of State's uninformed, damaging and irresponsible proposals?

Mrs. Rumbold: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman has much to complain about. As it happens, Newham benefits from the increased weightings for additional educational needs and from the area cost adjustment in the revised methodology for the educational element of SSAs. In other words, his authority is doing rather well out of the new system compared with the old.

Mr. Michie: Given the Minister's unsatisfactory reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) and the fact that the Minister and the Secretary of State have completely ignored representations from Sheffield city council and, indeed, many Tory-controlled authorities about the methods used to work out the standard spending assessments, should not the Secretary of State now have the courage to stand up for the children of Britain and argue with his colleagues that they ought to scrap the poll tax?

Mrs. Rumbold: Sheffield has been a significant overspender on education in the past and its expenditure per pupil has been considerably larger than most. None the less, its standard spending assessment will allow £150 million for spending on education, which should be perfectly adequate.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: Does my hon. Friend accept that the present system of putting money into schools—through local government finance—is not working well, particularly in the case of capital expenditure? Does she accept that, in the longer term, we shall have to consider direct funding for education from the Exchequer, while retaining local control?

Mrs. Rumbold: I think that my hon. Friend knows already that the Government have no plans for such a move. The money currently spent through the local education authorities, with the support of the Government and of the community charge payers would have to come from somewhere. Subtracting that money would not leave community charge payers in a better position.

Mr. Robert Banks: My hon. Friend will be aware that many secondary school buildings constructed in the 1960s have flat roofs, which are a pain in the neck because they leak constantly. Will she examine the criteria to see what can be done to provide special financial assistance to enable that design fault to be corrected?

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I share the view that the flat roofs of buildings constructed in the 1960s have proved very unsatisfactory. In saying that, I refer not just to education buildings but to buildings throughout the public sector. When we consider next year's assessment for capital expenditure, that matter will be taken into account.

Mr. Straw: Why have Ministers set education spending levels so low that if authorities were to meet them thousands of teachers across the country would have to be sacked? Why are Ministers getting ready to poll tax cap authorities spending well under £2,800 per secondary pupil while they are ready to subsidise children at private schools, such as the one to which the Secretary of State sends his child, which charge more than £4,000 per pupil? Why do we have to put up with that double standard, whereby Ministers are ready to put at risk and undermine the education of other people's children in a way in which they would never put at risk the education of their own children?

Mrs. Rumbold: The hon. Gentleman has totally failed to understand that the new standard spending assessments do not take into account exactly the same factors as the old grant-related expenditure assessments. That is perhaps not surprising as it is quite a difficult sum. It is quite wrong, and totally misleading, to say that the spending for 1989-90 can in any way be compared with the spending for next year. For example, the debt charges are not taken into account in the standard spending assessments, whereas they are taken into account in the grant-related expenditure.

There has not, as yet, been any suggestion that there will be charge capping.

Teachers' Pay

8. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to establish a new negotiating body for teachers' pay.

Mr. MacGregor: I held a series of constructive meetings with the teacher unions and employers towards the end of last year. I am considering carefully the points put to me and will make a further statement as soon as I am in a position to do so. The immediate priority is to complete the consultation process on the 1990-91 pay settlement.

Mr. Greenway: Teachers are understandably anxious that there should be a new pay body, but does my right hon. Friend agree that the issue of pay cannot be viewed in isolation from the career structure of the teaching profession, the effect of the local management initiative, and the overriding objective of raising the morale of teachers? Does he think that the threat of fresh industrial action will have precisely the opposite effect and will serve only to undermine the good will that has carefully been re-established in our schools?

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with my hon. Friend that these issues relate not just to pay as such but to career structures and to the need for greater local flexibility to enable local school management to operate. My hon. Friend will have noticed that in this year's pay settlement the interim advisory committee carried out the remit that I had given it and produced far-reaching recommendations to deal both with career structure and with local flexibility. As to industrial action, I can only repeat what I said earlier—I do not believe that such action does anything to enhance teachers' standing in the public mind. The vast majority of dedicated teachers want to get on with the job and deserve respect. I regret the fact that the action of the few undermines that hard and dedicated work.

Mr. Flannery: Five years after the Government destroyed the teachers unions' democratic negotiating rights and were condemned for doing so by international law and by the United Nations Organisation, through the International Labour Organisation, are we to have a negotiating body dictated to us which cannot negotiate, or one with teacher representatives democratically elected to negotiate?

Mr. MacGregor: As I have explained on a number of occasions, trying to find the right machinery for determining teachers' pay in the future is what the discussions are all about. There are wide differences of view among the interested parties and the task is to find the best way ahead. Some teacher unions have rather welcomed the outcome of the work that the interim advisory committee has been doing in recent years and have greatly welcomed the fact that through its recommendations and our acceptance of them a much better career structure has been produced.

9. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what consideration he has given to findings of the Interim Advisory Committee on Teachers' Pay which were not made in its formal recommendations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend has had a number of meetings with teachers in his constituency about the report. I have considered carefully all the points that the interim advisory committee has made. It has produced an excellent report. I am completing the required consultation on the report and will make an announcement in due course when consideration of the responses has been completed.

Mr. Jack: I thank my right hon. Friend for that extremely hopeful answer on the IAC report, but what message does he have this afternoon for the 100 or so teachers in my constituency of Fylde on the subject of teacher morale? Which parts of the IAC report will he act on to help address those problems?

Mr. MacGregor: The IAC report is fundamentally about pay. I have already said that, subject to the consultation process that I am going through at the moment, I am minded to accept the IAC recommendations in full. The committee has said that its recommendations are far reaching, and I believe that to be right. They will produce a career structure which rewards greater responsibilities and which rewards more those who get to the top of their profession. The pay of heads and deputies will increase by about 10·4 per cent. on average and there will be flexibility to deal with local shortages and to reward classroom skills. That is all helpful and, in so far as low morale is about pay, the committee's report takes us a good way forward.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I do not want to undermine some of the IAC's recommendations, but will the Secretary of State accept that the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers has been driven to take strike action, which I do not endorse, by a much larger majority of its members than the right hon. Gentleman's colleagues had as a percentage of the electorate at the last election, because they feel frustrated that they cannot negotiate their pay and conditions? Will the Secretary of State announce the end of the IAC and the beginning of negotiating rights for teachers so that they can negotiate a better deal?

Mr. MacGregor: I have already given my view on the decision to hold a one-day strike and I am glad that the hon. Gentleman takes the same view. Such a strike serves no useful purpose, particularly as I am in the process of consultation on the IAC report, about which I met the NAS/UWT a week or so ago, and on the long-term negotiating machinery, about which I have also seen representatives. It is pointless to have a strike while those discussions are going on. Strikes on such issues are not right in any case for a noble profession and I hope that even now the union will think again.

Mrs. Currie: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the House should condemn those who are trying to get teachers to go on strike over pay? At a time when strikes in industry are increasingly rare, is not it a crying shame that the teaching profession—of which I used to be a member and which is composed of educated people—should be unable to resolve such issues by sitting down round a table and discussing them?

Mr. MacGregor: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. What is more, I believe that that is what the vast majority of teachers think.

Higher Education

10. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proposals he has to increase the level of achievement of 16 to 19-year-olds in full-time education.

Mr. Jackson: The Government have achieved a substantial increase in full-time participation in post-compulsory education. For 16-year-olds, it has increased by 25 per cent.—from 40 to 50 per cent.—between 1979 and today, and for 16 and 17-year-olds taken together it has increased from 34 to 42 per cent. These figures do not include youth training scheme trainees who attend college full time. We also have improvements in hand for the curriculum and qualifications for this age group.

Mr. Skinner: Why cannot all 16 to 19-year-olds have the same freedom of choice as those who come from wealthy families? Is not it true that a lot of young people who leave school at 16 have the choice of the YTS swindle or cardboard city? If the Government have enough money to provide for city technology colleges and for tax relief for public schools, why can we not have equal financial allowances for those working class kids who volunteer to stay on at school?

Mr. Jackson: The hon. Gentleman's question is based on a factual misapprehension. It is perfectly possible for 16-year-olds to stay on at school or go to college full-time if they choose.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 27 March 1990.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I hope to have an audience of Her Majesty the Queen.

Mr. Dykes: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Will she confirm that the last remaining obstacle to early British entry into the exchange rate mechanism is the present temporary high rate of inflation?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is not quite right. In view of the statement made in Madrid, and repeated by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, my hon. Friend will know that it is absolutely vital that we have free movement of capital throughout the Community. That condition has not yet been satisfied and is one factor. We must get our own rate of inflation down and we must have proper competition throughout the Community.

Mr. Kinnock: Is it not evident from that reply that the Prime Minister has absolutely no serious intention of joining the exchange rate mechanism for as long as she survives?

The Prime Minister: No, not in the least—I stand by the statement that we made in Madrid. I was not able to join the EMS during my first decade—I hope to do so during my second.

Mr. Kinnock: Does the right hon. Lady not agree with the view expressed by the former Chancellor last night that Britain's non-membership of the EMS is an exposed flank? As a result is it not clear that last night she was savaged by a live scapegoat?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that my right hon. Friend the former Chancellor would be the first to agree about the need to get inflation down. That is the top priority.

Mr. Kinnock: So will the Prime Minister tell us whether she believes that, to use the phrase of the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), the current pace is "too leisurely"?

The Prime Minister: I reaffirm what I said in Madrid and what I have said in my two previous answers. We are committed to joining the exchange rate mechanism and we shall do so when the Madrid conditions are fulfilled. They are not fulfilled yet.

Q2. **Mr. Gorst:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 27 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Gorst: Does my right hon. Friend recall that at the end of last week she said that she had received a message from the electors of Mid-Staffordshire? In her characteristically forthright fashion, will she send a message back to them to the effect that, local difficulties apart, the Government have a lot of important business to transact in the next few months and that when that business has been dispatched they will certainly wish to dispatch the temporary representative?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I think that my hon. Friend has got it absolutely right. We hope and expect to win back that constituency in the general election, as we have won back seats from previous by-elections.

Q3. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 27 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Michie: What message of hope has the Prime Minister for the hard-pressed and beleaguered Scottish fishing industry? Will she allow that vital indigenous industry to go to the wall as so many others have?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady is well aware that part of the fishing grounds have been significantly overfished. There is a need to conserve the fish. Although in recent months the fishermen have not been able to land the same weight as previously, they have been getting much better prices. We are in close touch with the Commission and are carefully watching the effect of East German entry on the common fisheries policy. We will ensure that East Germany does not take the quota that we regard as ours.

Mr. Haselhurst: Can my right hon. Friend say whether the unequivocal assurance given by the Government in the White Paper, "Airports Policy", in 1985—that there would not be a second runway at Stansted—is as unequivocal now as it was then?

The Prime Minister: I have no reason to think that there has been any change whatsoever.

Q4. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 27 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Ross: Does the Prime Minister agree with the view of the Secretary of State for Scotland that the disastrous mishandling of the poll tax issue in the Budget was a victory for him over her—or, in his words, that on this issue she fell into line with his better judgment?

The Prime Minister: No, that showed how generous are the resources available to Scotland. The £9,500 million enabled my right hon. and learned Friend easily to take £4 million to help the people who have been paying community charge for longer than those in England.

Mr. Colvin: May I ask the Prime Minister to imagine that the community charge had been in operation for the past 100 years? If that were so, what does my right hon. Friend think that householders would be saying to one another if the Government were about to introduce a system of household domestic rates?

The Prime Minister: I think that my hon. Friend has made a clever point. My imagination does not go back 100 years, but the essential point that my hon. Friend makes is that the rates were the most unfair and unpopular tax of all, and they are being replaced by a fairer tax that will in time prove much better.

Q5. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 27 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Last night the former Chancellor and the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) both refused to support the Prime Minister in the Lobby in a Division on the poll tax—despite the fact that only hours previously the right hon. Member for Henley had been driven into a loyalty oath in favour of the Prime Minister. What does she think of those two right hon. Gentlemen now? Does she believe that the loyalty oath was hollow? Is this the first time that a Chancellor has expressed a reservation on the poll tax?

The Prime Minister: I must ask my right hon. Friend the Patronage Secretary to have a quiet word with them and see what that will do.

Mr. Gale: Does my right hon. Friend recognise that because of her special relationship with Mr. Gorbachev she is better placed than any other world leader to send a clear message to the Soviet Union that armed intervention in Lithuania is no more acceptable today than it was in Czechoslovakia and Hungary? Will she please do so?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend will be aware of my previous replies. The people of Lithuania have made clear their wish to determine their own future. Furthermore, we have never recognised the annexation of Lithuania by the Soviet Union as legal, although it was recognised in fact in the Helsinki accords. Undoubtedly this is a very difficult situation, both for President Gorbachev and for the people of Lithuania. I believe that it calls for great restraint on both sides. Force is not an appropriate way to settle the position. I hope that it will be settled by restraint on both sides and by their discussing it so that they come to a satisfactory conclusion. That view was also taken by the 12 Foreign Secretaries of the Community.

Q6. **Mr. Watson:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 27 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Watson: The Prime Minister will be aware of the statement by the Secretary of State for Scotland at the weekend to the effect that he had been involved in politics prior to her becoming leader of her party and that he would continue to be so involved when she was no longer the leader of her party. Does not the Prime Minister think it more likely that the general election will sound the death knell of both simultaneously?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland is a young and able man. I am sure that he will still be here at this Dispatch Box in a Conservative Government long after I am not.

Q7. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 27 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hind: My right hon. Friend is aware that high-spending councils such as Lancashire have levied a 17·5 per cent. increase in their expenditure this year. Does she agree that they are playing their part in increasing inflation, that they must recognise that that is their role and that they must look carefully at their finances with a view to restraining increases next year?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. Lancashire and a number of other Labour authorities are accepting some of the advice given in one of the Labour documents—to set the community charge as high as they can possibly get away with. That is what they have done. It adds to inflation and it puts a heavy burden on all their local electors who will have to pay far more community charge than they ought, had those councils adhered to the Government's standard spending recommendations.

Q8. **Mr Alton:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 27 March 1990.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Alton: In view of the answer that the Prime Minister gave a few moments ago, will she say in what way the Lithuanian people should show restraint, given that since 1939 their country has been annexed by and forcibly occupied by the Soviet Union and that the aggression in Lithuania now is coming entirely from the Soviet Union? Does she not believe that the Government of President Landsbergis should be recognised as the Government of that country?

The Prime Minister: I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would agree that the situation there is very difficult indeed, that it does not help to be provocative in any way, on either side, and that the only way is for both groups of people to sit down, try to work things through by dialogue and come to a satisfactory settlement. We had hoped last night when we saw people in Lithuania and people in the red army sitting down together that they were well on the way to doing that. It does require dialogue between politicians. We support such a dialogue, and so does the whole of the European Community.

Mr. Favell: Would my right hon. Friend care to contemplate the fact that in the 1980s shops and hotels had to put the customer first, with fewer people, factories had to produce more goods with a smaller work force and even the professions had to learn that the world did not revolve around them, but for local authorities the party has gone merrily on? Is there any earthly reason why that should be so?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes the point effectively. Output has gone up in factories and offices, with fewer people, and by that means we have achieved a higher standard of living. Unfortunately, the numbers employed by local authorities have continued to rise, and we have reason to ask whether they could achieve greater administration with fewer people, which would bring down the community charge.

Q9. **Miss Hoey:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 27 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Miss Hoey: Does the Prime Minister agree with her supporter, the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), who in a recent radio interview called for the police to sweep the homeless off the streets and close the cardboard cities? Where does she think he might like them to be swept to?

The Prime Minister: There are about 21,000 hostel places available in the London area, many more than there used to be, of which about 3,000 are available at short notice. They are not always filled and it would be better if people spent the night in the beds in those hostels than on the streets of London.

The hon. Lady will be aware that £250 million funding was recently announced to help the homeless, and recently £148 million of that—a considerable sum—was made available for London and the south-east, some to local authorities and some to housing associations, to help resolve the problem.

Training Credits

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Michael Howard): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I will make a statement about training credits for young people.

The initiative that I am announcing today marks an important new departure in our policies for training young people. Its aim is to excite young people about the benefits of continuing in training and further education after they have left school and to raise the amount and quality of training provided by employers. The initiative has the potential to revolutionise attitudes to training in this country. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will hon. Members who are not remaining for the statement please leave the Chamber quietly?

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. We are well aware that statements of this kind are a fiasco and are made for a specific purpose but the fiasco is contributed to when we cannot hear what is being said.

Mr. Speaker: I have just asked hon. Members who are not staying for the statement to leave quietly. Mr. Howard.

Mr. Howard: I was——

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Further to the point that was put to you by my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), may I seek your protection as a Back Bencher? We have witnessed, certainly since 1987, the way in which the Government of the day have manipulated the business of the House in the interest of the Executive against that of the legislature. You are in regular contact with the usual channels and the Leader of the House. Do you agree that it would be appropriate to let the Leader of the House know that this legislature will not tolerate for much longer the manipulation of the business of the House by a Government who are——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that whether or not a statement should be made is not a matter for me but is arranged through the usual channels, of which I am not part. Mr. Howard.

Mr. Howard: If we are to continue effectively in the world economy of the 1990s, we need a skilled work force that is second to none——

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Is it a point of order that I can answer? I hope that the hon. Gentleman's point is not questioning whether or not the statement should be made.

Mr. McCartney: Are you aware, Mr. Speaker, that the new hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire is as much interested in the subject of the training of her young constituents as is any other hon. Member of the House? Are you further aware that she is deliberately being kept out of the Chamber——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order for me.

Mr. Howard: If we are to compete effectively in the world economy of the 1990s——

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: This is getting ridiculous.

Mr. Faulds: Mr. Speaker, is this not yet another outcome of the introduction of the television cameras? The whole purpose of the delay of the introduction of the new hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire is so that it does not catch prime television time. The crowd on the Government Benches are manipulating things——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is a fair bet that the introduction of the hon. Lady will catch the television cameras.

Mr. Howard: Surely there can be few things more important for the future of our country than the training of our young people.

If we are to compete effectively in the world economy of the 1990s, we need a skilled work force who are second to none. The basis for that must be effective and high-quaity education and training for young people. We are already well on the way to achieving this. In schools, the Education Reform Act 1988, the GCSE and the technical and vocational education initiative are raising levels of attainment and preparing young people for the world of work. The new arrangements for youth training will build on the achievements of the youth training scheme and lead both to higher levels of training and to training that is more relevant to the needs of employers. We are currently establishing training and enterprise councils throughout England and Wales, and local enterprise companies in Scotland. One of their key tasks will be to mobilise local employers to offer more and better training in the skills needed by industry to young people.

We must also motivate young people themselves to understand the importance to them of quality training and to come to expect training as a normal part of employment. There has been widespread interest in training credits as a means of achieving this. The Confederation of British Industry in particular has advocated credits in its report "Towards a Skills Revolution" and has proposed pilot schemes at local level to test them out.

Training credits represent an entitlement to train to approved standards. They would be issued to young people who would be able to present their credit either to an employer who makes training available or to a specialist provider of training if the young person is unable to find employment. Young people would be given quality careers advice and guidance to help them to put their credit to best use. A monetary value would be shown on the face of the credit, and it would be open to employers and the body issuing the credit to supplement this as necessary to secure higher-cost training or other priorities.

I and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science, together with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and other Ministers concerned, have looked closely at the range of proposals for training credits. We agree that they are potentially an exciting means of motivating young people to train.

Credits are as yet untested. We have therefore decided to invite training and enterprise councils and local enterprise companies in Scotland to run pilot credit schemes to come into operation from April 1991. To this end, I am today issuing a prospectus inviting them, in co-operation with local education authorities, to submit bids for my approval. The aim is to select 10 such schemes to operate from April next year in areas covering up to 10 per cent. of the national total of 16 and 17-year-olds leaving full-time education—that is, some 45,000 young people a year. Every pilot will provide young people with an entitlement to train. Under some pilots, the entitlement will be for all young people leaving full-time education. Others may take a more selective approach in focusing, for example, on improving training for particular occupations or skill levels, in small firms, or through inner-city compacts or other business-education partnerships.

In all cases, the training and enterprise councils will need to work closely with local education authorities, further education colleges and the careers service. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science, together with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, will ensure that the authorities are properly involved. The training and enterprise councils will be expected to ensure that credits are used only for training that is relevant to the needs of employers and which meets approved standards. Their schemes will need to lead to more young people undertaking training and to the attainment of higher skill levels. There will be rigorous evaluation of the effectiveness of the schemes.

The councils will also have to make sure that all young people who are unable to find jobs will, as now, be guaranteed a suitable training place and that there is appropriate provision for young people who are disabled or who have other special training needs.

Overall funding for these pilot schemes will come in large part from planned provision for youth training. There will also be a contribution from the relevant element of local education authority provision for 16 to 18-year-olds undertaking part-time training and education. From their existing expenditure plans, the Government are making available a further £12 million in 1991-92, rising to £25 million in the following year. This will bring the total estimated resources available to the training and enterprise councils running pilot credit schemes to £115 million by 1992-93.

This is the first important step in an exciting new direction. Its purpose is to make a major impact on the motivation of young people to train after they have left school and so to increase the skills and productivity of our young work force. I am sure that these proposals will be widely welcomed. I commend them to the House.

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): I must tell the Secretary of State that I am sure that the Government's appalling training record played a major part in their crushing defeat in the Mid-Staffordshire by-election last week. Surely the key question today is whether he will recognise that we have a massive and widening training gap with our competitor countries; that we are behind in every sector, whether manufacturing or services, and that we must know whether this initiative will amount to a genuine entitlement by young people to high-quality training backed up by the public sector support and cash necessary to make it a reality.

Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman therefore confirm that, while the training gap in Britain is so big that half our work force are receiving no in-work training and our young people are denied training to the standards of our competitors, all that he has made available is £12 million, not this year but next, and £25 million thereafter? Is this new money or is it, as we fear, simply taken from elsewhere in the employment budget? Even if it is new money, can the Secretary of State tell us, as he has repeatedly refused to say over the last few days, whether he is intending to cut £150 million from the training budget next year, £120 million the year after and £60 million the year after—£300 million off the youth training budget over three years? Does that still stand?

Is it the case—just to forestall the excuse that this is caused by the declining numbers of young people—that, as we have calculated today, the cost of training per trainee per week over the next three years is to be cut from £50 to under £30? Does that still apply to this new training credit scheme and, if it does, how will he answer the demands by the Confederation of British Industry and the Trades Union Congress that we use any money saved by a training credit scheme to upgrade the standards and qualifications of our young people, since we languish far behind our competitors in the quality as well as the quantity of training?

Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman provide, as the CBI and the TUC ask, for each young person to be provided with his or her own action plan record of achievement to plan for the future? Will he undertake, as those bodies say is a vital component of any such scheme, to boost the advice and counselling services necessary for young people to make a reality of their choice in the training market?

Will the Secretary of State confirm that he is proposing to cut careers advisory service spending next year and, perhaps as important as anything, whether the credit will meet the full cost of a young person's training? Is it, in other words, a proper entitlement or will it be in strict terms a cash-limited voucher which trainees may be obliged to top up from their own resources? We need answers to those questions.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman says that these pilot schemes will start in 1991 and run until 1993. It will therefore be the mid-1990s before any full-blown training scheme can take off. When we examine the skills crisis that Britain faces, when, after 11 years of his Government, the Secretary of State is still talking about pilot schemes, when we confront the magnitude of our failure and the mountain that we have to climb, does he really believe that his announcement measures up to the scale of the revolution in skills that we say Britain needs?

Mr. Howard: That must rank as one of the most churlish receptions to an imaginative new training scheme that the House has heard. Of course I can confirm that the scheme will provide a genuine entitlement to high-quality training. That is what it is all about. To answer the question that I think the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) said was the most important of those that he asked, I can confirm that there will be no question of the person receiving the training being asked to top it up from his or her own resources.

The value of the training will in the first instance be provided on the face of the credit. It will be topped up either by the training and enterprise council or by the

[Mr. Howard]

employer, or by both. The funds to achieve that will be made available. I indicated clearly in my statement that the additional resources will be made available to ensure that these schemes deliver their objectives and are a great success.

The hon. Gentleman complained, among other things, that the additional money would not be made available until next year. That is because the scheme cannot start until next year. It is typical of the level of criticisms which we get from the hon. Gentleman that he should make such a point. To answer another of his questions, it is true that we recognise the importance of the careers advisory service, and we will be discussing with it how it can best play its part in ensuring that young people make the best use of the credits that will be made available to them.

The hon. Gentleman returned again to the criticism that he made yesterday about resources. I tried to explain to him yesterday that the contribution made by employers to the training of young people has increased six times in the last four years and that we expect it to increase again. His response to that yesterday was that he would use sanctions against employers who did not do what he wanted them to do, and that he would deal with them. It says volumes for the innermost thinking of the hon. Gentleman and his party that they use the same language about British employers as they use about the foreign regime which they most deeply detest.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I remind the House that this is a Back Benchers' day?

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): These are statements.

Mr. Speaker: I know. But I am frequently asked if statements may be made; I am seldom asked if a statement may not be made. As I was saying, this is a Back Benchers' day and there should be plenty of opportunity on the Adjournment motion or on the Consolidated Fund Bill to outline a case. Therefore I ask hon. Members to put single questions to the Secretary of State so that we may get on more rapidly.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Does my right hon. and learned Friend share my contempt for those on the Opposition Front Bench who, having clamoured for pilot studies in the Health Service, then come here to excoriate him for introducing an imaginative scheme as an experiment? Does he agree that colleges throughout the country are already responding to the possibility of being able to compete in the training market with enthusiasm and imagination?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The only place where enthusiasm for this initiative is lacking is on the Opposition Benches.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Given the training gap, it would be churlish not to welcome a scheme that will do something about it, albeit we wish to see other schemes too. Can the Secretary of State say what provision there will be for the maintenance of young people who are in receipt of training credits?

Mr. Howard: Those who are not in employment will have exactly the same entitlement as exists at the moment under the youth training scheme. I should emphasise that the guarantee that is currently available under youth training will continue and that all young people who cannot find jobs will continue to be guaranteed a training place. For young people in employment, obviously their income will be a matter of negotiation between them and their employers.

Mr. Colin Shepherd (Hereford): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that this will be seen by young people and employers alike as an incredibly valuable tool for the new training and enterprise councils? Can he confirm that the development of the TECs, which are so essential to his initiative, is running ahead of schedule? Does he agree that it behoves young people to recognise where confidence is placed in them—that is, that they should stay with a Conservative Government who have their best interests in mind, in view of the coyness with which the Opposition state their position on the future of training and enterprise councils?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his welcome for the proposals. He is absolutely right. Training and enterprise councils are running two years ahead of schedule and 66 are now receiving development funding. They are proceeding with the development of training that is much more responsive to the needs of local circumstances. That in itself represents the most exciting training initiative that we have ever seen in this country.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): In principle, the Secretary of State has the germ of a good idea which could empower people to have a right to training. However, does he agree that the scheme might wither in the hands of the Government if they underfund it? Will it be a further excuse to make further cuts in the training budget? The youth training scheme currently costs the Exchequer £50 per week per place. By 1992, that is scheduled to drop to £33 per week per place. Providing £50 per week amounts to a total of £2,500 per year. The Secretary of State has been to Germany and knows that Germany's apprenticeship places cost between £6,000 and £9,000 each. How much will the credits be worth? I have heard people talk in terms of £1,000, which is about £20 a week. We will not get much quality training for that.

Will the Secretary of State ensure that the payments are also made to children who stay on in school, because that is equally important? Will he ensure that employers give day release? Does he appreciate that, while welcoming the principle, the Select Committee on Employment will want to monitor its practice closely?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to the Chairman of the Select Committee for his welcome for the scheme. I also welcome the fact that he has said that the Select Committee will monitor the operation of the scheme. We shall all need to do that. I am confident that it will succeed. I am confident that far from withering in the Government's hands, as the hon. Gentleman suggested, the scheme will flower and that we shall all regard it in a welcoming spirit when we have seen the extent to which it delivers results.

On the point about resources, I refer the hon. Gentleman to my earlier reply to his hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) and to what I said in the

Budget debate yesterday. Employers' contributions for training are improving fast, and we expect them to continue to improve. One objective of the scheme is to encourage employers to contribute more to the cost of the training that we need.

Mr. David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): Once the schemes are under way, they will be very helpful to young people, but does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is important that we continue to expand the technical and vocational education initiative courses in schools? To that end, may we have an assurance that the Government will ensure that the equipment for TVEI courses is modern and in good working condition, which will require finance?

Mr. Howard: I agree with my hon. Friend—TVEI is one of the Government's greatest successes. We intend that it should grow and increase and continue to play an important part in strengthening the relationships between schools and the world of work. I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): The Secretary of State has said that he will implement the scheme with the assistance of three Cabinet colleagues, representing England, Scotland and Wales. Why has the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland been omitted?

Mr. Howard: There are no present plans to extend the scheme to Northern Ireland, but I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will have listened carefully to the right hon. Gentleman's observations.

Sir Philip Goodhart (Beckenham): While appreciating that young people must be given priority in this imaginative scheme, may I draw my right hon. and learned Friend's attention to the recent recommendations of the Select Committee on Employment, that training credits should be extended to older workers who may be contemplating a change of career?

Mr. Howard: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend who, in a pamphlet written some time ago, of which he was the co-author, pioneered an idea that is not very different from that which I have announced today. I have listened carefully to what he said about extending the proposal to older employees. We want to do all we can to encourage an increase in the amount of training that is provided for people of all ages in work. We shall be in a better position to evaluate whether the scheme represents the best way forward when the pilot schemes have been in operation for some time.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): Does the Minister recognise that his statement is an admission and confession that the youth opportunities programme and YTS have been an absolute and utter failure during the past 10 years? Although the changes suggested today are a slight step in the right direction, they do not compare with some of the schemes that have been running in Europe during the past 10 years—for instance, in Germany, France, Belgium and Holland. Compared to them, we have lost out for three generations. Is it not time to give the matter more urgency and priority?

Mr. Howard: I shall pay the hon. Gentleman this tribute. His attitude is at least consistent with that of his party, which has consistently opposed every training initiative introduced by the Government during the past 10 years. That is the limit of the extent to which his remarks were accurate. It is wrong to suggest that the youth training scheme has been anything but a considerable success. We have made rapid strides in training during the past 10 or 11 years. Of course, there is more to be done. The statement represents an important step forward.

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that his announcement will be a particular boost to open learning of the type conducted by the Open college? Will he tell those who would like to make constructive bids for pilot projects what criteria he will use to assess them?

Mr. Howard: As my hon. Friend suggests, there will be a place for open learning within the framework of the scheme. In assessing the bids that come forward, we shall consider proposals to increase the numbers of young people receiving training, the levels of training they receive and the qualifications they are expected to obtain, and proposals made by training and enterprise councils to increase employers' contributions and to avoid deadweight—that is, to avoid duplicating training which is already provided and paid for by employers. A copy of the prospectus—indeed many copies—will be available in the Vote Office shortly after I sit down.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): As the Government, rightly, emphasise the importance of consumer choice, may I welcome the first statement from his Department in 11 years that promotes that objective? May I also take the Secretary of State back to the points made by his hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste)? Surely, if the best way to test the scheme is by pilot studies, should not he announce in the near future the extension of such a scheme to the long-term unemployed, and equally importantly, to the low paid in work?

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome for the scheme, however qualified. I understand the force of the points he makes, but it is important that we should proceed a step at a time. The statement is an important step. We want to make sure that it is carefully prepared and evaluated. We shall decide how to take the matter forward in the light of the lessons that we learn from the pilots.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that safety on construction sites is extremely important? Will he pay tribute to the construction industry training board for the excellent work that it has done in raising standards throughout the country? Will he ensure that it is given a full role to play in this new and exciting initiative?

Mr. Howard: I am aware of my hon. Friend's close interest in these matters. I am happy to pay tribute to the role of the construction industry training board on safety. We shall have to consider its precise role in this initiative.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Secretary of State spoke of ensuring that there would be appropriate provision for the disabled and those needing special training. Will the Government give direction to LECs and TECs on that matter? Will he ensure that groups

[Mrs. Margaret Ewing]

representing the disabled are consulted and that additional funding is made available for the special needs of that group of people?

Mr. Howard: The important matters referred to by the hon. Lady will be among those taken into account when considering the bids that we receive from the TECs and LECs in Scotland. Such matters will be taken into account in that way.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): As some of the Government's excellent training initiatives in the past have been treated badly because of unfair political attacks on them, will the Secretary of State say briefly what extra entitlements or rights to opportunities will be available to young people through this latest initiative? Will he give some guidance on where the £12 million will go?

Mr. Howard: The essence of the scheme is that the young person receives the credit in his hands. That represents an entitlement to training with a significant monetary sum on the face of the credit to motivate that young person and make him or her much more aware of the value that should be attached to training. We want to encourage and excite young people about the importance of receiving training—that is the essence of the proposal.

The additional resources are designed to encourage more people to receive training; obviously, the greater the numbers who receive training, the more that will cost. We want to encourage and to achieve more people in training. I have tried to explain the way in which we are confident that the pilots will achieve that end.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): In the past 10 years, the successive freezing, and therefore erosion, of the allowances paid to school leavers on such schemes mean that the present generation of school leavers are £30 worse off than their counterparts were 10 years ago under the youth opportunities programme. Why and how does the proposed training scheme differ in terms of giving a decent allowance instead of the slave-labour rates of previous schemes? Given the Secretary of State's previous answer and his precise description, does he agree that training is far too important to be treated like luncheon vouchers?

Mr. Howard: When the hon. Gentleman got up to make a comparison of expenditure with that of 10 years ago, I thought that he was going to point out that the Government spend six times as much on training as did the previous Labour Government—three times more in real terms. That is the real comparison to be made between records when it comes to judging spending now with that of 10 years ago. We believe that the proposal represents a substantial step forward in exciting young people about the opportunities that are available to them on training. In due course, I hope that even the hon. Gentleman will recognise the importance of the proposal and the success it has achieved.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that I was privileged to open a £1 million extension to Stroud college in my constituency? Two thirds of that money came from local employers. Surely my right hon. and learned Friend's excellent announcement is tailor-made for areas such as Stroud.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am sure that the college—the extension to which he opened last week—will be anxious to take advantage of the increased opportunities that will be made available to it under the proposal to play its full part in providing training and education responsive to the needs of local employers in his area.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): The Secretary of State will appreciate that I have little faith in what he says, as he recently sold the skill centre in my constituency to a consortium, about which his office will not give me details. Does he agree that the best way in which to train the engineers, the lathe operators and the skilled technicians of tomorrow is to encourage industry to do it, instead of discouraging it as the Government have done in the past 11 years?

Mr. Howard: I cannot think what lies behind the last part of the hon. Gentleman's question, because we have been encouraging industry and employers to train. We have not only encouraged them to do so, but all the evidence suggests that they have responded to that encouragement to an unprecedented extent. Between 1984 and 1989, the number of people in work receiving training increased by 70 per cent.; that demonstrates the progress we are making. Of course there is more to be done, and the proposal I have announced will help us in that.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I welcome the proposal that I have long advocated, particularly as an employer in a small firm and as chairman of the Alliance of Small Firms and Self Employed People. Will my right hon. and learned Friend assure us that small businesses, which provide the majority of jobs where training can take place, will not be precluded from the schemes by making the terms on which money can be spent too difficult for those businesses to qualify? My right hon. and learned Friend and I know that small firms will train their young people, but the trouble is that, these days, the cost of an apprenticeship is so high that they need some input of money. The proposal will give that input. I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend agrees that we must be careful not to make the conditions so difficult that small firms cannot participate.

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her welcome for the proposal. She will recall that I specifically identified small businesses as one of the criteria on which selective schemes could be put forward by the training and enterprise councils. We will be looking with interest at the bids that we receive to examine the extent to which they reflect the concerns of my hon. Friend and many others about this issue. *[Interruption.]*

Mrs. Gorman: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore) has accused me of not being here for the statement, but I was.

Mr. Speaker: I know. I saw the hon. Lady or I would not have given her such a high place in the questions put to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Is not this a paltry sum of money compared to £300 million of cuts in youth training? Will this money be directed at local education authorities or towards the sleazy sell-off to Astra Training

Services Ltd. of a number of skill centres? It is designed to give the little cabal inside the civil service extra money or is it genuinely aimed at training?

Mr. Howard: It is designed to improve both the quantity and quality of training provided to our young people. I am confident that it will achieve precisely that objective.

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): Is not the point precisely that, if this welcome new instrument is fashioned correctly, it will help to draw into the training business some employers and firms that would have been reluctant to come in under the previous dispensation?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: that is one of the proposals' main objectives, and one of the criteria that we shall consider when we assess the bids.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is the Secretary of State aware that, when I saw that this item was on the agenda, I realised that it was part and parcel of the idea to prevent any extra publicity for the Mid-Staffordshire victor? Then I thought that perhaps the Government were worried about the election—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ask a question."] I am asking the Secretary of State whether he is aware of this. Then, when I saw that only £12 million——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should ask one question.

Mr. Skinner: I am asking the question now, unless you, Mr. Speaker, want me to say what my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campell-Savours) said yesterday.

When I found out that the amount was only £12 million, I realised what a pathetic programme it was—just enough money to cover the costs of Downing street and Buckingham palace for one year. I have some news for the Secretary of State: when the Labour party get into power, we will have a pilot training scheme and put its members on the gates outside No. 10 to pull them down.

Mr. Howard: The money that will be available for these proposals in 1992-93 will be £155 million. That may be an insignificant sum to the hon. Gentleman and the Labour party, in which case they should have a word with the shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who is always telling us that the Labour party will not spend money on anything other than its two priority areas, among which training does not feature.

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): I urge my right hon. and learned Friend to disregard the all-too-carping remarks from Opposition Members. I assure him that his imaginative project will receive a warm welcome from Conservative Members. The ideas that he has proposed to the House today are in line with the thinking of both the Trades Union Congress and the Confederation of British Industry. He might have some difficulty with local education authorities, particularly those under Labour control, if the city technology scheme is anything to go by.

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support. There is widespread enthusiasm among local education authorities for the ideas put forward by the CBI. I am confident that it will wish to play a full part in the development of the proposals. I fear that Opposition Members are the only odd ones out.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I have heard the whole statement and the Secretary of State's answer to all the questions. Will he draw our attention to the parts of his statement which prevented its being made either yesterday or tomorrow?

Mr. Howard: I dare say that, whenever the statement was made, we would have had a similar reaction from the Opposition. Even the hon. Gentleman, with all his customary ingenuity, cannot find a criticism to make about the substance of the statement.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): I welcome this imaginative scheme. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that its beauty is that it is locally planned, with education authorities and training and enterprise councils working together to provide the training needed in the immediate locality? It is flexible, so that the training can be taken in work, at college or in the evening.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; both the general flexibility, to which he referred, and the extent to which the training provided will respond to local circumstances—local jobs and the need to provide the skills necessary in each local area—will mean that it will be warmly received outside the House.

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): Is the Secretary of State aware that £12 million for Britain is less than one third of the cost of providing training this year in Scotland? The Secretary of State for Scotland has recently been saying that he is in control of training within Scotland. Will the Secretary of State for Employment confirm that the scheme is to be introduced in Scotland in exactly the same way as the rest of Britain and that there is nothing distinctive about it there? If there is something distinctive about it, what is it?

Mr. Howard: Local enterprise companies in Scotland will be able to bid to put forward a pilot scheme and operate it in the same way as training and enterprise councils in England. We shall consider such bids on the same basis as we consider bids from England and Wales. I am sure that Scotland will wish to play its full part in the initiative.

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): Is not the key to success in the scheme the size of the resources that the Government are prepared to allocate to it? Do not we judge the Government's record by what they have already allocated to youth training and the decisions that they have set out in their expenditure plans? Will the Secretary of State confirm that it is still the Government's intention to cut £240 million from the youth training budget between this financial year and 1992 and 1993? Will he confirm also that it is still his intention to cut the amount of money available for each trainee's training from £50 a week to £33? Will he give a guarantee that any youngster wishing to follow any training course will have the money made available to him or her either by the employer or by the TEC, or will the money available to the TEC be cash-limited so that certain youngsters will be disqualified from using the freedom that the right hon. and learned Gentleman claims under the credit?

Mr. Howard: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was in the Chamber yesterday to listen to the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair). If he had heard the hon. Gentleman's speech, he would appreciate how

[Mr. Howard]

absurd it is for him to say that the only criterion is the money that the Government are putting forward. The hon. Member for Sedgefield reaffirmed the Labour party's commitment to a jobs tax, to a compulsory payroll tax and to the sanctions which he said that the Labour party would apply to employers. How can that be said while at the same time the hon. Gentleman suggests that the only thing that matters is the money which the taxpayer is contributing towards the cost of training?

I said yesterday—I have repeated it today—that employers are making an increasing contribution towards the cost of youth training. The only difference is that, under this Government, they are doing it rapidly and voluntarily, while under the Labour party's proposals they would be obliged to do it as part of a payroll tax. There will be ample, and more than adequate recourses available to ensure the success of these proposals. We are content to see them judged by the monitoring to which the hon. Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton), the Chairman of the Select Committee on Employment, referred and by the monitoring to which the Department will subject them. They represent an exciting new step forward. They will be warmly welcomed everywhere except on the Opposition Benches.

Mr. Nellist: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I call Mr. Secretary Parkinson to make another statement. I shall take the hon. Gentleman's point of order afterwards.

Mr. Nellist: My point of order is on the first statement.

Mr. Speaker: I shall take it after the next statement.

London (Traffic)

4.13 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Cecil Parkinson): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about transport in London.

On 14 December I published a discussion document, "Traffic in London", on traffic management and parking control, together with consultation papers on the four London assessment studies. I asked for comments by 28 February and I am now ready to announce my conclusions. I want to tackle the problems urgently and end the uncertainty as quickly as possible.

We already have in hand a major programme of transport investment in London. In the next three years substantial sums are to be spent on improving the capital's public transport. I have already approved a programme of investment of £2·2 billion over the next three years by London Regional Transport. It includes extending the Jubilee line to south London and docklands, completely upgrading the Central line, increasing the capacity and appearance of the most congested underground stations, modernising underground rolling stock, increasing the capacity of the Docklands light railway and extending it to Bank and to Beckton. Network SouthEast plans to spend £1·2 billion over the next three years. There will be 1,200 new coaches coming into use, giving the growing number of passengers a better service. Stations will be improved and some of them lengthened to provide more capacity. Work is in hand to improve rail links to London's principal airports.

I am pressing ahead with my £1·9 billion programme to improve London's trunk roads. Priority is being given to the north circular road and better access to east London. In addition, the boroughs have 41 major schemes worth some £445 million and the London Docklands development corporation plans to spend over £550 million on new highway developments inside docklands.

The consultants' studies were intended to establish what more could be done in four particular areas. The response to consultation has been very full. I shall be publishing an analysis shortly. The main points are clear. First, there was strong support for improvements to public transport. Secondly, there was widespread opposition to most of the major new road schemes suggested by the consultants. Thirdly, there was support for proposals to slow traffic in residential areas, both to improve safety and to deter rat-running. Fourthly, there was general recognition of the need for better traffic management but concern about the level of traffic and a wish to see higher priority given to buses, cyclists and pedestrians.

A number of the most important public transport schemes identified in the assessment studies are now under active examination. We are evaluating urgently with LRT and BR the proposed Chelsea-Hackney underground line and east-west cross-rail. Subject to the satisfactory outcome of the work, I expect to authorise the introduction of a Bill for one of these lines in November 1990. LRT is appraising the extensions of the Docklands light railway to Lewisham and of the east London line northwards to Dalston and Highbury and southward to east Dulwich. It is taking forward studies of the Croydon light rail system with the borough and BR. Funds to begin upgrading the Northern line are already in LRT's investment programme.

I have asked the chairman of LRT to consider further the case for the extension of the Northern line from Kennington southwards to Streatham and Crystal Palace and for a further extension of the east London line to Balham. I am asking BR to give further consideration to service improvements and new stations suggested by the consultants.

I have decided not to proceed with the major road schemes recommended by the studies. I have rejected the western environmental improvement route and the idea of a tunnel from Chiswick to Wandsworth. I have also ruled out schemes on the south circular such as those at Stanstead road and Brownhill road, and the tunnels under Clapham common, Dulwich park, Tulse Hill and Forest Hill. My Department will press ahead with limited improvements along the south circular, and A3 West hill to improve conditions in Wandsworth.

In south London, we shall not pursue new routes across Chipstead valley or along the Wandle valley. We shall take forward proposals for improving the M23-A23 junction, for a Hooley bypass, and for widening and junction improvements between Coulsdon and Thornton Heath. I have ruled out new roads at Norbury and Streatham, but I propose to consult the local authorities on establishing an improvement line so that new development is set back to allow eventual widening.

In the east London study area, a new route from Holloway road to King's Cross, the Archway road scheme and a tunnel under Parkland walk have been ruled out. I shall be taking forward improvements at the Archway roundabout and Highbury corner. I shall be discussing with the local authorities concerned ways of taking forward improvement of the inner ring road from King's Cross to Aldgate.

These road improvements will cost some £250 million. Normal statutory procedures will apply. They will bring worthwhile gains in safety and reliability. The new road schemes will be designed in a way that is sympathetic to the local environment. We shall discuss with the local authorities the scope for associated measures to improve safety on local roads. I shall consider suitable measures for grant aid. We shall pay close attention to provision for pedestrians and cyclists. My Department will work with the boroughs to develop a network for longer-distance cycling in London.

I am going ahead with my proposal for the appointment of a traffic director and for a priority route system—red routes—for the efficient movement of through traffic, especially buses. This will be based on the primary route network, as proposed in "Traffic in London" but subject to further consultation on the exact composition. Discussions with the Metropolitan police and the Home Office about the resources needed to enforce the red routes, as well as to maintain an adequate level of cover elsewhere, are under way. There will also be further consultation on the level of penalties for illegal parking.

I am planning, with the co-operation of the boroughs concerned, to start a pilot scheme covering the A1 from Highgate to the Angel, round the inner ring road to Aldgate, and on to the A13 Commercial road. The purpose of the pilot scheme will be to work out the practical details, such as how to cater for the needs of local residents and traders, and how the benefits can be used to help buses and introduce traffic calming in the surrounding area. We shall be consulting widely with the local authorities, the police, bus operators and representatives of local residents and businesses.

Although I recognise that the local authorities would like to take over all parking enforcement, I believe that there should be a clear distinction between enforcement action against illegal parking and the regulation of permitted parking. A new system of permitted parking controls, together with a review of yellow lines, will give the local authorities a significantly increased role.

I shall be issuing guidance to the local authorities reminding them of the need to relate parking provision to the capacity of the road system. In general, they have opposed major new road schemes and have said that they would like to see less traffic. They should reflect these views when taking decisions on planning applications, particularly for new development with parking provision that would encourage the use of cars. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and I will consider what further guidance on the preparation of development plans will be necessary following the decisions I have announced today.

I shall be introducing legislation at the earliest opportunity to give effect to these changes. The most controversial issues about the future development of the road system in London have now been settled. Our plans for investment in public transport and roads will secure the status and success of London and its economic future.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): The Secretary of State's statement represents a great victory for the London Labour boroughs, for the London Labour party and, above all, for the people of London, who have protested in their thousands against the crazy road building plans that have been put forward by the Government.

Is the Secretary of State aware that his climb down will cause a tremendous sense of victory throughout London? After six years of delay and concern, during which 48 road building options have blighted 100,000 homes, the Government have finally been forced to see common sense —just before the May local elections. I trust that the Secretary of State will have more success with this bribe than he had with the Stafford electrification proposals.

Is he aware that, in rejecting a road-based solution to London's transport problems, he has missed a major opportunity to develop a modern, reliable public transport system that Londoners could be proud of? Does he accept that the £10 million that was wasted on the consultants' report could have paid for more bus lanes, which would have enabled traffic to move much more quickly than it did during the six years of delay? Is not this blind electoral panic? The Secretary of State has dropped the unpopular plans that could make London's transport crisis even worse, but he has failed to adopt the plans that could improve the situation.

In his statement, the Secretary of State identified the results of the consultation exercise, not the conclusions —better public transport, no new road building, more traffic restraint and better traffic management: the very approach that he dismissed as an eastern European approach at the previous Conservative party conference.

If the Secretary of State has finally seen sense, why has he not offered us any prospect of immediate action to fulfil those aims? Is not it clear that he lacks any coherent strategy for tackling London's worsening transport crisis?

[Mr. John Prescott]

The Secretary of State's policy for London amounts to the introduction of red routes, a confused parking enforcement system which will see two agencies patrol the same streets, the vague hope that pedestrians and cyclists will be encouraged and the prospect of more public transport studies.

Will the Secretary of State now reconsider a return to a directly elected transport body which Londoners want, with the powers and the resources to do the job? Will he give the House the assurance that the nearly £4 billion worth of money allocated for the proposed roads should now be used to invest in the findings of his Department's central London rail study?

Finally, while the Secretary of State is in the mood for policy climb downs, will he announce that he is to rethink the financial targets for British Rail and London Regional Transport so that we can end the disgraceful situation in which Londoners pay the highest fares in Europe for the dirtiest, most overcrowded and least reliable transport system, forcing many of them on to the roads and making our problems worse? Will he do that quickly before London grinds to a complete standstill and begins to demand his resignation, as it did with his predecessor?

Mr. Parkinson: One of the difficulties in answering the hon. Gentleman is that he clearly does not understand what the House is discussing, so let me tell him. Consultants were appointed. They put forward their proposals, not the Department's proposals. I dismissed some of the consultants' proposals and I put the rest out for consultation. When the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) and many other Labour Members urged me to abandon the major road programmes, I did not form the impression that they were trying to help me to win the London local elections in May.

The hon. Gentleman referred to a climb down, but it is difficult to climb down without climbing up. The proposals were never ours; they were those of the consultants. We put them out for consultation and we have declared the results. It is interesting that the hon. Gentleman should criticise us for listening, taking advice and carrying the consultation process through.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the public transport system. He was clearly sitting there reading his questions and not listening to what I had to say. Let me repeat the figures.

Mr. Prescott: I have read them.

Mr. Parkinson: I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman has read them.

London Underground will receive £2·2 billion.

Mr. Prescott: Who is paying for that?

Mr. Parkinson: The taxpayer. I am sick of giving the hon. Gentleman accountancy lessons in Parliament. If he comes to see me in my office, I will explain to him why he has been consistently wrong in his proposals.

Mr. Prescott: That is why the right hon. Gentleman is going down.

Mr. Parkinson: The only thing that is dragging me down is facing a reprehensible fellow such as the hon. Gentleman.

Our policy has not changed. We are pursuing a balanced transport policy and, as a result of our proposals, London will have a modernised underground system. I explained to the House why. Network SouthEast will be totally modernised. We have announced spending of £3 billion on London's roads. We are improving London's airports, air traffic control and access to airports. While the hon. Gentleman sits playing with his merchant ships in the bath, we get on with the business of modernising London's transport and giving London families a choice.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I remind the House that in the Consolidated Fund there are two debates—No. 1 and No. 4—in which this matter may be outlined in greater detail and a reply may be received from a Minister. Therefore, I urge hon. Members to ask single questions so that we can get on to the Adjournment motion debate and to those subjects on the Consolidated Fund.

Mr. John Moore (Croydon, Central): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and in particular the way in which he has rejected so much that the consultants recommended which all Members of Parliament for Croydon—I hope that I may include you in that number, Mr. Speaker—objected to. Those proposals were unacceptable, in the unanimous view of Croydon council.

Although I have read the details of the press release, I know that my right hon. Friend would wish to reassure my constituents and especially those people who are concerned about the proposals for enormous flyovers in the Waddon Road and fiveways area. Can he confirm for the record that those proposals have been abandoned, as have the consultants' proposals? Also, will he confirm that the widening and the improvement of junctions will be done in consultation with the local authority? On the assumption that I can have that confirmation, I thank my right hon. Friend for listening so carefully to Members of Parliament for Croydon and to our constituents. I am grateful.

Mr. Parkinson: I am pleased to confirm that the consultants' proposals for flyovers have been totally dismissed and that we shall join with the local authority to discuss the improvements that my right hon. Friend recognises are necessary to some of the junctions in Croydon. I thank him for his welcome.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement, but it seems to have taken the Government a long time to come to the conclusion that Londoners reached many years ago. If he is to become an increasingly green Secretary of State—as I hope he is—in an environmentally acceptable Department, he will have to persuade his colleagues in the Treasury to increase incentives for the use of public transport and disincentives for the use of private transport. The real test may be when he decides what to do about the proposals for Thameslink and a Channel tunnel rail link. Perhaps having rejected tunnels for roads he will reconsider them for railways.

Mr. Parkinson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remarks. My predecessor and I have stressed that we envisage that public transport will play an important role. That is why investment in London transport has doubled since we took the system over from the Labour-controlled Greater London council and why investment will increase next year and double again. We recognise the importance of public transport. We believe that a good public transport system will attract passengers, and that is what we are determined to provide.

Sir Hugh Rossi (Hornsey and Wood Green): I thank my right hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport for having listened so carefully to the representations that I made to them on behalf of my constituents, who warmly welcome the rejection of the consultants' proposals for Parkland walk and Archway road, whether above or below ground. May I remind my right hon. Friend that my constituents have been bedevilled by uncertainty about the proposals for Archway road which have come forward from every Administration during the past 25 years? That uncertainty has blighted the area and caused dereliction of property. Will he ensure that his proposal for the pilot red route scheme will not perpetuate that uncertainty for the future and will not generate extra traffic through my constituency?

Mr. Parkinson: I recognise the problems that my hon. Friend has faced and coped with for many years in dealing with a range of proposals for the Archway road. The Government have made their position clear: we want improvements to the two roundabouts at Archway and Highbury, and the red routes. We have made it clear that in implementing the red routes we will discuss with local residents and local shopkeepers the best way to do it so that they are not disadvantaged. I recognise the problems faced by those living in that area, and that is why we have been specific about our proposals. There are no other proposals.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): As the Secretary of State is a London Member, may I express the hope that he will be present to reply to a debate that I hope to initiate, later in the early hours? In reiterating the statement that his road schemes that remain will be sympathetic to the local environment, does he realise that he has forgotten our disagreement—or discussion—on 12 March concerning Oxleas wood? Will he now reconsider —not necessarily today—the controversial decision to destroy that wood, and not to put a tunnel under it, as recommended by the inspector? If there can be a tunnel for the M25 under Epping forest, why can there not be a tunnel under Oxleas wood?

Mr. Parkinson: I was originally a London Member, but the constituency boundaries changed in 1974 and I have been a Hertfordshire Member ever since. Therefore, I will be deprived of the opportunity of replying to the hon. Gentleman's debate early tomorrow morning. I am sure that that is a matter of great regret to both of us.

The decision on Oxleas wood was taken by the previous Secretary of State for the Environment and by my predecessor at the Department of Transport, and I do not propose to reopen the matter.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): Given that three of the consultancy firms produced four of the worst possible road schemes—all converging in my constituency—does my right hon. Friend accept a quadruple welcome from myself and from my neighbour, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) for his rejection of the road schemes for our part of London, and a loud welcome for his commitment to public transport schemes? Will he confirm that he will seriously examine schemes for the Hackney-Chelsea line to come further south through Wandsworth, and for the west London line linking Clapham junction—at long last—with the main London rail network?

Mr. Parkinson: I assure my hon. Friend that the Government are aware of the need to improve public transport links with south London. That is why I have announced within the past couple of weeks that the Jubilee line will go to the Greenwich peninsula, why—as my hon. Friend will know—I am keen for there to be an extension of the Docklands light railway to Lewisham, and why we are taking the Jubilee line south of the river from Waterloo. I shall examine my hon. Friend's proposal for the Chelsea-Hackney line, because I share his conviction that we must improve underground lines south of the river.

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): Will the Secretary of State reflect on the fact that the statement that he has just made takes Londoners back to where they were four years ago, being largely an endorsement of the roads strategy of the Greater London council, which he abolished? Will he further reflect on what that four years has cost Londoners? Perhaps he would stop the nonsense about the present Government's spending more on investment in London transport by reminding the House that the control of investment in London transport was under Secretaries of State for Transport who could veto, individually and collectively, the GLC's capital budget?

Will the right hon. Gentleman remind the House that his predecessors personally vetoed the GLC's plans to build the Docklands tube and the Hackney-Chelsea link, and to extend tube lines throughout south London? All those things would have been functional and operating if his predecessors had allowed the GLC to go ahead. What we see today is basically an admission that the Government have spent 10 years wrecking the public and private transport systems of London. They should resign as an apology to London.

Mr. Parkinson: The hon. Gentleman has a lot to answer for to Londoners. Very little of it is to his credit. He knows that he handed over an underground system that was in an appalling mess, because he preferred to spend the money on buying popularity through subsidy rather than on modernising the system. That is why we are having to spend so much, and are spending so much, on putting the system right.

Sir Barney Hayhoe (Brentford and Isleworth): I hope that my right hon. Friend will pay scant regard to the political posturing and the sour attitude of Opposition Members. He is to be warmly congratulated on having undertaken a proper consultation exercise, on having listened to what people said to him and on having taken account of their views. Those of my constituents—over 13,000 of them—who petitioned against the road tunnel from Chiswick to Wandsworth will be very pleased with his decision not to proceed, as they will be with his decision to increase investment in public transport and to provide better traffic management. I ask my right hon. Friend and his Cabinet colleagues to look again at realistic and practical measures to restrain traffic. I am sure that they are needed and that they will come.

Mr. Parkinson: I thank my right hon. Friend for welcoming our proposals. It seemed to us to be absolutely essential to bring an end to the uncertainty. Over 10,000—not 100,000—houses were blighted. We wanted to remove the worry from the people of London. I believe that we have done so.

As for my right hon. Friend's delicate suggestion about road pricing, that is not an immediately available option, as some of its proponents would have one believe. There are a number of serious problems to be overcome. However, I am watching the situation carefully, and I am in touch with my Dutch counterpart who, after a very long consultation period, is introducing such a system in the Hague.

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): Is the Secretary of State able to say when effective action will be taken to deal with the illegal parking that clogs so many main roads into central London? How much longer, for example, shall we have to put up with one northbound lane on Westminster bridge being regularly occupied by up to a dozen tourist coaches, an ice cream van and a hot-dog seller?

Mr. Parkinson: I thoroughly agree with the hon. Gentleman about thoughtless, illegal parking. One of the principles of red routes is that parking restrictions will be enforced stringently and that those who park there will be lucky if they ever see their cars again—that is a joke, Mr. Speaker, not a threat. I am beginning to sound like the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott). However, we intend to penalise those who thoughtlessly cause congestion.

Sir William Shelton (Streatham): Does my right hon. Friend accept that both my constituents and I will be delighted by his statement, especially by his reference to the possible extension of the east London line and of the Northern line to Streatham? Does he also accept that we need some junction improvements and that the decision not to go ahead with the St. Leonard's relief road and the Clapham common underpass will be warmly welcomed? Will he reject any Opposition imputations of a U-turn and accept my congratulations on having held genuine consultations and on having accepted the representations I made on behalf of my constituents? The Opposition are not used to genuine consultation—which this has been.

Mr. Parkinson: I thank my hon. Friend for so warmly welcoming the proposals. He is quite right. These documents were produced by the consultants. We put them out for discussion, and we have announced our decision on them. I am glad that my hon. Friend recognises that junction improvements are needed. We shall be discussing them with the local authorities concerned.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): If the Secretary of State were the Home Secretary within a capital punishment system, he would certainly be the best person to hand out reprieves. I thank him for ending the uncertainty about tunnels in Dulwich park, thus saving the Prime Minister's home and also Tulse Hill. What priority does he intend to give to the extension of the underground route to Streatham and Crystal palace? And is he now to be transferred to deal with the poll tax?

Mr. Parkinson: If one wanted, I suppose that one could relate everything to poll tax, but if I were the hon. Gentleman I should not waste my time on trying to relate this to poll tax. These major ideas for extending the underground will take some time to work through. None of these road schemes will be available before the end of the century. There are short-term proposals, but the longer-term, major proposals will take time to work through. However, we are determined to get a better service into south London.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Thousands of my constituents will be greatly relieved by my right hon. Friend's wise decision and very appreciative of the fact that he and his colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins), have listened so carefully to our representations. Does he accept that the real lesson of the story is that in inner London and Greater London and in all urban and suburban areas the appropriate means of transport which is both socially and environmentally friendly is public transport, adequately invested and adequately pursued. We urge him strongly to continue that policy in the London area.

Mr. Parkinson: As I said to the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone), the Government are pursuing a balanced policy. There is no point in pretending that there is no demand for roads and for the ability to drive in London, but we believe that the public are perfectly capable of making a sensible choice, provided that a choice is made available to them. That is why we want to provide a decent rail system and a decent underground system. We also want to provide a decent bus service and to make it possible, by means of the red routes, for people to drive. People are quite capable of making the choice that suits them best.

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): The Secretary of State's statement is a direct result of the total opposition of thousands and thousands of Londoners to the scheme. They have also made it clear that, although they want a modern public transport system, they want the fares to be realistic. Unfortunately, that is not what we are getting. With 32 London boroughs pursuing their own traffic policies, totally unaware of what may be happening in adjoining boroughs, surely it is time for an overall traffic authority for London. Until that comes about, there will be no realistic development.

Mr. Parkinson: We had an overall strategic authority for London. It was a disaster. When it disappeared, it must have been the most unlamented body that had ever existed. It was no advertisement for strategic bodies and strategic planning. We have got the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) to remind us of just how awful it was, if we are ever tempted to forget.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): My right hon. Friend and the Minister for Roads and Traffic deserve warm praise for proving that this Government listen and that they take careful note of the environmental points that are made by our constituents. The proposals are welcome. However, may I put to my right hon. Friend a point that relates to my constituency and the red route proposals? My constituents do not want the A243 between the M25 and the A3 made into a red route. They feel that it would be inappropriate. They would prefer a relief road around the village of Malden Rushett which would attract some private sector funding.

Mr. Parkinson: It is early days to settle the final details of red routes, as I said in my statement. The proposals were set out in the document that I put before the House in December. I will look at the point that my hon. Friend raised and report back to him.

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the most cost-effective, value-for-money way of providing access to and from east London, as well as for reducing tube congestion in central London, would be to go ahead with the Chelsea-Hackney tube line? Did he in his statement give a guarantee that that would go ahead, or did I detect a question mark over it?

Mr. Parkinson: We are looking at the two lines and evaluating them both—that is, east-west cross-rail and Chelsea-Hackney—but we do not believe that London could stand the simultaneous building of two major underground lines; it would completely snarl up London during the construction. So the work is in hand to assess them and, subject to that work going well, a Bill will be brought before the House by LRT for the new line in December.

Dr. Ian Twinn (Edmonton): I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcements, especially for the reduction of traffic in residential areas and for the improvement of public transport. Will he give urgent consideration to using some of the £3 billion for London roads to end uncertainty concerning the north circular road in Edmonton, where Pimms park is under threat and needs money spent on it for, among other things, a tunnel beneath it? Is he aware that a number of my constituents are still having their houses blighted by the lack of a decision about the north circular road?

Mr. Parkinson: I will look into that point and write to my hon. Friend about it. It arises only indirectly out of today's statement.

Ms. Harriet Harman (Peckham): Does the Secretary of State recognise that people in south London welcome the fact that the blight cast over their homes by what were disastrous road plans has been lifted, but that their homes remain blighted by the Channel rail link plan? Does he further recognise that the people of south London will judge the Government's commitment to public transport by the overcrowded trains, filthy stations, frequent cancellations, infrequent buses pumping out exhaust and by the complete absence of tubes? Only when he deals with those problems and we see in practice the situation in public transport improve will the Government get any credit for their so-called commitment to public transport.

Mr. Parkinson: I thank the hon. Lady for her remarks about removing blight and uncertainty. What troubled me when I arrived at the Department was the huge number of houses that were under threat, and I was anxious to clear up that anxiety as soon as possible. I have bad news for the hon. Lady and the occupants of the Opposition Front Bench. Between now and the next general election we could see the investment of about £2·5 billion in public transport, and the results will be too noticeable even for Labour Members to miss.

Mr. Gerald Bowden (Dulwich): There will be great rejoicing in my constituency this evening at the blight having been lifted, at the fact that the road scheme will not involve a grandiose underpass and at the decision to extend public transport into east Dulwich. While thanking my right hon. Friend for that, may I urge him to take steps to lift the other blight of the proposed route for the Channel tunnel rail link? Will he urge British Rail and its partners, Trafalgar House and Eurorail, to consider professionally and properly the alternative routes that have been suggested, with a through junction at Stratford going on to King's Cross and serving the whole of the United Kingdom, thereby immediately lifting the blight from Dulwich?

Mr. Parkinson: Hon. Members on both sides of the House have argued the cases for their constituencies, but nobody has argued more ferociously on behalf of his constituents than my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden). I cannot promise him an immediate answer to the second part of his question, but I note what he says and appreciate the concern that the Channel tunnel rail link uncertainty is causing in Dulwich.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): The Secretary of State will be aware of the enormous relief among my constituents that the proposal for a major new road from Archway to King's Cross has been dropped. I would add the personal observation that I am delighted that the right hon. Gentleman will not now be sending in the bulldozers to knock down my home. Is he aware that there will be continuing concern, especially among traders and shopkeepers along Holloway road and Upper street, about the news of the pilot project for a red route? Will he guarantee to consult them in detail about his proposal, because they are deeply worried about the impact on their deliveries and businesses and on pedestrian shopping?

Mr. Parkinson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remarks, and it was a small pleasure to me that I was able to decide that we would not be knocking down his home. We recognise that it is important to introduce red routes properly. That will involve making arrangements with the local traders and local people so that their lives are not too disrupted. We believe that we can find ways of doing that, but we shall be discussing them with all those affected.

Mr. Jeremy Hanley (Richmond and Barnes): I thank my right hon. Friend for his considered approach to the issues involved and for the approach of the whole of his team. They have done a difficult job extremely well, and we are grateful to them.

Is my right hon. Friend aware that my constituents are still totally opposed to any road widening of the south circular road? Will he confirm that the statutory protections to which he referred include public consultations followed by public inquiries if it is decided that proposals should go ahead after people have shown their dissatisfaction with them? Will he also confirm that he has scrapped the proposal for a light railway from Hammersmith to Roehampton because of the terrible environmental damage that that would cause at Barn Elms?

Mr. Parkinson: The answer to both parts of my hon. Friend's question is yes.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I do not know what the Secretary of State plays with in his bath, but it clearly is not the strategic transport plan for London. Does not he think it disgraceful that £10 million

[Mr. Tony Banks]

of taxpayers' money should have been spent on consultants' reports, for them finally, after all these years, to come up with the suggestion, and for him to decide, that public transport should be given preference in London?

Is it not a fact that transport planning in London is now predicated on Tory party electoral chances on 3 May and beyond and from where the Government can get private money to fund public transport schemes? No wonder the CBI and a number of other organisations say that London transport is now heading towards chaos. That state of affairs is entirely the responsibility of the Government.

Mr. Parkinson: If the hon. Gentleman is not careful, I will send him autographed copies of all four assessment studies. He will then see the volume of work that was done. He will see from my statement that many valuable suggestions were put forward by the consultants, suggestions that will help London and improve our transport system.

I repeat that the Government are following a balanced transport policy for London, and that means better tubes, massive investment, better Network SouthEast, better airports, better bus routes and the red routes. We are systematically improving all aspects of London's transport arrangements simultaneously, and Londoners will have the choice that they deserve in the years ahead.

Mr. Toby Jessel (Twickenham): My right hon. Friend referred to airports and road traffic between central London, the west end and the City and Heathrow. In view of the probable general increase in road traffic, as mentioned in the White Paper, reflecting the general level of national prosperity, may I ask whether he is aware that it would be totally wrong for the Government to accept that as an argument to justify any increase in the number of helicopters travelling between central London and Heathrow? Helicopters make a peculiarly and particularly loud and unpleasant whirring noise which would be detrimental not only to the well-being of my constituents but to the work of the Palace of Westminster.

Mr. Parkinson: There is unlikely to be any substantial increase in the number of helicopter flights as a result of anything that I have said today.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Does the Secretary of State agree that his statement does not represent an adequate transport policy for London? The red routes will encourage more traffic to come in and out of central London. Does he agree that powers are already available to prevent bus lanes from being clogged and that the red routes are a precursor of future motorway plans? Is he aware that in my constituency there is overwhelming opposition not only to major road building, but to the demolition of the Archway island, the widening of Highbury corner and the red routes because they will merely bring more traffic into the area? We require a transport policy for London that will reduce the number of cars and freight vehicles on the road, and that puts public money into public transport, and we require a democratic form of decision making in London rather than the traffic dictator whom the Secretary of State expects to appoint.

Mr. Parkinson: I have no plans to appoint a traffic dictator. The traffic director will be responsible for the management of the red routes. I note what the hon. Gentleman has said, and, not for the first time, I totally disagree with him.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend (Bexleyheath): Would not my right hon. Friend be wise to open again the question of a tunnel under Oxleas wood, which borders my constituency? As a strong supporter of the east London river crossing, I must say that £10 million, as recommended by the inspector, to save an ancient oak woodland and a site of special scientific interest is a small sum.

Mr. Parkinson: As I said earlier, the matter was considered carefully over a long period by my predecessor and by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the then Secretary of State for the Environment. They took a decision, and I have no plans to reopen the matter.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): As I represent a constituency north of London, I have listened with great interest to the statement and to the exchanges. Is the Secretary of State aware that, now and again, the London transport system actually works? Today, for example, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mrs. Heal), having driven a coach and horses through the Tory majority in Mid-Staffordshire, has arrived at the Palace of Westminster after having travelled through the traffic of London without too much trouble. The greatest hold-up that my hon. Friend has experienced is here in the Palace of Westminster. Would it not have been better for the Secretary of State to have spent today playing with his Dinky toys? We could have heard the statement tomorrow.

Mr. Parkinson: That was a rather elaborate joke, but it was rather better than most of the hon. Gentleman's jokes.

Mr. John Maples (Lewisham, West): Many hundreds, if not thousands, of people in Lewisham will be grateful to my right hon. Friend to know that they are not to have a new four-lane highway driven through their neighbourhood, with all the attendant noise and pollution. I am grateful that my right hon. Friend has responded so positively to their representations. Does he agree that the Opposition's churlish response to his statement makes one wonder whether their opposition to the road proposals was ever sincere? My right hon. Friend seems to have shot their fox pretty spectacularly, and they obviously resent that.

Mr. Parkinson: One of the strange features of the Opposition is that they spent their time coming to see me and saying that they hoped that I would reject the roads, yet when I do they accuse me of electioneering. We have taken sensible and carefully considered decisions, and we have listened to the people.

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): My right hon. Friend will know how grateful my constituents are to him and to my hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic for abandoning the western environmental improvement route, which has for so long blighted west London and my constituency in particular. My constituents are keen that the Chelsea-Hackney line which is misnamed and should be called the Fulham-Hackney line because it starts in my constituency—should be built as rapidly as possible as the congestion and overloading on the District line are serious.

In the meantime, will my right hon. Friend consider an urgent appraisal for investment to be made in the District line to improve the services there?

Mr. Parkinson: I hope that my hon. Friend will sort out the matter with our right hon. Friend the Member for Chelsea (Mr. Scott). I am happy to settle for the name that has been agreed between them—always assuming that that is the chosen line. There is a huge programme of investment in improving the rolling stock on the existing lines, including the District line, which is being pressed forward now.

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Croydon, North-West): My right hon. Friend's statement that there will be no new road in Norbury will be greatly welcomed by Norbury residents. They are grateful to him and to my hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic for listening so carefully to the representations, including those from Norbury councillors. In the long run, many of us in Croydon look forward to the day when the underground will extend as far as us.

Mr. Parkinson: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind remarks. *[Interruption.]* For obvious reasons, I shall keep my answers short.

Sir Philip Goodhart (Beckenham): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his constructive and sensible statement. May I press him to consult our right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary on the recruitment of more traffic wardens as the Metropolitan police reckon that they need 50 per cent. more wardens to make the red routes work? Will he also promise action on haphazard road works which add so much to traffic delays in central London?

Mr. Parkinson: There is a shortage of traffic wardens, with a substantial number of vacancies. I am advised that if we extend their powers and authorise them to order the removal of cars, the towing away of cars and wheel clamping, it will increase their job satisfaction and make recruitment easier. We must hope that that is the case.

Ms. Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): Does the Secretary of State accept that everything he has said today reeks of political defeat? Does he understand that everything he was forced to do in rejecting the road building schemes could have been done far earlier, thus preventing blighting, saving millions of pounds and enabling real progress to be made in solving the traffic chaos of this capital city? Does he accept that his list of public transport proposals does not impress because he has rehearsed them all in the House before? The technical feasibility of many of them has already been approved. As my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) has said, what they lack is public money.

Will the Secretary of State at last give hope to Londoners by committing the £3 billion of public money that would have been spent on those roads to public transport, thus relieving the pressure on the fares of the travelling public and easing congestion on our roads?

Mr. Parkinson: I find it extraordinary that the hon. Lady comes to see me and says that she hopes that we shall listen to what Londoners say, yet when we do says that it is a political climbdown. That shows how paper thin the Opposition's attachment to democracy is.

On the second point, I must make the point that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) clearly did not understand. We are talking about specific assessment studies on four areas only. The broad arrangements for London's transport improvements are in addition to that and huge programmes are in hand. Just because consultants include proposals in assessment studies, it does not mean that the Government have earmarked money for them. There is a long way to go before we allocate any money and, as I have pointed out already, the proposals would not have been implemented until the turn of the century. The hon. Lady is, as usual, talking charming nonsense.

Business of the House

5.9 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Sir Geoffrey Howe): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the rearrangement of business for tomorrow, Wednesday, 28 March.

The business for tomorrow will now be as follows: Timetable motion on the Social Security Bill, followed by progress on remaining stages of the Social Security Bill. Proceedings on the Bill will be brought to a conclusion on Tuesday 3 April.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): As even the Prime Minister recognised that the electors of Mid-Staffordshire were sending her a message, why have the Government deliberately delayed the keeper of that message for more than one and a half hours by putting on three statements today? Has not the graceless, churlish behaviour of the recently defeated Tory candidate in the by-election been matched by the Government's business managers this afternoon?

Is the Leader of the House aware that we deplore his abrupt announcement of a guillotine on the Social Security Bill tomorrow? Is it not outrageous, when the Government only last night tabled four new clauses and 37 amendments to this legislation—clauses and amendments which the House has never seen before—that they are now effectively pre-empting time in the debate and preventing my hon. Friends from moving Labour's amendments? Are they not simply doing this to prevent yet more embarrassing defections and votes against by their own supporters?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman is quite wrong to make allegations of deliberate delay by the Government. We are continuing our calm conduct of Government business in making statements today, the first two of which have been welcomed by the House. The third had to be made now; it could not be made tomorrow because it relates to tomorrow's business.

In due course, the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mrs. Heal), who was elected in the by-election last week, will commence her brief stay in the House.

The timetable motion is designed to give rather more time than would have been available under the arrangements made through the usual channels. The amendments and new clauses tabled for discussion tomorrow are for the most part proposals produced in response to discussion in Committee. The time available will be entirely appropriate for their consideration.

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): If the accusation made by the shadow Leader of the House should be valid, would that not be something that the House ought to take into account when it comes to consider whether to renew the televising of this place? Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the timetable motion that he has announced will be greatly welcomed by Government Members?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the welcome in the last part of his intervention. I make no comment on his first observation.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Does the Leader of the House not recognise that timetable motions at every opportunity are increasingly taking liberties with the House in general and individual Members in particular? Tomorrow's proposal not only carves out Opposition parties from being able to do their proper job on Report but is no doubt intended to carve out members of his own party who tried to amend the National Health Service and Community Care Bill last week and gave the Government a substantial shock. Will he agree that that has produced a response of even more autocratic behaviour by an ever more autocratic Government?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman has to try his best, but there is no foundation whatsoever for that interpretation. The Committee proceedings on this Bill proceeded in a normal, orderly fashion. They included consideration of no more than four new clauses. However, on Report the House is now required to deal with some 20 new clauses tabled at a very late stage by the Opposition against the background of a threat by Opposition Members to run the proceedings for 23 hours through the night. We are making a proposal to handle in an orderly fashion proposals that the House will need to consider and will be able to consider.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that many of us consider that the timetable motion on the Social Security Bill is a sensible way of proceeding? Is he aware, further, that most of us believe that the remarks by the shadow Leader of the House were entirely synthetic, when we recall the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) standing at the Dispatch Box when in government and moving five separate guillotine motions? Does he recall that, when I took my seat after a by-election victory under the last Labour Government, I was forced to wait until 6 o'clock in the evening?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful for the support offered by my hon. Friend.

Mr. Bob Clay (Sunderland, North): Will the Leader of the House admit that one of the major reasons for the decision to guillotine the business tomorrow is to avoid discussion of new clause 8, which is supported by Opposition Members and also by many Government Members? The new clause would provide compensation for British nuclear test veterans suffering from various cancers and for their dependants. Is it not the case that the Government, having filibustered that Bill out as a private Member's Bill earlier this month, are now having to resort to a guillotine motion to find other ways to prevent this from being debated and voted on, because they dare not risk even five minutes' discussion on the measure, so weak is their disgraceful position on the whole question?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: There is no foundation for that claim. The time that will be available for discussion of this Bill under the timetable motion will exceed that previously agreed through the usual channels. If the time is used sensibly, time will be devoted to the hon. Member's new clause as well as to other matters under consideration.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): Has my right hon. and learned Friend seen the reports in today's *Daily Mirror* and *Morning Star* in which the Labour party announced that an all-night sitting on the Social Security

Bill was to take place tomorrow? Will he not accept, therefore, that these are bogus and synthetic objections to a very sensible proposal?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I entirely agree.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): How can the Leader of the House justify a guillotine on the Social Security Bill when so many hon. Members want to explain to the Government how doubling the capital allowance on the poll tax without altering the taper will still leave people on tiny incomes qualifying for the tiniest of rebates? Will it not make it more difficult for the Secretary of State for Scotland to contribute to the debate to explain why reshuffling £4 million from his own budget can somehow be presented as a triumph over the Prime Minister?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: That would not arise in the course of this debate, in any event. I repeat that the time likely to be available for discussion under the timetable motion will exceed that agreed through the usual channels. That cannot be unreasonable.

NEW MEMBER

The following Member made the affirmation required by law:

Mrs. Sylvia Lloyd Heal, for Mid-Staffordshire.

BILLS PRESENTED

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PERSONS (PROTECTION FROM TOBACCO)

Mr. Joe Ashton, supported by Mr. John Home Robertson, Sir George Young, Mr. Roger Sims, Mr. Alan Amos, Mr. John Bowis, Mr. Ronnie Fearn, Mrs. Maureen Hicks, Ms. Harriet Harman, Mr. Archy Kirkwood and Mr. Allen McKay, presented a Bill to increase the penalties for the sale of tobacco to persons under the age of 16 years; to make illegal the sale of tobacco to such persons from vending machines; to require local authorities to enforce those provisions and publish reports; to prohibit the sale of unpackaged cigarettes; to prohibit advertising of tobacco or tobacco sponsored events from retail premises; to require the publication of warning statements on cigarette packages and in retail premises; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 4 May and to be printed. [Bill 111.]

COMMUNITY CHARGE (LANDLORD AND TENANT)

Mr. John Greenway, supported by Mr. Dudley Fishburn, Sir Rhodes Boyson, Sir Hal Miller, Sir Michael Shaw, Mr. Michael Shersby, Sir John Wheeler, Sir Fergus Montgomery, Sir Hugh Rossi and Mr. Michael Alison, presented a Bill to require landlords to reduce the rent of a tenant by the proportion of rent previously contributed by the tenant towards the payment of domestic rates; to give rent assessment committees the jurisdiction to hear and determine questions arising; and for connected purposes: And at the same was read the First time; and was ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 27 April and to be printed. [Bill 112.]

Medical Services for Women

5.18 pm

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision with respect to medical services for women, including screening, well woman clinics and other services; to amend the Abortion Act 1967; to make provision in respect of related duties and responsibilities of health authorities; and for connected purposes.

The Bill is about women's health. A large part of women's experience of health care is linked to their role as child bearers, but since control over reproduction—contraception, pregnancy, fertility and child birth—has been vested in doctors, these normal processes have become highly mechanised in recent years, and women have been provided with little choice of the services they receive and from whom they receive them.

The National Health Service birth control service performs a vital role, but Tory cuts in the National Health Service have meant that birth control facilities are becoming increasingly inadequate. An effective policy should be based on appropriate education and advice. To ensure that the message gets across to those most at risk, the case for effective, safe contraception and family planning should be made in schools and encouraged through the media. It is important, however, that contraceptive advice should be available to all who need it. That means that it should not be limited to information only about invasive measures of control. Every woman should have appropriate access to confidential advice and free, safe contraception at local centres.

Infertility causes grave personal distress. As many as one couple in six are infertile. Many district health authorities do not hold infertility clinics separately from their routine gynaecological work load or fail to provide literature or counselling for patients. In many health districts, artificial insemination by donor is not available and in nearly half of those where it is available the service is run outside the National Health Service. Only one in vitro fertilisation unit is funded solely by the NHS. Women have a right to access to those facilites. Before they undergo elaborate tests for infertility, which are often distressing, sperm tests should be carried out on the men because those tests, unlike those for women, are relatively simple.

Maternity services are crucial to the provision of women's services. The creation of the National Health Service extended the rights of pregnant women, but to a large extent doctors have taken over the rights of women in the birth process. For well over 10 years, women have criticised the National Health Service maternity services for being insensitive to their needs and for being too technically orientated in normal pregnancies and births. Hospitals have responded, but women still complain about the fragmentation of ante-natal and delivery care. Different tasks are performed by different people. The woman is not treated as a whole person, and she rarely sees the same person twice. That makes it difficult for her to build up the necessary relationship of trust with her midwife.

There is also concern about the lack of information about the hazards of pregnancy, the obstetric techniques, the high level of technology used in pregnancy, labour and delivery, and the adoption of blanket, routine practices in hospitals. Of course there are circumstances in which

[Ms. Dawn Primarolo]

technology is essential to the health of mother and baby. Also, many women find the use of technology reassuring and value the relief from pain that it can provide, but both positions must be respected. The woman must have the right to say how she wants her child delivered safely and confidently, within a caring, supportive framework.

The skills of midwives should be used to the full in the interests of achieving a close, supportive relationship between the mother and the midwife. In an emergency, the midwife should be able to call upon hospital colleagues, a consultant obstetrician and, if necessary, a flying squad —an emergency ambulance fitted with the necessary equipment to get the mother to hospital.

Continuity of care should be provided by reorganising the way in which midwives work. When women attend appointments, there should be sufficient time for questioning and discussion in cheerful surroundings, with a play area provided for accompanying children. No procedures during child birth should be carried out without the specific consent of the mother, unless she is alone and there is an emergency. There should be a flexible discharge system appropriate to the needs of the woman. More research should be undertaken into post-natal depression.

Cancer screening is desperately important to women. There are long delays, sometimes of months, in smear test results, because of acute shortage of trained laboratory staff. Every month's delay increases the risk of advanced cervical cancer. The Tory record on cervical cancer offers practically no hope of an effective screening programme to help the 15,000 women who die from breast cancer each year. Yet 3,000 with breast cancer and 1,000 with cervical cancer could be saved by proper screening.

We need an effective breast cancer screening, diagnosis and treatment service, meeting strict national technical and organisational standards. That should be provided by every health authority.

A properly resourced national cervical cancer screening programme, with computerised call and recall systems, should be set up in every health district to cover every woman at risk. All women should have the right to a smear test every three years. Mobile screening facilities should be provided in shopping centres, housing estates and workplaces, and women at work should be given paid time off to attend regular screening. The suffering and death of women from diseases which are detectable and curable, if diagnosed in their early stages, are totally unacceptable.

At the centre of provision for well women in society is the key element of prevention provided through well woman centres. The philosophy behind the centres is the promotion of the well-being of the whole person, with the emphasis on encouraging women to be responsible for their own health. It is vital to ensure that health authorities provide well woman services to meet minimum standards in every health authority. Each authority should be required to provide a secure, attractive place for women to meet to talk about the many problems that they face, such as tranquilliser dependency, menopausal problems and the problems of still-birth and miscarriage. We need the reintroduction of hospital services run solely by women for women. Women should have the right to see a woman doctor. Well woman clinics can help in the development of self-help groups and are crucial to the future of women's health.

Finally, I propose an amendment to the Abortion Act 1967. It is appalling that important and difficult decisions about their own fertility and about whether to continue with a pregnancy should be removed from the realm of women's choice and control, and should become a political battleground of the minority, causing distress, hardship and pain to many. The case for legal abortion has been made many times. The propect of forcing women into back-street abortions is beyond contemplation.

I propose that the time limit in the Abortion Act should be abolished, that the possibility of prosecution of doctors is removed and that the law in England and Wales is standardised with the law in Scotland. I commend the measure to the House in the name of women's health.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Ms. Dawn Primarolo, Mr. Frank Doran, Mrs. Teresa Gorman, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mrs. Audrey Wise, Mr. Ian McCartney, Mr. Richard Caborn, Mrs. Maria Fyfe, Ms. Diane Abbott and Mr. Tony Banks.

MEDICAL SERVICES FOR WOMEN

Ms. Dawn Primarolo accordingly presented a Bill to make provision with respect to medical services for women, including screening, well woman clinics and other services; to amend the Abortion Act 1967; to make provision in respect of related duties and responsibilities of health authorities; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 20 April and to be printed. [Bill 113.]

Adjournment (Easter and Monday 7 May)

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That this House, at its rising on Thursday 5th April, do adjourn until Wednesday 18th April and, at its rising on Friday 4th May, do adjourn till Tuesday 8th May.—*[Mr. Greg Knight.]*

5.30 pm

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): I strongly support the motion and wish to speak to a task that I should like to consign to the Treasury Bench during those few valuable days. It relates to local authority finance. As a result of recent weeks, the House still has ringing in its ears the unfairnesses of the rating system. That unfairness is undoubtedly true. However, the system was accepted—albeit uneasily—by generations of politicians and was paid for, with anger and resignation, by succeeding generations of ratepayers. Its longevity can be measured by the fact that it originated from Elizabethan days.

My request is simple and in that context. It is the desire that the inequities and injustices of the community charge shall not become perpetuated through time by weary resignation on the part of either the electorate or Parliament. I do not think that the electorate will be disposed to accept it with weary resignation.

Whatever the virtues of the community charge—I believe that they are substantial—none the less, I limit my remarks to saying that they are vitiated by a lack of regard for the principle of the ability to pay. The community charge needs to be reconsidered, judged by that canon. It needs to be reconsidered in respect of the abatements made and the effectiveness of the transitional arrangements for those who have a sharply enhanced commitment. Finally, it needs a reconsideration that will set aside the flat-rate principle and relate the charge to a graduated system under which the higher the income, the more will be paid.

Those principles should be embodied in a review to be undertaken by the Government. That review should be undertaken speedily. Hence, it is relevant to the Easter recess. Above all, that review should be undertaken in a spirit of calm and reasoned judgment, and that is why an argument addressed to my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House is so relevant.

5.32 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): It is a privilege to be called to speak in the Easter Adjournment debate because for many people Easter symbolises hope. The Secretary of State for Employment made a statement earlier about training and could not give an immediate answer when asked why his statement would not apply to Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Office seems to be in orbit somewhere outside the House.

You will be aware, Madam Deputy Speaker, that some weeks ago I asked the Leader of the House whether the Government would oppose the private Member's Bill that was introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross), which sought to restore the right of this Chamber, after 18 years of limbo, to legislate for Northern Ireland by primary legislation in this House rather than by the obscene Order in Council, which does not allow us to examine legislation. On that occasion, the response was that we should have to wait till Friday. When Friday came, what we had suspected would happen did happen. The Whips objected and the private Member's Bill did not make any progress.

Today, therefore, I ask that the Easter period brings hope for Northern Ireland on two levels. The first relates to security. Last week in London the President of Czechoslovakia revealed something about the trade in Semtex from Libya to terrorist organisations. Last weekend the people in Ballymena and Castlederg again suffered carnage. I therefore make the plea that the security forces in Northern Ireland should be given the same latitude as was manifested last summer when they contained a planned terrorist campaign that would have brought mayhem to the Province, and that they be given a more active role.

In making that plea, I ask that hon. Members who sometimes join the media in expressing more concern for the perpetrators of violence than for its victims give some consideration to the members of the security services in Northern Ireland and to the civilians of Northern Ireland who have been such victims.

I shall never forget the impression that was made on me during my by-election campaign when I met a member of the Royal Ulster Constabulary who had been mutilated in a bomb explosion in County Tyrone, yet years afterwards there was a serenity in his being that challenged me. That is reflected in all the people of Northern Ireland—those in the security services and civilians—who have turned tragedy into triumph as they have manifested courage and forgiveness.

Secondly, I draw the attention of the House again to the decision of the Supreme Court in Dublin. We in this House were led to believe that the Anglo-Irish Agreement had been honourably worked out by two Governments who understood the issues. We in the Unionist party had never been under any misapprehension about the use of language. We were told in the House that for the first time the status of Northern Ireland was guaranteed. However, if one looks back to the Sunningdale conference of 1974, one can read the two declarations: first, that

"the Irish Government fully accepted and solemnly declared that there could be no change in the status of Northern Ireland until a majority of the people of Northern Ireland desired a change in that status."

Beside that is the declaration:

"The British Government solemnly declared that it was, and would remain, their policy to support the wishes of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland. The present status of Northern Ireland is that it is part of the United Kingdom."

In the Dail on that occasion, the former Taoiseach said:

"The Government were well aware that differences exist in the constitutional law of the Republic of Ireland and of the United Kingdom as to the status of Northern Ireland but they considered that it would not be helpful to debate those constitutional differences."

The Taoiseach then referred to

"the de facto status of Northern Ireland"

within the constitution of the Republic of Ireland.

When the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed at Hillsborough, we were assured that the status of Northern Ireland was accepted, but there is no definition of that status in article 1. I remind the House that two agreements were signed on that occasion. Despite the number of times that this has been emphasised, I am amazed by the extent to which the general public and Members of Parliament have missed that fact. I repeat that two agreements were signed. One was signed by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

and by the An Taoiseach of the Republic of Ireland. That was the British agreement. The Republic of Ireland agreement was signed by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and by the An Taoiseach of Ireland. That difference was accepted by our Government.

We know that the then Cabinet Secretary, Robert Armstrong, confessed in Australia that in more than one place he had developed a habit of being economical with the truth. Churchill may have used other English language to describe it when he spoke of terminological inexactitudes. There is no excuse now for the Government, the House or the nation to be in any ambiguity about the correct position. In the Supreme Court we had it spelt out abundantly clearly. The wiliness of Dr. FitzGerald who saw the agreement as an aspiration has now been exposed. The Supreme Court made it abundantly plain that the agreement has legal force and is a constitutional imperative.

I appreciate that we are asked to keep our speeches concise and that others wish to speak in this Adjournment debate. I shall close by referring to an article in the *Irish Times* on 26 March. We were reminded that

> "Fianna Fail's first policy objective is the reunification of Ireland. Fine Gael's subtitle is 'The United Ireland Party' . something more than a desired 'aspiration' . . . This State has no idle, vague ambition to exercise authority over Northern Ireland. It is legally obliged to seek to give effect to that authority to which it lays claim."

In the Viewpoint column of the *Belfast Evening Telegraph* on Monday evening, we were reminded:

> "It is not the Unionists who put the obstacle of the constitutional claim in place in 1937."

The solemn international agreement of 1925 was unilaterally set aside by the Fianna Fail Government, under de Valera, who introduced that new constitution.

We plead with the House and the Government to give Northern Ireland its proper place within the Kingdom, remove any constitutional ambiguity and govern us as part of the Kingdom.

5.41 pm

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to speak briefly in this debate. I am between meetings of the New Building Sub-Committee of the Services Committee, in which I know that my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House has a particular interest.

I wish to make a plea to my right hon. and learned Friend on a different subject. Will he have the earliest and most earnest discussions with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on a subject which is exercising the minds of people throughout the country—the community charge, or poll tax? I speak as a long-standing and consistent opponent of the legislation. Without any recrimination, I urge my right hon. and learned Friend to reconsider the tax.

It has been said frequently and with accuracy that the introduction of any new tax is a difficult process. That is certainly the case with the community charge. What matters to our constituents who have to pay the tax is the amount that they are called on to pay. I believe that the tax is fundamentally unsound and unfair, in that it is a flat-rate and regressive tax, but even those problems could be overcome if the amount that people were asked to pay was much smaller.

I have asked my right hon. and learned Friend in business questions and on other occasions to think again about the cost of education. If the cost of education, or even just teachers' salaries, were removed from local government and given to central Government, the poll tax or community charge would be reduced dramatically. Instead of paying about £330, my constituents would pay about £200 less, or perhaps an even lower sum.

I could adduce many arguments in favour of taking education out of the community charge, but I shall restrict myself to a few because I wish to be brief, and to take no more than about three minutes. The Government have rightly made education more of a national concern. We have the national curriculum and the possibility of schools opting out. It is conceivable, but not likely, that within the decade a considerable number of schools will no longer be under the jurisdiction of local authorities.

For the foreseeable future, we shall have a declining young population. Therefore, increasingly those who pay the poll tax or community charge will not benefit directly from education in the way that they benefit from other local authority services. Logic and equity both point in one direction: we should remove the burden of education from local government and give it to the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

None of us in the House is completely stupid, so we know that education must be paid for. However, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has many opportunities of raising revenue, as we have been reminded during the past week. If education were removed from the responsibility of local authorities, it would have a dramatic effect. It would have a dramatic political effect on the Government, which I would welcome. I am sure that hon. Members from all parties who are worried, as I am, about the bills that people will have to pay would welcome anything that would reduce the bills significantly.

It is no good the Government tinkering at the edge or providing extra money here and there. It has been calculated that, if the Government gave another £3 billion to £4 billion between this year and next, the present level could be maintained. That would be wholly unacceptable. Therefore, let us deal with the matter and grasp this nettle. Will my right hon. and learned Friend take my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on one side this very night and urge upon her the course that I recommend?

5.46 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): I wish to raise another important matter—the procedure for appointing the next Archbishop of Canterbury. I do so because the matter is urgent. The archbishop must have notified the Government before the announcement was made on Sunday. Therefore, the procedure for selecting his successor must be well under way. If we allow the matter to rest until the day after the Easter recess, it might be generally assumed that there was no other way to proceed than by procedure that has been used hitherto.

The House will know that the normal procedure is that the Crown Appointments Commission puts forward two names and the Prime Minister chooses between them. There is no opportunity for the Church as a whole to be consulted on the matter. As the Church of England is not a democratic body, it does not have a ballot to elect its archbishop, so members of the Church of England have no formal say whatever in the choice of the person who is to lead them.

Even though the Church of England is a state Church —I shall come to that later—the House of Commons has no right to say anything about the appointment of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Yesterday, I asked Mr. Speaker whether it would be in order to ask the Prime Minister about the appointment of the new Archbishop of Canterbury. Mr. Speaker said that it was out of order for a Member of Parliament to ask the Prime Minister to answer on matters relating to the royal prerogative. Without going into detail, Mr. Speaker's ruling probably went further than he meant it to. Going to war and signing treaties are done under the prerogative, but we are allowed to question the Prime Minister on those matters. The Clerks may have to issue a statement clarifying the ruling, as President Reagan experienced from time to time during his time at the White House.

Mr. Speaker must have been saying that the Prime Minister is not accountable to Parliament for the advice that she gives to the sovereign on the matter. Therefore, the Archbishop of Canterbury will be appointed by a little commission called the Crown Appointments Commission, the chairman of which is appointed by the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister will make a choice between two candidates, if present procedure is followed. That is how the successor to Dr. Runcie will be appointed.

The Archbishop of Canterbury is not simply a bishop in the Church in England; he is widely recognised as the head of the Anglican community worldwide. Through the Lambeth conference and in other ways, he has spiritual responsibilities that go well beyond, thank God, the political control of the Prime Minister of the day, who exercises neither spiritual nor worldwide responsibilities. We should ask ourselves whether the time has come when we should make a further amendment in procedures that have changed over many centuries to allow the Church to decide who it wishes to be its new archbishop.

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): Is the right hon. Gentleman sure that he is right in saying that the Prime Minister must choose between two names submitted to her? Does she not also have a right to name yet another person?

Mr. Benn: The hon. Gentleman knows as well as I do how such things work: what is a practice becomes a custom, and then becomes custom and practice. I do not believe that any Prime Minister would reject both names and go for a third. Although the theoretical power of the Prime Minister over the Church, which is exercised by the royal prerogative, is absolute, as is the theoretical power of Parliament over Church Measures and the power of the Crown to reject all our legislation, that does not happen. One can reasonably assume that, unless the procedure is altered, the Church will put forward, through the commission, two names, and from them the Prime Minister will make a choice.

Yesterday, I tabled an early-day motion that I hope will attract wide support, because it is not related in any way to the present Prime Minister. I would, and will, feel exactly the same when my right hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) exercises similar responsibilities during his first, second, third and fourth Administrations. This time round, the Church should insist upon a slightly new procedure so that the Crown Appointments Commission puts forward one name only.

As the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) has already said, it is true that, in theory, it is open to the Prime Minister to reject the one name and ask for more or to choose someone else. If the Church said that it had thought carefully about its role in relation to the state and decided to put forward one name, the second part of my early-day motion asks for the Prime Minister to convey that name, without comment or change, to the Crown for the formal approval required.

The change I am proposing is modest. When Lord Callaghan was Prime Minister of the Government of which I was a member, he introduced the procedure under which two names were put forward. The unfettered discretion once exercised by Prime Ministers was limited by that new custom and practice. Anyone familiar with Victorian politics will know that Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Disraeli had an ecclesiastical secretary, and that the excitement about who would be given certain appointments was widely shared and a matter of speculation. Such decisions were entirely in the hands of the then Prime Minister, but all that has changed.

In recent years, I am glad to say, there has been a steady loosening of the control of Parliament and the state over the Church of England. I shall not go into the detail, but when Henry VIII nationalised the Church of England because he was not prepared for a foreign potentate to take more than half his state's revenues, it marked the beginning of a rigid enforcement. In 1662 the Great Ejectment took place, when the dissenters were thrown out of their parishes. In 1662, the Rev. William Benn was ejected from the parish of Dorchester under the Five Mile Act. Whether or not he is my ancestor in physical terms, he certainly is in spiritual and dissenting terms.

The House will know that, in the 19th century, it was not possible for a Catholic to serve in Parliament—it is still not possible for a Catholic priest to serve. It was not possible for a Jew to serve in Parliament. One of the men I most admire, Charles Bradlaugh, the Member for Northampton, was kept out on the ground that he was an atheist. The House will know that he turned up, would not take the oath and was thrown out. He was re-elected, came back, would not take the oath and was thrown out again. When he came back the third time he said, "All right, I'll take the oath if that's what you want." But he was told, "You can't, you are an atheist," and he was thrown out again. That is how atheists got into the House. I always solemnly affirm, rather than swear, in memory of Charles Bradlaugh.

The parliamentary procedure has changed, and in recent years, with the establishment of the Synod, the Church has had far greater self government. We had the recent example of the Clergy (Ordination) Measure when the House wisely decided not to have a confrontation with the Church on the ordination of divorced persons. It therefore reversed a decision that had been taken at 3.30 am in July because it knew that, if it pushed its luck too far, the Church of England would seek disestablishment.

I am, of course, a disestablishmentarian, and have been for some time. Now is not the occasion to go into that matter, because my proposal could be contained within the traditions of steady separation that have developed between Church and state. I believe that the establishment

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of the Church is a much bigger and livelier issue than the House might appreciate. The troubles that have occurred with the blasphemy laws concerning the writings of Salman Rushdie have, in part, derived from the fact that Muslims in Britain ask why they should be a second-class denomination. When a Christian commits an act of blasphemy, he can be punished in the courts, but a Muslim who blasphemes against his faith cannot. The question of blasphemy, a burning issue in some of our cities and worldwide, is inextricably bound up with the continuation of establishment.

I believe that my view is widely shared in the House. I do not know whether a majority hold that view, but from private conversations I know that people in many parties believe that the Prime Minister of the day, whoever he or she may be, is not the right person to choose, even from the limited choice between two candidates, the head of the Anglican community worldwide. I was brought up to believe in that view, which I hold strongly.

I believe that the time will come when the House will want to make a change, and I know that within the Church there is a growing movement in favour of disestablishment. I believe that the role of a bishop and of a Prime Minister are wholly different. I was brought up on the Old Testament, where the conflict was between the kings and the prophets—the kings exercised the power and the prophets preached righteousness. I doubt whether the Bible story would have been quite the same if the kings had appointed the prophets, but that is what we continue to do under the practice of an established Church.

I hope that the House will support my early-day motion, so that those in the Church who are anxious about present arrangements realise that there is an alternative open to them now, within the existing law. They can put forward one name only and decline to put forward two names. By doing so, the Prime Minister would have the difficult decision of rejecting the Church nomination and seeking to appoint someone else. As the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West has already said, in law she is entitled to do that, but I do not believe that the Prime Minister would be ready to take such a decision.

I hope that I have not abused the debate on the Easter Adjournment, as I believe this is one of the few occasions when a wholly powerless House of Commons can seek to influence events by argument. The right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen), fresh from his triumphs on the desert island—a very good programme—has advocated his argument on the poll tax. We have heard the arguments about Northern Ireland. Since the House has lost all its power to Crown prerogatives, to Brussels and elsewhere, it is now primarily the place where arguments can be put forward. I have advanced my argument in the hope that the House will listen and, above all, that those in the Church will gain the confidence to demand the right to choose their own leader.

5.59 pm

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): I offer my wholehearted support for the motion.

Today, I wish to raise a subject which I mentioned during business questions last week and hoped to introduce in a private Member's motion tabled last Friday, but it was not reached: the report of the Department of Trade and Industry inspectors into the House of Fraser takeover. In doing so, I shall refer to the City of London, and I therefore wish to declare my part-time employment with a large firm of accountants there. It is shown in the Register of Members' Interests, but I wish to add that I speak for absolutely no one but myself, as I have always done in the House.

Like my hon. Friends the Members for East Lindsey (Sir P. Tapsell), for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark), for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Warren), for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) and many other Conservative Members, I feel that, in his noticeably succinct statement of 7 March, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry failed to explore with sufficient thoroughness all the ramifications of a report which was disturbing in its evidence and damning in its conclusions, the publication of which was long delayed and which has been at the centre of a bitter and long-running public controversy. From the brevity of his statement and what he said in reply to questions, it seems that my right hon. Friend is persuaded that his scope for action is limited.

He said that, as regards misleading the Office of Fair Trading and the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, the legislative stable door has been shut by the Companies Act 1989. However, that is insufficient reason for failing to allow the House a full debate at the earliest opportunity, because too many questions arising from that detailed and highly critical report remain unanswered.

Many hon. Members have expressed their frustration that what the DTI inspectors described as the Fayeds' deceit and lies has not been met with their immediate disqualification as directors or, at the very least, with a bar from directorships of other United Kingdom companies or by the Bank of England's withdrawal of authorised banking status for Harrods bank.

I do not intend to take up the time of the House in this short debate by rehearsing those arguments. Instead, I wish to impress on my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House the fact that the House will also want to know more about the manner in which the DTI behaved over the House of Fraser affair and why, in taking character references on the Fayeds, such reliance was placed on the word of individuals and companies, whose vested interest in the Fayeds' success was plain to see. To ask the Fayeds' own merchant bank advisers, who were to receive an advisory fee of well over £3 million in respect of the House of Fraser take-over, whether they knew of any criticism of the Fayeds was like asking turkeys to vote for Christmas.

Those and other questions about the screening of the offeror company and the decision not to refer the bid to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission should be debated by the House at an early opportunity. I do not believe that the Easter Adjournment should be postponed for that purpose, but I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will find time shortly after the recess to enable the House to debate the inspectors' report.

If that debate is not held soon, two otherwise avoidable difficulties may arise. First, the failure to examine the DTI's performance in this sorry episode will make it difficult for that Department to retain the respect it normally deserves. I have no doubts about the excellence of the DTI's contribution to government generally, but the lapses which have occurred over the House of Fraser, as well as Barlow Clowes and the sale of Rover to British

Aerospace, need to be explained thoroughly if the DTI, and the regulatory process of which it is a central part, are not to fall into disrepute.

Secondly, the perception that British regulatory standards are beyond question matters crucially to the City of London when it is facing increasing competition from other centres of financial services elsewhere in Europe. The House will be aware of the keen competition between Paris and London for the location of the proposed European bank for reconstruction and development, and of the rapid advances in information technology on the Paris bourse, as that stock exchange seeks to attract business in securities trading which would otherwise be done on the London market.

This is not the time to repeat the arguments for or against the City's big bang, but it is clear that the move to dual capacity, and the need for firms in the City to have a large capital base, have generated a new breed of large financial services groups which lead the way in stockbroking and market making. Changes have also occurred in international banking and bond markets, whereby the leading players in London have increasingly become the huge Japanese and American banks, none of which holds an obvious traditional loyalty to London. Therefore, if our regulatory standards fall into disrepute, much of the financial services business now carried out in London could easily move elsewhere.

To look at the recent downward trend on our surplus invisibles, which I mentioned in the discussion on the autumn statement last November, and at the risk of a recession this year, to which I alluded in the debate on the Queen's Speech during the same month, is to remind oneself that the City of London will need to retain all the worthwhile and profitable business it can find. With that objective in mind, I think that the House would serve the City well if it looked critically at the House of Fraser report soon and demonstrated that lessons can be learned which will reinforce our regulatory standards, and not allow them to become a laughing stock.

6.6 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I am grateful for this opportunity to speak briefly about four issues which concern my constituents, and to argue that it would be helpful to have a shorter Easter recess so that the issues can be discussed more fully.

First, like the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) and the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack), I firmly press on the Government the need to look again at the community charge, or poll tax. I say that not just because it takes little or no account of my constituents' ability to pay it, but because of the philosophy behind it, that local government expenditure is excessive and should be cut. That view seems to be totally rejected by the vast majority of my constituents who know only too well that they need the services provided by local government and do not accept that there is waste.

I was appalled when, at Prime Minister's Question Time, the hon. Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell) said that the party was over and local government should cut expenditure. I know from my experience of representing other parts of Stockport that the authority has insufficient resources to meet the needs of my constituents in education, social services and public health, or to protect them adequately.

Therefore, the philosophy of the poll tax, to encourage people to vote for low-spending authorities, seems totally wrong. If the Government were talking about providing value for money, I should be perfectly happy, but value for money does not necessarily mean that money is not spent. Often, spending less means poor quality services. My constituents want good quality education and public health, and effective social services.

The calculations for the poll tax took little account of local communities' needs. I, and fellow Members representing the Tameside part of my constituency, have repeatedly pressed on Ministers the case for better treatment for Tameside when allocating resources.

Secondly, when creating the Denton and Reddish parliamentary constituency, the Boundary Commissioners argued strongly that the one factor which unified my constituency was the Tame valley, which is often referred to in the constituency as the Reddish vale. It does not unify the constituency particularly well in human terms, because people live on either side of it, and crossing from one side to the other for meetings and political activities is often difficult.

Reddish vale is a long open space in my constituency. Some years ago, it was threatened by the possibility that, when Greater Manchester was wound up, the land would have to be sold off. We were grateful to Ministers who allowed the land to be passed to Tameside and Stockport local authorities, to be protected as open space. My constituents are now alarmed by a planning application to turn one side of the valley into a ski slope. They are particularly concerned that someone can come along and put in an application without owning the land in total disregard of the needs of the people in the area. My constituents can do nothing except campaign, protest and try to oppose the planning application.

They are upset because there have been repeated attempts to develop one of the few remaining open spaces, an area where people can go to enjoy fresh air within the constituency. They want to find some way in which the area can be permanently protected as open space. Land can sometimes be sold to the National Trust to obtain such protection, but it causes my constituents grave concern that, time after time, they have to mount campaigns to defend Reddish vale. I merely ask the Government to consider ways in which they could defend it.

Thirdly, I wish to refer to war loans. The Chancellor of the Exchequer made great play in the Budget statement that he wished to encourage a nation of savers. It is high time that the Government considered the problem that faces the many who became savers to help the Government and invested in war loan. I have in mind especially a Mrs. Charlesworth, who is one of my constituents. She is one of about a third of a million who have war loan.

I ask the Government to tell us when they will find some way of allowing savers to redeem their war stock. I realise that the process is complicated and that it goes back a long way, but at a time when the Government claim that they want to encourage savers and wish to pay off part of the national debt, they should be able to find a device that will make it possible for those who want to get rid of their war loan to do so and to recover a sensible amount, rather than the poor returns that they can obtain if they sell their stock on to others.

I understand that the Government do not want to inject money into the economy at present, so it may be extremely difficult to do what I am urging now. As, however, so

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many of the provisions set out in the Budget will take effect next year or the year after, it seems that it should be possible for the Government to make an announcement now that, over a period, they will seek ways in which war loan can be redeemed.

Finally, I ask the Government what is happening about nuclear missiles around our shores. Many hon. Members and many others outside this place were pleased when it was announced that international treaties had been signed, with the result that cruise missiles were to go from Molesworth and Greenham Common. Much concern is being caused because it seems that cruise missiles are returning to our shores. I understand that, recently, at least one American submarine was in Portsmouth, and was clearly carrying cruise missiles. It seems that discussions are taking place with a view to cruise missiles being based at Holy Loch. It is possible that they will be on American surface ships that come into Plymouth.

I understand the argument that is advanced by Conservative Members—that, with the changes that are taking place in eastern Europe, we should not rush into an involvement in disarmament until we know what will really happen, and that that will not be possible until a few years have passed. At a time when we might have the opportunity to reduce world tension and to make further progress with the disarmament process, it seems foolish for western nations to be rearming.

Before we adjourn for the Easter recess, there should be a clear statement from the Government on whether it is their policy to encourage the United States to base cruise-launched missiles on submarines and American surface ships which use British ports. It seemed from answers that I received last week from the Secretary of State for Defence that the Government were admitting that that policy was under active discussion. It appears that American ships are carrying cruise-launched missiles and that talks are taking place on whether the American facility at Holy Loch will be converted so that missiles can be serviced in that area.

I hope that, before we adjourn for the Easter recess, it will be possible for the Government to make a statement on whether it is their expectation that sea-launched cruise missiles will be around our shores. Is it right that, instead of having to worry about cruise missiles emerging from Molesworth and Greenham Common on to land, we shall now have to worry about their deployment in the seas around us?

I hope that there will be an opportunity for the Government to make a statement about war loan. I hope also that they will be able to give me an assurance that they are seeking ways of protecting areas such as Reddish vale. Finally, I hope that the Government will produce an alternative to the poll tax.

6.16 pm

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): I urge that the House should not adjourn for the Easter recess because of the deplorable security situation in Northern Ireland. During the past week we have heard, seen or read about further terrorist activities in the Province. Hundreds of homes were destroyed or damaged in Castlederg and in Ballymena when the IRA planted bombs outside the local police station. It is said that one bomb in a car contained about 1,000 lb of explosives. While people in England and Scotland are fighting in debates about poll tax, we in Northern Ireland are fighting for our lives in the face of an evil and callous campaign waged by Republican terrorists. After 20 years of death, mutilation and destruction, all the decent people of Ulster remain steadfast. They will not capitulate to the IRA as a result of Republican murders or atrocities.

The morale of the people of Northern Ireland has been sorely tested by the Government's failure to maintain a relentless onslaught against the terrorists. As the Irish Republic has been the scene of terrorist activity over the years, it would be natural to assume that the Dublin Government would be unequivocal in their support of the forces of law and order operating in Northern Ireland, but logic does not seem to apply to the island of Ireland.

The people of Northern Ireland desire nothing but the friendliest of relations with the people of the Irish Republic. Both peoples share the island of Ireland and, despite the recent legal and political setbacks, I should like one day to see a rapprochement between the people of the two parts of Ireland, with one part consulting the other as a matter of friendly routine. It is surely in the interests of the Irish Republic that it should ensure that it has nothing but the best relations with Northern Ireland.

There is another reason why, I believe, the House should not adjourn for the Easter recess. It, too, affects Northern Ireland. On 13 March, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland announced that the Government had decided to end the electricity tariff subsidy arrangement for the Province. Instead of making a statement in the House and being available for questions from hon. Members on both sides, the right hon. Gentleman made his statement by means of a written answer. Instead of consulting in advance the elected representatives of the people of Northern Ireland, he gave the decision which had been arrived at by the Government in a written answer in response to a question from one of his hon. Friends. The right hon. Gentleman's answer was available to us on a Thursday evening when the matter could not be raised in the House. The decision that he announced was to take effect on 1 April, which is only a few days away. In my opinion, the decision is scandalous.

The Secretary of State revealed the real reason for his action when he stated:

> "It is clear, moreover, that the privatisation of the electricity supply industry in England and Wales and the decision to privatise NIE also have made the link less appropriate."—[*Official Report*, 13 March 1990; Vol. 169, c. *140*.]

The right hon. Gentleman was referring to the linking of Northern Ireland electricity prices with the highest tariff in England, not the lowest and not the average. That linkage, which was established in 1981, meant a considerable reduction in the price of electricity in Ulster. In his written answer on 13 March, the right hon. Gentleman forecast that Northern Ireland electricity charges would increase by about 8 per cent. on average for 1990-91.

There is no guarantee that prices will not soar—at a time when electricity prices in southern Scotland are likely to be kept down to a reasonable level. The increase will place an intolerable burden on domestic users in the Province who already have to endure the highest cost of living in the United Kingdom. I have formed the opinion that the Northern Ireland Office is indifferent to the plight of the Ulster people. An increase would be a harsh blow not only to domestic users but to industrial consumers in the Province. We must remember that our factories are fighting against all the odds to compete not only with English firms but with those in the European Community as a whole.

On 5 March 1981, the Prime Minister visited Belfast to deal with the crisis created by high electricity charges. She announced that the Government had accepted that the difference in electricity prices between Northern Ireland and England constituted an unreasonable burden on the Northern Ireland community and that electricity tariffs in Northern Ireland should be brought into line with England and "kept there". I emphasise the words "kept there". Nine years later, that assurance has been abandoned by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Let me give some figures for the year ending 31 March which show the contrast between Northern Ireland and the south of Scotland. In Northern Ireland, the standing charge is £41·60 per annum for the current year and the price of electricity is 6·39p per kW. In the south of Scotland, the standing charge is £29·88 and the price per kW is 5·83p. That gap will widen as a result of the deplorable decision, announced by the furtive means of a written answer, by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

I appeal to my right hon. and learned Friend the deputy Prime Minister to examine these issues, which affect the very being of the people of Northern Ireland, and to urge the Secretary of State to review the position.

6.22 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I wish to draw the House back to the issue of the poll tax. The Government are likely to need time to examine the impact of the poll tax and to amend the arrangements in a number of ways. First, I should make it clear that I accept that the case for replacing the rates is well supported and that rates provided a rather rough justice, aggravated by the reduction in the rate support grant. But the poll tax provides no justice at all.

The Government must address a number of factors as a matter of urgency if we are to achieve even an approximation to justice. First, it is extraordinary that people whose incomes are too low to make them liable to contribute to the central Government Exchequer should nevertheless be forced to pay taxes to their local authority, and there is considerable resentment about that. As the poll tax is basically a flat rate tax and the 20 per cent. rule means that everyone has to pay it, by definition, it falls disproportionately heavily on those with low incomes.

The poll tax is also an incompetent tax. It is inefficient to collect; the mechanism whereby it is to be collected is shambolic and extremely expensive. The facts on that subject may be of interest, and I checked them this afternoon. In Scotland, 2,000 additional local authority staff have had to be recruited to collect the poll tax and the cost of collection has added £50 million a year to the local authority bill. That absurd impost in collection charges alone will have to be borne by poll tax payers.

The tax entails an extremely cumbersome and complicated system of rebates which are allocated in an ad hoc manner. Some people will get a rebate because they happen to have a certain disease, whereas others who would regard themselves as equally ill or even more ill do not qualify. The application of that system is inconsistent.

The default rate will be higher and the speed of collection slower than was the case with rates. Again, I made a point of checking my facts. In Scotland, 400,000 people now face summary warrants, which means that they have paid nothing at all this year. A further 450,000 people are substantially in arrears. The uncollected amount represents 20 per cent. of the total, or £240 million —five days before the end of the financial year. The local authorities estimate that 6 per cent. of the total will never be collected. That means £60 million that they will not secure.

Let us extrapolate from that figure what the position is likely to be in England and Wales in a year's time: 5 million people will have paid nothing whatever towards the poll tax in England and Wales this time next year and a further 4·5 million will be substantially in arrears. In all, nearly 10 million people will have paid nothing at all or will not have paid anything like their full contribution, in many cases because they do not have the money and do not know how they can pay.

We in Scotland remain incredulous that the Secretary of State did not realise that the relief introduced in last week's Budget would be regarded as unfair if equivalent relief were not applied retrospectively to Scotland, which has already suffered the poll tax for a year. I do not need to rehearse that argument but I must emphasise that I believe that it has damaged the Union—the relationship between Scotland and England and between Parliament and the Scottish Office. It has thrown those matters into stark and sharp relief. The irony is that we are talking about a relatively small number of people and about a small amount of money. The Secretary of State for Scotland has now allocated £4 million, but most people believe that he will not need a fraction of that. I am advised that a very small number of people will qualify and that they are likely to receive less than 50p a week. That means that many people will not bother to claim. Would you claim 50p a week in relief, Madam Deputy Speaker, if you had £16,000 in the bank? It is hardly worth the bother. It is not the sum that the people resent, however; it is the principle that was wrong. Ironically, the Government got themselves in an enormous mess over a tiny amount of money because they forgot that Scotland is a year ahead and that people in Scotland therefore view matters somewhat differently.

There is anger throughout the United Kingdom about the introduction of transitional relief. Ministers stated categorically at the Conservative party conference, which was shown live on television, that anyone paying more than £3 a week more than they would pay under the rates system would secure relief. In fact, people will get relief only if the notional amount that the Government said their local authority would levy is £3 a week more than they would pay in rates. The amount that is actually levied does not come into the calculation. It is no good the Government arguing that local authorities are overspending. For the average person who must foot the bill, that failure is a monstrous injustice. The Government are not delivering what Ministers said was on offer, and that has caused considerable resentment.

The only way that the Government will get off the hook is by converting the poll tax in due course to a local income tax and transferring its administration to the Inland Revenue. That would be simple, just, progressive and fair. The arguments advanced by Conservative Members—and, if the truth be known, the underlying argument

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behind the Labour party's roof tax—suggest that all those who recognise that the poll tax is unworkable are gravitating towards a local income tax as the only way forward. To the local authorities, that has the additional advantage of buoyancy. It provides some of the continuity of revenue that it requires.

The Government cannot rumble on with this unjust tax, which falls so unfairly. It is high time that it was looked at. This should certainly be done before the recess. I do not think that the Government can assume, as the Prime Minister said, that this time next year the tax will be popular or that the grievances will have disappeared. In this regard, we in Scotland are a year ahead of England and Wales. I am frequently asked by journalists outside the House, "Does it settle down?" All that I can say is that, a year on, the complications in Scotland are greater than those in England and Wales. The anomalies are multiplying by the day. The injustice becomes more and more apparent. The total uselessness of the tax, its unfairness and inefficiency, and the fact that it cannot all be collected bring it home to anybody who is involved that it must go—and the sooner the better.

6.31 pm

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): I want to raise three —perhaps three and a half—subjects that the House ought to debate before it rises for the Easter recess. The first is not unadjacent to the subject that was raised by the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce). Many of my constituents tell me that they accept the principle of the community charge but have strong reservations about its implementation and are particularly critical about the amounts that have been levied.

I do no want to go into detail; I will make just two brief points about the matter. First, increasing numbers of constituents will be interested in local government spending and local government efficiency—that is coming across very clearly—but also, by definition, increasing numbers of constituents will be interested in the grant system and the way in which the grant is worked out.

The House may recall that last Wednesday, in the Budget debate, I bowled the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) what may at the time have seemed a remarkably soft ball, which, none the less, had a point behind it. I asked the right hon. and learned Gentleman whether the Labour party was vehemently opposed to a local income tax. My reason for putting the point to him was that the party of the hon. Member for Gordon—the SLD—supports the introduction of a local income tax, as do several of my constituents who are opposed to, or critical of, the community charge. Indeed, one or two of my hon. Friends support the idea of a local income tax. I therefore wondered why the Labour party, which must now have quite high ambitions, was against a local income tax.

I suspect that the reason—this is the point that I put to the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East —is that a local income tax would bear very heavily, and almost exclusively, on working families. I urge my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House and my hon. Friends to record that that is a major defect of the device of a local income tax.

I want to refer to an aspect of industry and an aspect of trade that may be linked. My hon. Friend the Member for North Down (Mr. Kilfedder) may be aware that the shirt-making company Van Heusen, which is located in my constituency, in Taunton, and in the constituency of the Secretary of State for Defence, in Bridgwater, has announced that it will close its operations in those two towns and will relocate—partly to Derbyshire and partly to Northern Ireland. What is the loss of Taunton and Bridgwater is Northern Ireland's gain, and I do not begrudge my hon. Friend that. I understand that one of the reasons that Van Heusen has given is that regional incentives are available in Northern Ireland. That is something that we have to reckon with, although I must place it on the record that this Government have rolled back regional incentives considerably.

The related matter of the balance of payments did not emerge during the Budget debate, but it is something to which we should be directing attention. The figures suggest that the major deterioration over the past few years is in Britain's deficit with West Germany and with the Netherlands and Denmark, which, in currency and financial terms, are closely linked to West Germany.

It may come as something of a surprise to hon. Members—indeed, we should welcome it—that our deficit with France has not greatly deteriorated. In 1986 it was £1,159 million; by 1989, while the general deficit had deteriorated remarkably, the deficit with France was £1,323 million. In the case of Italy—we know, of course, that Italy is always a strong competitor—there was a deterioration from £1,209 million in 1986 to £2,071 million in 1989. With Spain, which is becoming an important participant on the trading scene in Europe, we had a surplus of £115 million in 1986, and in 1989 that surplus had gone up to £366 million. That is quite a success story, and in the cases of France and Italy the situation is not disastrous—indeed, quite containable.

Over the past three years, the real deterioration has occurred in our trade with West Germany. In 1986, the deficit was £5·5 billion, whereas in 1989 it was nearly £9 billion. That is in addition to the rapid deterioration in the case of the Netherlands and in the case of Denmark. I commend to my right hon. and learned Friend and to Ministers in the Departments concerned with the economy a study of the reason for the development of the deterioration in respect of those countries.

What is it that British industry lacks in competition to Germany? Some days ago, Opposition Members were shouting about the pound having fallen to DM 2·71. That may help us in our export-import competition with West Germany, but this matter deserves consideration before the House rises for the Easter recess.

An aspect of the last main subject to which I want to refer was debated in an Adjournment debate on 21 February initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Sir M. McNair-Wilson). I refer to the plight that faces rural post offices and village shops. I am sure that this is a matter in which my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) will be interested. The situation has been exacerbated by the business rates revision and revaluation and the community charge—but especially the business rates.

I have strongly supported the policy of the Government on this matter: the uniform business rate was necessary and desirable, and in my opinion the revaluation was long overdue—there should have been revaluations in 1978 and in 1983—but this affects rural post offices and village shops, and the Government and the Conservative party must think very carefully about how to proceed.

There is no doubt that the matter concerns a number of people in the more remote rural areas—in my constituency, Exmoor, the Brendon hills and the Black Down hills—but there are even more extensive remote areas in the constituencies of many of my hon. Friends —places such as Devon, Cornwall and north Yorkshire.

Older people who have lived all their lives in those areas want to stay there in retirement. We must consider how they will be served when the shops and village post offices have possibly closed down. We might, for example, consider how we can encourage people who have retired from industry with a pension, and who have other occupations, to keep a village shop going. This applies to the post office that serves me and my family.

In these areas, it is becoming increasingly difficult to make a living simply from running a village shop or post office. No doubt these shops will be helped by transitional arrangements and by the phasing of the business valuation, and no doubt they have a right to appeal—a right that they should certainly use. I think that the rather broad-brush revaluations that have taken place have not taken account of what I might describe as the scarcity factor—the fact that not many people want to take over post offices or village shops in remote areas. That might bring temporary relief.

Finally, I come to my half-subject. Letters are beginning to roll in on dog licences and dog registration. I am well aware of the practical arguments and objections to a dog registration scheme. Taunton, has recently appointed one dog warden, but what can one do with so many dogs? One sensible proposal, which I hope will be considered, is to let local authorities keep the proceeds from the fines that they exact from people who break the law. That may go against the general principle operating with penalties and fines for justice, but it would give local authorities, which are responsible, the incentive to appoint dog wardens to pursue those who allow their dogs to stray, often to the severe inconvenience and danger of people and with the resultant increase in filth in the neighbourhood. If this were done, local authorities could choose how to pursue the scheme and how many dog wardens to appoint. That would help to meet the substantial lobbying which hon. Members will meet in the coming weeks from those who want a full-blown dog registration system, about which I have strong reservations.

Those are the subjects that the House should discuss before we rise for the Easter recess.

6.40 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): The terrible tragedy in South Africa yesterday, the killing of eight protestors and the injuring of hundreds more, took place 30 years and five days after the Sharpeville massacre and is rightly a matter of deep concern to the House. It could be argued that the South African Government have moved to a more flexible position, albeit in a limited way, but the police and security forces in South Africa appear to be out of control and politically sympathetic to the ultra-right parties who have opposed what the South African Government have done recently—the freeing of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of the African National Congress.

Therefore, I hope that the British Government will make the strongest possible representations to the South African authorities over what occurred yesterday. Moreover, I hope that Conservative Members will agree that this is not the time to remove sanctions. They should not be removed until negotiations between the South African Government and the ANC are well under way.

Understandably, hon. Members on both sides of the House have advanced arguments about the poll tax. The Leader of the House has a cheek to ask for a declaration of loyalty from the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) when some of the Prime Minister's admirers and supporters—my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) asks where they are, but I am sure that they are around somewhere, even if they are not too keen to show their loyalty at the moment—might argue that he himself has not shown undue support for the Prime Minister. When he was sacked as Foreign Secretary, his actions did not show undue loyalty to the Prime Minister.

The Government would have been in one crisis fewer today if they had taken the advice of the right hon. Member for Henley. I well remember that on Second Reading of the Local Government Finance Bill in 1987 the right hon. Gentleman said that when he was Secretaryof State for the Environment the poll tax was considered at his request—I see some Conservative Members nodding in agreement—and he recommended to the Cabinet that it was not on.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): He was right. I voted against it.

Mr. Winnick: I am pleased that some Conservative Members had the courage to do so. They have been proved right.

In the 1979 Parliament I was a member of the Select Committee on the Environment which had a Conservative majority. After looking at all the alternatives to the rating system, it came to the conclusion that the poll tax should be rejected. The hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) may have been in favour of the poll tax, but if so he was the only Conservative Member who was. However, I do not want to embarrass him tonight. He may have changed his mind.

Mr. Adley: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that I have now discovered the meaning of ability to pay? I have the ability to pay and I am entitled to transitional relief.

Mr. Winnick: I hope that the Leader of the House has noted that.

Another senior Conservative Member who warned against the poll tax was the former leader of the party and Prime Minister—the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath). On Second Reading, he completely rejected the poll tax. He warned that it would thereafter be referred to as the Tory tax. The people of Mid-Staffordshire have taken that on board. They know that it is the Tory tax. It is certainly not the only reason, but it is one reason why my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mrs. Heal) has a 9,449 majority.

In saying a few words about housing, it would be appropriate to mention my late colleague, Allan Roberts, who, sadly, died last week. Allan never hid his political views before he became active in public life. He was deeply political for, as far as I know, almost all his life, at least from the age of 16 onwards. He was dedicated to

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campaigning for adequate housing for all our citizens. I remember a speech that he made at a Labour party conference before he became a Member of Parliament when he said that it was nonsense to divide the community between council tenants and those who owned their own homes. He said that we should try to provide decent housing for all our citizens. Before coming here, Allan was the chairman of Manchester council's housing committee. He will be much missed by the parliamentary Labour party and certainly by his constituents. He was a much-liked and very able Member who served his constituents well. It is tragic that Allan Roberts died in his mid-40s.

We are faced with an appalling housing crisis. The latest figures that I have show a reduction of some 83 per cent.—I emphasise that figure—in public sector starts since the Government took office. In my borough no council dwellings have been built since 1979. What does that mean to the people who simply cannot afford a mortgage; those people who, even in better times of low interest rates and even when they are in employment, do not have sufficient income to take out a mortgage? When they come to my surgeries—many write to me on housing matters—I say that the Government do not expect them to ask for council houses but to obtain a mortgage, and they laugh. They are in no position to do so. I accept that the majority of people will be able to purchase their own home. Why not? I am all in favour of it. But there will always be a sizable minority who, because of their income, must rely on rented accommodation. It is precisely those people who are faced with many problems as a result of the Government's deliberate policy of making it almost impossible for local authorities to build.

Ministers gloat about the number of council houses that have been sold off. They believe that that is the right policy. But if it is right for council tenants to buy the dwellings in which they live—the Tories would say it was almost a human right—what about private tenants? Why should not they have the same right? Of course, the Conservative Government have been totally inconsistent.

If the Government pursue a policy of selling off council dwellings, is it not important that local authorities should have the means to replace the houses that have been sold off? We have always argued that people would not want to buy flats. Someone living in a multi-storey block of flats will not go to the housing office and say, "Give me an application form to buy." It is houses that are sold off, and inevitably it is the better houses.

We should be concerned not only about people who are desperate for housing but about families who live in multi-storey blocks. In my borough many couples with two children live in them and they have to wait for some considerable time to be rehoused because the local authority does not have enough houses to be able to offer them alternative accommodation. People with no children or only one child stand no chance at all. Is that right? Why should people with two children have to wait so long to be rehoused and people with no children stand no chance at all?

The Government have argued that housing associations can do the job if local authorities no longer do so. Figures show that there has been a sharp reduction in the number of dwellings built by housing associations. Since 1978 there has been a 40 per cent. reduction. Everyone knows the Government's views on local authority housing—they wish to undermine and destabilise it in every way. Therefore, why do they not encourage housing associations by every possible means? Instead there has been a 40 per cent. reduction and large rent increases.

There is no evidence to show that all the Government's talk about a revival in the privately rented sector has come to fruition. The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and his predecessor have often told us that the private sector can do the job. We have had the Housing Acts. I have tried to obtain information on the private sector in parliamentary questions. All the evidence shows that the revival has not taken place. Where there has been an increase, in the main it has been for people who have the means to buy their own homes and it has been of no assistance to the people about whom I have been talking.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Has my hon. Friend noticed that perversely there have been some more properties available for rent, but they are properties that were previously owner-occupied and the owner-occupier has been forced to surrender them back to the building society, or they belong to an estate agent who cannot shift them? Is it not perverse that, by squeezing the owner-occupied end of the market, the Government have managed to flush out more dwellings on to the market for rent, but for the wrong reasons?

Mr. Winnick: My hon. Friend is right. Some of my constituents are in dire straits. They have not been able to keep up their mortgage payments and repossession has been the only course of action. That is tragic, and the Government must bear some responsibility, because it has arisen due to their high interest rate policy.

Council rents have been substantially increased. The retail prices index has increased by about 110 per cent. since the Government came to office, but council rents have gone up by 223 per cent. and housing benefit has been drastically reduced.

I am deply concerned about the cases of some constituents who have written to me about their rents. I shall give two examples because it is all very well to talk in general terms about the drastic reduction in housing benefit, but what does it mean in practice? One of my constituents, a widow who is 74 years old, has a total income of £61·81 a week. That is not a high income. I do not think that any hon. Member would want to have to live on that. Some Conservative Members may consider it to be a suitable sum for a night out with the family. Out of that income, my constituent pays £18 a week in rent.

I wrote to the local authority to confirm that those figures were correct, and to the Secretary of State for Social Security, and he gave me the usual answer. The replies are always the same—sentence after sentence, justifying their policies.

Local authorities no longer have discretion over housing benefit—in ordinary layman's terms, over rebates —as that discretion was taken away in 1988.

I could give many examples, but I shall give only one more. Another constituent—a pensioner—has an income of £54·51 a week, and pays £10 a week in rent. How can Conservative Members defend or justify that? Can they imagine what it must be like trying to make ends meet, to pay for food and essential items, and to have a few pence left to go out for a drink, or to go to the club even if they do not drink? Out of that income he has to pay £10 in rent not because of a wicked local authority, but as a direct result of Government policy substantially to reduce housing benefit. There can be no possible justification for that policy.

That is one reason why the Government are so deeply unpopular. Other reasons are the poll tax and the National Health Service. Those are some reasons why an ever-increasing number of people throughout the country —not just in Scotland or northern Britain, but throughout the country, and not least the west midlands—recognise that Ministers are out of touch, callous and indifferent to the plight of the people about whom we are so deeply concerned. Conservative Members have been fortunate. They have had an easy run in the last three general elections. They would be foolish to think that that luck will hold for the next general election.

6.56 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): I wish to raise three constituency matters.

First, residents in Langdon Hills, in my constituency, are concerned about the plan to build a new Tesco superstore there. Likewise, residents in Vange are concerned about the new Sainsbury superstore which may be built there. Both areas are new developments. Residents bought their homes out of hard-earned income. They did not expect for one minute that proposals to develop those two stores would be put forward. The stores are both excellent, but they are unwelcome in Langdon Hills and Vange. There are other parts of the constituency which are more suitable for those developments.

While on the subject of planning, may I say that there has also been a proposal to build a shopping complex in the Pitsea Mount area and residents are concerned that they will lose parking facilities for Pitsea market and for Pitsea station. Residents accept that there is a case for some development, but there must be no loss of car parking facilities.

The second issue is the extraordinary proposal by the Eastern Bus Company to run a bus route through a residential area where roads are unsuitable for buses. I do not know where that proposal has come from. The residents have expressed no wish to open up the area to a bus route. I have asked the manager of the Eastern Bus Company to address a local public meeting to put the case.

If the local authority refuses planning permission, and those planning issues go to the Secretary of State for the Environment, I must kindly warn him, through the Leader of the House, that I intend to make a nuisance of myself until the Department of the Environment heeds the wishes of my constituents.

My third point concerns education. Until May last year we had a hung county council in Essex, and it was that hung council that decided to reorganise sixth forms in Basildon and in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman). Those proposals have now been developed by the Conservative-controlled county council, and there has been some local consternation about their clarity. While we are fortunate in having excellent schools in Basildon—my constituency contains seven excellent secondary schools—there is some concern about exactly who wishes to deprive all our schools of sixth forms.

There is a proposal to establish a sixth-form college at Basildon college, which I believe will be successful. The excellent Chalvedon school has made representations to Essex county council and to Education Ministers, and, as a result of its objections being overlooked, it has become the first school in Essex to apply for grant-maintained status. It is balloting parents next week: thus the first school in Essex to have grant-maintained status could be in my constituency. I hope that the Department of Education and Science and Essex county council will be even-handed in their judgment of what local parents may wish to achieve.

I have never heard such nonsense talked about the community charge as I have heard tonight. I support the charge, which I believe is fair and accountable. If anyone is entitled to an opinion, it is the current ratepayers in Basildon, who last year had the highest rates increase in the country, at 52·7 per cent. That was a disgrace: there are no special circumstances in Basildon to make such a rate increase necessary. It is scandalous. The unified business rate in Basildon is excellent news: business rate bills have been cut by 20 per cent., and local businesses are rejoicing at the Government's proposals. I am appalled to learn that Basildon district council is now £154 per head—194 per cent. above the standard spending assessment. It is the No. 1 overspender in the country, and for the past two years it has embarked upon a disgraceful spending expedition. It spent £18 million on a new civic centre for which it did not have the money—the only civic centre in the country that does not contain a council chamber. In future, the councillors will meet on the stage of the Towngate theatre next door. That theatre cost £12 million. Although it did not have a penny to build it, three weeks ago the local socialist council met and decided to pump an extra £600,000 into the theatre to prevent it from going into liquidation. It is all very well for Opposition Members to say that the community charge is not a good idea, but they have not put forward a sensible alternative.

I do not wish to deny Opposition Members their hour of glory and victory; it would be most inept for Conservative Members to be churlish as the Opposition rejoice in the election of their new Member. However, I ask the House to consider how, over the next two years, the Opposition can get away without having any policies on any issue. The Conservative party must unite to ensure that the British public are given the opportunity to examine the Opposition's policies closely. The community charge will eventually be seen as fair and accountable.

Basildon has set the scandalous charge of £478. The authority recently released a video that was supposed to celebrate the 40 glorious years of Basildon; instead, it turned out to be a party political broadcast on behalf of the Labour party. I have it on good authority that if elderly people watch the video late at night it gives them nightmares. A community charge of £478 is a disgrace, and I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House will ask the Secretary of State for the Environment to cap the charge in Basildon.

7.5 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I am glad that the hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) is sticking by the poll tax—or community charge, as he wants to call it. His defence of it reminded me of the boy standing on the burning deck. I am afraid that the flames of the poll tax

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will consume him in Basildon, as it will consume many of his hon. Friends. The House would lose an admirable champion of ponies, but, as he knows, even in Basildon, ponies do not have the vote.

I ask the Leader of the House for a debate before the Easter recess on African elephants and the Hong Kong ivory stocks. It will not come as a surprise to him that I am raising the issue again, as it is urgent. I have tabled a large number of questions on today's Order Paper related to the Hong Kong ivory stock. I believe that the Government have been grossly misled by the Hong Kong authorities about the level of legal ivory stocks currently held in Hong Kong. In turn, the Government accepted those assurances, failed to check the facts and inadvertently misled the House about the true position. The result is a scandal that further threatens the African elephant population.

When I first began asking questions about this topic last year, when I got the hint that the Government would enter a reservation on Hong Kong's behalf, I was told by Ministers—because they had been told by the Hong Kong authorities—that there were 670 tonnes of legally acquired ivory in Hong Kong. I said that much of that was poached ivory, but that was pooh-poohed by Ministers at the Dispatch Box. However, it is now clear that the Hong Kong authorities lied to the Government—or that they were so inefficient about knowing which of the ivory was legal and which was illegal that their word is hardly worth believing any more.

The Hong Kong authorities said at the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species conference last October that there were 670 tonnes of ivory, and that 7 per cent. of it—47 tonnes—had no CITES documents. At the conference, the Hong Kong authorities said:

> "We know the extent of our stocks because they are subject to strict control."

That was not true then and it is not true now; we now know the truth. Recent answers to my parliamentary questions have revealed that, rather than there being 670 tonnes of legal ivory, there are only 356 tonnes with CITES certification. The Hong Kong authorities now say that 116 tonnes are without CITES documentation: in other words, they do not know where the hell that ivory came from. Yet the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office said in a reply to me on 8 March that, although the Hong Kong authorities could not provide a breakdown of the places of origin of that 116 tonnes without certification, there was no evidence that any of it had been illegally acquired.

If there is no CITES documentation to accompany the 116 tonnes, how can anyone say with any assurance that it has not been illegally acquired? Ministers should not come to the Dispatch Box without first checking the facts. They have had plenty of warnings from me, and from other organisations concerned with African elephants, and with animal welfare generally.

If we add up the tonnage—not the original 670 tonnes, but the 356 tonnes and the 116 tonnes without certification —we are still 200 tonnes short of the 670 tonnes originally quoted. We are talking about only 472 tonnes. What has happened to that 200 tonnes of ivory that the Hong Kong authorities said was on the island in June last year which Ministers said was legally acquired, but which has now mysteriously disappeared? I believe that much of that illegal ivory has been smuggled into China, South Korea and Taiwan. The Government know that a shipment of 12,000 ivory name seals was recently confiscated by Japanese customs. The belief is that that shipment originated in Hong Kong.

By entering that reservation, the Government have allowed ivory to be traded on the world market and have given the ivory trade a massive boost. What is even worse is that poached ivory—ivory is still being poached—will be laundered on the world market. It will come in behind the camouflage of the legal ivory trade that the Government have allowed Hong Kong to maintain for the next six months.

A few weeks ago I asked the Minister for Overseas Development whether she believed that the Hong Kong reservation would have an impact on elephant conservation schemes in Africa. Her reply was that no effect whatsoever was expected. However, Dr. Richard Leakey, the director of wildlife and conservation management services in Kenya, has reported that, sadly, there has been an upsurge in poaching in Kenya and that many African elephants have died directly because of the reservation entered by the British Government. That is also true in Tanzania and Malawi.

I warned the Government when they were contemplating the reservation that the result would be that elephants would be slaughtered. The Foreign Secretary dismissed it as a ludicrous suggestion. That is in *Hansard.* He was wrong and I was right. Usually in politics it gives one satisfaction to say, "I told you so." I assure the deputy Prime Minister and Leader of the House that it gives me no satisfaction on this occasion to say, "I told you so." I am not interested in making cheap political capital out of the issue. All that I am interested in is getting some fast political action out of the Government, now that they realise what a tragic error they made.

I know that the right hon. and learned Gentleman shares my concern. We have had words about it in this place and outside. However, I urge him to get the Prime Minister immediately to withdraw the Hong Kong reservation. All the ivory stocks in Hong Kong, legal and illegal, should be destroyed. Legitimate traders would have to be compensated, as would the ivory carvers. But many shifty crooks and nasty people are involved in the worldwide trade in ivory. We should waste no tears on them, just as we waste no tears on drug barons.

I ask the Government carefully to consider the evidence that has been put before them—not by me but by the international organisations—to review their decision and immediately to withdraw the reservation.

The Government must provide far more support for those African Governments who are desperately trying to preserve their remaining elephant stocks. We need massively to step up our aid to them. President Arap Moi has been congratulated in the House more than once on destroying the large stocks of ivory that have been seized from poachers. Kenya can ill afford to see that money going up in smoke, but, as a matter of principle, President Moi said that the ivory must be destroyed.

Those of us who exercise our liberal consciences in this country—rightly so, and that is exactly what I am doing —should be prepared to say that the British taxpayer should put up the money to compensate countries such as Kenya for the finance that they have forgone by burning that ivory. I am sure that many British taxpayers would support such a stand. Kenya, and other African countries, desperately need our support. They need Land Rovers, wardens and arms. Many of the poachers are armed not with bows and arrows but with high-powered rifles and machine guns and they slaughter elephants indiscriminately.

The Government made a tragic error of both fact and judgment in respect of that reservation. They must realise their mistake and withdraw the reservation before many more of those wonderful African elephants are slaughtered as a result of their decision.

7.13 pm

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): I join in the tribute paid by the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) to Allan Roberts, whose great talents will be very much missed in the House.

I do not believe that the House should rise for the Easter recess without its attention having been drawn once more to the continuing tragedy along the north Wales coast arising from the collapse of the sea wall at Towyn on 26 February and the overtopping of the sea defences at Rhyl and also at Ffynnongroew, where the affected residents have had their cause so effectively championed by my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Raffan).

To give the House a picture of what happened, I cannot do better than quote from the report by the chairman of Clwyd social services committee, Councillor Malcolm King. It says:

> "Apart from the violent gale, the morning of Monday 26th February, 1990, started out like any other day for people in Towyn and Kinmel Bay. By lunch time houses were ruined, family pets dead and children separated from their parents.
>
> Under the force of unusually high tides whipped up by gale force winds a 200 metre section of the sea wall collapsed allowing the sea to pour through the streets. Within minutes many homes were under 5 ft of sea water with many people, often elderly, frantically trying to make their way to safety with water up to their chins struggling to avoid being swept under.
>
> At 10.30 am the biggest peace time evacuation in Britain swung into action with RAF Search and Rescue helicopters and RNLI inshore rescue boats being used to evacuate the predominantly elderly population from 2,000 houses over about four square miles of flooded land.
>
> Over 5,000 people were evacuated, most of them initially to a variety of emergency rest centres. Two primary schools were badly flooded and whilst parents were being taken to one emergency centre pupils had to be taken to another. Most were reunited the same day, but one seven year old boy was separated from his parents for nearly three days."

I might add at this point that there is unanimous praise for the work of the rescue services—fire, police and ambulance—and of that of the county and district officers at all levels. However, what was thrown into sharp relief was the inadequacy of the evacuation routes in an area where speculative building has manifestly outstripped the availability of many essential services. Councillor King's report continues:

> "Nearly a month on, 500 people are still in temporary holiday camp accommodation which will have to be vacated before the Easter holiday and a further 150 people are in residential care with little or no prospect of returning to their devastated homes for months. Most of the fully insured have been found temporary accommodation in guest houses or caravans spread along the North Wales coast. Others are staying with relatives. Many, including the elderly, or families with young children, have tried returning to their homes and are camping out in them while the extensive structural and clearing up work goes on around them."

While the sea wall has been repaired and most services are now functioning, serious and widespread damage remains. Because of the time taken to rebuild such a large section of wall, especially during gales and high tides, most of the houses and bungalows were under sea water for five or six days. The main sewerage pumps broke down early on so that most homes were contaminated with raw sewage. Trees, plants, shrubs and grass have died off over a wide area.

Most bungalows, of which there are many in the area, have had all their contents destroyed by sea water and sewage. Some homes have been written off with extensive structural damage. Most are having their floorboards, plaster and joists ripped out, having been severely contaminated. Many homes in the area have been or are in the process of being gutted.

In common with other disasters, a range of emotional reactions is becoming ever more apparent. Many people have had literally all their possessions destroyed. Much can be replaced, although the accumulated memories of a lifetime, such as letters from a sweetheart who died in the war and old family photos, can never be replaced. There is a widespread feeling of insecurity and a fear of it happening again. Feelings range from anger and frustration to despair and resignation.

Estimates at the moment suggest that 30 to 40 per cent. of the homes have no contents insurance and that possibly 10 to 15 per cent. have no home insurance. With premiums higher than average and incomes lower than average—many people in the area are on pensions or are receiving benefit—the figure of 40 per cent. without contents insurance tallies with the British Insurance Brokers Association's figure of 20 per cent. as the national average without contents insurance.

With probably 1,500 people seriously under-insured, it is estimated that between £6 million and £9 million will be needed to refurbish their homes. The Welsh Office has donated £150,000 to the appeal fund, which we understand is unique for a disaster where no loss of life occurred. The EEC has donated £200,000. Community care grants issued by the DSS are still being restricted to those on income support. Taking into account the Welsh Office and EEC contributions, local government grants and fund raising so far, the appeal fund is not likely to bring in more than £650,000.

Nothing can be done to replace personal possessions lost for ever. We should at least be able to replace those things that can be replaced. With a likely shortfall of £4 million to £7 million in funds needed to get people back into their homes, it seems likely that almost 1,000 people will, in effect, become permanent refugees.

The report by the chairman of the social services committee in no way overstates the position, and it does not deal with the continuous anxiety about whether the repaired sea wall will withstand another such battering. I am of course grateful to the Government for their contribution of £150,000 and I recognise that it is unprecedented for such a grant to be made where there has been no loss of life. But the scale of the Government's response is tragically inadequate to the needs, and the moneys available in the mayor's fund are pitifully small.

People who have lost every stick of furniture and all their kitchen equipment—washing machines and so on—are being given an immediate payment of £200 or £250, with a promise that there may be as much again or perhaps twice as much fairly soon. Honestly, what is the use of that? What will £250 or even £500 buy nowadays? Should they buy second-hand cookers? With a few hundred people looking for them, it will not be long before the price of

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those goes through the roof. Indeed, it may not be long before people find themselves buying back cookers which they had thrown out as being unsafe.

There must be an appeal for funds, but public interest is already waning; other, more glamorous causes excite their sympathy. The chances of raising even a quarter of the money needed to meet minimum needs are negligible, and I have not even mentioned the huge fall in the value of their houses, which are now virtually unsaleable.

As I wander around the stricken area—I spend most of my weekends doing that—I see people camping bleakly in caravans on the roads in front of their still uninhabitable houses, or paying a daytime visit to inspect the evidence of continuing deterioration and decay before returning to the provisional accommodation which they will have to call home for many months to come.

The whole economy of the area, which is totally dependent on the holiday trade, has been crippled, at least for the coming year, so it will not be able to contribute effectively to its own recovery. The mood of the people is turning from one of fortitude and philosophy to one of sullen despair. They feel abandoned, hopeless and bitter. I cannot blame them. I am deeply ashamed that we should rise for the Easter recess having done so little to bring them comfort.

7.23 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): The whole House will feel sympathy with the hon. Member for Clywd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) and his constituents.

Before coming to the main issue that I wish to raise, I take this opportunity to mention a huge gas explosion that occurred in my constituency this morning. One house was demolished and 10 others were seriously damaged. I offer sympathy to the person who was injured and the relatives and to all those whose homes were damaged. At the same time, I thank the emergency services, including the ambulance men and women, who, as usual, did a superb job. It must have been a traumatic experience for all concerned, and I hope that the injured person will make a speedy recovery.

I wish primarily to raise the major constituency matter of the crisis in my local health authority. My district health authority is faced with a deficit of £1·2 million. The crisis was brought to a head today with the resignation of the district general manager, Mr. Brian Jackson. I understand from a bland press release that there was a meeting between the chair, Mr. Templeton, and the vice-chair, Mr. George, and that Mr. Jackson agreed to go by the end of the week, even though his contract has another two years to run. Apparently he has been paid compensation and has gone "by mutual agreement", according to the press release.

In the past, I have not always been in favour of the attitudes and actions of the district general manager, Mr. Jackson. Indeed, I have opposed many of the cuts over which he has presided. But recently Brian Jackson has been extremely critical of the regional health authority's policy concerning the problems that he has faced in respect of the £1·2 million deficit. He is on record as having said that more cuts would harm the service to patients.

To appreciate the crisis, we must look back at events a few years ago in Calderdale. In 1986-87, £300,000 was cut from the budget. More than 100 beds covering various services had already gone by that time. In September 1987, the district general manager highlighted the fact that cuts totalling another £500,000 would have to be made, and a programme of action was produced.

By late 1987 it was thought that two principles on which the district health authority had operated would be untenable, set against the need to cash-limit. Those two principles had been that there would be no compulsory redundancies and that everything possible would be done to avoid patient services being harmed. I argue that by that time they already had been harmed.

It was agreed then that it would be impossible to make further cuts without harming patient services, but a number of measures went ahead. A sad measure was the decision to close ward H at Halifax general hospital. That was a specially adapted ward with a skilled and committed staff caring for older people with treatable psychiatric disorders. The patients and staff involved were dispersed and that specialty went. Fielden hospital, a small hospital for mentally handicapped children, closed in December 1987, and there was a curb on recruitment of staff.

Despite all that, the deficit rose to £664,000. In August 1988 a package of cost reductions was discussed and a "damage limitation" approach was attempted. Ward 6, a long stay ward for elderly people in Northowram hospital, was closed and the people were dispersed to other wards. The industrial therapy unit—the only provision in the area for people, mainly men, to learn and practise skills; it was essentially for people with learning difficulties—was closed.

Wards 13 and 14 at Halifax general hospital were closed, reducing the number of general surgical and gynaecological beds, particularly day case beds. The overall reduction in gynaecology beds has led to an increase in the waiting list. At one stage the cervical cytology call scheme had to be slowed down because there were insufficient beds for women requiring further investigation.

They were savage cuts which hurt people, particularly women. The number of maternity beds was reduced, reductions in nurse training were approved, and various planned appointments and developments were postponed or cancelled.

That brings me to 1989, by which time even more measures were needed to meet the deficit. It was clearly stated at that time by the district general manager that obvious savings had long since been achieved, that there was nothing left to trim, and that any additional reductions would mean direct cuts in services. It was clearly said that there was no scope to close wards without damage being caused, so a closure strategy was thought to be ill advised.

Nevertheless, a closure strategy had to be discussed, and we went through a series of exercises in which the district health authority drew up what it called an acute bed strategy. That included closing three wards, one of them a children's ward, closing a whole occupational therapy department and many other damaging cuts.

As a result of huge pressure from consultants, from staff, from the community, from the community health council and from the two local Members of Parliament —myself and the Conservative hon. Member for Calder Valley (Mr. Thompson), who both visited the Secretary of

State for Health—the district health authority decided to look again at the package of cuts. It decided to reprieve the children's ward from closure.

The Under-Secretary of State for Health promised to come to Halifax before any more cuts were approved. The authority went back to the drawing board and came up with a new package. A couple of weeks ago, the package was approved by all members of the district health authority. I am bitterly disappointed and disgusted because, having been warned that cuts would seriously harm patients, the district health authority still went ahead. With two or three notable and honourable exceptions, the district health authority voted for the package of cuts.

The new package still includes the closure of the three wards and the closure of the occupational health department, and it also includes a miserly reduction in prescriptions. No prescriptions are to be given to day patients including emergency cases who may, for example, go to the eye ward. At one time they would have been given eye-drops or ointment to take away, but they will now have to go to their own general practitioner for the prescription. In-patients will have only seven-day prescriptions, which will save £150,000.

The cuts will involve an almost total end to infertility treatment and to many health services for women. All funding to the well woman centre has been stopped and it will have difficulty in surviving. The Minister should honour his commitment and visit Halifax before the cuts go ahead. Unfortunately, the district health authority saw fit to ignore that commitment and some of the cuts have been implemented already. I contacted the Minister today. I asked him to come to Halifax immediately and to ignore the fact that the regional health authority might not pass on the community health council's opposition to the cuts. If it does that through a technicality, the Minister might slide out of visiting us, although he promised to do so.

With the resignation of Brian Jackson, a district health authority manager who, in the past, has not worried too much about making cuts, we are in a serious position. If Brian Jackson does not believe that he can go ahead with the cuts, and if he cannot justify them to the people of Calderdale, we are in a crisis. The Minister must come to see for himself the results of the damaging cuts and of the serious underfunding over the years. He needs to talk to nursing staff and to the 60 nurses who trained last year, over half of whom were not offered a job and the rest of whom are on part-time or temporary contracts. He should come to talk to the nurses, to the sisters, to the gynaecologists and to the consultants who say that people will die if the cuts go ahead. Surely, if the Minister comes to Halifax and talks to the people, those cuts will not go ahead.

7.33 pm

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): The deputy Prime Minister has heard some interesting suggestions, and I hope that he will consider them all, especially that of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), who mentioned the Archbishop of Canterbury. The appointment of the archbishop is one of the few matters in this House on which Mr. Jacques Delors does not make the decision, so it should be considered carefully.

I want to mention three points. First, can we delay our recess so the Government can explain why it is now more difficult than ever to obtain specific information on issues of importance to this country through parliamentary questions? I have been shocked in the past few days about specific changes of policy, which are all recorded in papers I have here. One example is trade with the EEC, which is a matter on which hon. Members ask questions from time to time. I asked my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the latest balance of trade with the EEC—and we always have a balance of trade with it. We have seen the ups and the downs, so we believe that it is an important matter.

I tabled a question and I found that, on 19 March, it had unfortunately been transferred to the Treasury, which is most unusual. When the Treasury dealt with the question, it simply referred me to a table called table A12 of the monthly review of external trade statistics. That table did not give the answers, because it dealt only with visible trade and not with the question that I had asked.

I also asked specific questions on figures published in *The Daily Telegraph* about an astonishing growth in our deficit in capital payments with the EEC. Again, I was referred by the Treasury to page 39 of the 1989 edition of "United Kingdom Balance of Payments" and was told that a copy was in the Library. I found some difficulty in obtaining it from the Library. I read page 39 and I challenge my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House, who is cleverer than I should ever hope to be: if he can read that page and obtain any helpful information from it, I should be surprised. When the country is facing up to important changes, it is important that information should be made available to us. If it is not, there is a danger that hon. Members will suspect that there is a conspiracy to keep information from them and from the public.

Secondly, I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend will agree that it is vital that, before Britain makes a decision on the exchange rate mechanism, we should have not a debate or a discussion, but a brief White Paper from the Government explaining to the people of Britain what the Government believe will be achieved in positive and negative terms. I have a deep feeling that the general view taken by the established clever people is that the exchange rate mechanism is a good thing; the same happened with membership of the EEC.

I can remember the days when we were told that British cars would go right across Europe, that jobs would increase and pensions would soar. There was a feeling of hope and optimism that, if we joined the club, we should gain all the great advantages of membership of that club. I find it worrying that, whenever Ministers are asked about such issues, we seem to have no information. We hear some of the Euro-fanatics say that ERM is good because it is European and many others say that it will bring more stability, lower interest rates and better trade.

I believe that all the evidence points in almost exactly the opposite direction. I hope that the Government accept that joining the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system is a big step, and is important to the powers of the House of Commons and to the Government. It would be terrible if we simply slipped into the proposal without the Government explaining to the people of Britain or to the House of Commons what might be achieved by such a measure. It would be unfortunate if, at a time when things in the economy seemed to be becoming a bit difficult, we were to join the ERM simply in the hope that it would make things better.

[Mr. Teddy Taylor]

Thirdly, will the Government give some attention to the fact that agriculture in this country and in the rest of Europe is doing great damage to the environment and, most importantly, to the Third world? I have always been depressed to sit here week after week and year after year hearing how new policies in the farm plan are changing the whole agricultural scene. We hear that, for that reason, we shall bring production and consumption more into balance. We have heard all the proposals. We have had restrictions of production through quotas, stabilisers, transfers and everything under the sun, but the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food must be aware that in 1990, although we spent a fortune on eliminating virtually all the surpluses, we are spending £9 billion simply on dumping and destroying food.

Apart from the fact that it is a shameful misuse of public funds, it is terrible to do this to the Third world. It is the people there who suffer the poverty, the hunger and the agony and who have to change their countries most. So long as we are spending this vast sum—I believe that it will be an ever-increasing sum under current policies—simply on dumping food at crazily low prices, we are not being fair to the world and certainly not to the people of the Third world.

I hope that the time will come when issues such as this will be faced and we will not just indulge in "kidology", as we seem to, week after week and year after year. Perhaps the most depressing thing in the House of Commons is to hear the Ministers of Agriculture announce that, because of new measures and new initiatives, problems will be resolved. I believe that, at the end of the day, we need a simple acceptance that there is no way in which the common agricultural policy can be reformed and the problems that we are inflicting on the world solved unless we scrap the CAP and adopt something wholly different and a great deal more in the public interest.

If the Government will give thought to the provision of information on these three issues, I am sure that I can join with the whole House in wishing the Leader of the House and deputy Prime Minister a very happy and healthy Easter break, in which he enjoys sunshine and all the things that go with the good life that he certainly deserves.

7.41 pm

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): A casual visitor to this palace, starting at St. Stephen's entrance and walking through the building, would notice that it resembles a superb art gallery; that there are many examples of brilliant workmanship, including the statues in the Central Lobby and the Members Lobby, as well as great paintings, good cartoons and many prints of different kinds. But any casual visitor would also notice that one thing is missing: there is not a single photograph.

The Leader of the House is trying to intimate to me that there is an odd print or two somewhere but, as I develop my speech, he will realise that the absence of photographs, particularly as we have just reached the 150th year of photography, is very puzzling. Many other Parliaments and institutions contain photographs of historical record, but in this Parliament we have missed great opportunities to display photographs.

I shall be meeting one of the Treasury Ministers, the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Ryder), to discuss with him the Central Office of Information and its destruction of many photographs. There has been a ridiculous shredding of pictures that could be of historical importance. I was speaking to an official about pictures in Ministers' offices and I challenged him on the point that there were no photographs from the central bank of pictures. The official said that I was completely wrong, because there are 12 photographs, all of Dartmoor. That said it all to me. It is really ludicrous that, in all the big offices from which Ministers operate, there are only 12 photographs.

My main plea tonight—I have corresponded regularly with the deputy Prime Minister on the matter—concerns still photographs and the fact that they cannot be taken in the Chamber. We are surrounded at the moment by eight television cameras, which during the day are beaming live into millions of homes. I understand that, during Prime Minister's questions, at least 7 million people tune in. Yet one cannot take a simple still photograph in this place. I just cannot understand that. I have pleaded in letters to the deputy Prime Minister and tabled early-day motions, but so far we ain't made 'alf an inch of progress. However, I am hoping that, having been given this opportunity to speak to the deputy Prime Minister directly, I may get some satisfaction.

One of the silly things about it—this will surprise many hon. Members—is that there is no way that one can raise the subject of photography except on the Adjournment of the House, because, according to the explanation that I was given, there is no ministerial responsibility. So, while we want photographs, there is no opportunity to ask for them except on an occasion such as this, and I am therefore grateful for the opportunity to make these few remarks.

I was a Member of the European Parliament, and still photography was allowed, as one of my former colleagues, the PPS to the deputy Prime Minister, the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris), knows. It did not cause any problems at all. There were television cameras, but not on the same scale as here. It was possible, for example, to request a photograph for a local paper while a Member was speaking. I would not have been likely to do so, but it was possible. There were photographs of the founding fathers of the European Community. I am not advocating this, but photographers could walk freely in the chamber of the European Parliament.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): I am rather worried about that.

Mr. Boyes: My hon. Friend says that he is worried about that, but if he will let me develop the subject a little further, he will find that I have a much more practical solution. Hon. Members make speeches here but, surprisingly, every Member loves to have his or her photograph in a newspaper. We all know that it is better to have a very small photograph in a newspaper than a whole page of text. Here is an opportunity for all of us —even my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow, whom I greatly respect, and who is not too sure about the situation.

How can we solve the problem of people walking around? The problem here is the same as the problem that arose over snooker, when it was essential that there be no intrusion or noise by photographers. They invented a screen system and the pictures of snooker are taken from behind the screen, so the game is not affected in any way. Except for Leicas, cameras make a noise, especially with the whirring of motor drives, but all that can be cut out. So all that would be needed would be two or three locations in the Galleries of this place where still photographers could operate.

At the moment, pictures are being taken from the television screen and we are told that they will get better. On the first occasion that we had television cameras in this place, every newspaper looked at the pictures and, to say the least, found them pathetic, and they are not much better now. As long as pictures are not very good, they will not be published in the newspapers.

The other problem with television is the restriction of the shape of the screen. Taking pictures from television will never result in the interesting pictures that the newspapers ought to be publishing. The newspapers have tremendously improved the techniques for displaying photographs. *The Independent* led the way and the other papers followed, but we are not taking advantage of that situation.

Photographs can be taken from the Galleries on the official opening of Parliament and that has been allowed for many years. But I understand—I hope that the deputy Prime Minister will clarify the situation in winding up—that there is a move now to stop even that. What kind of world do we live in when every hon. Member in this Chamber prays for a photograph in a newspaper, yet photographs cannot be taken on the most important occasion in Parliament's life—the official opening, when the programme for Parliament is set out in this Chamber?

I have been carrying out a project: I have taken photographs of about 100 Members in the building or in its surrounds, but the restrictions are extremely severe even for a Member of Parliament. I am repeating a project carried out by a Conservative Member, Sir Benjamin Stone, in the last century. According to his biography, he worked under terrible conditions. He had to ask a plethora of people where he could take photograhs.

I work under similar conditions. I have consulted Mr. Speaker, the Serjeant at Arms, the security people and police inspectors, yet the restrictions on taking photographs make photography difficult, even for a Member. In some locations, photographs may be taken before half past 9 in the norning, but if it is after half past 9, one cannot take pictures. Around 12 o'clock, one may take photographs for half an hour on the Terrace, but by 1 o'clock perhaps one cannot.

The silliest restriction is that pictures may not be taken in the Chamber. My hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow might say that he did not want his picture taken, but I cannot even take a photograph in the Chamber when it is empty. There cannot be a dafter restriction; 7 million people can watch proceedings televised by eight cameras, yet I am not allowed to take a picture of an empty Chamber.

Mr. Dixon: Why would my hon. Friend want to take a picture of an empty Chamber?

Mr. Boyes: That is an important philosophical question. It is beyond the realms of photography, and I will have a long discussion with my hon. Friend about it afterwards.

My hon. Friend, who may be an expert on these matters, knows that we could have a committee or some other way of controlling still photography. We do not seem to have much control over what is happening with television. The experiment started just with people's heads and torsos being shown, but now there are wider angle shots. I am in favour of that. I want the people whom I represent in the north-east, who get little opportunity to come to London, to see what Parliament is like—the good and the bad. We have an obligation to allow our constituents to see what is happening. Television may use wide-angle cameras, but let us have still photographs as well. That is all I ask.

I know that the deputy Prime Minister is sympathetic. I am not saying that he is supportive, but he has written me sympathetic letters on the matter. Perhaps the reactionaries on the Select Committee on Televising the Proceedings of the House, of which he is Chairman, are holding matters back, but I ask for some common sense. If people are enjoying the televised proceedings, let us have still photographs, taken by professionals from behind screens. Everyone in Parliament would benefit.

7.53 pm

Mr. David Porter (Waveney): A few minutes ago the House heard a moving account from my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) of the Towyn tragedy. It illustrates what I want to say. With winter behind us, I hope, I do not think that the House should adjourn for Easter without considering the coasts of Britain and without giving thanks in some cases. By the coasts, I mean the whole United Kingdom sea defence, coastal defence, coast protection and flood protection. Whatever name we give it, it is often all that stands between thousands of people, acres of land and millions of pounds' worth of property and total, irreversible oblivion under the sea.

When I say that we should give thanks, I mean that East Anglia should give thanks because the damage done to Towyn on 27 February, and to other parts of Britain in January and February, was not visited on East Anglia to the same degree, although it was bad enough. That was only because the wind was blowing in a particular direction. Had there been a different wind direction, half East Anglia would have gone. What I referred to in my first speech in the House in June 1987 would have come nearer. Then I said that unless we addressed the problem, the seaside resort of Birmingham would be a reality by the middle of the next century. As a sea-loving nation, we have to temper that love with respect and at times with fear.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed), in a magnificent Adjournment speech only last Wednesday, spoke knowledgeably about the urgency of the problem and the need for a national solution. He pointed out that responsibility is shared by 240 different authorities and that 10 new regional coastal groups have not yet met. He cited 10 major Acts stretching over the last 120 years. He spoke of the spectre of global warming leading to rising sea levels and changing weather patterns, with no certainty of the amounts and levels involved. He credited the diverse and many research projects under way at universities and at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. He estimated the costs to threatened land and property at £75 billion. He could not begin to estimate the amount of human life under threat. He stressed the need for more research into all aspects. He summarised the

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needs as co-ordination, research, urgent action and cash. He identified the overwhelming need for a single, responsible body to co-ordinate what is happening.

I support my hon. Friend's call and reinforce it. He recognised in that debate the major works in East Anglia which followed the disastrous floods in 1953. Not only is that work nearing the end of its life expectancy, but it was never total work. If we improve a piece of sea wall here, or put a new groyne in there, the effect is apparent further down the coast.

It is absurd that we do not have a national body in action on the job. The National Rivers Authority has general supervision of sea defences. Why is it not expanded and beefed up to do the job? The sea recognises no local authority boundaries. The wind does not give a toss whether it is an NRA-supervised scheme or a MAFF-approved scheme. The tide sweeps all before it —house, field and human being.

In my constituency there is a tiny settlement called Easton Bavents. It was once bigger but for some years about 12 ft a year have been sliding off the sand cliffs into the North sea. The rate advanced during the recent winter. At the weekend, when I last saw it, the cliff edge was as close to the nearest occupied dwelling as I am to the Front Bench on this side of the House. A modest scheme could be carried out, using blocks rather than a whole sea wall. I ask my right hon. and learned Friend to forward to my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food my plea that, once the scheme hits his desk, it will be considered in hours, not months, as is normal. If it is not, Easton Bavents will not exist this time next year. If Easton Bavents goes, half of Southwold will go as well, and probably most of Reydon and all the surrounding farmland and marshland. Indeed, it was only luck in the wind direction recently which stopped the collapse of the weak north wall of Southwold harbour.

I urge my right hon. and learned Friend to ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to use his best endeavours to ensure that there are no further delays in the Southwold harbour scheme, particularly as the other half of the harbour is the boundary of his constituency. We cannot go on relying on mild winters and luck. Corton cliffs, Lowestoft north and south beaches, Covehithe and Kessingland—in fact, the whole of the coastline of Waveney—are as much at risk as the rest of Suffolk and all of Norfolk.

It is not a problem for the local councils alone to tackle and fund, they must remain the first line of defence and proposal, but sea defence is a national issue which needs a national approach; hence my request for a one-stop, buck-stop agency.

Having said that, I readily acknowledge the progress that has been made. We had the announcement that £161 million will be spent on coastal defence over the next three years. East Anglia will get the lion's share of that money. That is very necessary and welcome, too, although some estimates are that £5 billion would not begin to touch the problem. The maximum grant to local authorities will be raised from 70 per cent. to 75 per cent. Again, that is very necessary and welcome, but I wonder whether the 25 per cent. which remains as a local function is still out of proportion when we are talking about telephone number size amounts in sea defence spending.

We need to consider a new dimension in coast protection. Are the groynes and the hard engineering, Victorian type sea walls the answer? Are there not other answers? Is there not a need for a national agency to consider the construction of ramps under the sea, further out, not to control the sea but to enable us to live with it? We might have management control of sea and land erosion by a soft engineering approach. Is not that what we want?

Erosion in one area leaves a build-up somewhere else. We need to stabilise natural beaches and to build submerged barriers, to change the rhythm of the waves. We need to take a strategic view. I do not claim that this phrase is original, but we need a national management agency for Britain's coasts to ascertain what should be saveable and what is saveable. Only a national view will do.

7.59 pm

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): The motion proposes that we should have a break at Easter and for the spring May day bank holiday. As a life-long trade unionist, I shall not object to that.

It is a long time since the Adjournment of the House was considered against a political background as extraordinary as the present one. It must be a long time since a Government have looked forward to a recess with such relish and relief as this Government. They must be revelling in the prospect of having a few days when they do not have to come to the House to answer for the poll tax, the Health Service and the numerous other issues that have been raised. I imagine that the Prime Minister must be tremendously relieved that for a couple of Tuesdays and Thursdays she does not have to come here in front of 7 million people, as was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes), to put up performances such as her recent ones——

Mr. David Nicholson: And my right hon. Friend wins every Question Time.

Mr. Grocott: I shall come to the little matter of winning in a moment.

We have known for a long time the opinion poll figures about the Government's collapsing authority and this weekend's figures show the Government being 18, 23, 27 or 28 per cent. behind us, with the gap increasing. It will be intriguing to see how the Government, and especially the Prime Minister, cope with electoral defeat. The Government and the Prime Minister have had a charmed life for so long, but the test comes when one is behind in the polls. Anyone can lead a political party when things are going well. The test is coming, and we shall have to see how the Government and the Prime Minister stand up to it.

I do not expect the House to take too much notice of opinion polls because we all know that they come and go. I prefer the real polls, such as the one that was held last Thursday in Mid-Staffordshire. I enormously enjoyed the three weeks' campaign there. I have no hesitation whatsoever in saying that an outstanding Member of Parliament has been introduced to the House. I have worked closely with her. I must also record the deeply sour and churlish way in which the Government prevented the admission to the House of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mrs. Heal) until late this afternoon.

That shows what bad losers they can be. My hon. Friend was required to wait around for two and a half hours until she could be introduced.

However, the sourness of the loser cannot detract from the significance of the victory. Like my hon. Friends, I like episodes such as this and we shall relish it. It would be difficult to overstate the significance of the by-election. I know that Conservative Members love hearing quoted pieces from that good newspaper, *The Guardian*, which reported:

> "The Mid-Staffordshire byelection was an unqualified triumph for Labour, one of the greatest in the whole of the party's history . . .
>
> The vital statistics of Labour's success can be swiftly summarised. This was the biggest swing in their favour in any byelection since March 1935 . . .
>
> The turnout was high, not far short of general election proportions . . . the increase in Labour support, by far the best of the post-war years".

I could go on——

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Having sat through the debate since quarter past five—I appreciate the pressure on time, Mr. Deputy Speaker—I am in the House as proof positive that there is life after a by-election. What I have just been listening to is precisely what was said throughout the length and breadth of Britain after the defeat of the Conservative party in the Ryedale by-election at which a 16,000 Conservative majority was overturned. I am glad to say that the Conservative party now has a majority of nearly 10,000.

Mr. Grocott: The hon. Gentleman must draw whatever consolation he can during his remaining time in the House. That applies also to one or two of his hon. Friends. Conservative Members should be clear about the fact that, after the Mid-Staffordshire by-election, no seat is safe.

The only persistent theme that the Conservative party managed to string together in the by-election campaign was its constant criticism of the style of the Labour party's campaign. I am not churlish or sour and I am quite prepared to say in this public place that I have no criticisms whatsoever of the way in which the Conservative party conducted its campaign. I hope that the Conservatives have many more campaigns similar to it. We hope and expect that there will be many similar results.

Mr. David Nicholson: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it not the convention that Front-Bench speakers should attempt to reply to the debate?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): The motion lends itself to a wide debate.

Mr. Grocott: I shall not disappoint the hon. Gentleman. A recurring theme in the by-election—and in today's debate, wide-ranging though it has been—has been the poll tax. I do not doubt for a moment that the poll tax was one of the factors that led to our tremendous success, but I should like to say a few words about why it was considered so important by so many people. Surprisingly, that issue did not recur simply because people have to pay more. Characteristic of the views that were expressed by many of the people on whose doors I knocked during the campaign was that, of the few people who will not be worse off as a result of the poll tax, many could see the manifest injustice of that system and were not prepared to vote for it. That may be difficult for many Conservative Members to understand, but it is undoubtedly true. Implicit in all that is the fact that many people object to the style and methods of the Government who introduced the poll tax.

I was amused to hear the hon. Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) complain that the Labour party is not spelling out its alternatives in enough detail. I refer him to the Conservative manifesto of 1987, which had a total of six lines on local government finance. I do not know what our next manifesto will be like, but I am sure that we shall be able to manage more than six lines on local government finance and to be a little more incisive and profound than stating simply:

> "We will legislate in the first Session of the new Parliament to abolish the unfair domestic rating system and replace rates with a fairer Community Charge."

That is not the most detailed analysis of local government finance that I have ever seen.

Like many of my hon. Friends, many Conservative Members have metioned the poll tax in this debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) referred to the crucial fact that it is not related to the needs of local areas. My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) also emphasised the injustice of the poll tax. Like other hon. Members, I associate myself with the tribute paid to Allan Roberts by my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North. I know that it is echoed by many hon. Members.

The Mid-Staffordshire by-election was not only about the poll tax. My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) referred to another issue repeatedly raised in the by-election—the Health Service. We were criticised many times during the by-election, and sometimes we were criticised for our candidate's campaign slogan, which was, "Vote for what you value." Many Conservatives and the brighter intellectual members of the press told us that that was not good enough and that "Vote for what you value" did not mean anything. It may not mean much to Conservative Members or to some newspaper correspondents, but it certainly meant a lot to the people of Mid-Staffordshire. They knew what they were voting for and what they valued. Conservative Members need not take my word for this—they can look at the ITN exit poll —but one of the things that the people of Mid-Staffordshire valued was the principle upon which the Health Service was founded. They also valued the principles behind the welfare state. They valued a Government who know the meaning of words such as "tolerance" and who believe in a fair system of taxation. They valued a Government who would listen when people criticised. They supported our values and rejected the values of Thatcherism. I use the word "Thatcherism" advisedly. I do not simply use the name of the Prime Minister but refer to the set of values with which she is associated.

In the next few months or even the next year pressure may be brought to bear on the Prime Minister and some moving statement may come from Downing street that she thinks it right to start spending more time with her family. That may be the reason for her going, but it is not a sufficient commentary on her terms of office or the way in which this experiment on our people should be closed. Everyone who has been associated with the Government—every Minister and every hon. Member who has gone through the Lobby for the Government—is accountable for what has been done in their name. It cannot be put down entirely to the Prime Minister; she

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cannot be held solely culpable. Those who have been associated with the Government cannot simply make a sacrifice of her and wipe the slate clean. The people of Mid-Staffordshire did not accept that and nor will the people of the rest of the country.

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the by-election. It is increasingly fashionable for people to believe that our electoral system is not the best in the world. I am an unashamed supporter of the first-past-the-post system. I hope that it will long remain. One of its many benefits which is so often overlooked is that it provides for the priceless safety valve of by-elections. Many of the alternatives put forward do not offer a sensible way in which by-elections could take place. We all know about historic by-elections that have taken place over the years. No doubt the Mid-Staffordshire by-election will be rated as historic. If that safety valve and the capacity of people to respond in a particular area at a particular time to the built-up frustrations of the country —which is what happened in Mid-Staffordshire—did not exist we would lose something precious in our electoral system.

In replying to the debate, it would be churlish of me not to mention that some Conservative Members who have spoken find the poll tax a particularly objectionable form of taxation. My neighbour the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) has spelt out his views plainly enough on that. Speeches to that effect were made by other Conservative Members. But still the Government are not listening, and still the Government will tinker.

It would also be churlish of me not to mention specific issues raised by several of my hon. Friends who have now left the Chamber. One such issue was that raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), who made a characteristically persuasive case for removing one area of patronage—the appointment of the Archbishop of Canterbury—from the hands of the Prime Minister. But my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), as ever, put forward an overwhelming and persuasive case, which was listened to by every hon. Member in the Chamber. Again, he is a person whom I would much rather have on my side than against me. If any cause in the world is looking for a champion, it could do worse than get hold of my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West.

I return to the main theme of my speech, which is the state of politics in Britain as we head for the Easter Adjournment. You will understand, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the enthusiasm of Labour Members for current political events. We understand the wholehearted desire of the Government to remove themselves from detailed scrutiny and examination, albeit for the short Easter Adjournment. However, they can dodge and weave from this crisis to that, but they must face the local elections in May and they will have other electoral tests to surmount. They may struggle on for another year, 18 months or two years, but sooner or later they must face a test greater than that of Mid-Staffordshire—the test of the whole country. For Labour Members, the sooner that test comes, the better.

8.14 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Sir Geoffrey Howe): I begin by joining several hon. Members who have spoken in reaffirming our sadness at the death of the hon. Member for Bootle (Mr. Roberts). In an equally uncontentious fashion, I extend congratulations to the new hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mrs. Heal). There was no sourness or obstructiveness in the way in which her admission to the House was arranged. The same has happened on other occasions. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) intervened to say that he arrived at a much later hour in the afternoon after his equally important victory at Ashfield. It is important to remember that just as opinion poll figures come and go, so, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) said, do by-election victors. As I recollect, the majority at Ashfield was 21,000. It was swept away in an astonishing recount at an early hour in the morning. But Ashfield is not now a Conservative seat. Nor will Mid-Staffordshire be a Labour seat when the next election comes.

We are more than ready to abide by the advice of the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) that we are accountable to the nation. We shall, indeed, account for our record when the time comes. We shall do so with success, as we have done three times already.

Mr. Winnick: Will the Leader of the House give way on a matter of procedure?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: No. If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, he is an inveterate interrupter. I have only 15 minutes to reply.

The community charge featured in the speeches of Conservative and Opposition Members. The hon. Members for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) and for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) made sweeping and dismissive speeches about it and I shall say no more about them. However, I wish to respond to what the hon. Member for Walsall, North said about South Africa. He was right to draw attention to the tragic events at Sebokeng on Monday. We condemn violence from whatever source. Those events underline the urgent need for parties in South Africa to begin direct talks as soon as possible.

As well as talking about sea-launched cruise missiles and urban ski-slopes, the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish referred to the position of war loans. I have to offer him the familiar reply on that. Were the Government to respond to his plea, the bulk of the money would simply provide windfall gains for those who purchased the stock after it had already fallen sharply in price. It would cost a great deal and set an unmanageable precedent.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) also spoke about the community charge. He was good enough at least to acknowledge forcefully the overwhelming case against the rating system. He commended a local income tax, which would be a most insensitive vehicle to manage. It has been dismissed for that reason.

My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) made some important points about planning and education. He also gave a robust defence of the principles and practice of the community charge. My hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) also made some interesting observations about it. He spoke about a dog registration system, which is not something for which I have great enthusiasm. It would cost about £20 million and would give rise to more complications than the collection of vehicle excise duty for rather smaller returns.

My hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) offered observations on the community charge from their great experience. I am delighted to welcome my right hon. Friend back from his desert island. Sadly, he does not come back to his antique home of Oswestry, which sounds much more distinguished than Shropshire, North.

My hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South, who has apologised for his absence, offered the simple proposition of transferring the costs of education from local to central Government. I say simple because it would be accompanied by arithmetical changes that would make it quite valueless as a transaction. It would erode the effectiveness of local government education and would transfer a burden of some £15 billion from the ratepayer to the Exchequer. That seems a somewhat extravagant claim even for my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South and even with the alleged labour burden of £3 billion. It is simply a book-keeping transaction unrelated to the matter.

I have some sympathy with the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North about the need to bring calm and reasoned judgment to bear in a speedy fashion or, in the words of the American Supreme Court, to approach the matter with "all deliberate speed". My right hon. Friend drew attention to the need to consider the ability to pay. When my right hon. Friend and I sat alongside each other in the Treasury some years ago even his brightest ideas, as well as mine, had to stand the test of affordability. The most compassionate approach that my right hon. Friend commends would still need to be tested against how much could be afforded from the central Exchequer.

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) gave us a fascinating insight into the questions that arise out of the prospective appointment of a new Archbishop of Canterbury and the movement towards increasing self-government for the Anglican Church. It was marvellous to behold that radical revolutionary looking back gently on the 450 years of progress in the right direction. He paid tribute to his heroes, Benn and Bradlaugh, who were figures of some distinction. The right hon. Gentleman spoke like an antique churchman as he offered us phrases such as, "I was brought up to believe this" and, "The time will come". His speech was an insight into the reverential, ecclesiastical style that has increasingly come to characterise the right hon. Gentleman. He emphasises that the Labour party is now becoming an extremely broad church.

I was interested in the observations of my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle).

Mr. David Nicholson: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Forgive me, but not even for my hon. Friend.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle referred to his anxieties about the reaction of my right hon. Friends to the report on the House of Fraser case. I understand his argument and he is not alone in making it, but, fortunately, that case has many unique features. In many respects the law and practice has altered since that case surfaced. I doubt whether it will ever be repeated, and we should be careful not to draw too many conclusions from it.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) returned with characteristic vigour to the case that he makes effectively and continually on behalf of the African elephant and the part played by the Hong Kong ivory stock in the matter. The issues involved must be balanced carefully against each other. The Hong Kong Government are in the process of enacting legislation to ensure that the CITES ban is enforced when our reservation is withdrawn on 18 July this year. The legislative process is on schedule, but, in the meantime, the Hong Kong Government will continue to enforce strict licensing and monitoring arrangements to prevent any illegal trading in ivory. The 116 tonnes of ivory without documentation to which the hon. Gentleman referred will not be allowed to be exported.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer), in what has already been described as a moving intervention, described the continued hardship faced by his constituents following the tragic events on the coastline of his constituency. He was supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Porter), who drew attention to the extent to which such events should be regarded as a national issue and who called for a different approach to their management. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food made an important speech about this not long ago. I know that one of the answers to my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, North-West lies in the uneasy balance between insured and non-insured risks and, to that extent, there must be a limit to what the Exchequer can do. My hon. Friends' speeches underline the need for me to draw my right hon. Friends' attention to the need to examine on a more general basis the way in which we respond to such tragedies.

The hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) rehearsed on the Floor of the House a conversation that we have had on a number of occasions on his photographic lust, which I share with him to some extent. The arrangements now made provide for what are known in the jargon of the trade as "freeze frames" from the eight television cameras to be made available. In one way or another, one or other of those cameras is, at this very moment, taking a sequence of potentially freezable frames of him and his elegant posture. We must leave the matter at that for now, but no doubt the hon. Gentleman will not leave it there and we shall hear about it again.

The hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) drew attention to a tragedy that occurred in her constituency today and the House sympathises with her in that respect. Obviously I cannot respond now to her general case about the Health Service, save to remind her that all considerations of the availability of resources for her constituency or mine must take into account the fact that there has been a 39 per cent. increase in real terms in the total resources going to the NHS. The torrent of demand always rises inexorably ahead of those resources, but somehow we must devise methods to balance both sides of the equation and that will always be difficult.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor) characteristically offered me three or four provocative questions before he wished me a happy holiday—I reciprocate that wish to him. I agree with my

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hon. Friend about the elusive quality of Treasury answers to some statistical questions. I have had some difficulty understanding them when affirming them myself and we must try to do better. As to membership of the exchange rate mechanism, when the time comes the case will be made plainly; of that I have no doubt.

My hon Friend's general question, to which he returns frequently, related to the damaging impact of the common agricultural policy. My hon. Friend is right to direct attention to the continually damaging impact of surplus agricultural production generated by artificial means. It is not just the CAP that does that; the United States and Japan create massive surpluses. If my hon. Friend looks at the OECD recommendations in relation to the producer-subsidy equivalent, he will note that Japan is a more extravagant subsidiser of agricultural protectionism than other countries. We do not embark upon such things out of sheer folly, but it is a course that does not commend itself to someone who has had the good fortune to represent the Gorbals and Southend. To others who represent constituencies with a slightly larger agricultural component the health of the countryside is important. It is extremely difficult to find methods of sustaining it, but let my hon Friend sustain the onslaught of criticism. The real question, however, is to work out how on earth one tackles the problem.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: The free market.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: That is part of it, but it is not the complete answer. I cannot indulge in a complete solution now.

My hon. Friends the Members for Southend, East and for Taunton also drew attention to the trade gap. In all the shifting statistics about the impact of membership of the Community on our trading performance the most important thing is the extent to which our industrial performance, inside or outside the Community, still falls short of what we would like. There has been a dramatic improvement, but we still suffer from widespread deficiencies in our trading performance compared with other major performers around the world. Our world market penetration is one half or a third of that of France or Germany. We must do better—we are doing better and we shall continue to do so.

The hon. Members for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) and for North Down (Mr. Kilfedder) raised four issues. The hon. Member for North Down asked about electricity pricing. No subsidy has been necessary since 1986 and it appeared to my right hon. Friend inappropriate to tie the price of a public utility, Northern Ireland Electricity, to that of the privatised industry on the mainland. I believe that that is a reasonable case. The first point of the hon. Member for Belfast, South provokes the unsurprising answer from me that my right hon. Friend is ready and willing at any time to talk to him and his colleagues about procedures for handling legislation and to consider any constructive proposals. The hon. Gentleman's penultimate point related to the impact of the McGimpsey case on the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The constitutionality of that agreement has been upheld in the Irish courts. The status of Northern Ireland in international law is clear: it is part of the United Kingdom. In article 1 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, both Governments affirmed that the status of Northern Ireland would not be changed unless a majority of people living there wished it.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney), the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, recently said in a debate, willingness to contemplate change carries with it de facto recognition of the position from which change might occur. The declaration on status in the Anglo-Irish Agreement is simply aligned with reality, which is that the status of Northern Ireland is British.

I echo the entirely justified concentration of the hon. Members for Belfast, South and for North Down on the recent vicious attacks by terrorists in Ballymena and Castlederg. Once again, we reaffirm that such attacks will not deflect the Government or the security forces from their absolute resolve to defeat terrorism from whichever side of the Northern Ireland community it comes. That is the position of the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House, at its rising on Thursday 5th April, do adjourn until Wednesday 18th April and, at its rising on Friday 4th May, do adjourn till Tuesday 8th May.

Orders of the Day

Consolidated Fund (No. 2) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Question, That the Bill be now read a Second time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 54 (Consolidated Fund Bills), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Motion made, and Question proposed, pursuant to Standing Order No. 54 (Consolidated Fund Bills), That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Light Railways

8.33 pm

Mr. Robert Hayward (Kingswood): It gives me great pleasure to be called first to speak in the Consolidated Fund debate because it gives me the opportunity to speak at 8.30 pm, whereas a large number of my colleagues will have to speak in the early hours of the morning.

I raise the subject of the operation of metro systems because it is appropriate to do so. There is a growing interest in their operation. It is fair to speculate that had we had this debate 10 years ago, its mover would almost certainly have been my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) and nobody else would have been interested in the subject because they would have thought that it was of a past era. The debate would probably not have lasted long.

Now we already have approval for a Bill for a light railway system to run through Mr. Speaker's constituency. There are proposals, at various stages, before this and the other House, for light railway systems in Manchester, Sheffield, the midlands, Bristol and the south, around Southampton and in Croydon. Only this afternoon, in his statement on London Regional Transport, the Secretary of State for Transport said:

> "LRT is appraising the extensions of the Docklands light railway to Lewisham and of the east London line northwards . . . It is taking forward studies of the Croydon light rail system with the borough and BR."

That is a further and timely indication of the interest right across the nation in light railway or metro systems, as they are referred to.

When I first came to the House, I shared an office for a number of years with my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, East (Mr. Moynihan), the Minister for Sport. I was well aware of his keen interest in metro systems. I am sure that he will be particularly pleased by the announcement made today.

In the almost seven years that I have been a Member of Parliament, there has been a dramatic growth in congestion on the roads leading into the city centre of Bristol. When I was first a Member of Parliament the rush hour lasted only about an hour and the backlog up the motorway, the M32, was only a mile and a half. The rush hour, on all the arterial roads, including the motorway, now lasts about two hours and stretches for several miles. Therefore, there is great need for action to be taken in the area.

I am pleased that both the county and the Department of Transport are funding the largest bypass system currently under construction anywhere in the country. I hope that it will be completed, as scheduled, in 1994 and that the area will benefit.

There is no doubt that the proposal for a light railway system is to be welcomed and is generally welcomed by the vast majority of the population, not because it will suddenly resolve all our congestion problems—it will not. Anyone who believes that any form of transport policy will suddenly resolve our congestion problems is being extremely naive, if not downright stupid. What a metro system in Bristol and other areas may well do is to ease the growth of the congestion. People's propensity to travel is becoming ever greater and, therefore, we must tackle the problems in a radical way.

The metro is a radical proposal. The proposals put forward are environmentally friendly and will not add to the congestion on main roads or to the fumes in areas of dense urban population. Therefore, the metro system is to be welcomed provided it can be successfully negotiated between the local community, local councils and the proposed operator. I notice that my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Yardley (Mr. Bevan) and for Meriden (Mr. Mills) are present, and I am sure that they will talk about the midlands proposals.

In Bristol, parliamentary approval has already been received for one stage and two further stages have been lodged before the House. First, it is proposed that there should be a road link through the city centre towards Temple Meads. Secondly, it is proposed that there should be a two-armed link out to both Yate and Bradley Stoke.

Negotiations have been taking place during the past two years and it has proved possible to achieve agreement with organisations such as Avon county council. In the west country we all welcome the completion of those negotiations. However, in the next stages of the legislative process there are objections from three categories—the blockers, the negotiators and the concerned.

Objections in the form of petitions have been placed by Kingswood council and other groups which believe that they can negotiate with Advanced Transport for Avon and other interested parties to achieve a working agreement in the same way that Avon county council has. Also, a large number of organisations and individuals are concerned because they do not understand the position, believe that the ATA has been unable to meet their objections and do not know where they will be left at the end of the day.

When I first started discussions with the ATA on the subject, it was talking about running the system through my own constituency, at Staple Hill, which at present has a cycleway running through it. It was proposed that the cycleway should be diverted through the centre of Staple Hill and back down on to the track where there is a tunnel. I said that that was utterly unacceptable because we could not require people to mount what is virtually a hillside, 200 ft high, carrying their bikes, go along a congested high street and come back down the other side. We have managed to resolve that problem and agreed with the ATA that, instead of having a double track through a tunnel, we now have a single track and a protected walkway and cycleway.

Quite naturally, both cycling and pedestrian organisations are still concerned that their rights of way will be obstructed. However, I believe that the problem can be resolved and there should be further negotiations. At

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present, the ATA's proposals are that the cycle and pedestrian ways will be protected through the length of the cycle path and will be a minimum of 2·5 m wide. However, there are still safety way and fencing problems which must be dealt with. They could be resolved by further discussions.

Safety obviously concerns people because they are not sure of the regulations. I understand that all aspects of a metro's operation are covered by the rail inspectorate. I should like the Minister to confirm that when he replies because it is of substantial concern to local residents at any point along the railway.

The objective of a metro is to ease urban congestion. There has been concern that wherever there is a station there will be huge parking problems. Following discussions among myself and others, including my colleagues who represent other parts of the proposed rail system, it has emerged that there will be two extra stations and there will be a station every 800 yd. That should obviate the need for the vast majority of people to drive to stations and, therefore, the need for large areas of parking.

In many instances there should not be any requirement to provide parking. I understand from the ATA that it is determined that any decision on parking or on the subject of similar objections should be made as a result of negotiation with the local council. When talking about negotiations with councils, it should be understood that there is a need effectively to communicate. The proposers of a metro system must be conscious of the level of ignorance that is to be found among ordinary people and councillors about the general operation of such a system. I advocate strongly that the ATA talks more clearly and openly to local councillors in particular, who are the representatives of the individuals who are most concerned.

I have said already that in part of my constituency the metro will go through a tunnel. Local people are unsure of what that will mean in terms of noise or vibration. I understand that the Department of Transport has confirmed that a study is taking place on noise levels on railways, including light railways. I ask that the Department includes in the study, if possible, the impact of vibration. In my constituency the metro would pass through a tunnel for several hundred yards and many of the houses above the tunnel were built since the old railway system stopped operating, or the occupants of the houses have moved in since the ending of that operation. Therefore, they are unsure. Indeed, they are extremely concerned. They have presented a petition against the proposal because they do not know what impact vibration will have, if any. I am told by the operators that vibrations will not have any impact, but there is nowhere in Britain where a light railway system runs through a tunnel. I cannot confirm or deny what the proposed operators have told me and nor can the proposers. I should like some independent advice from the Department.

The other group which is negotiating on the metro and which finds it difficult to understand the system is one whose members have bought houses in the area since the light railway system has been proposed. I am critical of Bristol city council for not drawing clearly enough to the attention of proposed developers and home owners the ideas of the ATA.

I referred earlier to blockers, and I refer specifically to Bristol city council. Negotiations have been successfully concluded with Avon county council. I think that most hon. Members on both sides of the House will know that that is a hung council. Negotiations took place with all the parties and a draft working agreement is available. There is also a draft working agreement with the other councils, which has been arrived at on much the same basis. The district councils of Kingswood and North Avon believe that matters can be resolved, but they have presented what they describe as protective petitions.

The objection of Bristol city council has been so clear and so firm that it has effectively stopped the middle link of the light railway system. Without the link between Wapping road and Temple Meads, we effectively do not have a system. The light railway would come to an end and then start again about a mile further on. Temple Meads is the ideal location for the system to be centred upon. It would enable travellers to leave the main railway system and get straight on to the light railway system.

I understand that the elected Labour city councillors voted to support the proposal some months ago. There was then a meeting of unelected members of the Bristol Labour party, who are not representatives of any particular group, at which the decision of the elected councillors was overturned by a majority of one. I think that everyone strongly regrets that decision. I hope that by further negotiations between Bristol city Labour councillors and the ATA we can rapidly arrive at the same position as that which has been established with Avon county council. That would be a working agreement that could be operated and an understanding that the centre section of the proposed metro could go ahead. The ATA believes that its proposals would provide an integrated system with Temple Meads and with the bus operators. That has been a matter of concern to Labour councillors and Bristol Labour Members. I appeal to Labour councillors and to the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo), who is not, unfortunately, in her place this evening, to remove their objections and to say that they are willing to support what I believe is a worthwhile proposal.

The Order Paper refers to "Government support" for the metro system. Having removed the objections of Bristol city council, which I believe can and should be done rapidly—we should not delay until after the local elections—we need to be able to apply for section 56 grants. We have already lost our position in the queue to Manchester, Sheffield and, probably, the midlands. I should like an assurance that the Department will consider the ATA's proposals seriously—I understand that they will come forward in the next few weeks—and a second assurance that the Department has enough finance available for the ATA's proposals and for others.

I said at the beginning of my remarks that metros are a growth area. A few years ago there were virtually no parts of the country that wanted to submit proposals for a light railway system. Therefore, the Department was not being asked to finance such projects. Different regions are now falling over themselves in competing for relatively limited moneys. I appeal to the Department, in framing its budget for forthcoming years, to give serious consideration to making available considerably more section 56 moneys so that proposals that many support can be implemented rapidly.

There is a worthwhile proposal from Avon, and with a series of negotiations we can deal with most of the objections. Without the removal of the block by Bristol city council—the Labour group—the proposal will go ahead, but there will not be a worthwhile network to serve the whole area. I hope that the Department can and will provide satisfactory finance to help the system to be implemented. I hope also that it can give a clear sign, because of the problems that we face in Bristol, that there will be tests on vibration and general noise levels. That will be a means of easing the concerns of many residents in my constituency and in neighbouring constituencies.

8.48 pm

Mr. David Gilroy Bevan (Birmingham, Yardley): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) on the way in which he has presented his case on behalf of Avon. I wish to express concern about the matters that worry him. These include whether he will get into the queue on behalf of Avon and whether the necessary money will be available.

I do not wish to repeat the detail that I included in my speech in favour of the second Midland Metro Bill. The first such measure is now an Act. I want, however, to make the House aware of some of the difficulties of introducing and financing breathtaking conceptions of a new form of transport that will become available to move the public in much larger numbers than can be done now on our roads and with less congestion.

We are faced in this place with an entirely obsolescent private Bill procedure. It is, regrettably, the only one available. It is objected to by many hon. Members on both sides of the House as inappropriate to the passage of any Bill. Regrettably, they regard that as giving them the right to interrupt and impede the progress of Bills and so prevent them from reaching the statute book. I hope that the House will give further thought to adopting a procedure that is more appropriate to this day and age.

Before a private Bill can be published, the exact route along which the lines will be built must be promulgated. That means that a lengthy and widespread public consultation procedure must be followed. One cannot please all the people all the time, and it is difficult to go through the proper consultation procedure in time to comply with the requirements of the Bill.

We must also consider funding for such schemes. I note that, in addition to the applications mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood, four schemes have already been enacted and the Bills for two more are already before Parliament. A further seven are before us for consideration, and 25 studies are in progress in other cities. It is a very big sphere.

Funding must come from the Government, from the EEC, from the private sector—perhaps by operational concession—and from local sources. It is no easy matter to amass and amalgamate the funds and to work out where the money should come from and in what proportion. The Government will have to consider a formula for that. They will have carefully to reappraise the socio-economic benefits so that they can compare them with those built into the rate of return that they seek for road schemes. Road schemes carry less traffic, their capacity is less, and they cost many times more.

The Birmingham heartlands spine road is to cost about six times as much as a rapid rail transport scheme. Birmingham rapid rail transport line cost £3 million per kilometre. The current proposals are estimated as costing between £5 million and £10 million per kilometre and, in the case of the docklands light electric railway, some £20 million per kilometre.

The advantages in terms of prices and costs are clear. The proposals will provide jobs for many people and help to cure our problems by giving us an environmentally friendly system for moving people that is most attractive to look at and that performs whisper-quietly, unlike the old tramway system. The metro can negotiate city roads with tight corners and carry in its vehicles many more people, and will help us to get rid of traffic congestion. It will also help to improve our manufacturing capacity in no uncertain manner and will add a whole new dimension.

I beg the Minister to think deeply about the equation for costing the socio-economic benefits and the rates of return that the Government seek for investment in road transport. If he did so helpfully more money could be made available from the public sector.

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): Will the hon. Gentleman add a supplementary question to the Minister and ask him why, in view of his sincere interest and questioning, the Department has recently changed the rules so that those proposing such systems have to prove the benefit to non-users? That will cause enormous delays in the completion of the Birmingham system, in which both he and I are interested, and make it much more difficult.

Mr. Bevan: I accept what the hon. Gentleman says. The assessment of non-user benefits lies at the heart of the problem. Doubtless, now that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned that subject, he will not find it necessary to refer to it in the speech that he will make shortly. We are all ad idem in wanting to develop modern rail systems. I have been fortunate enough to see such systems throughout the world—in America and Europe. The 1960s witnessed the development of such systems in the United States; the 1970s saw their development in Germany; the 1980s brought them to France. Each system was bettter than the last, and the most perfect system so far is now to be seen in Grenoble. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to ensure that the 1990s will bring the rapid implementation of such systems—the very finest—financed from all sources in the public and private sectors, throughout Great Britain.

8.56 pm

Mr. Iain Mills (Meriden): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) on having been chosen in the ballot and on his important speech. I think his constituents, and, I hope, his council, will listen to what he has said. He referred to a number of impediments in the system that is to help Bristol. I welcome the Midland metro, which will help my constituents, but I have a few points to put to my hon. Friends the Members for Kingswood and for Birmingham, Yardley (Mr. Bevan) and to the rest of the House.

We all face two difficult, balanced problems. We must weigh possible improvements and the participation of local people in the shaping of those improvements. Why on earth do we have such an arcane procedure at present? The private Bill procedure does nothing at all for democracy. It does not help people to put their point of

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view and it is archaic; it is as though we were living in the last century. Arguments advanced in Bristol, in the west midlands or anywhere else should be heard in some form of public inquiry which would allow people to participate properly.

I wish I had a pound for every time someone has said to me, "I should like to see a better transport system, a Midland metro,"—in my hon. Friend's case, a Bristol metro—"but please provide me with some means of ensuring that the route suits me." It is not a case of, "Stop the route" or Don't put it there"; it may be a question of a move by a few yards, or a change in the traffic arrangements, or better car parking facilities, or better landscaping. Indeed, people could be asked where they want stops to be located. Under the present procedure, many people are prevented even from stating their views.

This is my hon. Friend's time, and I may be transgressing slightly, but I must refer to four groups that have protested to me, although not against having a metro in our area. This is a most important matter. It is a question of connecting Birmingham with the national exhibition centre. We are not against a better system running right across the egg-shaped part of the centre of England that I represent. In fact, we should like to see one in operation, but with the odd changes that the four groups who petitioned this House proposed.

As I spoke on Second Reading of the Bill, I shall not go on at length tonight. Indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you may have heard me speak then against the private Bill procedure. Three out of those four groups were prevented by that procedure from petitioning this House. The senior Deputy Speaker, whose judgment I trust absolutely, has confirmed that people whose land is not actually crossed by the route may not petition this House. Yet this route is as close as the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape).

Mr. Snape: But not as noisy.

Mr. Mills: The hon. Gentleman is well known for his skill in debate. I shall not comment on the noise he makes, except to say that sometimes it is pleasant and sometimes not. We shall have to wait to hear what it will be like tonight.

I hope my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood will not mind the main point that I want to make. This House must find a better way of proceeding with what is the most important development in public transport. We need light rail systems. We need quiet trams. My hon. Friend the Member for Yardley has explained how well these are doing at Grenoble. When constituents believe that they will provide a better transport system for both Bristol and the west midlands, why should procedures prevent those people from having their say? Little problems concerning routes are big problems for people living within metres of a line. By all means let us have grants from our own Government and from the European Community to improve systems. Unless public transport is improved, the west midlands and, indeed, Bristol, which I know quite well, will face real problems. The roads will be crowded.

Let us provide the funds, by whatever means—councils, the Government or the EEC. We must do all that we can to ensure that my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood does not have to face difficulties from the local council. Let us make sure that those people who would welcome this benefit to their areas are provided with a real voice, that they are not denied the opportunity to make their suggestions. I am glad to say that, in the case of the west midlands, Centro—the West Midlands transport executive—has agreed that there should be further consultation. That should have happened long ago. By a combination of public pressure and public agreement, a better transport system could have been created to take us into the next century. But changes in the procedures of this House in respect of private Bills are essential.

9.3 pm

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): The House will be grateful to the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) for providing the opportunity to debate this important subject, especially at a reasonable hour of the night. I do not suggest that had the hon. Gentleman been less successful in the ballot we might not have welcomed his contribution in quite the same way.

I shall deal in reverse order with the contributions that have been made so far. The points that the hon. Member for Meriden (Mr. Mills) made are ones that I have heard him make before. That is not intended as a criticism: he has every right to speak as often as he deems necessary on behalf of his constitutents. He will be aware of my views. I, too, believe that the objectors to the Midland metro should have been allowed to make their case before the appropriate Committee. Like the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Mr. Bevan), I find the private Bill procedure less than satisfactory—to say the least—when it comes to proper consideration of objectors' views.

Opponents should be allowed to put their points of view and, like the hon. Gentleman, I welcome the further consultation that has been promised to those groups. I happen to believe that they are wrong, but I understand their fears. Like the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Yardley, I, too, have seen the metro schemes, particularly in Grenoble, other parts of France and in Germany. Many of the fears that have been expressed about noise and pollution are groundless. There is little point in running such schemes through areas of low population because they need to run through fairly heavily built-up areas if they are to justify the cost of installation.

Mr. Bevan: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that in Grenoble only about 53 per cent. voted in favour of the scheme initially, but subsequently, after the system had been running for two years, 93 per cent. were in favour? Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, for the objectors to be heard, we must deal with the point that inhibits them, that of locus standi—having to have a property interest along the line of the route? That must be expanded into a proper system of consultation.

Mr. Snape: I was not aware of the figures that the hon. Gentleman has just given, but I accept them. The rules are far too restrictive. Those whose privacy and general environment are likely to be affected by such schemes should have the right to object rather than only people whose properties are directly affected. Like the hon. Gentleman, I have recently been to Grenoble to see the system there. I was most impressed by it, as I am sure that everyone who sees it would be. Like him, I found it possible not to hear the metro system, even though it was only a few yards away from the restaurant in which I was enjoying a rather good dinner. The rattle of the cutlery, or perhaps it was the clink of the glasses—it was some time ago—far exceeded the noise of the trams. The noise was not in the least obtrusive. Many of the fears that have been expressed are understandable, but groundless.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the cost of the scheme. I cannot challenge his figures, but he will probably agree when I say that at £3 million per kilometre they are a darn sight cheaper than most road schemes that the Department of Transport all too often favours. I am pleased that he agrees about the recent change in the investment criteria. If the Minister is not prepared to give permission for the funding of the schemes, I wish that he would come out and say it, so that we know where we stand.

Continually to change the rules, particularly when it adversely affects the projected profitability of the midland metro in Birmingham, is not helpful. It is nonsense to change the rules, as the Government have, so that benefits must be shown to non-users. That would not happen with any other mode of transport. I cannot see the sense in that rule change, other than as one of the delaying tactics in which the Department habitually engages. It makes the use of management time at Centro, formerly the West Midlands passenger transport authority, even less efficient. Instead of getting on with the job of managing, managers will have to find a fresh set of criteria to justify Midland metro to conform to the change of rules recently announced by the Department. That is a retrograde step and one that the Opposition deplore.

The hon. Member for Kingswood talked about the Avon scheme. I have also had recent experience of the Bristol rush hour, although not as much experience as he has had, and I am convinced that the traffic congestion round Bristol that he mentioned is serious and that something will have to be done in the 1990s to tackle it.

The Labour party's attitude towards such metro schemes is well documented in "Moving Britain into the 1990s: Labour's new programme for transport", which I commend to the hon. Member for Kingswood and to the Minister. I had some peripheral involvement in this document. It says:

> "Labour will also encourage public and private collaboration in rapid transit systems which provide attractive, modern, clean and fast movement through cities. Now common in Western Europe, 11 schemes are already being considered in British cities."

Since that document was drafted last year the number of British cities considering such schemes has increased by about half a dozen. The Minister will not be surprised to learn that the document goes on to say:

> "Their development has been hindered by the narrowness of the government's financial approach. Labour will speed up the process for the construction of metro, light railway or tram systems in cities throughout Britain."

I have dealt with some of the details of the Government's changes to the criteria for giving the financial go-ahead for such schemes. It appears that the Avon scheme—about which the hon. Member for Kingswood has already spoken—meets the criteria.

I must say a few words about private sector involvement. I have made it plain that the Opposition have no deep ideological objections to it—*[Interruption.]* The Government Whip, the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South-East (Mr. Lightbown), is supposedly silent on these occasions, but he giggles girlishly for some reason.

Opposition Members believe that the great fault of private sector involvement in such schemes is that all too often promises do not match reality. We have seen that happen in London, with the much-trumpeted involvement by the property company, Olympia and York, in the extension of the Jubilee line. The millions of pounds originally promised have shrunk considerably.

All too often the private sector is not prepared to put up the cash, even though it benefits from the regeneration of urban areas that results from such schemes.

Mr. Hayward: I do not want to destroy what seems to be a bipartisan approach to light rail systems, but I noted that the hon. Gentleman quoted from the Labour policy document, saying that the Labour party would speed up the process. Will it oil the wheels with more money? Or is that also up for consideration along with the other 169 commitments in the Labour policy document?

Mr. Snape: If the hon. Gentleman had contained himself for a few seconds more, I was about to explain how the Labour party will speed up the process—*[Laughter.]* —and if the Government Whip can contain himself. Perhaps at some time in the future he will be moved to a speaking post. We eagerly look forward to his contribution.

We propose to give local authorities such as Avon the right to approach the private money market and to take a leading role in raising capital for such schemes without the —I was going to say dead hand, but I would not be so cruel to the Minister—shadowy figure of the Minister leaning over their shoulders. If a financial case can be made for such a scheme, I hope that there will be no ideological objections from the Conservative party to allowing local authorities the right to approach the private sector direct to seek its involvement. I hope that that little policy snippet also appeals to the Government Whip, although I had better not provoke him—*[Interruption.]* The Whip appears to find it revealing and interesting; we should be grateful that it is outside the normal conventions of the House for him to reply.

I hope that the hon. Member for Kingswood agrees that such an approach would be quicker, and—in his immortal phrase—would oil the wheels, although I understand some of the fears that he expressed about the Avon scheme. The Labour party's rules make it clear that decisions should be taken by elected Members; thus the Bristol district Labour party has no standing on the day-to-day decision-making processes, and nor has any other district Labour party.

I visited Bristol at the end of last year to speak at a light railway conference. I made the closing speech; the Minister for Public Transport opened the conference. Both our speeches were greeted, if not with acclamation, with a good deal of interest. While I was there I was approached by the management of Advanced Transport for Avon Ltd. about the dilemma—as ATA perceived it—and the difficulties that it was having with Bristol city council.

I explained to the local media that I did not know enough about the position on the ground in Bristol to make any detailed comment. However, I subsequently wrote on 3 January to the leader of Bristol city council about the difficulties. It is a long letter, and I do not propose to read it to the House; but I offered to come to speak privately to the group, and to play any mediating role that it thought would resolve the difficulties. Alas, I

[Mr. Snape]

have received neither reply nor acknowledgment to that letter, so I am reduced to repeating the same offer tonight. I hope that Bristol city council will not think that at some unspecified time in the future a Labour Government—like the United States cavalry—will gallop to Bristol's rescue if, for ideological reasons, the scheme falls by the wayside.

As the hon. Member for Kingswood said, many other towns and cities in the United Kingdom are at present drawing up, or have introduced, parliamentary Bills for metro systems. I have received assurances from ATA about its intention to introduce a public transport system that will be fully integrated to combine buses and taxis, and which will allow co-ordinated interchanges, through ticketing and related services. That would appear to meet the criteria laid down in the Labour party's national policy document to which I have referred.

I hope that these Advanced Transport for Avon matters can be resolved and that the city and the public sector will play a full part in promoting future schemes. In my letter to the leader of the city council I said that we must live in the real world. If we can obtain the go-ahead for the complete metro system only by means of this approach, that is better than having no metro system at all.

Mr. Hayward: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his clear comments on the position in Avon. I am not an expert in the Labour party's machinations; my grandfather was only deputy editor of *The Daily Herald* under the Attlee Government, so why should I know anything about the Labour party as it stands today? Will he confirm that what he said regarding the meeting with the Bristol Labour party as opposed to the Bristol city Labour group was that that vote is not binding on the actions of Bristol city Labour councillors?

Mr. Snape: I said, and I repeat, that no district Labour party anywhere in the country can bind elected Labour councillors when it comes to the decision-making processes of the authority. That applies just as much to Bristol district Labour party as it does to any other. The hon. Gentleman says that he does not know very much about Labour party rules. It is not unreasonable to describe them as byzantine.

I hope that the environmental and other transport benefits of the system will be realised, provided that there is agreement and co-operation between ATA and Bristol city council. I endorse the hon. Gentleman's point that the transport authority for the area is Avon county council. Although it is a hung council, it has agreed to the proposals. I hope that any outstanding difficulties will be resolved, despite the unsatisfactory nature of the private Bill procedure—a point on which all hon. Members agree.

I apologise for detaining the House for so long. However, I thought it right to point out that the Midland metro system and the ATA scheme are worthy of support and conform with the Labour party's views on urban transport in the 1990s.

9.23 pm

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Michael Portillo): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) on securing the debate and in particular on securing it at such a civilised hour. As the Minister who was selected to respond to this debate, I say that with real feeling, not merely as a conventional courtesy. There is a saying that Ministers now abed will think themselves accursed. However, I assure my hon. Friend that I am happy to be responding to the debate at this civilised hour.

My hon. Friend referred to the development of light rail systems and made it clear that it is not just in Avon that great interest is being shown in them. Similar proposals have been made throughout the country. He was perfectly right to say that the benefits that are being sought from light rail systems include escaping from traffic congestion and providing high capacity systems for greater numbers of passengers.

The Government have followed the development of light rail systems with great interest and considerable encouragement. I am pleased to see that the Transport Select Committee will be considering the options for public transport in urban areas, including light rapid transit, and hon. Members will look forward to the Committee's views in due course.

The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) spoke not so much with appalling frankness as with endearing candour about his exchanges with the Bristol Labour party, and my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood will have found much of what he said extremely helpful, so we thank the hon. Gentleman for those comments.

Mr. Snape: In that case, I had better withdraw most of what I said.

Mr. Portillo: The record stands.

It was churlish, in an otherwise generous speech, for the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East to pour a number of criticisms on the head of the Government. After all, under the Conservatives, a light rail system has been built in the east end of London—the docklands light railway, which is now operational. That is one more light rail system than was brought into operation under the last Labour Government.

Mr. Snape: The Minister is wrong again. It is a shabby affair in docklands—non-integrated and rather tatty, and it breaks down with monotonous regularity—and is not to be compared with the system in Newcastle, which was introduced by the last Labour Government——

Mr. Portillo: Oh?

Mr. Snape: It was brought into operation in 1977-78, those halcyon days when the Minister was probably still at school and the people rejoiced.

Mr. Portillo: My recollection is that it was brought into operation in 1981, but let us not quibble about it. We have approved a light rail system which the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East did not mention. I refer to the Manchester metrolink system, an important project which cost £110 million to build on the basis of a 50 per cent. section 56 grant from the Government for, the eligible expenditure.

In other words, under the Conservatives there has been not simply talk about light rail systems, but action. The docklands light railway proves the point, and it is going from strength to strength. The hon. Gentleman had some ungenerous criticisms to make of the docklands light railway, but it is now being extended to Beckton and Bank, the frequency of operation is being increased and it will shortly move to two-car operation. I am concerned, as the hon. Gentleman knows, about the reliability of the operation, a matter to which the management of the railway is giving much attention. That is happening under my guidance, in my role as the Minister with special responsibility for transport in docklands.

The Manchester project was approved and the money committed during our announcement last summer on public expenditure. That has been widely welcomed in Manchester. More than that, we have been carefully considering the light rail system proposed for south Yorkshire, the supertram system. That proposal was not given approval by the Government last summer, as the PTE would have wished. At a time when the Government made a generous settlement for transport—both public transport and roads—we were not able to find the resources last summer for the project, and the PTE was anxious that I should let it know whether the project in principle met the criteria that we had established.

I considered that carefully and was happy to write to Councillor Meredith, chairman of the South Yorkshire PTA, on 22 February, saying:

> "I am glad to say that the combined project currently meets our appraisal criteria."

That was an important statement for building confidence, so that the south Yorkshire development could continue, and in proving the point—questioned by the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East and my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Mr. Bevan)—that the criteria that had been set by the Government for light rail systems were achievable criteria. In the case of south Yorkshire, we have now approved expenditure of £6 million so that the project can be worked up further and considered at the appropriate time.

The purpose of the criteria, which have been mentioned in the debate, is to establish that, where there are external benefits for which it is not reasonable for the users of the system to pay, they can justify the payment of grant from Government funds. The criteria are pretty widely drawn and are set out in a circular sent out from my Department on 3 November 1989:

> "Benefits to non-users will in most cases arise mainly from the relief from congestion. Other external benefits may include environmental improvements . . . Where relevant, promoters should also give an assessment of economic development, job creation, or regeneration benefits where these are in line with Government objectives, particularly in inner-city areas."

Those criteria are quite broadly drawn. If we are to be in the business of giving Government subsidy for those rail projects, it must be on the basis that the subsidy can be justified in terms of benefits which one could not expect to recoup from users of the system, but which are benefits for the general population. We have drawn the criteria broadly, and in the case of Sheffield it has proved possible for the criteria to be met in principle. We shall be interested to hear how the Sheffield project continues to be developed and we shall want to consider it for funding at the appropriate time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood asked me to give an assurance that funds would be available for the projects. My hon. Friend has considerable experience of the workings not only of government, but of the Department of Transport. I am bound to say to him that it is simply impossible to make such a commitment outside the normal public expenditure survey period. When the time comes, we shall want to consider the light rail project in line with others. I remind my hon. Friend that it is not a matter of theory, as we have already been able to give approval to a substantial sum in the case of Manchester.

Mr. Snape: I shall try not to interrupt again, but while we are on the subject of approvals for the schemes, will the Minister tell us about the Midland metro scheme and how soon the first line, which will pass through our respective constituencies, Madam Deputy Speaker, will get the go ahead?

Mr. Portillo: I cannot make such a prediction. The hon. Gentleman will know that, in the case of the Midland metro system, and in the case of the Bristol system or any other he may care to mention, there is not yet a firm proposal before the Department for us to consider. We shall be very willing to consider such proposals for section 56 grant when they come forward.

In addition, the project can apply to us for section 56 grant to help with the development of the case for the project. That has happened in the case of Sheffield, south Yorkshire. We have been able to make available funding of £6 million for the development stage of the project, rather than for the project itself. A similar pattern was followed in the case of Manchester.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood wanted to know whether I would confirm that the railway inspectorate had a role in light rail systems. I am happy to confirm that to him. The railway inspectorate would need to approve the works, and the approval of the Secretary of State for Transport would also be required, before the railway came into operation. The railway inspectorate would have health and safety responsibilities for the railway and any accidents on it would have to be reported under schedule 1 to the Railways (Notice of Accidents) Order 1986, on which I gave a written answer on 23 March.

My hon. Friend was also concerned about noise levels and vibration. He will have seen the answer that I gave on 23 March, which said that we had set up a committee so that we could consider the establishment of a national noise insulation standard, or standards, for the operation of new railway lines that would be related to the standard set by regulation for new highways. I shall reflect upon what my hon. Friend has said this evening, but the important point is that we want to treat railways in exactly the same way as highways, and that announcement last week was widely welcome.

I believe that it is reasonable to ask of any operator proposing a new service that he be able to give the most thorough information to those who will be affected. There is probably a considerable caucus of experience on the operation of railways on which to base information given to interested parties.

My hon. Friends the Member for Yardley and for Meriden (Mr. Mills) were perhaps principally concerned in their speeches about private Bill procedure and its shortcomings, as they see it. I see in the Chamber my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown), who is something of an expert on this subject, so I almost hesitate to say any more in his presence. Both my hon. Friends will be well aware of the Joint Committee report on this subject. More to the point, they will probably have heard or read the comments by my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House, who has

[Mr. Portillo]

said that he wishes to give urgent consideration to the matters raised in the report. It is not for me to go further than that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Yardley was concerned about the funding criteria. In the case of the Midland metro proposal, he is of course speaking about a project that is very ambitious—I do not say that by way of criticism—and very expensive. He may be showing a certain nervousness about how that will shape up against the criteria. It is far too early to say, but I believe that the criteria are now very clear and firmly established, and it has been possible for one other system, the south Yorkshire, to qualify under those criteria.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood was concerned about what the attitude of Bristol city council would be and how that would affect the development of the proposal put forward by Advanced Transport for Avon Ltd. We welcome proposals from the private sector as well as from the public sector. When proposals come from the public sector, we are very keen that there should be some private sector involvement. When they come from the private sector, we are delighted to receive them and to consider them if there is an application for grant.

Obviously, if one intends to run a system through a particular area, it is very important to have some understanding with the city council. I have heard that Bristol city council has not given consent to the deposit of the ATA Bill for the city centre route, and that clearly must be a matter for the council. However, Avon county council, which is the highways and public transport authority, has given its consent. Plainly, however, there can be no decision on grant for that route until this uncertainty has been resolved. As my hon. Friend quite rightly said, if the possibility of running through the city centre is excluded, that may have fundamental effects on the scheme as a whole, so I very much hope that these difficulties and uncertainties can be sorted out.

I have been very pleased to meet representatives of Avon county council and to discuss the project with them. It was a very productive meeting. However, I do not yet know what the position on grant will be. We are awaiting the outcome of the economic appraisal; when that has been received, I shall again want to know the views of Avon county council. I hope that the scheme will offer a worthwhile contribution to meeting congestion problems in and around Bristol.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood has caused us to concentrate on one project, that for Avon, but the questions that arise there, paricularly about the way in which these projects will be appraised by the Government and about how they may qualify for section 56 grant, apply much more widely. The Government are well aware of the considerable and widespread interest in light rail systems. I think that the Government are right to establish clear criteria for the making of grant. It would be a mistake for us to be carried away by the idea that light rail systems are the only possible solutions to the public transport demands of various cities. There may be other, more cost-effective solutions. That is one good reason why any project should be assessed carefully, against well understood criteria.

The attitude of Government to light rail schemes is benign. We look forward to receiving applications. We have been pleased with the progress that we have been able to make so far, both with the construction of the docklands light railway and with the substantial grant aid to the Manchester metrolink project.

National Health Service

9.40 pm

Miss Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): I am very pleased to have been drawn No. 2 in this night of debating. Some people said to me, "You are lucky that you will not be here in the early hours of the morning. There will be many Members in the Chamber for your debate." When I see the number who are here at 9.40 pm, I do not know what the attendance will be like at 4.40 am. Perhaps it is time that the House examined some of the anachronisms about the way it is run.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to discuss the National Health Service and its underfunding. It is no surprise to me that people generally are concerned about what is happening to the National Health Service. When I was speaking today to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mrs. Heal), it was clear from what she was saying that one substantial reason why large numbers of people shifted their vote to Labour last week was their dissatisfaction about the way the Government are running the National Health Service and their underlying fears about the future. The Government will ignore that message at their peril.

The fear is justified, particularly when we consider that the Government chose last week to guillotine arbitrarily the debate on the National Health Service and Community Care Bill. The guillotine resulted in nearly 100 amendments not being debated. I hope that we can concentrate on the underfunding aspect of the Health Service.

The Government have attempted to defend their record on the Health Service. It is like trying to defend the indefensible. With nearly 1 million people waiting for hospital treatment, the Government's statements ring false. In my constituency people's everyday experience of what is happening to them when they seek treatment under the National Health Service speaks much louder than any single Government statistic. As we reach the end of the financial year, and as regional and district health authorities face the increasing need for money, they are having to struggle desperately to keep within their cash-starved limits.

The first casualty in West Lambeth health authority has been bed closures—the so-called temporary closure of beds that soon becomes permanent. That is happening not only in West Lambeth but throughout the country. The district health authority has recently had to make some savage cuts to meet the spending limits and a shortfall that was much greater than it had expected. Some of those cuts have been spelt out clearly in letters to the Secretary of State for Health from the community health council.

Some of the worst effects of those cuts are felt in a hospital that does not receive the publicity that St. Thomas' hospital does—I refer to the South Western hospital in West Lambeth district health authority. The staffing levels in psychiatric wards there were reduced at short notice to such an extent that even the unit manager said publicly that he no longer felt that the hospital was able to provide health care and that it was simply acting as a place in which people could just about be kept safe. As a result of the outcry about what was happening, there has been some temporary improvement, but the morale of the staff in the hospital is low. The cuts have affected the way in which people work and operate and mean that they cannot do their jobs as they would like. There have been cuts in the paramedical staff, and the dismissal of the agency occupational therapists has severely affected both the Tooting Bec and the South Western hospitals. Physiotherapy activities, which are so important in such hospitals, have been reduced to a minimum.

There have also been what may seem to be minor but which are very sad cuts. I refer to cuts in the clothing supply and even in the food supply. One resident has stated publicly that it is like living on war rations. There are such shortages of food on some wards that a hospital sister was triumphant and happy at managing to get some extra eggs from another section. No wonder that people are feeling extremely concerned about what is happening in our National Health Service.

West Lambeth district health authority runs the Lambeth community care centre, which is a unique project. Reductions in its nursing staff mean that the centre has to manage its caseload to ensure that it does not have too many high dependency patients at any time. That means that that facility is being used at less than its full capacity. People who could otherwise have benefited from it are now having to use the more expensive acute hospital beds.

Those are just some of the events of the past couple of months. However, we must also consider what will happen after 1 April. The health authority is having to consider drastic cuts which, if implemented, will mean that about 150 staff posts will disappear and that another four wards may be closed. That will mean an increase in the number of people waiting to become patients.

In an answer to me on Tuesday last week, the Secretary of State for Health told me that funding for the West Lambeth district health authority had been increased this year by 7 per cent. in real terms. I have never been very good at maths, but I remind the Secretary of State that this year's allocation for West Lambeth was £103 million, which was only a 5·5 per cent. increase over last year's funding of £97·6 million. Therefore, his answer last week was incorrect. Furthermore, that increase did not take inflation into account. As is happening all over the country, the increase did not take into account the full funding of the staff pay awards. At the moment, the health authority is facing a projected shortfall for next year of £7·5 million. Cuts will have to be made somewhere, unless the Secretary of State intervenes.

I welcome the increase in capital expenditure for West Lambeth, but what is the logic of giving extra capital and of providing capital funds if the Government deprive the health authority of the revenue funding to maintain its services? The Government are inconsistent with their funding. Often they place an unacceptable burden of services that are used nationally on local health authorities.

In West Lambeth district health authority there are two specialist units which receive no national funding. We are proud of the Lane Fox unit. Indeed, the Minister was present at its opening at St. Thomas's hospital. It is the only specialist respiratory unit in the country. Its patients come from far and wide. Yet no extra money is given to the health authority from central funds for the unit. It costs approximately £1·25 million a year. We want the unit at St. Thomas's, but the Government must recognise that it is not used only by people in the health authority area. Similarly, St. John's Hospital for Diseases of the Skin, which moved to premises at St. Thomas's recently, serves

[Miss Kate Hoey]

the whole community. It has been refused national recognition for central funding. Those two examples show not merely the unfairness of Government spending on the Health Service but how deliberate underfunding is hidden. The change in Government funding of the regions was welcome. But was it really necessary for the increased funding for some of the regions to be paid for by patients in inner-city areas such as Lambeth?

St. Thomas's is classed as a major accident and emergency unit. Up to 70 per cent. of patients who come into the hospital are booked in through the accident and emergency unit. Obviously, that adversely affects what is euphemistically referred to by people involved in the Health Service as non-urgent surgery. The majority of such surgery is for local residents.

Just last night, when the health authority was asked to make drastic cuts, it refused to do so and said that it wanted the proposals to be reconsidered. It was not prepared to cut another 160 beds. The health authority knows that cutting 160 beds will mean an even greater cut —a 10 per cent. cut—in out-patient appointments. Currently there are some 300 cancelled admissions every month. It is important to consider what that means. It means that sick people who expect to go into hospital on a certain day are turned away for lack of a bed on the morning of their admission or when they arrive at the hospital doors. The figure given—300 a month—cannot disguise the suffering and distress to individuals who may have already waited for months for an operation.

I have received several letters from people who have suffered in that way. I have one recent letter here. The lady —I shall not give her name—said:

> "On the day"

of my operation the

> "Hospital staff phoned me to say they had no bed. I'm trying to keep my job . . . Some days I can hardly walk by the time I have finished. How much longer do I have to wait? To them it's not an emergency—to me it is . . . I thought I would tell you my story and I'm sure there are thousands more like mine."

There are thousands more like this lady. That is the personal side of bed closures.

At a teaching hospital, when there are fewer beds and operations, student doctors and nurses do not get experience. That creates a vicious circle. It does not help when it comes to recruiting to a hospital such as St. Thomas's.

The Secretary of State has implied to me that the problems of West Lambeth district health authority all stem from financial mismanagement. I have questioned the financial management at West Lambeth. Certainly the allegations which the regional health authority is currently investigating require an explanation. It is ironic that, while investigating the person who is responsible for the financial mismanagement, the regional health authority has given him a consultancy worth a substantial amount of money. The impartiality of the investigation must be questioned.

The financial mismanagement amounted to public awareness of the shortfall being delayed for approximately five months. It had nothing to do with the actual shortfall and underfunding. In future, whenever anything is raised about funding in West Lambeth, it would be sad if financial mismanagement was cited as the reason for underfunding.

As a direct result of the Government's suggestions and plans for the NHS, West Lambeth district health authority and St. Thomas's now have an army of accountants and management consultants employed by the regional health authority. The Secretary of State has admitted that the total spent by his Department and the district and regional health authorities to prepare for implementing the National Health Service and Community Care Bill is more than £80 million.

I know that the Under-Secretary of State knows St. Thomas's well and has had personal experience of the hospital. I hope that he realises that it is absolutely imperative for more negotiations to take place between the regional health authority and West Lambeth district health authority about the amount of money allocated for the coming year. It is not too late for the RHA to recognise the specific difficulties of West Lambeth district health authority, the needs of its area, and its peculiar problems.

It must be as unacceptable to the Minister as it is to me that there will be further reductions in services. We cannot accept a 10 per cent. cut in out-patient services or one more bed closure. We cannot allow more people to suffer the indignity of being told that their operation will no longer take place. Year after year West Lambeth district health authority has been told that if it just makes a few more sacrifices, if it just manages to close a few more beds and fiddle a few more figures, it will help to bring the district's finances under control. It is then told that, next year, everything will be all right. Year after year, however, things have got worse and we are now in a worse financial position than ever before.

The time has come to say that such a level of cuts is simply unattainable and that the health authority's priority is to maintain services to patients. The managers of that health authority have already said that they cannot carry out the wishes of the RHA and the Government to make cuts to enable them to provide a health service, let alone a decent one. Surely the time has come for the Government to make extra resources available to prevent the health services in West Lambeth from collapsing.

I hope that it is not too late for the Minister to listen, intervene and accept that the needs of West Lambeth district health authority and the people of West Lambeth are much greater than he, his fellow Ministers and the RHA have said. I hope that the Minister will respond to the points that I have made.

9.58 pm

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey) on her good fortune in the ballot and also on the way in which she deployed her argument about Health Service underfunding in her area. Her story could be repeated in many parts of England and Wales. Her good fortune also means that those of us who want to comment on cuts in the Health Service can do so in this debate.

It is highly opportune that this debate is taking place tonight because yesterday evening Gwynedd health authority, which covers my constituency, had a meeting, yet again, to try to avert financial disaster. This is not the first time that Gwynedd health authority has been in that position. It has happened every year since at least 1984. During the past two years, particularly since I was elected to the House, I have warned the House and Ministers in the Welsh Office that the authority's chronic financial plight must be sorted out. Hitherto, my plea in the House and elsewhere has fallen on deaf ears.

Last year, I went so far as to call on the Secretary of State for Wales to use his powers under existing legislation to intervene directly in the affairs of Gwynedd health authority. Sadly, on that occasion he refused to do so. The matter is vital because it affects the health care of nearly 250,000 people in north-west Wales.

A year ago I told the House that I was gravely concerned about the financial crisis which then faced Gwynedd health authority. As a result of decisions taken 12 months ago, a number of hospitals in Gwynedd are to close and vital community provision is being cut. I said then, and I repeat, that one of the major reasons why the health authority had to cut back last year was that it suffered chronic underfunding, but I accept that there are other reasons. Unfortunately, for some years, Gwynedd health authority has suffered from poor management control.

When I made these points last year, the Minister of State, Welsh Office, said that, although the health authority had suffered from particular management problems in the past, he believed that significant improvements had been made which would lead to the problems being solved. Unfortunately, this year Gwynedd health authority is in exactly the same position. Therefore, the best that one can say about the Minister's reply is that it was complacent in the extreme.

The difficulty for hon. Members and the public is that the health authority blames the Government for underfunding and the Government blame the health authority for mismanagement. That has already been said in this debate. It does not matter to the patient who is right or wrong. The problem is one of immediate concern to the patient who will not have his or her operation because wards have closed.

This year Gwynedd health authority estimates that unless cuts are made it will overspend by more than £2 million, and that sum will increase to £4 million next year. It blames the Welsh Office for underfunding. The crisis this year has already led to the closure of one ward at Gwynedd hospital in Bangor, which means that 23 operations have had to be cancelled, six of which were hip replacements. Yesterday, the area health authority gave its managers authority to make further cuts which could lead to the loss of 200 jobs and further ward closures in the next few years. That is an absolute scandal and should be stopped.

How can the health authority discharge its duties to provide a comprehensive health service to the people of Gwynedd when, during the past 15 months, it has taken a number of steps: first, to close several community hospitals; secondly, to sack 200 employees; thirdly, to close wards and day centres; fourthly, to freeze vital medical posts; and, fifthly, to cut essential community services. What sort of health authority and what sort of Government allow that to happen? I have a copy of the speech of the Secretary of State for Health to last year's Conservative conference, in which he said:

> "A lot of small hospitals are very popular and very threatened under the old way of doing things. In future thanks to the new funding arrangements which I propose, popular units and popular cottage hospitals will thrive if they attract patients. That is precisely how the new funding will operate, to provide wider choice and more local say."

I wholeheartedly endorse those sentiments, but how can Gwynedd health authority live up to that sort of statement if hospitals have already been closed? There is no way in which a health authority can provide community provision if five hospitals in the county have been closed. If the Government are serious about providing decent community hospitals, they must reverse the closures.

The latest decisions on job losses and ward closures were confirmed late yesterday afternoon. The implications are staggering, especially for the elderly and the disabled. Unfortunately, the health authority has a reputation for cutting its community provision as it struggles with the finances of the main acute general hospital at Bangor. There is already a massive shortfall in community nursing, speech therapy, occupational therapy and all the other attendant services. I have no hesitation in saying that something must be done to improve health provision and health care in Gwynedd.

I was astounded to learn that from today no elective orthopaedic surgery is taking place within the NHS in Gwynedd. That is a scandal. The managers already have powers—they were passed through the area health authority yesterday—to close other wards as and when the need arises because there is a shortage of nurses and staff. The Secretary of State for Wales—I am sure that my comments will be passed on to him by the Under-Secretary of State for Health—cannot further abdicate his responsibility. He must intervene now to save the Health Service in Gwynedd.

I shall quote from the document which the health authority provided to its members in reaching the decision for further cuts yesterday. It is very much as the hon. Member for Vauxhall said—that if a few cuts are made here and there during one year, the authority concerned will be in a better position the following year. That is precisely what the Welsh Office told Gwynedd health authority last year. It implemented the cuts which the consultants who were asked by the Welsh Office to examine the Health Service in Gwynedd said that it should make.

Those cuts, however, were not enough. The general manager of the health authority told the members yesterday:

> "The interim strategy was the Action Plan,"—

the action plan is to close the hospitals—

> "which has not succeeded in the aim of bringing the Health Authority back into balance. This has largely been due to the accelerating pressures of inflation and under-funding of wage awards and regrading exercises, continued increase in workload and delays in obtaining decisions on the rationalisation proposals."

He also told me that the Welsh Office criteria for providing funding for Gwynedd health authority do not take into account the increase in the workload to meet demands caused by the increase in the elderly population as a proportion of the population as whole.

Is it not appalling that, according to the *Western Mail*, the general manager of Gwynedd health authority said:

> "The best way to get more money is a good cholera outbreak while the Welsh Office base their allocation of funds on standard mortality ratios. It is as stupid as that."

If that is the view of the general manager of health services in Gwynedd, it is a sorry state of affairs. Without direct Government intervention, Gwynedd health authority will collapse under the financial strain. I urge the Minister to pass my comments on to his colleagues at the Welsh Office.

10.10 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey) on being lucky in the ballot and on her opening speech. It is my pleasure to reside in her constituency during the week and I am glad to know that she is actively representing my London interests tonight.

The central question to which we must address ourselves is why a Government who have had a huge pile of Exchequer resources, throughout their period in office and certainly in recent times, have found it necessary to underfund the National Health Service to the extent that they have. We know that they have had about £83 billion in North sea oil revenues and it is calculated that revenues from privatisation—the sale of state assets, council house sales and land sales—and other income have amounted to about £50 billion. Why have a Government with resources above and beyond those available to any previous Government chosen to do so little to increase National Health Service funding? My answer to that question is that they have deliberately chosen not to fund the National Health Service properly as part of a longer-term political strategy involving the transformation of the NHS as we have known it since just after the second world war.

About a year ago I read in the press the remarks of David Willetts, who appeared on "Question Time" a couple of weeks ago. David Willetts was the Prime Minister's previous health care adviser at No. 10 Downing street. About a year ago, he was reported in the press as having asked a senior civil servant what he would do with the Health Service if he were a Minister. The reply was interesting:

> "I'd either leave it entirely alone because it's too politically dangerous. Or I'd de-stabilise it and see what happened."

I believe that the Government have chosen a policy of destabilisation to pave the way for a different form of health care—the direct result of the National Health Service and Community Care Bill passed by this House a couple of weeks ago.

It is important to examine the destabilisation process. I believe that the Government have deliberately provoked industrial disputes in the National Health Service so that they can say to the public, "We have to do something about the National Health Service." The dispute with the nurses dragged on for far longer than it should have done; indeed, many nurses are still dissatisfied with the outcome of their grading appeals. More recently, there was the ambulance dispute—and one cannot but conclude that that dispute was inflamed by comments made by the Secretary of State for Health on a number of occasions.

Without doubt, the Government have deliberately underfunded the Health Service although, as I said, they had the resources available to do things that previous Governments could not. Year after year, we have shortfalls in the funding available to the NHS.

Figures provided by the National Association of Health Authorities indicate that there has been a shortfall every year since 1982-83. The figures are as follows: 1982-83, £67 million; 1983-84, £209 million; 1984-85, £334 million; 1985-86, £495 million; 1986-87, £550 million; 1987-88, £429 million; 1988-89, £472 million; 1989-90, £490 million. In addition, the capital improvement works needed to deal with the crumbling infrastructure of the Health Service will take £1·8 billion. Why have the Government done so little with all the money that has been available to them over this period? They have failed completely to estimate the huge increase in the costs of the National Health Service. The cost of equipment, for instance, has increased well beyond the rate of inflation.

The Government have also failed to anticipate the huge increase in demand for services, much of which arises directly from their own social and economic policies. One thinks of the mass unemployment and poverty that have occurred under the present Government. I could reel off statistics from one research document after another, indicating the clear connection between the increased incidence of ill health and increased unemployment and poverty. The connection must be obvious to anyone, whatever their politics. Obviously the Government have underestimated it. They have also underestimated demographic changes, especially in terms of the number of elderly people and the increased expectations of better health care that people rightly have.

The Government have attempted to foster the idea that we can no longer afford a National Health Service and that we have to go back to the situation which prevailed in the last century and in the early days of this century. My parents have told me about that. I have heard about the appalling ways in which people had to scratch around to raise money for hospital beds. Nowadays there seems to be an increasing notion that health care can be improved only by raising money charitably. Recently I had a discussion with a lady who is involved in the hospice movement in Wakefield. On her arrival in Wakefield from elsewhere, she said that she was amazed at the number of charitable ventures by which money was being raised for health care—for basic facilities which ought to be provided within the National Health Service. That situation is giving rise to great concern, yet I believe that the Government, through their policies, are actively encouraging it.

We must also consider the implications of the Health and Medicines Act 1988. I had the questionable honour of serving on the Standing Committee which considered the Bill and I recall the efforts that were made to defeat proposals which we felt would be detrimental to the Health Service. At local level we now have commercial managers coming up with all sorts of bizarre ways of raising money. The Under-Secretary of State is aware of some of the problems in Wakefield. He will know that the health authority there has proposed that patients who do not turn up at clinics should be fined. What a way to encourage people to take preventive measures. People are not to be asked why they did not attend but simply fined for non-attendance.

The Minister is aware of the classic case in Wakefield. I refer to the introduction of a charge for measuring bodies before removal from the hospital mortuary—at £5 a throw. The district general manager, in defence of the charge, asked why a public body like the NHS should subsidise private industry such as undertakers. Clearly, that official failed to understand that the charge is being passed directly to the bereaved families.

Another matter which is causing great concern and anger in Wakefield is the fact that Wakefield health authority is about to introduce car parking charges for people going to hospital. People who go for treatment will be charged for parking their car and people visiting their loved ones will also have to pay for the privilege. That is appalling. My concern is that if the Government remain in power much longer, the next stage in the process will be that a person will have to pay to park his or her body in a bed.

We should consider the implications of the introduction of charges within the NHS because that process is part and parcel of the creation of a different climate and a different attitude towards health care. Under the Government there has been a massive increase in prescription charges from 20p to £3, without any commitment being stated in their manifesto, and charges for dental and eye checks have been introduced. The Under-Secretary of State will be aware of the huge drop in attendance for preventive checks at dentists and opticians and the appalling consequences that that will have for the nation's health in due course.

It is important that we understand why the Government have acted as they have. They did not need the money—they needed to introduce the idea that people will have to pay for health care. That is the important point to understand. We are moving towards a different form of health care in Britain. The Government are seeking to transform the public perception of health care, putting it on a more commercial basis. They are creating a crisis to make people believe that there is a need for the damaging reforms that they are introducing.

The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones), whose constituency I had the pleasure to visit last week, and my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall have said that certain services are being slashed right, left and centre, but alongside those cuts we are seeing the introduction of financial incentives for health authorities to opt out and form self-governing trusts. In a recent paper, the district general manager of the Wakefield health authority proposed that Wakefield health authority should opt out all its services, not just hospital services, but community services as well. He said:

> "It is already apparent that units identified for self-governance are receiving preferential funding to strengthen their skills, resources and market advantage."

He went on to say:

> "Concern has been expressed that any district not engaging in the new open market culture might become a Cinderella service of the NHS."

The Wakefield health authority has problems. As the Under-Secretary of State is aware, the health authority's treasurer has recently been sacked, for a variety of questionable reasons which I hope to raise on a subsequent occasion in the Chamber. He said, among other things, that nurse staffing levels were dangerously low but that money was being spent—irresponsibly in his view—on the opting-out process. The district general manager says that that is not true, but a consultant agrees that nurse staffing levels are dangerously low. District health authorities are being bribed to opt out in order to obtain the money that they need to provide a basic health service, and that is worrying.

I conclude by restating the point that underfunding needs to be seen in the wider context of the Conservative view of the NHS, which is one of hostility to state health care. The Conservatives oppose the forms of collective provision which we have had since 1946 and which are the envy of the world. They believe that only things which are bought and sold are valued.

The Government have completely misread the view of the British people on the issue and the extent to which the British people deeply believe in the Socialist principles of the NHS. The National Health Service is the main reason above all the other reasons why the Government will very shortly—but not before time—be swept from power.

10.24 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): There has been an element of deja vu in these proceedings for those hon. Members who sat in the Chamber for the National Health Service and Community Care Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) made a compassionate and passionate speech. My hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) has brought his deep knowledge of Health Service issues to this debate as he has done to many other such debates. The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) has told us of the cuts occurring in the Health Service in Wales.

That element of deja vu will be repeated when the Under-Secretary gets up to speak. He will tell us the usual story, as all Ministers do, but especially this one. I do not wish to be unkind, as he seems to be a decent person who is trying to defend an indecent set of policies, but he is an identikit Conservative Minister who has to come forward to read the standard brief provided by No. 10 Downing street, telling Opposition Members that more money has been spent on the Health Service by the Government.

Someone suggested to me that the Under-Secretary seems to have been knitted by the Prime Minister on one of her days off because he is so similar to so many other Ministers in other Departments. He was the best of the Ministers who came before us in Committee. The Secretary of State was hardly ever present. He was spending his time battering the ambulance men. The Minister for Health was not present. She came to the Committee occasionally and disappeared halfway through discussions on vital clauses. At least the Under-Secretary was present and had some understanding of what was going on.

The Under-Secretary kept telling us that more money was being spent under this Government on the Health Service than under any other Government. I have news for him. Recently in Leicestershire the health authority announced the largest number of cuts ever announced by the health authority—a total of £30 million—as a result of this Government's policies. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey) on initiating this debate. When the Under-Secretary replies to the debate, I would like him to tell us what the Leicestershire health authority is going to do now it has frozen those plans.

The royal infirmary, the flagship of Leicestershire health authority, whose employees were praised by the Prime Minister and hon. Members on both sides of the House after the terrible aeroplane crash at Kegworth, is going to freeze millions of pounds which should have been part of its spending plan. Two million pounds is to be frozen in spending on the new infectious disease unit; £300,000 on urgent repairs to the operating theatre floors; £300,000 on facilities for elderly patients; £200,000 on the conversion of adult wards to provide a large children's ward; £330,000 on the entrance to phase 4 of the new developments at the infirmary; £270,000 on storage facilities for records; £168,000 on the replacement of radiotherapy equipment; £660,000 on the upgrading of training facilities; £1,270,000 on the relocation of the medical, ear, nose and throat out-patients departments; £540,000 on upgrading the gastro-intestinal unit.

[Mr. Keith Vaz]

At the Leicester general hospital, £645,000 of the ward rationalisation programme will be frozen and £500,000 of the spending on the planned new pharmacy unit. Those cuts will affect the people of Leicestershire and my constituents. They total £30 million.

One of the features of Leicestershire is the way in which hon. Members from both sides of the House frequently meet the chairman and members of the health authorities. The Minister will encounter a good deal of difficulty when he hears the representations of Leicestershire Members. I should like to know how he can justify £30 million of cuts in the amount allocated to Leicestershire.

Why was it necessary for the health authority to make those cuts? The answer is quite simple. The outgoing chairman of the authority, George Farnham—a former Conservative councillor, and once chairman of Conservative-controlled Leicestershire county council—firmly believed that the reason was Government policy. He said that he had pressed Ministers and other Members of Parliament for years about Leicestershire's growing financial difficulties, but that his appeals had fallen on deaf ears.

Let us note what the experts are saying. Mr. Roger Austin, a consultant orthopaedic surgeon at the general hospital, is quite clear where the blame lies: he has pointed out that surgeons in the hospital are more than willing to conduct hip replacement operations, but cannot do so because so many beds have been taken out of use and so many theatres are lying idle. According to Mr. Austin, the surgeons themselves have had to fight off possible closures of the orthopaedic ward in the past year.

I am sure that my next example will ring a bell with the Minister, as I raised it with him just after my Adjournment debate a year ago, when we discussed the occupational therapy service and the need to provide more resources to encourage more people to be part of it. I described to him then the problems faced by the general hospital's renal unit. I told him that the new unit had been established 18 months before—at a cost of some millions to the Health Service in Leicestershire—and that there were not enough funds to open all the beds.

I am pleased to say that the bed problem has now been solved: there are enough beds for patients. Because the renal unit has been so successful, however, it has now run out of money, and Trent region has told the Leicestershire health authority that it is no longer prepared to provide any extra resources.

Professor Bell—head of the renal unit, and a respected person in the Leicestershire NHS—had this to say:

> "Somebody has to tell the patients they cannot be treated. They will have to go away and die somewhere. I won't tell them".

Those are the words of a senior Health Service figure who is not given to making outlandish statements. He also said that, unless he is provided with the resources necessary to run his unit effectively, people will have to die because they will not be able to obtain the treatment that they so desperately need.

We are very proud of the general hospital's renal unit: we are proud that it is regarded as a sub-regional unit, and that the staff who currently work there are respected for what they do. If the funds are not available, however, they cannot carry out that work efficiently and effectively. I urge the Minister to give us an assurance that he will go back to the regional health authority and demand that it provide the necessary resources.

The human suffering that people are having to undergo was demonstrated to me at my surgery last Saturday. There—in my office in Uppingham road—I met a man called Mr. George Brown. He is no relation to the George Brown who used to be a Member of Parliament; I asked him, and he confirmed that they were in no way related. Mr. Brown is in his 70s, and had difficulty in communicating with me: he is hard of hearing, and has no hearing aid. Mr. Brown has been told that he will have to wait for six months before his hearing aid is fitted, because of the delays at the royal infirmary. I asked the infirmary to provide me with the current waiting list. In December 1989, 684 people were on the waiting list for hearing aids. The vast majority are elderly people, like Mr. Brown.

Mr. Brown suffers because he cannot lead an ordinary life. He cannot listen to the radio or television because he cannot hear what is said. He cannot go out on his own in Leicester, because he cannot hear traffic when he tries to cross the road. He cannot communicate with his Member of Parliament except through a third party, because he cannot hear what I have to say to him. That is human suffering, the face behind the statistics.

I pay tribute to the general manager of the royal infirmary, Mr. Paul Barker. I know that he is doing his best and that the infirmary has tried to cut the waiting list. However, it says that it does not have the funds to pay clinical and laboratory assistants the kind of salaries they need in order to staff the unit effectively. No money is available to pay them overtime to clear the waiting list. Therefore, Mr. Brown, and thousands of other people like him throughout the country, have to lead unnatural lives. One of them said to me a few weeks ago that he confidently expected that he would be dead before the hearing aid arrived. Then, of course, it will be too late.

I echo what my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) said about the Health and Medicines Act 1988. The information officer of the Leicestershire branch of the Association of Optometrists published a report last week that was widely publicised in the local press. It suggested that the number of people who had had eye examinations was 30 per cent. lower than before the introduction of charges. He said:

> "The importance of proper eye care has been reduced by the way the Government has behaved."

He is clear about where the blame lies.

A new campaign has been started by a consultant paediatrician at the Leicester royal infirmary. Dr. Una MacFadzean would like the Department of Health and the Department of Transport to work together in order to provide concessionary fares for parents when visiting their sick children in hospital or when they accompany their children to out-patients departments. She feels that, because of the social fund and community care grant changes, parents are having to pay enormous sums of money to be with their children. She says that parents ought to be encouraged to be with their children when they are in hospital, because it helps them to get well soon.

I urge the Minister to take heed of that campaign, but I know exactly what he is going to say: that the Government have provided more money for health care than any other Government in history. However, I do not want a jumble sale Health Service in Britain. I do not want people to have to give money to jumble sales to support the Health Service.

When I visited America last year, I went to some hospitals there. I saw the future of the National Health Service in Britain when I was there, and I did not like what I saw. People in America have to pay for medical services.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Vaz: The hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) shakes her head, but in a casualty ward in an American hospital, I saw a person who wanted treatment turned away because he did not have a private medical insurance card.

For the next two and a half years, before the return of the next Labour Government, the Opposition will continue to press the Government for improved health care. We demand for the people of Britain a service that is free at the point of need and available to all. If the Minister will direct his comments to the matters that we have raised, I hope that we shall be able to return to our constituencies with some reassurance. Somehow, I believe that, when he speaks, we shall yet again be bitterly disappointed.

10.40 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): I join my hon. Friends in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey) on her good fortune in gaining a place in the ballot, on her good judgment in choosing this subject for debate, and on her splendid presentation of her case. Her presence is a reminder—today of all days, when my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mrs. Heal) took her seat for the first time—of the number of excellent women who are joining the ranks of the parliamentary Labour party and who will be doing so in greater numbers at the next general election.

This debate, like many we have had in recent times, including the Committee stage of the National Health Service and Community Care Bill, as my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) reminded us, is mainly about the problem of underfunding. My hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall dealt with the issues at West Lambeth. My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) pointed out that, in addition to the problems of underfunding, there are industrial disputes, one of which—to which I shall refer later—is going on in my constituency, involving the Greater Glasgow health board. The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones), in describing the problems in Gwynedd, said that in Wales, as in the rest of the country, the problems of underfunding will not go away, however glossy the Government make their presentations and however persuasive the Minister tries to be tonight.

Hon. Members have the opportunity to find out precisely what is going on. We speak to our friends and constituents, and I begin by referring to some comments that were made to me today by two of my friends. My constituent, Janette Watson, a staff nurse from the mining village of Waterside in Strathkelvin, has worked for the Greater Glasgow health board for 24 years. She, in common with many of her colleagues, is now in dispute with the board.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy), who was present for much of the debate, would agree that it is one of the most dictatorial boards in Britain. Its attitude to this dispute—I regret that the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, is not in his place—is an indication of that dictatorial approach to serious problems in the NHS.

What do the decisions of that board mean for Janette Watson? The board has imposed on her a decision which means that, instead of working an average 10 or 11-hour shift, she will work a shift of 9 hours 22½ minutes. This woman, who has given virtually a lifetime's service to the NHS in Greater Glasgow, will lose £450 a year. There are many equally unacceptable cases, all arising from the problem of underfunding.

Another friend with whom I talked today is Andrew MacKinlay, the prospective parliamentary Labour candidate for Thurrock. He showed me a document headed "Private and confidential"—it is not meant to be available to the public, including the taxpayers who pay for the NHS in that important area—which is to be discussed by his health authority on Thursday of this week. Some plans make even my hair stand on end, yet they are being seriously considered, not because they will lead to greater efficiency or because the Health Service in that district will be better served but because the people who will consider that secret document on Thursday are compelled to think about the problems of underfunding which have dominated this debate.

What are some of the options that will be considered by that authority on Thursday? The closure of the accident and emergency unit at Orsett hospital will mean that people will have to travel a considerable distance to Basildon. We are told that, for 80 per cent. of those patients, the maximum travelling time to an accident and emergency unit will be 20 minutes and for the rest it will be 30 minutes. We are told in this secret and confidential document that the average travelling time by car to the accident and emergency unit will rise from 10 minutes to 14 minutes. Perhaps most staggering of all is the prediction that, if the report is approved on Thursday:

> "It is further estimated that the total number of new patient attendances in the District would decrease by 21 per cent. on closure of Orsett Hospital A & E department."

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): It seems that the Greater Glasgow health board is imitating some of the actions of the Lanarkshire health board. The same trick has been carried out at Stonehouse general hospital in my constituency. Two years ago, the board cut away the accident and emergency service. If someone has a heart attack now in Stonehouse, instead of it taking five minutes to reach a general hospital with an accident and emergency service, it takes half an hour to reach the next general hospital in my constituency, which is Law hospital. Such incidents are not happening only in Glasgow; it seems to be a tactic in Scotland which, as my hon. Friend rightly says, is deeply worrying.

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is staggering that any health authority, as a result of underfunding, is taking a deliberate decision which will mean that it will take longer for people to arrive at the accident and emergency unit.

All of this, including the problems that my hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood) mentioned—and I was delighted to be in his constituency on Sunday evening and to know how well his constituents think of him—is caused by underfunding, by the shortfall that has been identified in virtually every authority in the country and by the simple fact that the proportion of national wealth devoted to health under this Government is far less than the proportion that would be expected and endorsed by the British people.

The consequences of that underfunding are clearly profound. Patients, staff and communities are concerned about what is happening to the Health Service as we understand it. The Minister will, of course, tell the House that, since 1979, expenditure on the NHS has increased —and no one has ever denied that. In the light of demography, inflation and other factors, it would be astonishing if that were not so. However, even with that increase, the Government, including in this financial year, have failed to take into account a number of important factors, including inflation. The 5 per cent. figure included in the current figures is clearly nowhere near the target that authorities must realistically face.

Moreover, the cash resources, limited as they are, are unevenly spread within the regions and from one part of the country to another. My hon. Friends have identified the problems and we know that there is a challenge to the hospital and community health services, on the one hand, and to the family practitioner services, on the other. The challenges are not being met by the fiscal and economic priorities that the Government have offered to those who take decisions.

The fact is that real growth is necessary in the NHS in order to stand still, and nobody wants an NHS that simply stands still. We want to respond to the problems of the increasing number of elderly people, the new developments in technology and the need to implement central Government.

My hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall referred to community care. I do not know how serious the Government are being about the objectives that they set themselves in their White Paper, but I do know that my hon. Friend is absolutely right when she identifies yet again a decision on capital expenditure that is not met by revenue expenditure so as to make a reality of the original commitment.

On inflation alone, apart from the other factors that authorities have to deal with, there is a shortfall in England and Wales amounting to £140 million. Therefore, it is not surprising that the National Association of Health Authorities calculates that the shortfall between needs and income for this financial year, 1989-90, is £490 million. There is a very big difference betwen the £67 million in 1982, the year in which I came to the House, and the £490 million shortfall which that distinguished organisation identifies now.

In a reply recently to my hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman) we learned that the backlog of maintenance and repairs was over £1·8 billion. This issue is very important in almost all our constituencies, as I saw recently when the Woodilee hospital in my own constituency, a hospital for geriatric patients, including some psycho-geriatric patients, literally fell apart and patients had to be removed to other hospitals in Greater Glasgow, some of them in the middle of the night. The outstanding amount of £1·8 billion for repairs and maintenance is a reality which authorities have to face and which the Government clearly have to take on board.

Investment has fallen as a proportion of national wealth in terms of our commitment as a nation to the future of the NHS. When the Minister, in replying to the debate, refers to Government investment, perhaps he will bear in mind comparisons which the British people will find unacceptable. Britain compares badly with other developed countries in terms of gross national product spent on health care. Between 1977 and 1987, Italy's GNP contributed 19 per cent., France's 14 per cent., the United States' 25 per cent., Belgium's 19 per cent. and the United Kingdom's 12 per cent.

When we consider our commitment and the need for investment in the Health Service, it is reasonable that we should look elsewhere to see what other countries are doing, and we find very little comfort indeed. In 1987, Britain devoted 5·8 per cent. of GNP to health. This compared very unfavourably with the United States at 11·1 per cent., Sweden at 8·9 per cent., Belgium at 7 per cent., Canada at 8·3 per cent. and West Germany at 9 per cent.

Because of the lack of investment, because the Government have in no way managed to keep up with the demands of inflation, because authorities have to take on board the real levels of wage settlements and the demands of increasing drugs bills—and I find it very surprising that we hear so little about that—there are many problems, which my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall has been right to draw to our attention.

I will refer briefly to only three articles, all in newspapers of different political complexions. The *Daily Mirror* had this to say on 30 January:

> "Heart patient Fred Brinkman lay in hospital for five weeks while health bosses squabbled over his bill. Doctors agreed that 62 year old Fred needs a life-saving operation. But two hard up health authorities couldn't agree as to which one of them should pay for his treatment".

If the *Daily Mirror* is unattractive to Conservative Members, let me quote *The Daily Telegraph* of 22 February:

> "A coroner called for an urgent review of intensive care facilities throughout Britain yesterday after a woman died when no bed could be found for her at 20 hospitals."

On 22 February *The Guardian* reported:

> "A health authority"—

Hounslow and Spelthorne—

> "facing budget problems is to move elderly mentally ill patients into hospital buildings categorised three years ago as 'fit only for demolition'."

The National Health Service as presented by the Government certainly is not fit for the approval of the House or of the people. It was therefore right that my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall should have introduced the debate as she did. She did a great service not only to the House but to patients in Great Britain, to those who are committed to the Health Service and to those who work for it. It is on their behalf that I endorse my hon. Friend's remarks and look forward with anticipation but not with much confidence to the Minister giving a response worthy of the problems which have been brought to the Floor of the House.

10.55 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Roger Freeman): We have had a very interesting debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey) who concentrated, as Opposition Members have said, on the underfunding of the Health Service. I have to say to the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), who somewhat taunted me, that the text has not been written at 10 Downing street—it is entirely mine, and the comments are entirely my own beliefs, representing my colleagues in the Department of Health. I take seriously the points made and I shall attempt to provide serious answers. I shall not give a long catalogue of achievements over the last 10 years. The hon. Gentleman has heard that before. I want to treat the comments made with greater seriousness.

Mr. Hood *rose*——

Mr. Freeman: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall not give way as I have only 13 minutes in which to reply.

I shall pass the comments of the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) to my colleagues at the Welsh Office. Perhaps he will forgive me if I do not pursue the points that he raised.

The health and community health services are cash-limited. They have been cash-limited for almost 15 years. The process was started by a Labour Government in the late 1970s. I have always assumed that a future Labour Government would continue the process of cash-limiting the hospital service, although not the family practitioner service. Apart from certain elements of that service, we do

[Mr. Freeman]

not cash-limit primary care. We have just announced £360 million for next year for practice staff and cost rent allowances for the family practitioner service, but essentially that service is not cash-limited.

When the hospital service is cash-limited, there is inevitably a clash of finite resources and almost infinite demand because it is a free service. In a service which does not have the sophistication of planning non-emergency services and case loads we do not yet have the ability to forecast as clearly as we should the pressures on the Health Service during the course of a year. We therefore have the problems to which the hon. Lady has referred. They are not entirely due to an inability to predict staff increases, which is certainly the case in the hon. Lady's own health authority, or patient admissions. It is a commentary on our Health Service that we do not have that sophistication at present.

Time prevents my reading out a list of our achievements in the past 10 years, but I will comment briefly that in 1990-91 the Health Service in the United Kingdom will spend some £29,000 million, which is equivalent to £500 per man, woman and child. It is an interesting comparison as the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) was referring to the proportion of GDP, which is a relevant measure. Nevertheless, in real-terms—that is, at current prices—the money that was spent in 1978-79 was £338 per head, and it is now £500. Measured in terms of the retail price deflator, after allowing for general inflation, there has been a 45 per cent. increase in Health Service expenditure over the 10-year period. We now have a budget larger than that for defence.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Monklands, West will agree that because we are dealing with such a large chunk of public expenditure—12 per cent. now goes to the NHS—it is not possible to plan other than by way of cash limits. The hon. Gentleman cannot seriously suggest volume planning and indexing the cost of health care during the course of a year if inflationary pressures rise. I am sure that he is not suggesting that, as it is clearly impractical in terms of managing public expenditure.

The hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) thought that there was some sinister plan behind the White Paper and the National Health Service and Community Care Bill. He referred to deliberate underfunding and to destabilisation and said that Conservatives believe that only things that are bought and sold are valuable. I entirely dissociate myself from all those value judgments, as do my hon. Friends on the Back Benches. The hon. Gentleman also talked about the "Socialist principles" of the NHS. I hope that we have a bipartisan approach to the NHS. The Conservative, Labour and minor parties all have a common shared heritage in the NHS, of which we are all proud, and the Conservative Government are determined to ensure that both the quality and the quantity of its care improve.

Opposition Members have talked for an hour and a quarter about underfunding in the Health Service and I have stated the record to date. Not one Opposition Member—certainly not the hon. Member for Monklands, West—has said anything about the scale of real terms increases in expenditure that a Labour Government would introduce. I honestly believe that one advantage of our democratic system of government, in which the party in government periodically changes—*[Interruption.]* I do not deny the history of the past 100 years and I am not making any forecasts about the future, but one advantage of our democratic system of government is that it provides a cold douche of reality for Opposition parties when they realise that they have to deal with real resources. As I have said, I have listened to one hour and 15 minutes of speeches about underfunding without hearing any view from Opposition Members about the level of resources that they feel are needed. I shall be happy to give way to the hon. Member for Monklands, West if he would care to enlighten the House about the increase in expenditure that he is recommending. Obviously, the hon. Gentleman is unable to comment. Indeed, that was the attitude of the Opposition during the passage of the National Health Service and Community Care Bill.

The House is entitled to know the level of increase in funding that the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) is recommending. The hon. Gentleman is quoted as saying that an extra £3,000 million is required immediately for the Health Service. I hope that I have quoted him correctly. I also hope that the hon. Member for Livingston will tell the House, at some appropriate time, what additional expenditure he envisages and where that money will come from.

Mr. Tom Clarke: The Minister began his speech by refusing to give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Clydesdale (Mr. Hood), saying that he had only 13 minutes in which to reply to the debate, but he has since steadfastly refused to reply to the points made in it. I refer the Minister to the Budget debates last week, in which his questions were answered time and again. Will he now answer our questions and tell us why the NHS has been so disgracefully treated by this Government who, unlike the last Labour Government, have had more than one spoonful of oil? What are they doing with the oil revenues? Why are they not investing some of it in the NHS?

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman will know that the shadow Chief Secretary has studiously refused to commit a future Labour Government to any increase in National Health Service spending. A commitment has been made only to increasing child benefit—part of the social security budget. I am not aware of any other commitments that have been made.

In addition to the 8·5 per cent. cash increase for the hospital and community health service next year, it is fair to include the value of cost improvement programmes at £150 million and income generation at £25 million. Both have an important role to play.

Miss Hoey: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Freeman: If the hon. Lady will forgive me for a second, I shall certainly give way before I conclude. I am trying to answer the points raised in the debate.

The one specific comment about the Health Service in the Labour party's manifesto is that a Labour Government would eliminate compulsory competitive tendering. That would remove a contribution of the order of £100 million per annum. I admit that the consequences of inflation this year and next year for the Health Service are significant. The assumption of 5 per cent. inflation for the year 1991, which applies to the health authority of the hon. Member for Vauxhall, looks unrealistic. Therefore, it is not surprising that the 14 English regional health authorities are advising the districts to plan for about 6·5 per cent. That is not the full retail prices index forecast for next year because health authorities do not pay mortgage interest rates and several other ingredients of the RPI do not apply to them. Nevertheless, there is pressure on them. The year 1990-91 will be difficult for many district health authorities simply because the additional cash provision now looks less generous than it was at the time of the public expenditure survey last year. That is even more reason why it is important to control inflation next year. It is important for a cash-limited service that the Chancellor should succeed.

I understand the points that the hon. Member for Vauxhall made about her health authority and I shall reflect them to the regional chairman. We have suffered a reduction in capital expenditure plans for the coming year largely because sales receipts from surplus land are substantially down. I hope that that is cyclical and will be reversed. I hope that plans that have had to be postponed or dropped in the constituencies of Vauxhall, Leicester, East and others will be reinstated when sales receipts begin to pick up again.

I hope, too, that one of the principal advantages of capital charges will be that they will tip the balance at the margin towards proper maintenance of buildings, rather than the provision of new buildings, much as we would like to see that.

The hon. Member for Vauxhall spoke of the pressure on the Thames regions and on her district health authority. Over the next five years or so the four Thames regions will have to move resources relatively out of inner London and towards the shire districts. That is reflected in the figures on expenditure in relation to the resources allocation working group targets. Even by the measure of weighted capitation, which is the basis for allocation of funds in the future, regions must engineer a relative shift of resources out of London simply because patients have moved out of London. However, I agree with the hon. Lady, and I can provide her with some comfort on this, that when the regions allocate resources to the inner London districts, we expect and understand that they take social deprivation into account. That is a legitimate factor for the regions to take into account. It influences the cost and nature of health provision.

We hope that, through our White Paper reforms, better financial management and planning will avoid some of the problems in her district health authority that the hon. Lady cited. That will be done, for example, through the resource management initiative and the initiatives in the White Paper on contracting. Therefore, the hon. Member for Leicester, East should note that the renal unit of Leicester royal infirmary will not run out of cash if patient flow continues. The hon. Gentleman should welcome our proposals as they will enable money to follow patients. Hospitals will not fall into the efficiency trap, which catches so many, whereby if the consultant runs out of money activity has to stop.

I join the hon. Members for Monklands, West and for Vauxhall in paying tribute to the NHS managers for a change. They have a difficult task——

Mr. Tom Clarke: The Minister has not answered the debate.

Mr. Freeman: I have.

Those managers have a difficult task in balancing finite resources with almost infinite demand. Although there are exceptions, they do a good job and the House should stand by them and congratulate them.

Regional Policy (Yorkshire)

11.10 pm

Sir Marcus Fox (Shipley): It is extremely encouraging at this time of night to see so many colleagues, on both sides of the House, in the Chamber bearing in mind that the television cameras are not operating. I therefore assume that the effect of regional policy on our county is of supreme importance to all of us.

First, I must declare an interest—to be safe I should do so—as I am a director of two companies that employ a few thousand people around the United Kingdom. They also employ a couple of thousand people in the Bradford area. My directorship gives me a greater ability, if I dare to say that, to speak about employment. I believe that regional policy is specifically aimed in that direction.

I do not seek to ignore high interest rates, which are so damaging to our economy. I do not want them to remain high for a day or hour longer than is necessary. However, I support the principle that to squeeze inflation out of our economy means that such high interest rates are necessary, especially if we are to return to the level of growth that has become natural under this Government. I emphasise "under this Government" as the level of growth that has been achieved in the past 11 years, and particularly in the past six years, has been far in excess of anything achieved previously.

In spite of high interest rates, the economy in my area is buoyant, and profitability has ensured that. In the past few years profitability has acted as the cushion against high interest rates. I have no doubt that other colleagues will confirm that that is so in their part of the county.

It is the luck of the draw that I have the opportunity to open the debate. I do not want to speak too long as that would deny other hon. Members the chance to participate. I want to refer to my area of Shipley and the Bradford and metropolitan district. I pay tribute to the Conservative-controlled council in Bradford, which has transformed our city since it took over. I do not want to talk about the community charge—I have already said quite enough about that—except to say that I do not accept it as it is. It is the equivalent of tablets of stone set in concrete, but there will be other occasions on which to discuss it.

The city of Bradford is the fifth largest metropolitan district in the United Kingdom and the seventh largest city. We tend to forget that. During the 1980s an increasingly large work force was drawn into the city, existing companies have expanded and many new firms have been established. Many national companies are also located in the city. I get tired of people looking at Bradford and speaking in terms of its decline. That was true in the past, but it is certainly not the case today. When one thinks of Grattan, Morrisons, Fine Art Development and the many textile and printing companies which are national names, the names speak for themselves. *[Interruption.]* I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Mr. Thompson) is listening, not writing.

Mr. Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): I am writing down what my hon. Friend says.

Sir Marcus Fox: If I had to select one company that epitomised what can be done, it would be a company called Spring Ram. My hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley got the Prime Minister to open the first factory in November 1979. I believe that there was no roof on it then. It manufactured baths. Two men, with considerable borrowings, moved into the area. Today, they own 11 companies, four of which make baths and sanitary ware. A third of all the baths made in the United Kingdom come from that company. It is the brand leader in the kitchen market and controls 15 per cent. of the ceramic market. It has 40 per cent. of the United Kingdom market in non-metal sinks and 25 per cent. world wide. Guess where it does its manufacturing? Thanks to regional policy, it is done in Bradford, Barnsley and Scunthorpe.

Out of 1 million companies in the United Kingdom and 100,000 quoted companies, Spring Ram is the most profitable company in Britain. It started in 1979 and its year-on-year profits have been 74 per cent. a year. It has not borrowed for five years, has £15 million in the bank, is doubling the size of its work force to 3,000 and spending £85 million in the coming year. Therefore, when people talk about the decline of manufacturing industry, they should look around and see what is happening. The numbers employed do not necessarily have anything to do with the output or profitability.

We used to call our area the West Riding of Yorkshire. What a tragedy that we do not still live in the West Riding or the East Riding or the North Riding. I am well aware under which Government those changes took place, but I still criticise them. The small, family businesses are still crucial. The cult of being one's own boss has particular attractions for many of our countrymen.

I was delighted that there was in the Budget particular appeal for savers. Many tax concessions were made to individuals, and not before time. There were tax-free arrangements for those who save and the composite rate of tax, as I think it is called—composite motions are something about which Opposition Members know—was highway robbery. It allows building societies and banks to deduct tax from interest, whether or not one is liable to it.

The threshold at which small companies have to pay a reduced level of tax has been lifted from £150,000 to £200,000. The limit for the 35 per cent. rate has been raised from £750,000 to £1 million, and the cost of financing has been made easier. We all have stories to tell about VAT. For far too long small companies have lost VAT that has been paid, even when they have been unable to collect it from their customers. I welcome the legislative changes on VAT. I am also delighted that VAT registration has been made simpler.

Both I and my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) are concerned about transport problems in the Aire valley. Life is being made impossible by the failure to complete sections three and four of the Airedale trunk road. Section three, through Bingley—the Bingley bypass—is awaiting the inspector's report. At present, traffic in Shipley is at enormously high levels. When the Bingley section is completed, the position will be horrendous.

Hence the need to bring forward a preferred route for the final section—section four. There is no reason why the consultation or inquiry could not be commenced immediately. I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins), who has ministerial responsibility for the matter as the Minister for Roads and Traffic, is on the Government Front Bench this evening although he is not to reply to the debate. I have spoken to him about the matter on one or two occasions. I tell him, without detracting from my hon. Friend the Minister of State who is to reply, that it is my belief that there is a solution to the section four difficulty. For 20 years there has been total opposition to a route through the bottom of the valley, but the 47 groups which have aired their objections—I did not give my hon. Friend advance warning of this—have come together in agreement. It would seem that they wish to get something done. If there is consensus, I believe that we can move forward. That is possible if the opposing groups have buried the hatchet.

At the recent inquiry on section three, I understand that the Department of Transport announced that a cost-benefit analysis on revised traffic flows showed that a dual tunnel would have positive results. It would be a solution to the bottleneck in the bottom of the valley, and our environment demands it.

The improvement to roads is, however, only one solution. The growth of traffic in the area—some Opposition Members' constituencies suffer from this problem as well—means that there is a need for rail links as well. Traffic figures tell us that there is scope to take passenger traffic off the roads on to rail. I have read what my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley said in a recent debate on electrification. I was one of several hon. Members who were present yesterday at an instructive meeting with the passenger transport authority, the city council, the chamber of commerce and perhaps a representative from British Rail, which I know is with us on the issue. We all look forward to Bradford being linked into an electrification of the rail system. It would be of great advantage to the area.

Finally, I mention the bypass for Burley, which is in my constituency. Over 95 per cent. of the local people have wanted a bypass for years. It has been thwarted by the odd individual, but at long last the proposal is coming to fruition. Perhaps those who live on the main street of Burley will see something happening in the near future.

All of us in the county take pride in what has been achieved in the past. I am sure that what the Government have done has helped to eliminate many of the problems that existed before they took office.

11.23 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) on being fortunate in the ballot and enabling us to debate Yorkshire regional policy this evening. I am sure that all his Yorkshire colleagues on both sides of the House are indebted to him for providing the opportunity for advancing the Yorkshire case. It is rare now that we have the chance to do so. I can remember the days when we used to have Yorkshire debates. It is unfortunate that they are so sparse these days; we seem never to have them.

I do not want to paint a picture of entire gloom and doom in Yorkshire, but I do not want to follow the same path as the hon. Member for Shipley. I assure him that, if he represented Pontefract and Castleford or another mining community in Yorkshire, he would have a different story to tell.

The Budget offered little hope for Yorkshire and Humberside. Families in the region have lost over £67 million in child benefit because the value of the benefit has been frozen since 1987. Only families in receipt of over £275 a week have gained anything substantial from the Tory tax cuts. Yet 72 per cent. of families in Yorkshire and Humberside have weekly incomes below that sum. Many of them will have suffered a loss of income under the Tories. Any growth in income has been concentrated on the rich and those in the south-east. I do not think that many Conservative Members would disagree with that.

Manufacturing investment in Yorkshire and Humberside has grown by 1 per cent. since 1979; in my view, that very nearly amounts to recession. Male unemployment stands at 8·6 per cent. Yet the Budget did nothing for manufacturing investment or for research and development. It also did nothing for the region's training.

The hon. Member for Shipley, understandably, failed to refer to the poll tax. The average family in Yorkshire and Humberside faces a poll tax bill 30 per cent. higher than their previous rates bill. That will create great financial difficulties in Yorkshire.

The holder of the average new mortgage in Yorkshire and Humberside, which is £10,000 less than the national average, is paying £103 more per month as a result of the increases in mortgage interest rates since July 1988—a massive £1,200 a year. The average new mortgage in the area is £29,600, and many such mortgages were taken out at an interest rate of 9·8 per cent. Initially, the owners paid £181·30 a month; they are now paying £284·90 a month. Those are some of the problems that people in Yorkshire and Humberside are experiencing.

The problems in Yorkshire's blackspots—the mining communities—were brought about by the savage rundown of the coal mining industry that has taken place since 1984. I do not want to go into the reasons why some people think that that was necessary. Conservative Members think that it was necessary on economic grounds, and I suppose that some of them would also argue in favour of an alternative fuel supply. To my mind, that is purely and simply dogma. But whatever the reasons, there has been a savage rundown of the industry. In the Wakefield area, 11,000 jobs have been lost in mining alone, and the spin-off has been significant, with about 20,000 jobs lost since the miners' strike, if we include related industries.

I shall return to the matter later, but, until recently, no assistance has been given to attract industries to my constituency to replace the jobs lost in the mining industry.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Oh.

Mr. Lofthouse: The hon. Gentleman says, "Oh." Let me repeat what I said: until recently, there has been no encouragement to industry to come to the area. Year in, year out, we have made representations to different Ministers, some of whom are present. We have visited Ministers, with deputations, to try to influence them and to make the case that the Select Committee on Energy has twice argued in its reports on the coal mining industry and the privatisation of electricity. The Opposed Private Bill Committee on the Associated British Ports Bill said that, if the Government were not ready to prepare the way for alternative employment, the industry should not have been run down so rapidly.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): My hon. Friend has given us details of the number of jobs lost in the mining industry, especially in the Wakefield district. Is he aware that about 2,000 to 3,000 jobs have been lost in other industries—in particular, in mining engineering—in the Wakefield area? Is he aware of the clear implications that that has for Britain's export potential? I have met members of British Jeffrey Diamond and Fletcher Sutcliffe Wild, now Gullick Dobson, both major exporting companies, who complain that, as a direct result of the rundown of the

[Mr. David Hinchliffe]

British coal industry, they have difficulty in demonstrating their machinery to potential exporting countries and thus boosting Britain's export potential.

Mr. Lofthouse: I am certainly aware of the spin-off that has resulted from the rundown of the industry. The companies are in great difficulty and are no longer in a position to manufacture and supply abroad.

Mr. Conal Gregory (York): The hon. Gentleman is not noted for gloom. I do not know where he has been this evening, but clearly the Horlicks that he has imbibed has turned him into a prophet of doom. That cannot be in any way representative of the citizens of Pontefract. He says that there has been no Government help whatsoever for Pontefract. Either he has been sleeping or he is being mischievous. In fact, money has been poured into realising the potential of Pontefract. I mention tourism as an example. Tourism is the fastest-growing industry in Britain. The hon. Gentleman need not, by his demeanour, dismiss that. Let him look to Bradford, which, next to York, is the tourism capital of Yorkshire. The potential is there, and the money is available. If the hon. Gentleman intends to keep knocking Pontefract, when will he resign his seat?

Mr. Lofthouse: First, let me assure the hon. Gentleman that Horlicks is the strongest drink that I touch in this building.

The Castleford travel-to-work area includes Pontefract. As its status has not been changed since 1981, we have received no assistance whatsoever—not one penny. No alternative employment has been provided. The unemployment rate is now shown as about 11 per cent.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): Massaged.

Mr. Lofthouse: As my hon. Friend says, the figure is massaged. Redundant mineworkers are not included, the 11,000 men in my travel-to-work area have been removed.

Mr. Gregory: Get them another job.

Mr. Lofthouse: The hon. Gentleman says, "Get them another job."

Former Conservative Ministers who are in the Chamber tonight know full well that we have been pressing the case for many years, but without result.

I am no prophet of doom. I am simply stating facts. I refer hon. Members to a Coalfields Communities Campaign report that was issued about a week ago. I realise that it is not a Government document, or anything like that, but previous reports from the same source have not been far off the mark. That body forecasts that, by 1995, the number of men in the mining industry will have fallen to 30,000. That suggests that many more pits will close.

Indeed, on 16 March the Coal Board issued a press release preparing the way for this. The redundancy terms are to be made a little more attractive. The Coal Board tells us that the reason for that is that further restructuring is necessary. Why is further restructuring necessary? It is because of the privatisation of electricity. We know that, within the next three years, the demand from the electricity industry will have gone down to 60 million tonnes. That is why there is to be a further rundown in the mining industry. But still there is no sign of Government help for these communities.

I said earlier that we had seen a chink of light. In the first movement that we have seen since 1984, a Japanese company decided to invest in my constituency. That investment will provide 1,200 jobs. I was a member of the deputation that met the Minister for Industry, who is on the Government Front Bench tonight. I was very grateful to him for meeting us. He was very pleasant and very sympathetic, but he could not give us any money. Wakefield, being the solid Yorkshire area that it is, had to look after itself. We persuaded the Japanese to come, but we cannot replace the jobs that we have lost without some Government financial assistance. It is time that the Government recognised that. There have been problems about regional area status. I accept that it is not all doom and gloom in Yorkshire as it is in the areas that I represent, but I can sincerely say that what I say about my area and its mining communities is the truth. It is rather noticeable that the Yorkshire constituencies with big Labour majorities get little help.

The Government took the decision to run down the mining industry—no one else—and they have an obligation to provide employment in those communities. The average age of the present work force in the coal industry is 34 and they will not be cushioned by weekly payments as the men over 50 were after 1984. Those young men have no future. Many of them were encouraged to purchase their council homes, and they were keen to do so. They now face a future with mortgages round their necks, their jobs down the Swanee. They cannot pay their way, and the Government have an obligation to those Yorkshire miners who have never let the country down in its hour of need and never will, despite all the turmoil. The Government should at least give serious consideration to putting Wakefield and the Castleford travel-to-work area into an intermediate area zone as soon as possible. Failing that, they should find some other way.

We are fortunate, with the Government's assistance, to have been included in one of the EEC's regional programmes, objective 2 I think it is called, and the RECHAR scheme. With some Government pressure on the EEC, we hope to see a chink of daylight in the form of financial aid. I hope that the Minister will take note of what I have said and will do all he can to assist us.

11.37 pm

Mr. Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) on being successful in the ballot and gaining such an early debate. It is good to see my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry on the Front Bench. He looks after the northern areas in Yorkshire very well, and my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Patnick) works hard for Yorkshire and for Yorkshire Members on both sides of the House.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): That is daft—he works against Labour Members.

Mr. Thompson: As usual, the hon. Gentleman knows not what he talks about.

On Friday, I shall be welcoming my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside to my constituency. He looks after the development commission which spends a great deal of money in the upper Calder Valley—a prosperous area with 4 per cent. unemployment or less.

Tonight I shall mention four topics which concern all Yorkshire Members—pylons, the canals, the moors and new industry. Various proposals to replace pylons which march across our moors are imminent. The pylons were put in place in the 1950s and 1960s and are ready for replacement. My constituents are anxious that, wherever possible and reasonable, the pylons should no longer march across the moors. The lines should be buried beneath them—for no other reason than that it is sensible and environmentally efficient. Cost-efficiency is one thing, but environmental efficiency is another. The new pylons would be in place for some 40 years, so if we renew the lines, they may as well go underground as they do in towns and cities such as London, Bradford and Brighouse.

I have had sensible discussions with people in the electricity industry and with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy, who has a quasi-ministerial responsibility for this matter, and I know that he has listened to what I have said.

The pylons march across the moors which connect our Yorkshire constituencies. While I am on the subject of moors, I will mention opencast mining. I hope that the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse), who has just made a brief speech, will not intervene—I know that the subject is dear to his heart.

Many of the old coal workings on the moors are becoming viable again as opencast mines, but not solely as opencast mines. Opencast sites can also be used for infill with industrial and other sorts of waste.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): Imported toxic waste.

Mr. Lofthouse: The waste has to go somewhere. The industries of south Yorkshire, north Yorkshire and the west riding produce it. It should not go under the moors, as that would destroy their geology and geography. Waste has been sympathetically disposed of in other parts of my constituency.

Todmorden moor has some derelict coal workings and is a likely subject for opencast mining and the tipping of waste. The local Calderdale council has been lured to tidy up areas of dereliction by planning trade-offs and has been talking to various companies about waste disposal and opencast mining for a long time. The coal will be produced as a by-product. If Calderdale council rejects the plan that it has been discussing for the past two years, will the Minister give special consideration to the areas of outstanding natural beauty in my constituency and in all the Yorkshire constituencies?

Rochdale canal is also in my constituency. There is a blockage at Sowerby Bridge on the canal, which inhibits navigation throughout the region and throughout the United Kingdom. To make a deliberate pun, millions of pounds have been poured into the Rochdale canal by the Government and by the development commission to make it navigable for pleasure boats and other craft. That has led to development alongside the canal by such companies as Tenterfields in my constituency, where two young men have built up a business park using their own money.

If my right hon. Friends at the Department of the Environment can see their way to help Calderdale council with regional aid to eradicate the blockage at Sowerby Bridge, we shall have a feature that people in constituencies throughout Yorkshire can enjoy and use. It will also enhance the tourist potential of the area, which I know is dear to the heart of my hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Gregory).

I heard all that the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford said about new industries. In my constituency the old, traditional industries have reshaped themselves and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley said, the family industries have come through very well. New industries are also starting.

The industry that is now burgeoning and expanding, however, is the much-maligned financial services industry. The Halifax building society, the Pennine insurance company and others are attracting numerous new workers and jobs, and could be said to base their activities on northern thrift. The Halifax wants to create 1,200 new jobs on the edge of my constituency, but the local authority is quibbling about a road scheme which will cost the building society between £2 million and £4 million.

Yorkshire Members often go to see the Minister to ask for money to develop various activities in the area. When a new, expanding industry which will be of crucial importance to the United Kingdom and Europe wishes to place 1,200 jobs in its home base in Yorkshire and the local authority quibbles about mending roads—something that it should have done many years ago—I despair. When once the authority would have been on its knees begging for £2 million to get those jobs to its area, now it is behaving in what I consider to be a most peculiar way.

We have a fine initiative at Lowfield, in my constituency. A large amount of Government money is going into opening up an area of flatland—only about 50 acres, which is not considered much in other parts of the country, but which in my constituency is very valuable —and I thank the Government for that. The development must be carried out sensitively so as to enhance Elland and its environment rather than damning it.

I could say much more, but I will content myself with thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley again for securing the debate.

11.46 pm

Mr. Hardy: I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Calder Valley (Mr. Thompson), not least because he proposed a subterranean activity. I accept that it only involved electric cables, but it is nevertheless reassuring that Conservative Members are worried about what takes place underground. It is about time that that interest developed.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) for stimulating interest in the debate. I noted the elegance with which he declared his interest and talked about employing thousands in our region. Let me point out, however, that many of the thousands in our region are very badly paid, and that one of the problems is low purchasing power. If Conservative Members develop their interests, I hope that as the years unfold they will be able to increase the wages that they pay to the employees in their various companies.

Starting a small business is difficult. There are exceptions—some have managed to achieve despite all the difficulties, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out—but having less than average purchasing power makes it more difficult for small firms to succeed in our region than in better-off areas.

Mr. Cryer: Would not that purchasing power have been enhanced if the Regional Development Grants (Termination) Bill, which cut out regional development grant aid to such areas as Yorkshire and Humberside, had not been given its Second Reading on 25 January 1988? Does that not make Conservative Members' comments sound rather hollow, especially when we know that they all voted to cut such aid by supporting the Bill?

Mr. Hardy: My hon. Friend has anticipated my next point. Conservative Members, who certainly have an interest in the region, did not serve that interest effectively when they supported the Government's various steps to reduce dramatically the value of the regional and selective assistance that was in place before they took office in 1979.

Fifteen years ago—the Minister cannot contradict this, nor, I think, can his hon. Friends—the Department of Trade and Industry took the view that Yorkshire's problems would be resolved within our own county. The economic problems that we faced then were much less severe. Many of us felt that the internal generation of investment and wealth would help us largely, if not entirely, to succeed. Unfortunately, the need now is much more acute than we could possibly have envisaged 10 or 15 years ago.

I do not have time to list all the problems that we face. Three quarters of Yorkshire's population are worse off today than they were in 1979. Owner-occupiers are paying, on average, £100 a month more in mortgage interest. Conservative Members have had the audacity to suggest that they are saving money. The vast majority of people in Yorkshire cannot afford to save £1,800 a year under the TESSA scheme, or to invest in personal equity plans. Yorkshire is well down the road towards impoverishment as a result of this Government's policies.

The metropolitan borough of Rotherham has received inquiries about industrial development. All of them during the last two years have been for green field, green belt sites. My constituents, and those in neighbouring constituencies, are desperately concerned about green belt development. The local authority is in real difficulty. It needs to attract investment in order to create jobs, but the only inquiries of any consequence throughout that period have been for green belt sites.

Largely due to the excessive number of colliery closures, there are thousands of acres of derelict land in the borough. All that Conservative Members are interested in is getting rid of them quickly. Our concern is to make that derelict land decent again. Unfortunately, the allocation of money for the clearance of dereliction is absolutely disgraceful. The main scheme in Yorkshire is in Rotherham, but there ought to be 10 or 20 schemes every year on that scale. While 1,000 acres in the Dearne valley remain derelict, there is no cause for congratulation. That is not the only area of dereliction in the county. The increase in dereliction during the past five years has been of criminal proportions.

I hope that I do the hon. Member for Calder Valley no disservice when I say that he suggested that our area could be used for the deposit of waste. There is an old county song about a Yorkshireman who did not wear his hat on Ilkley moor catching his death of cold. I have a feeling that there are those who would like to bring toxic waste to many areas in Yorkshire. The people of Yorkshire would die then not of cold but of the kind of toxicity that was brought into my constituency, improperly and unlawfully, almost a year ago. And it is still there. It is a tribute not merely to dereliction; it is also a tribute to the inadequacy of the law as a result of the Government's decision to keep industry at arm's length and to allow free market forces to play havoc with common sense and blight areas such as mine.

I am glad that we have had this opportunity to debate the matter. The Minister's forebear, Lord Hailsham, was deeply moved about unemployment in the north-east. It will be recalled that he rang a bell to express his indignation. The causes that we are espousing tonight demand not a little hand bell but a veritable carillon of loudly clanging bells to remind the Government of the damage that they have done to areas such as mine.

11.55 pm

Mr. Conal Gregory (York): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) on initiating this debate, because Yorkshire is one of the most successful regions in Britain under Conservative Administration—*[Interruption.]*—and I shall give facts and figures to prove it. Although Opposition Members are few in number, they are, as usual, vocal and they might care for some home truths.

The number of new businesses in the United Kingdom expanded on average by 1,500 a week in 1989, compared with 1,200 a week in 1988. In the last year of the last Labour Government—probably the last year ever of any Labour Government—6,000 more businesses closed than opened. In 1988, 64,000 more opened than closed.

In the Yorkshire and Humberside region, 11,900 new businesses were registered in 1980, the first year for which figures are available. That increased to 13,700 in 1983, the year I was elected, and by 1988 the number had surged, again under the Conservatives, to 16,900. So the net rise in that time was from 900 in 1980 to 4,000 in 1988. That was success indeed, and most embarrassing for the Opposition.

Investment has also been rising. Government expenditure on fixed assets—on replacement of or addition to the stock of fixed assets, excluding expenditure on maintenance and repairs—in the region rose from £346 million in 1979 to £465 million in 1983 and to £606 million in 1987. For industry as a whole for those three years, it rose from £1,981 million to £2,385 million to £3,288 million. That covered agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy water supply, manufacturing transport and communications. It excluded air and sea transport, dwellings and the service sector.

The population of the region, like that of the rest of the United Kingdom, is rising. In 1979, there were 1·808 million households in the region. By 1988, the figure had increased to 1·924 million. The number of housing starts has also been on the rise. In 1980, there were 12,829 starts in the region. In 1989, there were 15,800. I would not like to be a Labour candidate in the region at the next general election trying to explain away that success story. In York —I mention this in the unlikely event that there is a Socialist candidate—in 1979, 228 new properties were recorded, 478 in 1983 and 536 in 1987.

There is falling unemployment in the area, as one would expect, improved pupil-teacher ratios in primary and secondary schools and shorter hospital waiting lists. It is a good picture for the heart of the white rose county.

Any visitor to York can see beyond the tourism highlights to the industries of confectionery, the railways and insurance. But all those sectors are subject to the unified business rate, and I wish to discuss the problem that faces Yorkshire in general and York in particular in that connection.

Mr. Cryer: Ah.

Mr. Gregory: It is nice to see the hon. Gentleman, who has joined us for this part of the debate, although he was not here at the start.

The major problems result from valuation and revaluation. That should have been undertaken by the Socialist Administration in 1968. They pledged to revalue properties at that date, but, not for the first time, that Administration did not keep their pledge, and that was the start of the difficulties that we now face in north Yorkshire. The Conservatives postponed, as they announced, a radical alternative to commercial rates—the unified business rate.

At the time of the last revaluation—1973-74—the commercial rates in York were 39·9p in the pound. Today, they are £2·557, higher than they need be if there was competitive tendering throughout all services. To date, York has not gone the way of other more progressive councils such as Wandsworth, which has put 17 services out to competitive tender. The struggling and shouting Socialists on York city council have put the minimum number out, although the figure would have been lower if they had put more services out to competitive tender. That is, perhaps, a subject for another occasion.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gregory: From April, the rate is set at a far lower figure of 34·8p in the pound, but on substantial revaluations. That is hard on family businesses. It is important to retain a good mix of businesses. An example is Kilvington's of Stonegate, founded in 1838 by George Kilvington, a craftsman in wire. It is a typical family business which is still selling pet food as well as wirework in those premises. Up the road, we have lovely porcelain shops and jewellery shops. Transitional relief will help such companies over five years, and no property will face a rise of more than 15 per cent. plus inflation each year if the rateable value is less than £10,000 or 20 per cent. plus inflation above that level.

However, we need to retain small family businesses, because they are the backbone of the north Yorkshire economy. Businesses pay £2 billion more to local authorities than the value of the services they receive. York has its strength in such family businesses and it makes sense to differentiate between such shops and the branches of national chains which have no loyalty to the city.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gregory: Part of the problem arises from the fact that there has been no revaluation for 17 years.

Mr. Illsley: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gregory: Those involved in the commercial sector are well aware of the considerable rises of rental values in that time. I shall give some examples to the House. In Colliergate in 1972, a typical rent was only £1,500, whereas today, a person renting those premises could expect to pay £34,000. In the Shambles in 1973, rents were £5,500. I am not sure whether the Socialist council wishes to rename that street Mandela street, as one scurrilous report has suggested. Those rents will now rise to £22,000. Petergate rents were £1,500 in 1973; today they are £70,000. A typical shop in Coney street had a rental value in 1973 of £7,000; today the figure is £152,000.

Clearly such market forces for rents—and various groups, especially the pension funds that have purchased such properties, appreciate this—are a reflection in certain respects of Labour's failure to revalue the rents—*[Interruption.]*—and there has been a great deal of catching up to do. The new transitional rate means that a typical city-centre shop that had expected to pay £11,136 in rates with the new valuation will now pay between £3,000 and £3,874 next year. I hope that, as a result, York's rich mix of shops will continue for resident and visitor alike.

However, the Inland Revenue valuation officer has not fully taken into account the growth in outer-city shopping, which is only just starting. Any visitor to York will see the equivalent of American-style shopping malls and, until recently, no effective competition in the city centre. That will hit cities such as York. Few shops now sell exclusive, high-profit-margin goods such as those in Helmsley, Pocklington and the suburbs of Leeds.

I suggest—I hope that the Minister will respond to this specific point—a sliding scale for the uniform business rate, as with corporation tax. Under corporation tax, if a retailer's profits are under £150,000, he currently pays 25 per cent. Between £150,000 and £650,000, there could be a sliding scale between 25 per cent. and 35 per cent. If a similar scheme were in force for York, the small businesses, not only of Yorkshire but throughout the country, would benefit enormously and ensure that shoppers continued to enjoy a wide range of merchandise. Clearly, only a caring Conservative Government and a return to a Conservative administration in the city of York will ensure that city's future prosperity.

12.5 am

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Yorkshire is large, complex and different—different in its many aspects and different in its representation. I am sure that no hon. Member would not wish the best for Yorkshire. We have to recognise its highlights and its difficulties, and we shall not overcome its problems easily. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) for initiating this debate: it is time that we had more debates on Yorkshire.

I see that the hon. Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) is in his place. When he was Minister I was grateful for the help that he gave to a firm in my constituency, Shaw Carpets. He helped it to survive and it is one of the greatest successes in manufacturing industry. I wish that he was still the Minister, because we could do with a few more such help-outs.

The area of south Yorkshire that I represent probably has one of the highest unemployment rates outside Northern Ireland—14·1 per cent. male unemployment and 5·9 per cent. female unemployment—and, against all trends, it is rising. When we talk about things going well in industry, we tend to forget those areas where things are not going too well. We need the Government to recognise those difficulties.

My hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) said that, because of the

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destruction of the base of manufacturing industry in our area—mining, steel and engineering—there are tremendous difficulties. My local authority is taking areas out of the green belt, which I have fully supported, and the roof has fallen in because people have quite naturally objected to this. But we have a great deal of derelict land, and in our area, unlike the rest of the country, the acreage is increasing. We need more help poured into it so that we can use it for green belt purposes. If we take areas of green belt land for industrial purposes, we must replace them by turning derelict land into green belt areas.

We are very lucky in that we have made a breakthrough with Japanese firms such as Seiko with Government help and local authority initiative and the industrial willingness of people at Dodworth in my constituency. This has meant the creation of 400 high-tech jobs. Rather than penalise local government, as they are doing, the Government should recognise this achievement and the efforts that the local authorities are making in this area.

I turn briefly to the problem of possible poll tax capping. The Government's standard spending assessment for my local authority is way out. There is nothing in the assessment that fits the local authority. For many years under Conservative and Labour Governments the assessment of local authority expenditure in my area and the calculation of grant have been wrong. When we had a base industry, mining, to cushion the effect, that was fine, but mining has disappeared. The 10 collieries which were operating in my constituency six years ago have closed. Therefore, the spending power in the local economy from those collieries has gone. The rating assessment has gone as well, but that has not been fully compensated for.

In the standard spending assessment the Government have not taken into account the £3·5 million which it will cost to bring in the poll tax; the local authority will have to pay the larger part of that. The Government have not allowed for the £6 million in grants that will not be paid or for the inflation rate. That means that the Government assessment of £222 is way out and that the local authority has had to bring in a poll tax of £329.

As the local authority is likely to be poll tax capped, what will it mean? In my area nursery schools will close because they are a non-statutory provision. Many other non-statutory provisions will also have to go. In an area which we are trying to rejuvenate and prepare for 1992, education is of prime importance. Part of the education system is nursery education. In the early years the foundation is laid for the secondary years. Therefore, it would be sacrilege to impose upon the local authority the necessity to close nursery schools which have taken 10 years to develop.

As regards industry, we are likely to lose in the next three weeks the firm of Corah, which provides 300 female jobs. Because of a merger at David Brown's we are likely to lose another 150 jobs. Against all national trends, our unemployment rate is getting worse.

It is not all doom and gloom because there is light on the horizon, but we do not want Government policies and Government ideas round our neck. By all means let central Government determine what they will give local government. There is no quarrel with that. Our quarrel with central Government is over the fact that they will not allow us to determine our future. The local authority should consult the people about what they want. We do not want central Government interfering.

Yorkshire and Humberside is a proud region. Along with Scotland, we will have devolution if the Government do not leave us alone. We will determine our own future, whatever the Government want.

12.13 am

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) and to thank him for his reference to a problem which occurred some years ago.

It is typical of the debate that there are areas in our great county which have considerable difficulties, and none more so than the areas in which the great coal and steel industries were once the main and possibly only sources of employment. I think particularly of the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) when I recall the problem of the boundaries of assisted areas. The matter of greatest difficulty, whether one was in government or in opposition, was the redrawing of the map every two years as one problem succeeded another. I remind the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) of the huge input of cash, largely from the European Community, to assist the declining steel and coal areas. That must be added to the major changes that have been funded in infrastructure investment. I agree that it was a long time before we managed to persuade Mr. Ian MacGregor to head the British coal industry. That happened far too late in view of the declining prospects of the industry. I fully recognise that and apologise for it.

We are talking about Yorkshire in the round and about the problems of regional aid in relation to Yorkshire. Large areas of Yorkshire are not covered by regional aid and do not deserve to be so covered. I am thinking of the city of Leeds and of my constituency of Pudsey, in so far as Pudsey is within the city of Leeds. That is not and never has been an assisted area, and rightly so in view of its diversity of employment and its potential for growth and for attracting the new industries that have moved into the metropolitan area. In fairly recent times Leeds has obtained an urban development corporation to deal with a portion of the derelict area of the city centre, alongside the canal, where there used to be factories which have long since closed. That too is starting to make a major contribution.

We are also grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry who, no doubt, has assisted in the redeployment of another 2,000 or more jobs from within the Civil Service deployment unit, which are now coming to Leeds with the Departments of Social Security and Health. Those are two recent and welcome developments.

I refer briefly to two other aspects that concern me. Both can be classified as regional policies but both are national in origin. I refer first to the Channel tunnel and to its consequences for railway development in the north of England. I am far from satisfied that that operation is being planned correctly. I am also far from satisfied that the commitment to the northern links will be built to a time and cost that will enable us in the north to share in the developments of 1992.

I am far from satisfied that the funding arrangements for the Channel tunnel will survive the pressures put upon them. I take a critical view of the absence, so far, of public funding for a portion of that project. If, as seems possible, the next attempt at a private sector tranche of funding fails, I trust that my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry will do his bit to insist that public sector funding is considered as the correct solution to that problem.

We must have correct and rapid goods transit to the north. I want to put in a plea for the transit station and depot to be at Stourton on the outskirts of Leeds. As one Opposition Member—bless him—now recognises, that is the natural place to site it. I am sorry that I cannot be persuaded to consider the Doncaster alternative, but I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg) and our hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins), who is sitting next to him on the Treasury Bench, might also consider the transport advantages of the Stourton turn-off for the international freight service.

I make no apology for referring now to the wool textile industry. It would be wrong for a debate on Yorkshire to conclude without reference being made to the vital importance still of the wool textile industry to our economy and the vital importance to that industry of a successful and progressive transfer from the multi-fibre arrangement to the general agreement on tariffs and trade. That was the burden of our debate some months ago and of the message that we left with my noble Friend Lord Trefgarne when we went to see him in another place. It is crucial that my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham ensures that the arrangements to transfer the MFA over a period into an orderly world textile regime which is funded by GATT and founded within that system is an essential part of the future of the textile industry in Yorkshire. I trust that careful note will be taken of that element tonight.

12.19 am

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I shall take only a few minutes because others wish to speak. The number of hon. Members who wish to speak shows the wisdom of allocating three hours to any future debate on Yorkshire and Humberside.

Mr. Irvine Patnick (Sheffield, Hallam): This debate is one and a half hours.

Mr. Cryer: I want the next debate to be three hours, not one and a half hours. There was a time when the Consolidated Fund—*[Interruption.]* I am talking to the Whip, who is shouting out from a sedentary position. I am merely pointing out that we want more time, not less. The amount of time allocated is decided by Mr. Speaker. I do not like the position and I make a plea for more time in the future. I am spending an unnecessary amount of time doing that so as to make the position clear to the Minister.

Yorkshire and Humberside has suffered under the Tories. To repeat points made already, we have lost money through the poll tax which will result in a bill 30 per cent. higher than the rates bill for the average family in Yorkshire. We have lost almost £80 million through the freezing of child benefit in an area where there is much social deprivation and a great need for child benefit, which goes direct to the family and the children.

Tax cuts have benefited only a tiny wealthy elite. In manufacturing industry, which is vital to the future of Yorkshire and Humberside, and indeed the rest of the United Kingdom, investment has grown by only 1 per cent. since 1979. I shall not dwell on the increase in mortgage charges to 15 per cent. as a result of the Government's economic policies.

I emphasise the importance of the textile industry. In Bradford, of which I represent the south side, 14,000 jobs depend directly on textiles. Another 14,000 at least depend on the industry indirectly. We want the multi-fibre arrangement to be renewed. We want any changes in the MFA resulting in a takeover by GATT rules to be made in an orderly fashion, as Silberston recommended. The Minister should note that Silberston said that as many as 33,000 jobs could be lost if the MFA was not renewed. The industry believes that the figure could be nearer 100,000.

As the textile industry is a large water user, the region also faces penalties because of the increase in water charges. That could mean that more jobs will be lost in Yorkshire and Humberside. I hope that the Minister will consider what both the employers and the trade unions in the Yorkshire textile industry want. They want grant aid to make more efficient use of water. The industry's investment capacity is limited. Increases in water charges are not its fault. It is a large user of water. I suggest that it would make environmental sense, too, to have better water utilisation facilities in the textile industry.

Since 1979 when the Government came to power, 2 million jobs have been lost in manufacturing industry. Nearly 200,000 of them were in Yorkshire and Humberside. That trend must be reversed in the future, and I guess that that will be done only with the advent of a Labour Government at the next general election.

I echo the remarks of the hon. Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) when he opened the debate that we need a shift from roads to rail in the region. This comes in a week when we have had the formal announcement of the closure of the Wortley Curve, which will remove direct rail access to Bradford. From now on, all trains will have to go through Leeds. There has also been a meeting of the west Yorkshire passenger transport executive. I know that this is not the direct responsibility of the Minister, but we want the railway between Bradford and Leeds to be electrified. I should like both the Aire valley route and the route through Pudsey to be electrified. It would mean a speedier, more efficient and better service.

In Yorkshire and Humberside, rail passenger transport has grown. Trains are overcrowded and uncomfortable and passengers are carried in unacceptable conditions. We need more investment. I hope that the PTA obtains authority to borrow £50 million. I would like to see grant aid from the Government to make sure that the investment goes ahead. It is environmentally sound, it will benefit Yorkshire and Humberside and it will help to create jobs. Jobs for the future are a vital component of success for Yorkshire and Humberside.

12.23 am

Mr. Timothy Kirkhope (Leeds, North-East): I shall be brief as I know that this debate is drawing to a close.

It is symptomatic of the power and influence of Yorkshire that hon. Members on both sides of the House have done much to persuade Government of the need to consider always what is best for Yorkshire. The initiative taken by the present Government, especially in certain parts of Yorkshire—for example, Chapeltown in my constituency—are welcome. The pump-priming effect of

[Mr. Timothy Kirkhope]

the work of the Department of Trade and Industry in relation to the task force operations is something of which I am extremely proud—as we all should be.

The other day I was involved in the opening of a nursery school in Chapeltown, which had been helped with £76,000 of aid from our task force operation. With the full co-operation of charities and commercial organisations, in partnership with the local authority in Leeds, that venture, in common with others in the area, will be an enormous success. That aid, coupled with yesterday's announcement of £5·4 million for Leeds under the urban programme, demonstrates the Government's commitment to the city and to Yorkshire.

In many ways, Yorkshire can look after itself, and many other parts of the country look to it with great envy. Leeds is the undoubted capital of the north. The prosperity of the financial services in that city is legion.

The continuing success of manufacturing, the excellence of the local beers, the success of the textile industry and its on-going development and the commitment and interest of local politicians and politicians at Westminster guarantee the continued success of the region. That is thanks to the Government's policies and the hard work of the region's representatives.

12.26 am

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): In common with other hon. Members, I thank the hon. Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) for introducing the debate, which has been worth while. There has been agreement across the Floor about the Channel tunnel and sections 40 and 42 of the Channel Tunnel Act 1987. No doubt Conservative Members will support us when we seek to abolish section 42—we shall be pleased to see them in the Lobby with us.

The debate has been about regional policy and I would be remiss if I did not say that the Labour party is extremely concerned about the structural weaknesses in Yorkshire and in the northern region. There is ever-increasing evidence that, with the advent of 1992, we shall face some serious problems. Those problems must be seen against the present background of a reduction in support for the regions.

It is difficult to discover the Government's regional policy, as they have been withdrawing from the regions ever since they came to power. That withdrawal is now costing Yorkshire about £47 million per year. *[Interruption.]* Reductions in the regional development grant and regional selective assistance have cost Yorkshire £47 million a year in the past 10 years. Government funding is set to continue to decline. On top of that, support for research and development and training has been cut, as has support for our transport infrastructure. All that shows that the Government have abrogated responsibility for supporting the regions.

If one compares our regions with those of our European counterparts, it is clear from any economic indicator—gross domestic product per capita or real economic growth—that our regions fair badly. Let us compare the English regions with the lander of Germany. The very best English region, the south-east, does not compare with the worst lander. All the English regions, not just Yorkshire, are in the third division.

Some revealing figures on state aids have been published recently by the Community. The Community has considered not public expenditure, but public investment. If one excludes steel and shipbuilding and considers manufacturing, the state aid per head for that industry across the Community is £1,050. In the United Kingdom it is £448, in Germany it is about £550. That shows the decline that has taken place. If we are to play on a level playing field, let us have that level playing field.

It is no good the Commissioner, Sir Leon Brittan, running round carping about it. He must do something about it. If the average investment per person in manufacturing is £1,050, and the level in the United Kingdom is £448 per head, there is a major discrepancy. This Government's withdrawal of the grant regimes has made it difficult for our manufacturing industries to compete. That has been made more difficult by the high interest rates and high inflation. That is why we have a £20 billion trade deficit.

It gives me no pleasure to refer to the Louvain report, which was carried out by the European Commission to consider the rundown of industrial regions in the Community. Strathclyde and south Yorkshire were two of the regions considered, and on almost every count we were at the bottom of the league. It was a most depressing report. I do not have time to go into it this evening, but it is compelling reading, and it shows the structural weaknesses for which I do not blame just this Administration. Over a period of recent history, structural weaknesses have appeared in this country. Our technology, infrastructure and decision-making centres are behind those other industrial regions in the EC. The report said that south Yorkshire had become marginalised.

We should take heed of such information, which is objectively produced. The Commission was right to commission that report and show the problems that we face. We have not relaxed in south Yorkshire, or in Yorkshire in general, and, based on that report, an outline of regeneration strategy for south Yorkshire, hopefully developing to the whole of Yorkshire and Humberside, has been undertaken. Those developments and discussions taking place at present are to try to start rectifying some of the structural weaknesses with intervention and structural planning.

Our problem is a Government who are ideologically based, have objections to local authorities, and will not intervene, but want to parachute in resources. While I do not want to knock urban development corporations or task forces, it is interesting to read the Audit Commission's report on urban regeneration and economic development, which states that we have a patchwork quilt of aids which nobody can understand and which mitigates against any development of economic growth. I ask the Minister, for about the third time, if he will make time to debate that report, together with the reports on urban development corporations from the Select Committee on Employment and the Public Accounts Committee.

This evening's debate has been good. It is unfortunate that we have not dealt with the issues entirely at regional level, but many hon. Members have brought in problems involving their constituencies. Unless we heed the advice that is being given and consider seriously reports such as the Audit Commission's, Louvain and many others available to us and have some strategic planning for our regions, the advent of 1992 will make a difficult position much more serious. I hope that, when he replies to this debate, the Minister will at least give us a little light at the end of the tunnel and show that he will take the subject more seriously than he has done in the past.

12.33 am

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister for allowing me a moment or two to contribute to this debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for York (Mr. Gregory) spoke about the uniform business rate, which is particularly helpful to Yorkshire and Humberside. We benefit as a region to the tune of 21 per cent. Before revaluation, the rate bill for our region was £710 million; it is being reduced by £150 million. Our only regret is that we shall not see all the benefit at once. It is a great pity that the change is being phased. There are firms that will pay more, but the Government cannot be held responsible for changes in market conditions. The region will benefit, and that will make a great difference to regional policy.

The change to the uniform business rate is helpful. There have long been complaints that local authorities unfairly increase business rates and that the firms which have had to pay the increased bills had no opportunity of expressing their verdict via the ballot box. The new system protects businesses from that form of exploitation, and that has been widely welcomed. It is especially important that the legislation guarantees that the increase from one year to the next will not be greater than the current rate of general inflation. The change to the uniform business rate and revaluation has been welcomed throughout the region, and I hope that no one will lose sight of that fact.

12.35 am

The Minister for Industry (Mr. Douglas Hogg): In the five minutes of the debate that are available to me, I shall not be able to do justice to all the matters that have been raised in the debate.

Like other hon. Members, I wish to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Sir M. Fox) on initiating the debate. I was entirely in agreement with the way in which he opened the debate, which was to stress the buoyant nature of the economy in Yorkshire and Humberside and to attribute much of that buoyancy to Government policy. My hon. Friend has great experience of the area and what he says carries considerable weight. His support of the Budget provisions, especially in so far as they relate to VAT changes and to reductions in the corporation tax burden on smaller businesses, was especially apposite.

I am glad that the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) referred to Pioneer going to Wakefield and I much appreciated the meeting that we had to discuss it. That enables me to make a much more general point but one that I think is worth drawing to the attention of the House. It is wrong to say that the Government do not have a regional policy. In fact, we have an extremely effective one. That is one of the reasons why we secure for the United Kingdom about one third of all Japanese investment in Europe. It is also one of the reasons why we gain a substantial proportion of United States investment in Europe.

Opposition Members want us to return to something like the old regional development grant system, but that would be preposterous. The RDG was automatic and took no account of the relevant economic criteria that come to mind. The policy of regional selective assistance has been of extreme benefit to Yorkshire and Humberside. I shall give some relevant figures. Between 1 May 1979 and 28 February 1990—I like to be precise—in Yorkshire and Humberside there have been 1,308 offers of assistance. The value of that assistance is £144 million. The projects to which the offers related were worth £1,543 million. The offers of RSA are likely to create about 48,000 jobs and to safeguard about 30,000. That is a remarkable achievement and a testimony to Government regional policy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Mr. Thompson) made some extremely important remarks about the environment. They are primarily matters for my right hon. and hon. Friends at the Department of the Environment, but I shall ensure that they are made aware of what he said. My hon. Friend was right to draw attention to the considerable stress that is placed on new industries, and especially financial services. The substantial increase in employment in the financial services sector in Yorkshire is one of the most remarkable transformations to have happened recently. That is especially true of Leeds.

Speaking of Leeds, it was especially pleasing to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw), one of my most distinguished predecessors. I entirely agree with what the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) said about the contribution that my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey made to the region. Understandably, my hon. Friend dwelt on the textile question and emphasised the importance of securing proper safeguards when the multi-fibre arrangement is brought back into the general agreement on tariffs and trade. That is entirely right. When the MFA is brought back into GATT, it is important that proper safeguards are introduced, that a sufficient transitional period is provided for, and that we address the questions that will then arise.

Transport (London)

12.40 am

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): This is a notable day for London. This afternoon, the Secretary of State for Transport made what I believe will prove to be a turning-point statement in the history of transport and, indeed, strategic planning in our capital city. I hope that it will bring to an end nearly 25 years of controversy on the subject of major road building in London.

In 1973, the Greater London council elections were fought largely on the issue of the ringways—the then motorway box. A cartoon in *The Guardian* showed a large centipede-like creature—representing a motorway—crunching up houses and gardens but being killed by an insecticide spray with "Ballot Box" written on it. That was the issue at the election. This afternoon's statement was the result of the majority party of what remains of the GLC—in effect, London Members—persuading their Government that the public would not put up with the proposals, which ostensibly came from consultants but which really came from the Department of Transport. The Minister for Roads and Traffic shakes his head, but it is unlikely that a request for the consultants would otherwise have been made.

In the old days, the GLC professional transport planners would have been asked to provide green schemes for the GLC committees to discuss. That did not happen in this case. The expenditure of large sums of public money was involved and we now know the result. The tragedy is that, having now accepted a policy of bulk public transport in London, with necessary road engineering and supplementary travel by private car, the Government find that they have destroyed the only agency that was capable of putting such a balance into effect. We must start from scratch.

I hope to draw to the attention of the House some of the issues which the Government must examine—and which, alas, this House must examine because we have no other democratic London-wide assembly. There are more London Members than Scottish Members, and this is the only place where we can debate such matters.

The demise of the GLC meant the end of proper strategic planning in London. Although the road proposals have been defeated, there is no proper strategic planning. The Government must do something about that. For Canary wharf, there was no public inquiry and no statutory procedure other than a private railway Bill. It is the lack of strategic planning in London which has caused the crop of private Bills that has delayed the legitimate business of the House. The Redbridge London Borough Council Bill may not sound like a planning Bill, but it deals with the expansion of retail marketing. The GLC had a plan to integrate industry, retail outlets, places for people to live, and places for people to work. It was a coherent strategy. Without that, everything is up for grabs. Those who want office development or retail areas will try, by hook or by crook, to get them.

Officially, the strategic plan for London now consists of the strategic plans for all the boroughs shoved together like a lot of jigsaw pieces. That is no good for any city, let alone the capital of the United Kingdom, but it is what the Government have produced. It is little wonder that even developers are saying that the Government have got it wrong. *The Guardian* yesterday carried the headline:

> "Private sector snub for rail cash hopes".

The article quotes Stanhope Properties, a well-known development company, as having said:

> "The Government seems to be waiting for the hidden hand of the market to solve its problems, instead of producing a framework by which the public sector and private sector can work together to provide the solution."

Stanhope Properties say that this has to change, yet they are the sort of people whom the Government profess to represent. Even the developers are saying that there must be a proper structure to deal with these matters.

In the old days, when I was a co-opted member of the GLC planning and highways committee, my colleagues and I complained that planning permission was put in a drawer and used as currency. That was pretty bad, but at least there was some sort of coherent planning—coherent because it was based on a London-wide scheme. We must get back to that. The Government, having decided their transport strategy, have a responsibility to get on with the job.

I wish to deal quite rapidly with one or two issues in this context. I shall point out the Government's shortcomings and what must be done to rectify them. I assure the Minister that I should be saying the same things even if the Government were of my own party. Indeed, national Governments have not performed very well in respect of the matters that I want to draw to the attention of the House.

First, there is the perennial problem of traffic congestion in London. Year after year, for the past 50 or 60 years, people have been saying that London is grinding to a halt. In a leading article in *The Times* not long ago, Mr. Joynson-Hicks, a former Home Secretary, said that one of his most difficult tasks had been dealing with traffic congestion in London. The point is that any road space available will fill up. That is partly why a roads policy such as was suggested by the Government would not work and they have realised that.

We must make the best use of the road space that is available. On 13 January 1989, at column 795 of the *Official Report*, I was told in a written answer that no records were kept of the reasons for, or incidence of, traffic congestion in London. We all know that specific things cause abnormal hold-ups. On 12 March 1990, in reply to another question, I was told that the police were considering whether it would be worth noting down the major incidents of congestion in London and, where known, the reasons for them.

That is remarkable. Many millions of pounds are spent on the traffic department of the Metropolitan police, which is funded by the Home Office. A whole section of that traffic department deals with London roads, yet the people there do not think it worth while to note major incidents of congestion, which some of us know very well. That is a stupid and misleading policy because there will always be congestion. Most of them will be caused by readily apprehensible reasons—road repairs, accidents, vehicle breakdowns, water or gas main bursts or failures, traffic light failures, shed loads, official events or demonstrations. Many of the perceivable incidents of congestion in London are due to one or some or a combination of those causes.

We can build as many roads as we like and have as many skilful traffic schemes as we like, but those causes are bound to occur. They are part of the technique of roads and to some extent they cannot be avoided. But the

Government do not even try to prevent any of them. The Department of Transport will insist on closing the southbound lane of the Blackwall tunnel at weekends rather than at night. There are no police, no proper precautions appear to be taken and jams occur, although I have written about the matter. The same happens in west London. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) knows Hammersmith Broadway very well and the same problem occurs there. Years ago a policeman on point duty would have specifically sought to ensure that such incidents did not occur. The Government have not got their act together in London at all well on such matters.

Then we come to the vexed question, so far undiscussed in the House in any depth, of company cars—or rather, assisted travel. On 13 January 1989 I asked when we would have some results of the research that the Government were supposed to be undertaking into that, and I was told that it would be in a few months' time, but I have had no reply. On 20 March 1990 we were told that the final report is due in a few months' time. That seems to be taking a long time. Yet we all know that a high proportion of car use in London is by people who are not paying for it themselves. I suppose that Members of Parliament come into that category, although hon. Members know that it is not often that I come into that category.

Greenpeace has just issued a report saying that subsidies can be up to £2 a day for a Sierra and £7 a day for a Rolls-Royce, and people can do more or less what they like. It says that about one in three vehicles in London has some form of company ownership or support. But if we go further into the matter and ask how many of those are cases of assisted cost, some people say four out of five. Even the Government estimate that 2 million cars in Britain come into that category and there may be 3 million to 4 million in total. Therefore, the proportion of vehicle miles in London run by motor cars that are assisted in their movement is very high.

I hope that the Greenpeace report will be taken into account. It estimates that £1,000 million is lost to the Government in national insurance payments because, as we all know, many people have a car with their job which adds to their effective income. By coincidence, I tabled a question today about that very matter. In many cases a car is advertised as a perk of a job, but it is not subject to national insurance payments. Compared with our industrial rivals on the continent, car assistance in Britain adds to traffic congestion.

I am not one of those who advocate road pricing. That would only extend the vicious circle. Various firms and those who pay assisted travel costs would just pay the costs involved, and in any case I do not believe that it would be technically possible or socially desirable. If anyone is thinking of Hong Kong, I would say that the situation there is different from ours. They have buses, but they are often small minibuses. I do not object to those in the right places, but——

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Robert Atkins): British Leyland buses.

Mr. Spearing: They have both sorts. They have trunk routes, happily, with Leyland buses—I shall come to Leyland in a moment—but they have other sorts as well.

I hope that the Minister can assure us that there is no intention of extending minibus routes to the exclusion of the main trunk routes in London. They are increasing. In east London some do not even come under the aegis of London Regional Transport. In London we now have a bus service which is less comprehensive, gives less service to the public and lacks proper planning.

The Government have not yet said that they are not going ahead with privatisation and, worse still, with their planned deregulation. In view of their recent announcement about road plans, the proposals for privatisation and deregulation are even less appropriate than they were.

The public have won one victory—we have managed to retain buses with conductors in central London, and the Routemasters, which were supposed to be on the way out, are still with us.

I think that the Minister for Roads and Traffic comes from the Preston area, not far from the town of Leyland, where many buses originated. He should be discomfited to know that in London Regional Transport's official magazine not long ago LRT proudly said that it was going to re-engine the Routemasters, and was reported to be looking as far afield as Italy, Yugoslavia and even India. Unfortunately, they can no longer be built in London—the Southall works of AEC is an empty site, as is the Chiswick works, where they might have been re-engined. However, they could be built in Leyland, Lancashire. I see no reason why London should look abroad to re-engine its Routemaster buses. I hope that the Minister will consider that issue.

In the past few weeks we have heard, almost ad nauseam, that the Minister is considering either a Chelsea to Hackney tube line or the Liverpool Street to Paddington cross rail. Since none of the planned roads will now be built, the Minister has money to build both the tube and the rail link—and why not? The Government were going to spend a lot of money knocking down houses and building roads. Now that that option has been turned down, why can we not have both rail routes?

Some of the new rail routes that the Government boast about are not being put to good use. For example, in east London, the docklands light railway was originally meant to be used by the people of the area and to some extent that is still true, but people in east London cannot help noticing that the existing railway is not open at weekends and closes every night at 9 o'clock. Surely revamping cannot take two years. There is something wrong somewhere. The reliability of the railway has not earned a high reputation, although safety is probably all right. The London Arena, which is part of the famed docklands development in the West India docks, is not now served by the DLR because people leave after 9 o'clock—so much for transport co-ordination in new rail lines.

Today the Minister emphasised the needs of the people of south London, who have often wanted more underground services, and I understand why. South London has a good overground rail system but unfortunately the lines terminate at the London terminals. Many years ago the Greater London council had a plan for a cross rail scheme, not just from Paddington eastwards but joining Victoria and Euston. Another possible option for the Minister to consider is that as it is only a short distance from Victoria to Euston there could be a north-south cross rail so that many of the suburban lines of south London could go through central London and out the other side, just as the famed Thameslink does. That would be a relatively easy option and it would be good value for money.

[Mr. Spearing]

A scheme which would be even better value for money, and which I advocated to the House some years ago when I was Member of Parliament for Acton, was the ring rail. There is only about a mile and a quarter gap between the electrified lines north and south of the river. If that gap were filled, we could create a complete fast rail ring around London which would join, among other places, Stratford, Willesden, Clapham Junction and New Cross. There could be variants of that route, but it would certainly relieve traffic congestion in central London as well as possibly giving some sort of alternative to the M25.

On Friday I had, if not the pleasure, at least the opportunity of pointing out what I regard as a major lacuna in safety on the Underground. I shall not repeat myself now, but I note that the managing director of London Underground, Mr. Tunnicliffe, says in today's *Evening Standard*:

> "I have only one overriding priority: safety."

I am afraid that I cannot agree. As I have said often enough, the extension of one-person operation on to London's older tube lines certainly increases hazard. I do not think that either Mr. Tunnicliffe or the Minister could disagree with that, although they may not agree with me that the increase is significant.

The Government have imposed economies on the transport authorities. Worst of all, they have imposed economies on staff numbers, and have damaged the staff morale that is so fundamental to any public service. They regard London's transport as a marketable commodity rather than an essential feature of city life.

I have sketched out several of the gaps in current policy, but the biggest gap is financial. We all know that the cost of travel in London has risen by markedly more than the cost-of-living index. As Secretary of State for Transport, the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) directed that the increase should be roughly in line with inflation. It is ironic that the right hon. Gentleman, who does not really believe in intervention, should intervene in a reasonable way in that regard. Since he left the Department of Transport, however, successive Secretaries of State have almost boasted that the cost of London's public transport—on both British Rail and London Regional Transport—will rise by more than the cost of living. That is a deliberately inflationary policy, notwithstanding the oft-repeated phrase of the Prime Minister and others at the Dispatch Box, "Above all, we must fight inflation." It will have such a major effect on the people of London that the Government will not be able to get away with it.

We often hear that London Transport in the 1930s set an example to the world, and indeed it did. One reason why that was possible was the co-operation between parties which produced the London Passenger Transport Board; another was the relatively low car ownership of those days, which allowed a rough balance to be struck between public and private transport.

We believe—the Government must surely come to the same conclusion—that that balance has been achieved in many capital cities throughout the world, particularly on the mainland of Europe, but it can be achieved only with adequate public finance, both capital and revenue. Without that finance, the result will be either an imbalance or the public paying more than they should.

The cost today of travelling between two London underground stations—a facility that is particularly important to people living in east London, who do not necessarily own cars—is either 50p or 70p. That is both illogical and anti-social. It is a policy of regression, which helps neither public transport nor the people involved—it merely reduces the taxpayer's subsidy, which is not particularly appropriate.

The Government have at last understood that building roads does not in itself solve transport problems, but they have dispersed the professional teams at County Hall—the only people capable of putting Humpty together again. I do not know whether it can be done just like that. There is a variety of organisations, including the roads unit in the Department of Transport. I presume that there is also a London and south-east railways unit, though it is not particularly visible. London Regional Transport is supposed to be the statutory authority for the co-ordination of transport, but it is in competition with British Rail, which has its own regions and Network SouthEast, which lies very uneasily with it. They, together with the 32 London boroughs and the City of London, provide the transport policy for London. There is no coherent and logical system for transport planning, although we need one urgently.

I put it to the Secretary of State, through the Minister for Roads and Traffic, that the Government must produce a coherent, understandable and, above all, democratically oriented organisation which at the very least is accountable to this House, for at last it appears that both sides agree about the strategy and the direction in which we wish to move.

Such an organisation needs a place in which to live. I can think of a vacant building not too far from here in which space should be reserved. In the not-too-distant future, the people of London—not to mention the people of Mid-Staffordshire—will show that they have rumbled the absence of policy and the negative policies of the Government as regards public services, not just transport but almost any other public service that one cares to name. The people of London will want the new Government to provide a democratically elected and accountable organisation to look after the strategic planning of London's transport. If the present Government do not recreate a body such as the Greater London council to administer transport in London—it is the only capital city in the world with no central planning strategy for transport—I know that the next Government will.

1.7 am

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing). We represent a hard-pressed London borough, but we enjoy the great advantage that it is a Tory-free zone. It will remain that way after the 3 May elections, and the next Labour Government will give us the transport and social investment that east London so desperately needs.

The Secretary of State for Transport sounded a little miffed because we were not wholly grateful to him for his announcement yesterday. If one looks for gratitude in politics, one will look for ever. When he does the obvious, he can hardly expect us to fawn. He has spent £10 million of taxpayers' money on road assessment studies that I could have carried out for nothing, reaching exactly the same conclusion.

The consultants' recommendations were not the Government's recommendations. The consultants were given a working brief. If the Government had said that they were not in favour of larger roads and more roads around London, and if they had asked the consultants to consider the public transport aspects, the consultants would not have made the recommendations that they did. So they took their lead from the policy direction given by the Government, from the working brief that I am sure they were given by the Department of Transport, and came up with their proposals. But the Government have now wisely rejected them, and there are three reasons why the Government have done so.

First, there was massive public resistance to the roads proposals. We fought those proposals on many occasions, and that, among other things, cost the Tories the 1973 GLC elections. In particular, the public were opposed to the motorway box proposals. Londoners were never in favour of them. They are no more in favour of them in 1990 than they were in 1973.

Secondly, environmental issues in London, as elsewhere, are more to the fore now, and that must have influenced Government thinking when considering the assessment proposals.

Thirdly—and probably the most important—the Government realised the disastrous political consequences of proceeding with road schemes and making an announcement at about the time of the 3 May elections. There was some cynicism in that. I do not blame them. After all, only a stupid politician—there are plenty of them on the Government Benches, not necessarily present tonight—would be prepared to court political catastrophe. Conservatives are doing that now over poll tax.

I do not see the Secretary of State for Transport in that category. If I were giving credit tonight, I would give him credit for not wishing to fall on his own sword. The Government have enough problems with poll tax, mortgage levels and the whispering campaign against the Prime Minister without adding the problems associated with mass defections from the Tory party at the time of the local elections in London. Those three reasons caused the Goverment to have a change of heart.

We appreciate what the Secretary of State does not want. But we do not have a transport strategy for London. That is still missing after yesterday afternoon's announcement. We have transport decisions being driven by purblind political dogma. They believe in deregulation; and in the deregulation of buses, for example, we have chaos developing with commuter coaches coming into London. There are many feeder lines, causing coaches to go down side roads in an effort to avoid the jams on the main roads. That is causing chaos to parts of east London.

Opposition to bus lanes and lorry bans is all part of the ideological defects with which we are presented by the Government. We also have the short-term political considerations to which I referred, coupled with the question, "How many votes will be lost by various proposals, and how can we keep the really nasty bits of what we are doing in Labour boroughs?"

Another motivation for Government decisions in transport in London just now is how much they can get out of the private sector. A classic example of that is the Jubilee line extension proposal. Anybody who understands the transport requirements of London knows that the Jubilee extension is not, if looked at objectively, the highest priority for new investmemt. But because it is required by Olympia and York for Canary wharf, and because they are prepared to put up some money for it, the Government have been prepared to go along with them.

But, remember, Olympia and York is putting up only some money, and that amount is changing all the time. My figures show that originally the Government announced that Olympia and York would contribute £400 million to the Jubilee line extension, which had an estimated cost of £900 million. All that has changed. The cost of the Jubilee line extension is now put at £1 billion at 1988 prices, and by completion it will have risen to nearly £2 billion in outturn prices. Olympia and York will contribute only £100 million cash during the course of construction, with up to £300 million cash after completion in 1997.

It seems that its contribution has come down to about 15 per cent. of the total cost of the project. In other words, for that 15 per cent. we can have something put into London which would be good for us in Newham, but would we, for London as a whole, have gone for that investment?

Mr. Spearing: No.

Mr. Banks: As my hon. Friend says, we would not have chosen that. More pressing demands are being made on transport investment decisions in London. That is no way to run a capital city's transport system, and it is little wonder that people in this city are becoming angry and impatient with the Government.

It is no wonder that the Confederation of British Industry, in its recent report "The Capital at Risk", described transport in London as being in a "deplorable state". I shall carry on saying that, but that was also said by the CBI, a body to which the Government have paid some heed. The CBI estimated in that report that the cost to the nation of our inadequate transport system was about £15 billion per annum, of which £10 billion accrued in the south-east and no less than £7·5 billion in London alone. That is the scale of the problem in the capital city.

Everyone can see what the Government either cannot or will not see in terms of transport planning in London. We desperately need strategic planning for all modes of transport in London and the south-east. My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South mentioned the past expertise at County Hall. We used to produce the transport in London plan which was a once-a-decade proposal. I have here the 1981 Greater London transport survey, and there were others in 1962 and 1971, which were carried out under Tory as well as Labour administrations at County Hall. We considered all modes of transport, which was our contribution to coherent transport planning in London.

That has all been thrown out of the window. Expertise has disappeared and transport is now left in the hands of private sector companies such as Olympia and York, which has become the transport planner for London because the Secretary of State and the Department of Transport have washed their hands of the responsibility. We know that coherent strategic planning in transport is necessary. That is the efficient way of doing things and that is what is done in other capital cities. That is precisely what is being rejected by the Government.

[Mr. Banks]

My hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South quoted from a report which was described in *The Guardian*. I have the report itself, which was prepared by Stanhope Properties plc for the CBI. I shall continue my hon. Friend's quotation. The report, when talking about the present transport system in London, says:

> "The Government will not be able to rely on securing private sector funds from developers and contractors to assist in financing an"—

I suggest that the Minister listens to this because these comments are coming from the private sector and he is relying very much, as is the Secretary of State, on the private sector coming in to contribute heavy funding for transport investment decisions. The private sector is simply not prepared to be used in that way. I shall read the quotation again:

> "The Government will not be able to rely on securing private sector funds from developers and contractors to assist in financing an uncoordinated transport programme; although better value may be achievable through private sector participation enhancing public spending. What is needed is an integrated planned transport system for London, encompassing roads, rail, ferries and air, encompassing the needs of passengers, goods and freight."

That is what one of the largest developers in the capital city is saying to the Government. I hope that the Government listen. They do not listen to us, but at least they should listen to one of the largest developers in the capital city.

If one travels around Europe, as I am fortunate to be able to do as a member of the Council of Europe at the moment, one is able to contrast the transport systems in places such as Paris, Brussels, Rome and Strasbourg with that in London. I accept that we have one of the longest established and most extensive transport systems in the world, but that is no excuse for it to be so lousy. It should be a reason for us having now, after all those years, just about got it right. However, the comparisons are invidious and we always come out on the wrong side. We have a tacky, rundown, inefficient, unreliable, overcrowded and expensive transport system in London. Anyone who travels in London regularly on public transport or who uses the roads of London knows that to be a fact.

In many ways, customers on the public transport system in London are treated as though they were getting in the way of running an efficient system. I am sick of waiting for trains at Stratford or Forest Gate stations with the new game that British Rail has just invented on Network SouthEast. It is called "guess the length of the train". It is quite dangerous when one suddently realises that the train is one or two carriages shorter than one expected; all the people on the platform start running towards the shortened train. There is no indication. In the age of advanced computer technology, we still do not know whether the train will turn up or how long it will be. We are still not given the sort of announcements that allow one to make one's own decisions. It is an ineffective way of communicating. It is so appalling that at times it defies belief.

Roads in the capital city have deteriorated alarmingly in recent years. There are many reasons for this. One is that local authorities have broken away from the planned maintenance that they used to carry out, perhaps in many cases because they have been hit by expenditure cutbacks initiated by the Government. Then, of course, with deregulation, privatisation and various development schemes, one sees that the roads in our capital city are reaching an appalling state of dereliction.

I have put this to the Minister on a number of occasions through parliamentary questions and I have talked to his colleagues in the Department of the Environment about it. Because of privatisation, there are so many more bodies now that have a statutory right to dig up the roads. I wanted to know just how many there were, but unfortunately no one seemed to be able to tell me. One sees a lot of decent road—I have seen it in the east end, round the Romford road, at Forest Gate—just dug up, probably by the gas board. Then they put in that soft tarmacadam, which immediately sinks, the road deteriorates, it is right by a bus stop, puddles collect and people get splashed.

These are small points, but when they are taken together one realises that there is a lack of consideration, concern and co-ordination. People should not be allowed to dig up the road and then walk away, leaving it in a terrible state, until someone else comes along and digs up the same patch.

Where is the sense in all this? Surely someone must have some sort of computer model somewhere in London that could co-ordinate matters, but no one seems to care and no one seems to know. That is an indictment of this Government, since they have pooh-poohed the idea of strategic planning in London.

Developers do not pay the full cost of the developments that they undertake. It is all very well to say that this is part of the burgeoning economy, but when developers cause massive hold-ups round a site, morning after morning and evening after evening in the rush hour, they should be told that part of the development cost is the cost of disturbance to others in the locality and in London as a whole because of the traffic problems that are created. I am all for people paying costs, but I want to make sure that they pay all the costs and that there are no hidden subsidies.

The Government are drifting along, as ever, in terms of transport in London. As many of my hon. Friends have said, there is no coherence in transport planning in the capital city. Planning has become a dirty word in the political lexicon of the Tory party. Major decisions are left to pot luck and the market, with no proper evaluation of the schemes. We have myriad schemes at the moment and it is very bewildering and difficult to follow them all. They emerge one at a time, with no relevance to each other and with no coherent overall planning.

What is happening over the Channel tunnel and the decisions about the links to the tunnel is making us the laughing stock of Europe. The French do not behave like us in making major financial decisions. They cut across political boundaries in France. Why the hell cannot we cut through the obduracy of the Tory party? The Government are completely hidebound by their political antagonism to any form of public expenditure or coherent planning. What really annoys me is the petty-mindedness of the Tory party, led by the half-mad old bag lady in No. 10.

I cannot understand why the Government continue to sit this one out and hope that somehow, in the end, everything will work out all right. It is not working out all right. It is getting worse and worse. Anyone who knows anything about transport or who travels around London realises that that is the truth.

The Secretary of State said yesterday afternoon that he is considering the east-west cross-rail link and the Hackney-Chelsea link, but that he is not sure that London could stand both of them. Of course, London could stand both. When we consider what we are standing at the moment, we could certainly stand two major transportation developments which would be to the massive benefit of all Londoners. We can take it if the Government are prepared to authorise the finance.

In the absence of coherent strategic planning and thinking, we shall have to wait for a Labour Government. That we all understand and appreciate. Fortunately, the cavalry is not far away; it will take two years or perhaps less to arrive. The Government could get us away from having to go through the peculiar system of private Bills to bring major transportation proposals before Parliament. The Secretary of State again talked about London Regional Transport lodging a Bill in November either for the east-west cross route or for the Hackney-Chelsea line. Those should not be left, like the Channel tunnel or the fast link, to the private Bill procedure. He knows that there are recommendations for reforming private Bill procedure. If the Government will not do anything about strategic planning of transportation in London, they have the opportunity to reform the private Bill procedure. If they did that, it would at least be some contribution.

In the meantime, we will have to hobble along in London with the belt-and-braces approach to strategic planning which is a disgrace to London and to Europe. It defies all accurate description and belief, but unfortunately we seem to be stuck with it for a few more years. Fortunately, the Government will soon be on their way and we will get back to a strategic plan for London which Londoners can look forward to and benefit from.

1.26 am

Ms. Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I want to echo much of what has been said by my hon. Friends the Members for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) and for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South on securing this important debate. It may be of interest to note that there seem to be no Members other than the Minister on the Government side seeking to speak. I wonder why, since they were all so keen to hear this afternoon that their marginal seats in London had been protected by the victory that we have all had in getting the road proposals turned down. That is what they think, but in practice it will not save the day for them. That is why they were here; that was their interest this afternoon. When it comes to debating how we should solve the problems of transport in London, they are absent.

It is a historic day. We are all delighted to see the end of the process of assessment studies, initiated by the Secretary of State for Transport in 1984.

Mr. Tony Banks: As long ago as that?

Ms. Ruddock: Yes, as long ago as that.

Mr. Banks: Which one was it?

Ms. Ruddock: I am afraid that there have been too many for such a junior Member of the House as myself to remember.

The studies were intended to solve the problems of traffic congestion in four corridors in London. As such, they were always fatally flawed and, as my hon. Friends have pointed out, there has never been any way in which the problems of the capital city could be solved in isolated pockets.

Today the Secretary of State attempted to distance himself, as well he might, from those studies, saying that they were the ideas of consultants. But the brief was drawn by his own Department of Transport. It is clear that the major elements in that brief were consistent with the Government's own philosophy. I believe that they were as follows. The first aim was to increase, where possible, the road capacity around the central area and to increase the radial capacity in selected areas. The second element was to support public transport schemes, but with the proviso that they should not depend on Government grant and should be paid for primarily by the users of the service. The third was to resist the pressure for traffic restraint which has come from so many people in London; I quote the west London study which said of restraint that it is not

"a practical or acceptable basis for planning."

The fourth element was to support traffic management measures, such as red routes and traffic calming.

Bearing those elements of the so-called "strategy" in mind, and after today's announcement, I wonder how the Government will now plan for the future. We have been told that all the road-building proposals have been scrapped. I suggest, therefore, that the Secretary of State's policy for London lies in tatters. After six wasted years, he now gives us a whole series of public transport measures for which the studies were wholly unnecessary, and proposals for traffic-calming measures that the London boroughs could happily have produced for themselves.

Even so, we could perhaps forgive the delay and the waste, if only we were certain that the public transport options were likely to become reality. The Secretary of State today scorned my suggestion that the £3 billion that would have been spent on roads should be committed immediately to the support of public transport in London. He suggested that the money had not been committed to road building, but, as he knows only too well, the difference is that money for roads is readily made available from the public purse, whereas British Rail has to find an 8 per cent. return on investment, while operating subsidies are being removed from Network SouthEast and have already been removed from London Regional Transport. Thus, the fare-paying passenger will have to bear the brunt of the cost of any new public transport infrastructure that Ministers propose. As we have seen from recent experiences on Network SouthEast, constant price rises deter passengers.

Does the Minister still agree with the consultants who, for the purpose of the assessment studies, assumed that there would be a 46 per cent. increase in real terms in public transport fares between now and the end of the decade? Does he still agree with the Department's estimate of between 1 and 2 per cent. growth in road traffic per annum in London? If so, how does he intend to solve the congestion problems on the roads, the overcrowding on the tubes and the huge inefficiencies of our bus and train services? If road building was deemed necessary, what is he now proposing to put in its place?

When Opposition Members asserted that only public transport could meet the needs of millions of Londoners on the move, Ministers constantly denied it. Indeed, when the hon. Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) briefed

[Ms. Ruddock]

hon. Members representing London constituencies, he said that only a mix of new road building and public transport could solve the problems of congestion——

(Mr. Atkins): That is right.

Ms. Ruddock: The Minister says, "That is right." Where is his faith in new road building tonight? His right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has rejected all the road proposals for London which, at that meeting, he said were absolutely essential to solve the problems of this capital city—*[Interruption.]* I assure Conservative Members that I do, indeed, understand.

I shall go further into my recollection of that meeting with the Minister. At that very same briefing, the Minister's advisers told us of the computer models on which the Department itself had tested the consultants' proposals. I remember specifically asking the Minister whether he could give me the results of the proposals of the tests on road building alone. His advisers said that they could not, but they could tell me that, in their model tests, the public transport proposals alone could not solve the problems. Both the Minister and I were present——

Mr. Atkins: Absolutely.

Ms. Ruddock: The Minister says, "Absolutely." Opposition Members must therefore ask, if that is his view and if there are now to be no road-building proposals, how is he to solve the very problems that were identified in the four assessment studies?

Just a matter of weeks ago, the Minister put that view on the record, so I challenge him tonight to make absolutely clear how the Government propose to deal with the problems outlined in those studies when they no longer propose to build the roads that they previously said were so essential to the solutions.

Does the Minister intend to introduce measures of car restraint, or does he accept that in 10 years the amount of traffic could be 20 per cent. greater than it is today? If he accepts that, in an essential area, does he honestly believe that any vehicles will be moving on our roads?

How exactly do the Minister and his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport intend to accelerate the development of public transport proposals that have been listed and reiterated today? Will the Minister answer my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, South and tell him why he cannot do as the central London rail study recommended and immediately put in train the building of both the north-south Chelsea to Hackney link and the cross-rail link? Is it not true that it is not that London cannot stand work of that nature, but rather that the private Bill procedure is so onerous that London Regional Transport feels that it cannot cope with its pressures if it has to put two Bills through the House simultaneously? Surely it is incumbent on the Minister, as my hon. Friend said, to find a way through that procedure so that we can put into practice the public transport options that are so agreeable to people in this city.

I hope that the Minister will not give us another tiresome list of all the measures that are in hand.

Mr. Atkins: Does not the hon. Lady like them?

Ms. Ruddock: On the contrary, we are delighted that measures are in hand, but we see that they are not producing any solutions. We want the Minister to explain whether his Department has a new approach to the transport problems of London. We believe that this is a time for a reassessment of London's transport needs—not, I hasten to add, another series of studies, but a pulling together of the many analyses and reports that have already been done and are available.

There is a consensus across the political spectrum, in local government and among the people of London about what the problems are and what the solutions should be. The Minister must explain to the House what the Government's attitude to future funding of public transport will be. We have had no explanation of why the extension of the docklands light railway into south London, into Lewisham and my constituency in particular, could not have gone forward last autumn. All the details had been worked up by LRT and the docklands light railway. There had been proper public consultation, the conclusion of which was wholly in favour of the proposals. The proposals were environmentally sound. It had all been costed.

We believe that, quite simply, the Secretary of State was not satisfied that enough private money had been sought to support the proposal. That kind of strategy is no strategy. It means that, if a developer happens to be prepared to put up the money, the scheme will go ahead, but if a developer cannot be found, there will be no public transport option. That is completely unacceptable to everyone in London. If the Government are to have a change of heart—which we would welcome—in favour of public transport, they must be clear where the money is coming from and when it is coming. They must be absolutely clear that, although partnerships with and contributions from, developers are welcome, developers must not determine the public transport policy of the city.

How satisfied are the Government with the quality of our public transport?

Mr. Tony Banks: They do not use it.

Ms. Ruddock: As my hon. Friend reminds me, they probably do not use it. The vast majority of Londoners who do use public transport are clearly dissatisfied. If we are to encourage people to use public transport or continue to use it, not to use their cars, or to use their cars less, we must aim for the highest possible standards. Will the Minister help in that regard by reviewing the Government's attitude to staffing levels on all our public transport systems? Reductions in staffing have prevented people from getting the help that they require to make public transport more acceptable and usable.

Many women are already determined not to use public transport after dark because they feel unsafe. Will the Minister end the cost-cutting regime so that public transport can be cleaned up and people can be confident about its safety?

What does the Minister intend to do about the state of public transport, which my hon. Friends and I have repeatedly drawn to his attention and that of his right hon. and hon. Friends? I remind the House, yet again, of the situation that prevailed in January. In an average week, there were 26 station closures on the underground due to staff shortages. On average, 12 underground stations were closed every morning for a time because of overcrowding. On average, one in six escalators were out of order on any given day. The average wait for a high-frequency bus service is one and a half times what it should be, and only two thirds of timetabled bus services depart on time or within five minutes of their schedule.

We applaud any change of heart by the Government that is positively in favour of public transport. That change of heart will be useless if it is but a public relations exercise, if real public money is not behind it, and if standards are not improved so that people in London positively want to use public transport and enjoy using it.

My hon. Friends have made an extremely good case tonight, for bringing back a strategic transport authority for the city. There is no other way in which we can find a coherent and comprehensive response to the traffic problems of the city other than through one elected authority with an overview, a strategy, and the necessary mechanism and access to public money to make that possible.

Tonight we urge the Minister to go beyond this afternoon's exercise, which was an attempt to save the skins of Tories in marginal seats. He should show us that there has been a change of heart and that we can look forward to a real and comprehensive strategy for transport in London.

1.42 am

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Robert Atkins): First, I must congratulate the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) on his ingenuity and stamina in raising this subject at this time, particularly after the exhaustive statement and discussion about these matters in the earlier part of the afternoon.

On Friday there was a major debate on public transport, when the Minister of State, who deals with such matters daily, spent a lot of time discussing the issues, as did many hon. Members on both sides of the House. There was also an earlier debate today on light railways, when my hon. Friend discussed that matter with hon. Members. If the House will forgive me, I shall not dwell at enormous length on the details of the railways and the tube, which Opposition Members have already raised with the Minister. He is aware of their concerns, but I shall ensure that they are once again drawn to his attention. I suspect that his reply will be his normal robust one—that the problems are being addressed with substantial investment and commitment.

Given my particular responsibilities, I should like to discuss roads in London. I am delighted to record that it appears that we have shot the Opposition's fox. They thought that the Government would be hogtied over this issue and find themselves in difficulties, and are now making a U-turn. That is absolute palpable balderdash.

Everyone who heard this afternoon's statement will know not only that Conservative Members reacted very favourably to the consultation exercise that we carried out, but that not one Opposition Member was able even to wing my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State because they knew full well that what we did was sensible and logical and the sort of thing that they could have expected from my right hon. Friend and me.

I make no apologies for the course of action that we took. When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I took office in this Department last July, we came in at the tail end of the assessment study procedure, which had been going on, as the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) said, for some time. My right hon. Friend and I were determined to ensure that we brought the study to fruition as quickly as possible for the simple reason that as a Londoner born and bred, and one who served on a London local authority for 10 years—although I represent a Lancashire constituency—I know full well the problems and realities in London.

I recognise that there has been concern. When I started on Haringey council, Archway road was a problem, when I came off the council in 1976 it was still a problem, and when I came to this Department I discovered that it was still a fundamental problem. My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) has reminded me that it was a problem as far back as 1947. Many things do not change. I think that the hon. Member for Newham, South referred to a former Home Secretary who recognised that there was a problem at Archway road. Were it to have been recorded, I expect that many other hon. Members have, over the years, protested about congestion in London and other major cities.

The consultants came up with a number of proposals. The Department of Transport was involved in asking questions, as it had in years gone by. It invited consultants in the four areas to look at the possibilities as the technical experts saw them. Hon. Members will know better than I, because it affected their constituents before I came to this job, that a considerable amount of controversy was stirred up because the consultants considered the most extreme options and the much smaller ones. On average, there were a dozen options, sometimes more, sometimes less, in each of the assessment study areas. Those included road and public transport options, and were the consultants' ideas.

Shortly after my right hon. Friend and I took office in this Department, we were presented with the consultants' final reports. The matter had gone on for some time, and Members from both sides of the House had indicated that they did not think that it could continue for much longer. Therefore, we determined to complete the process as quickly as we could, which we did.

Some hon. Members attacked my right hon. Friend when he said in November that the consultation process would be over by the end of February. They said that the period was too short. We wanted to curtail people's worry and concern, and forestall the possibility of blight. The right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) waved around a figure of 10,000 this afternoon. Many people—about that number or less—were concerned about the threats as they saw them, although they were largely fictitious. However, there was much concern. We all know, as Members of Parliament, that our constituents can become worried by any sort of proposal. One only has to have a chat with the surveyors, draw a line outside a house and everyone starts worrying. I recognised the concern, and the Department wanted to do something about it.

At the same time, we underwent a processs of consultation in the Department which was as wide as I have seen since being in public office. We listened to everyone and received representations in all sorts of odd forms from various opponents of the schemes. A good number of them were doubtless Labour party supporters, or even further to the left. Equally, there were a substantial number of opponents who represented Conservative and other views, and it became——

Ms. Ruddock: At this stage of the consultation, did the Minister or the Department learn anything different from

[Ms. Ruddock]

all that had been set out in the many documents, reports and statements made by those who had been involved over the years, including the public response that came to the Department before stage 2 was commissioned in 1987, which was to the effect that additional road capacity would attract more traffic and the congestion problems would not be solved?

Mr. Atkins: That is a school of thought of many people, not least my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), but we cannot disinvent cars, lorries, trucks or buses. They are there, and we must deal with that problem.

I think that the hon. Lady and I would find agreement if I were to remind the House of the remarks of the Liberal spokesman on these matters. She has said that there are not many Labour Members in their places or many of my hon. Friends, but no Liberal Member is present. The House may recall that the Liberal party has said that it is not in favour of any restriction on the use of private cars but it would not be prepared to build roads on which those cars could travel. That would be the ultimate recipe for congestion. That is typical of those who sit on the fence with an ear to the ground on both sides of it.

The hon. Lady has talked about the consultation procedure. I cannot give her chapter and verse of what went on before I became involved, but I could inquire for her. If she would like me to do so, I shall write to her. I can explain only what I have done since I have been Under-Secretary of State for Transport. The Department has gone through the consultation process with no fixed view of what should or should not happen. Opposition Members may not believe that, but I assure them that what I say is true. I recognise the concerns that have been expressed.

The hon. Lady says that we have done away with all our road programmes and that our road policy in London is in tatters. I invite my right hon. and hon. Friends to agree with me that a road policy that will cost £250 million for new roads and road improvements in London is not much evidence of a policy in tatters. It is not much evidence of a complete removal of road improvements.

It is a substantial policy, and we are talking only of proposals. I remind the House that we are already committed to a £1·9 billion programme for London's trunk roads and a further £1 billion to be spent by the London Docklands development corporation and the boroughs on other road schemes. That is not much evidence that we are reducing the roads programme and other road schemes. We have the largest roads programme that we have ever had outside London. Incidentally, that investment is being exceeded by the spending on public transport.

Ms. Ruddock: I wish to correct the Minister. This afternoon, the Secretary of State for Transport said clearly, "I have decided not to proceed with the major road schemes recommended by the studies." I merely reiterated that statement tonight. I have not questioned the so-called improvements and the moneys for the traffic-calming measures, of which we wholly approve.

Mr. Atkins: Many adjustments will be made to existing roads, but what about the commitment that we made to build the Hooley bypass, for example? That is a new road for which people have asked. It forms part of the £250 million programme to which I have referred.

Ms. Ruddock: We must be clear what we are talking about. The cost of all the road building proposals was to be about £3 billion. There is a considerable difference between £3 billion and the millions of which the Minister speaks.

Mr. Atkins: We cannot continue like this. The hon. Lady and her hon. Friends say that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I made much play with the proposed roads being unpopular. Having listened to what the London public requested across the political, industrial and municipal spectrum and decided that the proposals did not make a lot of sense in some areas, we are now accused of making a U-turn and dropping programmes. Where exactly does the Labour party stand on these issues?

Ms. Ruddock: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Atkins: The hon. Lady has had a fair crack of the whip, and doubtless will have the same opportunity again.

I make no apology for the statement that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made this afternoon. The comments about London borough elections are well taken. Our currency and the way in which we operate in the House across the political spectrum has to do with votes and public opinion, because votes represent the views of ordinary people. I do not deny that, for the simple reason that, if Opposition Members are fair, those of them who have been in government or who have served on local authorities—I know that the hon. Member for Newham North-West (Mr. Banks) is one—will agree that some decisions that may be cross-party in conception or in practice are not always discussed properly in the heat of a general or local election.

To that extent, it is wise to remove some matters from an immediate election programme discussion. We have the opportunity to discuss these matters; we have taken it until now and will doubtless do so again. But I make no apology for recognising and hearing what London has said about its concerns. I am proud of the fact. As my right hon. Friend said this afternoon, the decision is not to be regarded in any way as a climb-down, because we never climbed up in the first place. Let us get that clear and on the record.

I do not wish to delay the House unnecessarily but I must answer one or two of the questions that have arisen. I was interested in what the hon. Member for Deptford said about traffic restraint and road pricing——

Ms. Ruddock: Not me.

Mr. Atkins: Road pricing was mentioned.

Mr. Spearing: It was me.

Mr. Atkins: The hon. Member for Newham, South mentioned road pricing and said that he did not favour it. I am interested in that view, because I was under the impression that the Labour party had adopted a measure of road pricing. On at least one occasion, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East has made it clear that he is in favour of it; presumably he has had to change his mind as a result of pressure from his hon. Friends. Road pricing is an area of philosophical concern which I suspect will not go away and will have to be examined over a period of time.

The hon. Member for Newham, North-West also referred to problems arising from street works—a subject on which I have considerable sympathy with him. He will know of the existence of the Public Utilities Street Works Act 1950—PUSWA for short—which is long overdue for reform.

Ms. Ruddock: Hear, hear.

Mr. Atkins: At this stage I can do no more than express the hope that street works will form part of legislative proposals based on the Horne report and related matters towards the end of the year. I deduce from Opposition Members' reaction that such proposals will find favour across the political spectrum. I cannot make a commitment, but I hope that, when my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord President of the Council considers these matters, he will take into account the express view of hon. Members on both sides of the House.

The final concern that was expressed was in relation to company cars. Company cars are an emotive issue. I know that many of my constituents who have achieved some status in their lives look upon company cars as perks or as the tools of their trade, whether they are salesmen on the road, people who regularly travel or even company directors. The taxation of company cars is, of course, a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

We have a unique capacity in this country to provide cars for a substantial number of people and I look upon that as an opportunity for environmental change and improvement. We can persuade companies that buy a substantial number of cars to realise that they can influence a decision on the sort of cars that their employees use. Cars should be environmentally more friendly, smaller and safer, and they should be capable automatically of using lead-free petrol——

Mr. Spearing: And be British.

Mr. Atkins: Yes, and be British. Even if they are Japanese in origin, the fact that they have been built in this country is another attraction. If that opportunity were taken, it would go a long way to coping with the environmental problems about which hon. Members on both sides of the House are concerned.

I have ranged over a wide variety of concerns that have been raised. I emphasise that the proposals that my right hon. Friend announced today are an indication of a plan for London that is balanced in terms of public transport and improvements on the roads and in terms of the finance which in part we shall provide. I have no doubt that we shall persuade the Treasury, as we have in the past, to increase our budget to provide the resources, and we shall endeavour to ensure that the schemes are completed.

In terms of transport proposals for London, we now know exactly where we stand. I reject utterly the suggestion of Opposition Members that, as one of my right hon. predecessors may well have said, the Government are adamant for drift. In fact, we are committed to a London public transport policy covering a wide variety of options. It is up to the public to choose. Through the recent consultation procedure, they have indicated their views. I welcome that, as do my hon. Friends. In due course, the proof of the pudding will be in the eating, and it will be a Conservative Secretary of State for Transport in a Conservative Government who will be implementing the plans in the year 2000.

European Exchange Rate Mechanism

2 am

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): That we can move from transport in London to the European monetary system in one fell swoop, in the blink of an eyelid, is another indication of how this original parliamentary institution deals with so many subjects on the Adjournment. I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the very important matter of the future of this country in the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system, but I am especially grateful to my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury for appearing at this late—or early—hour to respond to points made by myself and, perhaps, by other hon. Members. All Treasury Ministers are known to have an excessive workload during the day, and they work in the evenings as well—and now the early morning, too. At this late hour I shall try to be brief, despite the fact that this is a very important area of policy.

As the debate has ebbed and flowed, in this House—the mother of Parliaments—in the European Parliament and in other institutions of the European Community, this area of policy has been in the news. It has been dealt with in a very major way in the British press. I am thinking in particular of the excellent contributions of the *Financial Times*. As in so many other areas of enlightened policy, that excellent newspaper is a most enthusiastic exponent of our immediate, or very early, accession to the exchange rate mechanism, and of the theory that yesterday would have been even better. I think that I am right in saying that.

I assume that that is more or less the policy of Her Majesty's Government, including my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary and his colleagues in the Treasury. Indeed, the Chancellor gave a notable and interesting interview on television on Sunday, in which he emphasised that the rate of inflation was the crucial factor in the timing of our joining the exchange rate mechanism. I do not remember his exact words, but I think that the implication was "as soon as possible". He sounded enthusiastic, although he uttered a word of caution about our inflation rate differential.

That is obviously a problem, so much so that after the television interview the press and, I think, hon. Members, perhaps from all parties, took it as being the primordial condition and assumed that other questions concerning our formal joining of the EMS had faded into the background. That is my understanding of what I heard. I hope that it is not a wild exaggeration and that it does not indicate a misunderstanding of the realities of a complicated debate.

In this country, however, the debate seems to have become unnecessarily complicated. Certain people seem to be agonising about when we should take this step. I was very struck by the words of the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), when he referred to this matter on Monday, the last day of the Budget debate. His comments attracted considerable attention. Referring to the Chancellor's broadcast the previous day, he said:

> "Again, my right hon. Friend, in his Budget statement and again in his broadcast yesterday"—

that was on Sunday—

> "very firmly restated the Government's commitment to sterling joining the exchange rate mechanism of the EMS. But my concern is that the timetable which is envisaged by the Government might be somewhat too leisurely for the circumstances in which we find ourselves. In my judgement, it is a pity that we did not join some time ago, but we did not, and that is that. But now we really cannot afford to take the risks involved in a leisurely timetable.
>
> It may be that we should initially join within the framework of the wider bands before subsequently moving to the narrower bands, but the whole of the Goverment's commitment against inflation is potentially at risk. There is an exposed flank, and that is why I could favour the early entry of sterling, as I said, possibly initially with the wider bands, into the exchange rate mechanism of the EMS".—[*Official Report*, 26 March 1990; Vol. 170, c. 62.]

There was much more in that vein from other hon. Members in the debate.

When the decision will be made and what is the reason for further delay are now the central concerns. The matter came up again at Question Time yesterday when the other elements in the policy for delay were raised, whether justified or not—the creation of greater competition in the Community and the need for the residual capital controls to be removed, matters which have to be taken care of before Britain can join the ERM.

A few weeks ago an additional condition was interposed in this increasingly complex and somewhat bewildering debate—the processing of, and perhaps even the conclusion of, German monetary union and reunification of the two parts of Germany before we could proceed further. That seems subsequently to have lapsed, and now there seems to be a suggestion that that may not be such a difficult condition after all.

I am grateful to Mr. Speaker and the authorities of the House for allowing me to initiate this debate, the purpose of which is to try to elucidate from my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary precisely the point we have now reached. There is confusion among our partners and friends in the Community, as we see from the foreign newspapers and the utterances of representatives of the Commission in Brussels and members of the European Parliament, and from the bewilderment in Britain too, about what we are about.

I do not think that there is much debate now about the modalities and the attractions of the EMS. We are, after all, part members of it. We share in the reserve sharing system, and so on, and the implication is that we shall join fully as soon as possible. We know what has been done and launched under the Delors report with the central bank governors, and so on, all at the specific request of previous European Councils and summits and the Council of Ministers, not something that was launched by the Commission as a malevolent, perverse exercise of its own with nobody asking for it. If I remember rightly, Delors was enjoined, with his colleagues, to produce a detailed blueprint—those are the words used in the request for that complex and impressive examination. Yet when that was produced by Mr. Delors, whom some denounce as a dangerous Marxist—on further examination that proves to be untrue; he is a distinguished high functionary of the French public service and now an equally distinguished and important servant and President of the Commission—he was castigated in some quarters for producing such a detailed report, as though that were an unwarranted intrusion into the sovereignty and national financial affairs of the member states. But that does not seem to have caused any problem in the other member states, and I think particularly of Spain, with its enthusiasm for most aspects of the Community and its decision to go in on the basis of an inflation rate similar to ours.

The questions in Britain remain: what is our policy, why the delay, and are we locked into delay for its own sake? Ominously, we have increasing illustrations of the danger of high interest rates adding to the prevailing rate of inflation rather than reducing it, and so the danger is that we are locked into a policy because we have said that high interest rates are our only policy of control. We cannot get out of that. We are waiting for something else to turn up, or for the inflation rate to come down, but perhaps it will not, because other forces are keeping it up. That is also a primordial condition of the delay which causes further excessive delay in our joining the exchange rate mechanism.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there are three areas of debate: first, on principle; secondly, on conditions; and, thirdly, on timing? Does he also agree that there has not been much debate on the principle? May I draw his attention to the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) yesterday? He took a diametrically opposed view to that of the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), the former Chancellor of the Exchequer. Does the hon. Gentleman wish to comment on anything that my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East said about principle? I thought that my hon. Friend made a powerful case for the economic principle.

Mr. Dykes: I do not agree, because I think that the principle has been thoroughly and fundamentally debated at all stages.

Mr. Spearing: Not in this House.

Mr. Dykes: Yes, very much so, through every stage of its parliamentary consideration, within the institutions of the Community, in the inter-governmental relationship with other member Governments of the Community since the Stuttgart declaration of March 1983, throughout the statements made in the House, the subsequent debates, and throughout the lengthy and elaborate process of the Single European Act. Although the single market is the first item in the list of items in the Single European Act, it is not the only one. According to juridical examination of the seven items, they are all equal, and economic and monetary union is one of them. That was ratified by the House as an addition to the treaty.

There is no question of any gaps or subterfuge by the Government or anyone else, nor any question of lack of debate in this place about all these matters. The principle seems to be greeted with enormous and almost universal enthusiasm in the House and outside, although that is somewhat precluded by the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing), who is the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee and one of the last hon. Members to remain unenthusiastic about our membership of the European Community. We know that, and we respect his scholarship, research and study of such matters, but we think that he is out of date and has been overtaken by events. Most people in the Labour party also now think that, because they too have changed, whether for genuine or artificial reasons, or for a mixture of both.

When one studies what has happened under the exchange rate mechanism—and, predictably, one would expect the Delors report to be enthusiastic about it—one realises how well it has worked. It has also worked for the weaker members of the Community. I remember some of the British newspapers—the *Daily Express* and the *Sunday Express* used to go berserk about this subject but they have calmed down a bit now—said that Italy could not possibly stay in the European monetary system because the Italians could not organise things, which is most offensive. It is not true either. Italy is a rather well-run country, and we ought to learn more about it as it could give us some good advice about how to do things here. They said that the lire was too weak. But not a bit of it—we have seen what has happened.

I shall quote from page 2 of the Delors report—and the House will recognise his natural enthusiasm; after all, he and his committee made all these proposals and suggestions. It says:

> "Within the framework of the EMS the participants in the exchange rate mechanism have succeeded in creating a zone of increasing monetary stability at the same time as gradually relaxing capital controls. The exchange rate constraints"—

which are what we are talking about when we mention anti-inflation discipline and all the rest of it, and it is a pity that we are not right in there, as 100 per cent. members—

> "has greatly helped those participating countries with relatively high rates of inflation in gearing their policies, notably monetary policy, to the objective of price stability, thereby laying the foundations for both a downward convergence of inflation rates and the attainment of a high degree of exchange rate stability. This, in turn, has helped moderate cost increases in many countries, and has led to an improvement in overall economic performance. Moreover, reduced uncertainty regarding exchange rate developments and the fact that the parities of the participating currencies have not been allowed to depart significantly from what is appropriate in the light of economic fundamentals have protected intra-European trade from excessive exchange rate volatility."

I think that I am right in saying that a few years ago Holland too had a high rate of inflation. According to various learned articles in the Dutch papers—and ours —it was caused by huge social costs. I hope that the Whip, my hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Mr. Dorrell), with his knowledge of Holland, will confirm that inflation there is now running at 1·5 or 2 per cent. Perhaps there is a lesson for us in that.

When I read out the passage from the Delors report, I did not hear anyone say that it was an exaggerated, hysterical description of an unsuccessful system. If we accept it, it underscores the view expressed by the former Chancellor on Monday—that is is a tragedy that we did not join the exchange rate mechanism long ago. I still do not know why we decided to establish some of the Madrid conditions.

I support the Government's view that there should be reasonable primary conditions for our entry, if they appear rational; but, when I look back on all the ebb and flow of subsequent developments, I wonder whether that is so. By joining, would we not have avoided, at least partly, our present high interest rates and ominously high inflation? We seem to be stuck in a corner; we continue to say, for some curious chemical reason—I should love to be able to work it out rationally—that there is still no good reason for joining a mechanism that has been so enormously,

[Mr. Dykes]

tangibly and incontrovertibly successful for all European member states, including the weaker and newer ones such as Spain.

Surely, given the enthusiasm of those countries, we should follow their example as soon as possible, despite our mistake of having delayed unnecessarily so far. I look forward to hearing my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary reassure us—and, indeed, add to an already spectacular career—by getting carried away and announcing a putative future date on which we can join the ERM with no further delay. I am sure that, in his heart of hearts, he too regards the present position as unsatisfactory and frustrating, and would like to make his name by lending it to what we would call the Ryder declaration.

2.16 am

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes), not only on his success in securing a slot for such an important debate—albeit in the early hours of the morning—but on his recent persistence in raising the issue. He has already intervened in the Budget debate, and this afternoon he asked the Prime Minister a question which produced an extremely interesting response. He also chose exactly the right time of day—I was able to travel to Nottingham to deliver a speech to the Royal Economic Society earlier this evening about this very issue.

I am not surprised that the hon. Gentleman should describe the confusion that he felt—and thought that the world felt—about the current stance of the British Government, each of whose members seems to tell a slightly different tale. First, the Chancellor himself said clearly in his Budget speech:

> "Our commitment to do so"—

that is, to take sterling into the exchange rate mechanism—

> "was set out at Madrid. It remains firm"—

and then the qualifying phraseology comes in:

> "and the conditions for entry remain unchanged."—[*Official Report*, 20 March 1990; Vol. 169, c. 1013.]

That may seem clear enough, but in a television interview at the weekend the Chancellor seemed to become rather more positive about British entry than he had been in the cold, formal Budget statement. After the Chancellor's more enthusiastic references in his television interview, however, the Prime Minister seemed today to be distancing herself, yet again, from a firm commitment to British entry.

There was a new version of the royal "we" in the Prime Minister's answer. I think that I quote her correctly as saying, "In my first decade as Prime Minister I was unable to enter the exchange rate mechanism." Identification of the Prime Minister with the rest of the world by the use of the word "we" is one thing. Identification of the Prime Minister in her own person with the currency of this country is something else. However, it was clear from what she said that she regards the conditions that she laid down at Madrid as being, as yet, unfulfilled and that she is reiterating them with ever greater ferocity.

What are those conditions? The first is that the rate of inflation must come down. The Government have never specified what the rate of inflation must be before they believe it right to join the exchange rate mechanism. They have said that inflation will increase over the next few months, that it will reach a plateau of around 7 per cent. for the rest of the year and that if their predictions turn out for once to be correct, inflation will fall to around 5 per cent.—but it will still be above the European average—in the next financial year. However, the Government have not said at what point on that scale, if at all, they would regard it as right for Britain to join the exchange rate mechanism.

Secondly, there is the free movement of capital condition. I was surprised when the Prime Minister laid such stress upon that condition this afternoon. The Prime Minister regards the French as the principal perpetrators of evil in that respect, but considerable progress has been made in the past few months in the rest of the European Economic Community and especially by the French. The condition relative to free movement of capital has been almost fully met, yet it was again trotted out by the Prime Minister as the principal condition that she thought had not been met.

Behind those two stated conditions, relating to inflation and to the free movement of capital, there is perhaps another, which the Prime Minister is reported in the press as having stated privately though not in public—the fear that unification of the two German states, leading to German currency union, will have an impact in the short term on the deutschmark and will thus create a strain on the existing exchange rate mechanism. We know from press reports that that fear may have been in her mind but nowhere has she stated it.

I hope that the Economic Secretary will say at what point, in terms of inflation, the Government believe that it would be right to join the exchange rate mechanism. I hope that he will also say whether the Government believe that progress on the free movement of capital has gone far enough and that that condition has been met. I hope, too, that he will make clear where precisely the Government stand in relation to the convergence of the deutschmark and the ostmark in terms of its impact on the exchange rate mechanism.

It seems clear that the conditions being reiterated and amplified by the Prime Minister at every stage of the debate have either been fulfilled or are incapable of fulfilment in the terms in which the right hon. Lady states them. The only logical and practical conclusion to draw is that she has decided that she does not want sterling to enter the exchange rate mechanism at any foreseeable stage.

By contrast, the position of the Opposition is clear. We wish to commence discussions for the entry of sterling into the ERM immediately. We have said that clearly and we shall continue to urge the Government to undertake it. We would wish four principles to form the content of the negotiation and discussion. They are, as clearly stated, entry at the right rate, adequate swap arrangements between the central banks to ensure protection against speculation, policies for growth agreed between the countries of the European Community and a proper regional policy to ensure that imbalances between different countries can be remedied. Those are matters which any sensible Government contemplating entry of the currency into a fixed exchange rate mechanism would wish to discuss in an amicable fashion with our European colleagues.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I have agreed with every word the hon. Gentleman uttered until his last statement, and perhaps I could even agree with that. I detect a change of emphasis of the kind that he was trying to analyse in the Government when he said that he was looking for policies for growth as one of the conditions. Is this the end of the reflationary condition? Is it no longer a condition of Labour's now welcome support for the ERM that it should become an engine of reflation rather than an institution designed to prevent inflation?

Mr. Smith: An argument to which I shall be coming for entry into the ERM is that it provides a counter-inflationary discipline. I would draw a distinction between an economic mechanism that is counter-inflationary and one that is deflationary. Entry into the ERM assists in acting as a counter-inflationary discipline on the internal economy. In association with that, however, we would wish to ensure that balanced growth—growth can be unbalanced and bring problems—policies are adopted in common across the whole of Europe. One must ensure that in seeking to achieve counter-inflationary pressure one is not simultaneously achieving deflationary pressure. That danger exists unless at the same time there are common policies for balanced growth.

We do not regard the principles that we have adumbrated and that we wish to see as part of the discussion with our European colleagues as obstacles we are placing in the way of membership. We regard them as prudent items for friendly discussion. In our discussions so far, Governments and colleagues in EC countries have readily agreed with our objectives.

The benefits of exchange rate mechanism membership are clear. First, there is the benefit of stability for industry in having an exchange rate on which it can plan. The verdict of industry itself is clear. An interesting poll was reported in *Financial Weekly* in January. The magazine took a poll of chief executives, finance directors and executives responsible for the financial strategy of companies with a total market value of £152 billion, which represented 32·5 per cent. of the market capitalisation of the whole British-quoted sector. The report of the poll continues:

> "Their verdict was an almost unanimous 'yes' to joining the ERM, with 97·2 per cent. by market capitalisation, and 91·8 per cent. by the number of companies questioned, in favour."

It is staggering that there should be such unanimous support within British industry for British participation in the exchange rate mechanism.

That view is confirmed in private discussion after private discussion that I have had with people responsible for running companies in Britain and there is, of course, overwhelming support from the other side of British industry by the Trades Union Congress. That must show that there is a clear view coming from British industry in support of membership.

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): Industry wishes to take advantage of the single market, which is the declared policy of the Government. It is not logical to believe that one cannot take part in a single market unless there is some relationship between currencies. It is impossible to plan, design and take advantage unless one knows what the exchange rate will be for a considerable period.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman is right. I draw his attention to my recent conversation with one of the directors of BP, whom I asked whether, as a director of one of Britain's premier companies, he would prefer a low exchange rate or a stable exchange rate. He said unequivocally that he would prefer to have a stable exchange rate—a view which is shared across British industry by firms large and small.

Mr. Spearing: Everyone would agree that stability in exchange rates is an aid to trade and industry, but does my hon. Friend agree that in the last resort the exchange rate is an expression of the relative strengths of different economies as expressed in the value of their own currencies? If the economy of a country is, alas, for any combination of reasons not so strong as it should be and perhaps getting weaker, is there not a risk that, whatever the form of mechanism devised, there must eventually be some break point equivalent to the old-style devaluation with all its traumas and disadvantages?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend, who enjoys considerable respect in the House for his sterling work as Chairman of the Select Committee on European Legislation, is an assiduous follower of our discussions on this and related issues. I confess, however, that I do not entirely agree with the point that he has raised because I believe that it ignores a number of factors. First, within the existing exchange rate mechanism, especially if we go in as the former Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), wishes—on broad bands rather than narrow bands at the start—there is a capacity for adjustment. Only if we got to an eventual grid-locked exchange rate mechanism, which in effect would land us in the realm of a common currency, would it become impossible to alter between exchange rates.

Perhaps more important than that, the relative weakness or strength of different currencies has more to do with confidence and credibility than with any particular pragmatic, identifiable economic factors. The linking of a particular currency with a basket of other currencies can engender an enormous amount of confidence and credibility which would not otherwise be there. I draw my hon. Friend's attention, for example, to what has happened with some of the smaller currencies in the world that have been tied explicitly to other currencies. The most obvious examples are the Hong Kong dollar, which is explicitly tied to the United States dollar, and the Austrian schilling, which is explicitly tied to the deutschmark. In all such cases, very considerable economic benefit has been derived from the confidence which the linkage has generated in the economy concerned.

Of course, sterling is in a different league and we have to make a judgment about the impact of sterling's entry into a much wider currency accumulation such as the exchange rate mechanism. It is our judgment that the entry of sterling into the ERM would be sufficiently economically beneficial to outweigh the potential disadvantage of yielding up the ability automatically, independently and unilaterally to devalue.

Mr. Dykes: Is it not the accurate reflection of the supreme attraction of so doing that the system has, above all, helped the weaker, deficit-oriented members coming into it and remaining in it—that would include Britain if we joined now with a somewhat uncomfortable deficit—rather than the main strong currency, the deutschmark in Germany, and the other strong one? It has been particularly beneficial to the weaker ones, which have become stronger as a result of full membership.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Member is right, because the tendency within the exchange rate mechanism, especially in recent years as the number of fluctuations within the mechanism has decreased, has been for the weaker currencies and economies to be strengthened by membership rather than for the stronger currencies and economies to be weakened. That, obviously, is one of the major reasons why we believe that Britain would benefit. I note the implication in what the hon. Gentleman has just said that our economy would indeed count as one of the weaker economies in the exchange rate mechanism. That is a point that we have been urging the Government to accept and admit, but we seem to be having little success with those on the Treasury Bench.

The benefits of ERM are these. First, it would create stability for industry. Secondly, it would strengthen protection against speculation. The ability that membership of the exchange rate mechanism gives for one central bank to wrap the strength of other central banks around its efforts to protect its own currency is extremely important. It is not without its burdens as well as its benefits, but it is none the less useful. Thirdly, as I mentioned in response to the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), the exchange rate mechanism would provide the surest anchor against inflation that we could seek.

Fourthly, and perhaps most important, membership of the ERM would formalise the position that we have in any case, whereby our economic sovereignty is to some extent circumscribed by the actions of other countries and currencies. It cannot have escaped anyone's notice that when the Bundesbank put up its interest rates at the beginning of October last year, our interest rates had to follow within two hours of that decision.

The reality is that the global economy is far more inter-dependent than it was 10, 20 or 50 years ago, and that reality should be recognised within the structures in which we play a part. ERM membership would give us a seat at the table and enable us to participate in the important decisions from which we are excluded but which have an inevitable impact on our economy.

The exchange rate mechanism offers no panacea for our economic problems, nor would it give us an instant solution to our inflation problem, our balance of payments difficulties or the high interest rate policy upon which the Government are so dependent. Nevertheless, it offers considerable economic benefits of stability, strength, protection against speculation and participation in crucial economic decisions and it would impose a discipline within the internal economy. In our view, the benefits of exchange rate mechanism membership and participation would enormously outweigh the burden which that discipline would impose.

There is a real danger that if the Government delay too long in making the necessary approaches for Britain to join the ERM, we shall be left outside the club while it develops, changes and progresses into a different shape, leaving us totally isolated on the sidelines and removing any of the potential benefits which increasing economic co-operation across Europe can and must offer to the British economy.

2.44 am

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Richard Ryder): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) for his kind words at the outset of his speech. As to the enticing words at the end, I must resist any temptation to make a Ryder declaration tonight. I assure him that no dikes will be broken. I also congratulate my hon. Friend on initiating the debate. As the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) said, it is appropriate that he should have done so, in view of his long-standing and consistent interest in the issue, the most recent example of which we heard at Prime Minister's Question Time earlier today.

There has been some speculation in the past few days about the timing of the United Kingdom's entry into the exchange rate mechanism. Let me make this very clear. It is not a question of whether sterling will join; it is simply a question of when. The Government believe that, in the right context, membership will be helpful to us, but the context must be right.

As the House knows, the Prime Minister set out the conditions for our entry clearly when she returned from Madrid last June. She said then that we will join the ERM when the level of United Kingdom inflation is significantly lower, when there is capital liberalisation in the Community and real progress has been made towards completion of the single market, and when there is freedom of financial services and strengthened competition policy. Those conditions still stand—and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer reaffirmed them only last week in his Budget speech. We shall not join the mechanism until they have been met.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury and my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East raised the question whether German monetary union would have any bearing on the timing of our entry into the ERM. The Germans have not yet taken any decisions on the details of monetary union between east and west, much less announced them, but I am sure that the German authorities are well aware of the need to manage the operation in a way that does not lead to higher inflation or disrupt the markets or the ERM. Therefore, the latest developments in Germany should not affect sterling's entry, so our conditions remain unchanged. They have not altered one iota.

Mr. Dykes: Can my hon. Friend add that the Government do not intend to add any additional conditions to our joining the ERM as time goes on?

Mr. Ryder: The conditions were set out clearly at Madrid. Those conditions still stand, and once they have been met, they will enable us to enter the ERM.

Since June, the Community has advanced in a number of the areas that the Prime Minister listed after Madrid. All those countries required to abolish their exchange controls by 1 July 1990 under the 1988 capital liberalisation directive have now done so, apart from Italy. France lifted its remaining controls on 1 January, while Belgium and Luxembourg announced the end of their two-tier exchange market earlier this month, well ahead of the 1992 deadline they had been set. Italy is reported to be aiming to remove all its controls by May. Progress has also been made on competition policy and on liberalisation of financial services.

But further important decisions still need to be taken. For example, as yet only 60 per cent. of the measures contained in the original White Paper on the single market have been agreed at Community level. In the financial services area, the draft investment services directive is still under discussion and the associated capital adequacy directive has not yet been adopted by the Commission. Above all, we need to make more progress in reducing inflation here at home.

Against that background, it would be foolish to attempt to make any precise prediction about the timing of sterling's entry. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East will be well aware that one of the elements in the so-called stage 1 measures recommended by the Delors committee in its report on economic and monetary union was that all Community currencies should be included in [illegible] exchange rate mechanism and that the same rules should apply to each. The Government have fully endorsed that section of the committee's report, so there can be no doubt that sterling will enter the mechanism during stage 1, which begins on 1 July this year.

As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor told the House yesterday in the last speech in the Budget debate, progress is being made towards entry, and join we will, once the conditions that the Prime Minister set out at Madrid have been met.

Mr. Beith: As the Minister is aware, I cannot make my own speech because I have a debate later. I merely wanted to inquire whether the Chancellor's forecast of much slower progress in bringing down inflation will lead to a long delay in entry or a recognition that membership might assist us in defeating inflation.

Mr. Ryder: By a happy chance, I happen to have a transcript with me of what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said. The hon. Gentleman seems to be referring to the interview that the Chancellor gave on the television at the weekend. My right hon. Friend was asked by Jonathan Dimbleby about the ERM and whether the reduction in inflation to 5 per cent. or thereabouts would

> "constitute, for you, a substantial reduction?"

My right hon. Friend replied:

> "Well, it is a large reduction. I think it . . . the really important question is not of itself the reduction of our inflation but the fact that our inflation rate and the inflation rate of our European partners should be proximate. If their inflation rate was all about the same as ours at the moment, then the conditions effectively would probably be met. It is the proximation of our inflation rate to theirs that is the most important factor."

That gives the hon. Gentleman the reply that he sought.

Vietnam (Aid)

2.50 am

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise this important issue. However, when I applied for the slot—I am still grateful for it—I did not realise that I might be speaking in the small hours of the morning. For that reason, I am glad that I am given a relatively high position in the list of debates, so that we are here at this time. I do not need to apologise to the Minister for Overseas Development for keeping her here at this time of morning. If we had not had three statements yesterday, we might have debated this matter at about ten minutes past eleven. Perhaps she should ask her right hon. and hon. Friends why the statements had to be made yesterday.

Aid to Vietnam is an important issue. I shall be fairly brief, because the key points that I wish to make are not controversial—at least we can agree on them. Vietnam is desperately poor. Poverty is the main reason why the boat people attempt to flee the country. Despite all the efforts of the Vietnamese Government, who are trying to reform the economy and to establish economic regeneration, they can begin to regenerate only when the international economic embargo imposed on them is brought to an end.

No one would dispute the range of poverty in Vietnam. Recent figures show that the average per capita income is about £100 a year. Half of all the children who survive suffer from some form of malnutrition. Even if they do not suffer from malnutrition now, the ravages of malnutrition over the years have left their scars on them. They suffer from the health problems associated with malnutrition.

I am indebted to Roger Mathews of the *Financial Times* for an article that he wrote on 8 March. It said:

> "In 1987 and 1988 thousands of Vietnamese were starving and millions more barely had enough food to survive. In April 1988 the Government had to appeal to United Nations agencies for urgent aid, citing 3m people suffering famine conditions and 7m with insufficient food, out of a total population of about 65m.
>
> Eighteen months later not only was Vietnam satisfactorily feeding its population, but to its own amazement had more than 1m tonnes of rice to export, about 10 per cent. of its total production. For the past 20 years Vietnam had been a consistent net importer, now overnight it has become the world's third largest exporter. Those officials who feel like jumping on chairs and cheering have restrained themselves, but privately they are cock-a-hoop despite the characterisation of this achievement by Mr. Nguyen Van Linh, the Communist Party's general secretary, as 'a great revolutionary drive by the peasant masses'.
>
> The revolution had been wrought not in the paddy fields of the Red River and Mekong deltas, not by a change in climatic conditions nor by a new strain of rice, but by Ordinances Nos. 10, 169, 170 and 193 of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, 1988. They stated, very simply, that for the first time peasant farmers were to be given long-term rights to the land they tilled"—

on a 15 or 25 year lease—

> "that, after paying taxes and commissions, they could sell what remained of their crops on the free market, that private traders had the same rights as the state to buy argicultural produce; and that state employees were no longer to receive heavily subsidised rice allowances."

That economic miracle regarding the supply of food was achieved in 18 months and must be admired.

The country has been drained of resources by 30 years of war, first against the French and then against the Americans. It has had no access to international aid or investment in that time to help to rebuild its central

[Mr. William McKelvey]

economy. Some may say that the country's attempts at reform are meagre and certainly there have been none of the sweeping changes witnessed in the Soviet Union as a result of perestroika and glasnost. The communist leadership of Vietnam has begun to reform the central economy and for the first time market principles have been introduced. Some state controls have been lifted and a liberal foreign investment law has been passed.

There is an urgent need for foreign funds because Vietnam is so poor that it cannot raise sufficient funds for investment inside the country. Foreign funds are desperately needed to purchase imports, to invest in the infrastructure, and to help to support the economic reforms that have begun.

The international embargo is led by the Americans who banned all aid and trade with Vietnam following the war. The Americans, of course, have a tremendous influence on many western nations which follow their example. When the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia in 1979, almost all European countries stopped any aid they had supplied.

Last year the International Monetary Fund mission returned to Washington and praised the economic reforms under way and proposed IMF funding. Thanks to a United States and Japanese veto, that proposal was squashed. The United Kingdom stopped aid to Vietnam in 1979 when the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia. Since Vietnam's partial withdrawal from Cambodia the Government's excuse for not giving aid has been that the Vietnamese are not fulfilling their commitment to their people, including the boat people. They will not accept compulsory repatriation and therefore the Government are refusing to give aid.

Last month the Minister of State visited Hanoi, and it was expected that he would offer British aid at least to the areas from which the boat people were attempting to flee. The Vietnamese however, remained intransigent on compulsory repatriation and, therefore, the hon. Gentleman did not offer any aid.

There has been a slight shift in ministerial policy, which was revealed during the most recent Foreign and Commonwealth Office questions. I was pleasantly surprised by some of the responses that were given by Ministers. My hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) asked about aid to Vietnam and when the Government would use their influence to stop the international embargo that

> "appeals to the Pentagon, but to no one else".

The Minister answered:

> "The hon. Gentleman may remember that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and I had a meeting with a number of non-governmental organisations on 14 November 1989. At that meeting we invited the NGOs to put forward a number of proposals which may help people coming from the area where the boat people came from. We have only received the proposals in the last week, but we shall be considering them urgently."—[*Official Report*, 12 March 1990; Vol. 169, c. 18.]

Another two weeks have passed since then. While I appreciate that such decisions cannot be made too hastily and must be carefully considered, because the Minster has indicated a slight shift in policy, I hope that she will be able to tell us tonight whether any progress has been made on the matter, and whether any of the suggestions of non-governmental organisations can be followed up by some sort of positive action from the United Kingdom.

The Minister will probably understand why many Opposition Members need to feel that we are still applying whatever pressures we can to the Government to make them seriously consider, as I am sure that they are, the NGOs' projects. However, funding is essential and should be done as quickly as possible.

While the Minister is considering the NGOs' suggestions, will she look at the possibility of restoring bilateral aid to Vietnam and, through her good offices and those of her right hon. Friends, apply some pressure on the United States to end its embargo, particularly in relation to the International Monetary Fund and the World bank? Through her connections—I am sure that she has many in the European Commission—will she encourage other member states to consider seriously the possibility of giving aid to Vietnam?

Only if we give such aid, and encourage others to do so, will the Vietnamese economy begin to pick up. That will help not only to solve the problem of the boat people, which is most urgent, but to eradicate poverty in an area where we can hopefully begin to establish some useful trading links.

3.3 am

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): Even at this time of day, I am delighted to return to a subject in which I have taken an interest and have followed for some time.

In the previous debate, it was said that, with the exchange rate mechanism, we now have a global economy which is fast moving. One of the big draws of the eastern European countries that I have visited recently is the fact that they feel that they are out of the global economy. Those of us who have been to Vietnam know that that is exactly what many Vietnamese feel.

In south-east Asia there are tremendous, live, developing countries. Vietnam and possibly Burma are probably the only countries to have been left out of that growth, for the reasons described by the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey). In this changing world, at this time of flexibility before things are once again set in concrete, there is a great opportunity to restore Vietnam into the family of nations, restore its economy, deal with its previously aggressive actions and lock it into south-east Asia and its economy. It is interesting that when my right hon. Friend the Minister of State visited this part of the world and attended the conference of the Association of South-East Asian Nations, the ASEAN Ministers, apart from condemning the Khmer Rouge and Pol Pot for the first time in direct terms, suggested that in future they wanted not a Foreign Office Minister but an economic Minister. That bears out what many of us feel, that the time is right to take an economic view as well as a political one.

The first time that a real interest was taken in these matters was in 1986 when the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs looked at south-east Asia and examined Britain's relationship with the region as a whole. We made three recommendations when we returned from Vietnam. First, we pressed for a normalising of relationships between Vietnam and the United States. Secondly, we said that even before there was a withdrawal from Cambodia —we had no doubt that there would not be one before 1990—there should be a common European policy and approach. We never managed to achieve that. Thirdly, we said that a Europewide aid programme should be planned in advance of the withdrawal from Cambodia so that from day one things could start to happen. Again, that was not achieved. I suspect that if it had been, the problems of the boat people and those that we have in Hong Kong would not have arisen. We would have been giving some encouragement to the reforms that have been introduced in Hanoi and a sense of hope, which those of us who visit the country know is sadly lacking. We would have been able to start to build bridges, as it were. That is an essential element in the current relationship.

As I see it, Vietnam is in a Catch-22 situation. It has left Cambodia, but we are not able yet to obtain a United Nations seal of approval because of the protracted negotiations that are taking place over Cambodia. I welcome the statement that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made to me in which he detailed the part that the British Government are playing in bringing about a settlement through the Security Council and the various discussions that are being held. That is obviously the key. As soon as we can obtain a United Nations or European seal of approval to what has happened in Cambodia, it will be much more difficult for America, especially, to stand against what needs to be an international effort to restore normal relations.

Secondly, Vietnam is in a Catch-22 situation because, as the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun has said, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State has done a great deal to prepare for what might be called the first stages of rehabilitation, and that is joint funding of non-governmental organisation projects in North Vietnam. I hope that that is not too specifically connected to only the boat people because, as the hon. Gentleman said, poverty is pretty universal. There would be difficulties in targeting merely where it is thought that the boat people have left. It would be better for the region to target more broadly and to deal with poverty generally. That is the Overseas Development Administration's principal aim in most of its aid programmes.

The scene is set in that the programmes have been given to my right hon. Friend and she is considering them. I have seen many of them already and I know that they are effective. We have pressed the Vietnamese Government to facilitate the opening of offices of NGOs in Hanoi to make this element of policy really work. I press my right hon. Friend the Minister of State and the diplomatic wing of the Foreign Office that there should not be a direct link to the agreement to take back the boat people involuntarily. Hanoi wants more than anything else to normalise relationships with the United States, and the United States has taken a deliberate view on the returning of anyone involuntarily to Vietnam. This is another Catch-22 situation. The Vietnamese are torn between the two pressures. They are trying to assist the Vietnamese boat people and recognise their difficulties, but they do not want to do anything that makes it more difficult to normalise relations with the United States.

The joint funding operation could take place under all the existing agreements. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development has courageously started a similar operation in Cambodia, which we welcome. I judge that it would be better to introduce some carrot into the argument rather than always relying on stick. I say that for a reason. I have just come back from Washington. While I was there, I argued the case personally with Ministers and members of the State Department responsible for this area of policy. One came up against a stone wall on every issue. It was impossible to convince those responsible that the Vietnam that they constantly discuss is the Vietnam of 1979 rather than the Vietnam of 1990 or that the situation in Cambodia is not as they remember it, as those of us who have been there on more than one occasion realise.

Now is the time to persuade America that if it cannot normalise relations, it should stand back. I understand the trauma that normalising relations would entail. One has only to see the memorial to Vietnamese veterans in the park outside the White House to know how deeply the war affected American society. But that does not excuse the Americans from not getting the correct facts on which to base a policy judgment. I pay tribute to the Foreign Office which, like the Select Committee, has taken many hours and days to try to persuade the State Department that the situation is as we see it. Even with the great skills of Foreign Office officials and the Foreign Secretary himself, that has not been possible.

That means that we have to think again. We cannot allow matters to continue in limbo. We cannot accept the fact that the United States is strongly against the involuntary return of the boat people. As the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun suggested, the Americans use their influence with all the international organisations. The IMF has said that the amount of debt to which my right hon. Friend the Minister referred when we last questioned her on the arrears was not a great matter and that it could be dealt with; it was not the debts but pressure from the United States in particular that was delaying matters.

There is also a block over the settlement in Cambodia. The United Nations Development Programme has been prevented from visiting that country to assess its needs. It has not sent one of its diplomats, although almost all the countries now interested and involved have sent a stream of diplomats. It is one thing if, for their own reasons, the Americans want no relations with Vietnam and are prepared to provide no aid. But we ought at least to persuade them to stand aside and let others get on with a job that desperately needs doing. That is the tack that my right hon. Friends the Minister and the Foreign Secretary should now take. If America does not want to get involved, it should at least stop blocking other international organisations such as the European Community and the IMF and preventing them from starting to establish much more secure and sensible relationships.

We have a particular problem because of the boat people. But that is a consequence rather than a reason. As the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun suggested, the reason for their flight is abject poverty, which is coupled with dramatic economic change. Increasingly, the Vietnamese economy has become an open market economy, and the result of an open market economy in a country where there is no safety net is that people who lose their jobs have no other source of income and nowhere else to go. That is one of the major reasons why so many people have left. I expect that the flow will not be so great this year. The Vietnamese Government, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and others have done a massive job of persuasion that the great route to California, Australia or Canada is not to be found through Hong Kong or by taking to the boats.

It is imperative that we respond, at the earliest possible date, by agreeing to joint funding and by re-establishing bilateral aid—if necessary, through an overall economic

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agreement. But if America insists on trying to stop such an agreement, it will have to come about without that country. I say with absolute sincerity that it was impossible to get through to the United States officials who are currently responsible for policy the real situation in either Vietnam or Cambodia. Things were easier on Capitol Hill. It was easier to talk to Congressmen. There has been a welcome move in the House of Representatives, as, indeed, there has been in the Senate. I am hopeful that in a very short time two eminent senators will visit Cambodia. But we cannot wait for the American system to work on its own officials.

The situation in that part of the world is sufficiently critical to justify our discussing it at 3.15 in the morning. For all the reasons that have been mentioned, we could give a lead. We and our European colleagues could start to build the bridge that would enable Vietnam to come back into the family of nations and restore a decent standard of living to its people. This would facilitate precisely the sort of change that we are seeking to encourage in previously socialist countries of eastern Europe.

3.18 am

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): On this subject there has been a chorus of unanimity. My hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey) and the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) have sung the same song. Their message is that current Government policy towards Vietnam is very difficult to understand or explain. The hon. Member for Broxtowe and I visited Hanoi fairly recently. We saw and heard for ourselves some of the changes that are taking place in Vietnam. Perestroika and glasnost may not be as obvious there as they are in some other countries, but there is a mood of change. This mood has been recognised by some international organisations, such as the IMF, which pay considerable compliments to Vietnam for the efforts that are being made to liberalise its economy.

I remember well some of the people that we met. We were impressed by their vigour and their enthusiasm to bring about change and to forge links with countries in the west. A woman took us on a tour of Ho Chi Minh's summer house, where the clock had stopped at 8.36 am. I think that most visitors have been on that guided tour. People file past to glance at the books on the desk and then to feed the massive goldfish in the pond outside. In a country where so many people are poor, where there is so much malnutrition, it is obscene to see these massive goldfish leap out of the pond to grab pieces of bread.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun and the hon. Member for Broxtowe have said, it is not surprising that the Vietnamese flee their economic plight. Vietnam is one of the poorest countries in the world. The average income there is less than £100 a year. Half of all children suffer from malnutrition, and the country has never recovered from the devastation caused by 30 years of fighting—first against the French, and then against the Americans. It is particularly ironic that Vietnam is the only country among the poorest 50 to which, according to British aid statistics, we give no aid.

During the Vietnam war more bombs were dropped on Vietnam than were dropped throughout the second world war, an estimated 2 million Vietnamese died, more than one third of the land in southern Vietnam is still affected by chemicals such as agent orange, and serious post-war problems remain such as bomb craters, much physical disability, a high incidence of birth defects and the effects of agent orange.

It is particularly tragic that a great country such as the United States is still fighting the Vietnam war. I am reminded of a visit that I made a couple of years ago to the American base at Upper Heyford when I saw one of the song books that the American forces were using, and one of the songs was about nuking the gooks. The gook mentality is still strong in the United States. We all sympathise with the families of those who were killed in the Vietnam war, but it is time that the American Government took less notice of the veterans' associations. We all sympathise with them, but it is ridiculous to pursue the vendetta against Vietnam because of the Vietnam war.

I am sorry to say that the gook mentality still appears to be strong in America and, thanks to the American-led, international economic embargo, Vietnam has been starved of funds to rebuild its economy. Farmers work without fertilisers and workers without adequate tools because of the shortage of foreign exchange to pay for imports. There is no money for basic services. For example, in Hanoi, 1 million people now rely on a drinking water system built by the French to serve the 1945 population of 100,000 people.

An end to Vietnam's economic isolation is essential. The struggling economy needs foreign aid. Everybody says so. It needs aid, trade, loans and investment to get off the ground. There has never been a more appropriate time for Britain to initiate such international action. Vietnamese troops are out of Cambodia, the boat people in Hong Kong are living testimony to the desperate conditions in Vietnam that they have fled, and the economic reforms now under way in Vietnam make it one of the best long-term bets for foreign aid and investment.

At Question Time on 12 March, the Minister mentioned Vietnam's outstanding arrears to the IMF and said that there would be no active lending programme by any of the major donor countries, which seemed to be a justification for the continuing block on the United Kingdom giving aid to that country. But the IMF report is clear. It was written by IMF staff after visits to Vietnam in May and July 1989. It may be written in IMF language, but it is difficult to miss the point, which is that Vietnam is making every effort to reform its economy and to fulfil the conditions necessary to win the international funds which it desperately needs, and the internatonal community should provide them.

When asked to comment on the report on 19 February, the Minister said;

> "The Government welcome the positive initial steps taken by the Vietnamese authorities towards more market-oriented policies."

The fundamental reforms under way, however, are hardly initial steps. They require a stronger response than a grudging welcome.

Arrears to the International Monetary Fund are not a reason for continuing our embargo. Far from treating arrears to the IMF as an obstacle, the report commends Vietnam for making every effort to meet its payments. It says

> "Vietnam's financing needs are immense—to rebuild the infrastructure, support the reform process and strengthen the growth momentum. Towards this end, Vietnam is seeking to

normalise is relations with western creditors and has despite minimum reserves—commendably remained current on obligations falling due to the fund in 1989."

Far from identifying arrears as a problem, the efforts that Vietnam has made to repay the IMF are surely a reason for lifting the embargo.

As the report states, the Vietnamese authorities

> "are giving priority to clearing overdue obligations to the fund . . . Through payments made since March 1989, Vietnam has stabilised outstanding arrears to the Fund at their end-1988 levels . . . and intends to remain current on future obligations falling due to the Fund."

Despite its poverty, it has even taken out a commercial bank loan to clear its overdue obligations to the fund. Therefore, it is clear that it is the political will that is lacking and not arrears, and that political will is the obstacle within the IMF board and within the British Government.

The Japanese are already investing in Vietnam. The Government should encourage British industry by restoring full diplomatic relations, bilateral aid and export credit guarantees.

The Minister told us about, and I am aware of, the moves made by non-governmental organisations, which have put forward a series of projects which they think ought to be supported by the Overseas Development Administration. They made a powerful case to the Minister for aid for those projects. In their submission to her they said that they were

> "concerned, above all to see the vast needs of ordinary Vietnamese people addressed to the best of our own ability and that of the international community . . .we believe that economic improvements in Vietnam would be a powerful factor in dissuading departures of boat people to Hong Kong and elsewhere."

There has never been a better time for the British Government, if they are serious about solving the problem of the boat people, to assist Vietnam to keep its people within that country.

After years of unsuccessful, rigid economic planning —and the hon. Member for Broxtowe and I had talks with several Ministers on the subject—the Vietnamese Government are now trying desperately to turn the economy round. They have steadily scrapped Marxist dogma. They have encouraged market forces and have probably passed the most liberal foreign investment law in Asia.

Some of the conversations that we had with Vietnamese Ministers were reminiscent of some of the language used by Ministers on the Government Front Bench. We were rather surprised to hear the sort of language that was being used to show that they were serious about turning the economy round and attracting foreign investment. For example, to bring inflation down from the 400 per cent. mark in 1976, the Government cut spending, tightened monetary policy and slashed state subsidies.

Some would argue that austerity works, because inflation fell dramatically; but it did so at a cost—the cost of falling wages, bankruptcies and unemployment, and enormous cuts in health and education spending. That, of course is a familiar scene in this country as well. During our visit we heard of one factory that could no longer afford to pay its workers in money; instead, it paid them in the bicycles that they produced.

International aid should be flowing in to support the reform, both to cushion families from the harshest short-term costs and to kick-start the Vietnamese economy into long-term growth. Many developing countries have attempted such drastic economic overhaul, but few—even with massive international assistance—have survived the course. Vietnam has followed IMF advice consistently, and last year—as I have said—received a glowing report on its fundamental reorientation. Even so, it has not received one penny, one dollar or one dong of IMF money.

Last September—as my hon. Friend the Minister for Kilmarnock and Loudoun said—the United States and Japan vetoed an IMF loan about which Vietnam has been desperately optimistic. Until relations are restored with the IMF, other multilateral agencies and private banks will probably keep away.

Both British and European aid stopped in 1979 in protest at the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia. While the troops remained there, it was accepted that there was little chance of restoring economic ties with the west; but, as the troops withdrew, expectations mounted inside Vietnam, which expected a sudden rush of unfettered foreign funds. That, of course, was not to be: western Governments, apart from Sweden, have found new reasons to leave the Vietnamese to deal with their economic problems alone. For the British Government, the occupation became only one consideration in the question whether to resume the aid programme: the goalposts were moved—as we have seen so often with Cambodia—and the ban has continued.

We are told that the Minister of State visited Vietnam recently. Unfortunately, he has not made a full statement to the House, and newspaper reports have not made it clear whether he offered aid conditional on compulsory repatriation. If we read between the lines, however, that seems to have formed part of his conversation with Vietnamese Ministers. It is unfortunate that his mission to Hanoi left that impression; not surprisingly, the Vietnamese resented such an approach.

If the Government seriously want to boost economic growth in Vietnam, rather than merely securing their own repatriation policy, there is much that they can do. As my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun has said, they should press the United States to end its comprehensive economic boycott; more important, the United States must withdraw its veto on assistance to Vietnam from the multilateral agencies. It is ridiculous that IMF officials should be able to go to Vietnam, write a glowing report and express enthusiasm about giving the country aid, while the United States—the largest shareholders in the IMF, as well as in the World bank —can pull the plug on its officials' recommendations.

Within the international agencies—the World bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Asian Development bank and the European Community—Britain should be advocating funding for investment in Vietnam's infrastructure. The lack of roads, railways, water supplies, power and telephones hampers development at all levels —from grass roots community work to inter-regional trade and investment projects by foriegn companies.

I hope that before long the Minister will find that she can announce a bilateral aid programme consisting of substantial technical and financial assistance to help industry and agriculture to get back on their feet. Britain has great expertise in telecommunications and oil. Vietnam desperately needs that expertise. Moreover, that age-old skill of ours—English language teaching—is also much in demand in Vietnam. Until translators are trained, western instruction and advice will be limited.

[Mrs. Ann Clwyd]

The Government should also fund the work of the development agencies. I hope that the Minister's response to the submissions that they have made to her will be rapid. I repeat that in order to boost foreign investment and trade the Government ought to provide export credit guarantees to British companies in their dealings with Vietnam.

British Telecom and British Petroleum have already signed contracts to work in Vietnam, but smaller companies need Government assurances before embarking on such a long-term and uncharted course. We visited one of the rural co-operatives and saw the enthusiasm of the Vietnamese workers. They showed us with pride their lacquer work, rush work and other rural products. They have great enthusiasm, but their resources are extremely limited. They are desperate to sell their beautiful lacquer work in other countries. They pressed us to push their case.

We saw many women working in the co-operatives. They work extremely hard there and also as the prime producers of food. That has an adverse effect on their health. The Overseas Development Administration is supposed to be enthusiastic about the development of opportunities for women. Aid for Vietnam would help them. They are in desperate straits.

While Vietnam remains isolated, it is not surprising that the Vietnamese lose hope. Instead of taking flak from the United States for forcibly repatriating boat people, the British Government could be tackling the main source of the problem by leading a concerted international effort to end Vietnam's economic isolation. I hope that the Minister will say as much in her reply.

3.40 am

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): Like the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey), I welcome the debate, if not the hour at which it is taking place. It is rather sooner for me to respond on this issue than I had hoped when we discussed the matter at Question Time on 12 March. The proposals from the NGOs had arrived in my office literally that day, so I have not had much chance to examine them. The suggestions that are now coming forward are sensible and worthy of thorough discussion. While I will not hold up anything, I must do what needs to be done thoroughly. I make that point as a precursor to the rest of my comments tonight.

I welcome the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) and the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) have taken part in the debate. They have long experience of these issues and have visited Vietnam together on more than one occasion. The Government and hon. Members in all parts of the House —and many members of the general public, thanks to television—are aware how sad Vietnam is. The people there live in extreme hardship. The poverty is grinding and, despite the increasing agricultural capacity, they still have great need.

We must be realistic and appreciate that Vietnam's relations with the west have been strained in recent times by a number of factors. There are three main ones. The first is the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in December 1978, and I shall return to that. The second has been the tide of emigrants, many of them economic emigrants rather than refugees as defined in international agreements. They have left Vietnam for other countries in the region. Many of them have left in recent years, and particularly last year. We cannot ignore that, because behind it lies Vietnam's responsibility towards its own citizens, and that is bound to have a bearing.

The third factor that has greatly influenced Vietnam's relations with the west—I shall discuss this issue at some length—has been the problem that Vietnam has with the international financial institutions. Vietnam has had major arrears in payments to the IMF and to the Asian Development bank.

On the first factor—the Vietnamese in Cambodia—we welcome the fact that the withdrawal of Vietnamese combat units from Cambodia seems to have been completed at the end of last year. We believe that some Vietnamese may be back in Cambodia. We hope that they are there as advisers and are wanted by the Cambodian people. So it would not be correct to say that all the Vietnamese have gone from Cambodia, nor will that probably ever be the case. But if they are there in a peaceful role, that is much better than the situation that has existed for many years.

The second and third factors are continuing to pose substantial obstacles to the establishment of the good relations that we wish to establish with the Vietnamese Government. I mention that because when the Minister of State visited Hanoi following the EC-ASEAN meeting in Kuching, he made many efforts with his interlocutors there to get a result by which we could move forward in our relations with the Vietnamese Government.

The majority of participants at the meeting of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees steering committee in January accepted that mandatory repatriation of boat people, who have been determined through internationally accepted procedures not to be refugees, should begin on 1 July 1990. A full consensus would have enabled an orderly and internationally supported programme to go ahead. But that, sadly, was blocked by the United States and Vietnam, the latter because, I think, it believed that it could be to its economic advantage to agree with the United States to block it at that time, and the former for the reasons that we know, together with the hurt, which seems to overshadow all else in the minds of Americans when approaching this issue.

The American position, of course, is that repatriation should be confined to volunteers. We should prefer that, but that is not possible at present because it is clear that such an approach would not make a significant impact on the large numbers present in Hong Kong—numbers that represent an increasing and intolerable burden on the finances and physical facilities of Hong Kong. That is not to say that we have come to a halt on the issue. We have not. We shall continue to try to obtain an agreement from the Vietnamese Government to take the responsibility for Vietnamese people to return to Vietnam. There are letters outstanding between the British and Vietnamese Governments, and we await a response from Hanoi on this issue at the moment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe mentioned his efforts in Washington, and I am grateful to him for what he sought to do there with members on the Hill and also with officials on the vexed issue of the return of the boat people. I shall be going to Washington next month and I, too, shall try to bring some light into this difficult subject. We cannot ignore the fact that there are many people—who are not refugees—in Hong Kong whom Vietnam should accept back and whom we should encourage to go back voluntarily, if possible, but whom, if not, we should return just as, for example, the United States, will return those who come illegally to the United States and as so many other countries do. We must resolve the issue, and I should not want it to be said that we can ignore the situation.

Mr. Lester: The problem is that, when one makes that comparison to State Department officials, they constantly reiterate that Hong Kong is returning not economic migrants but political refugees to a tyrannous Government. They will not accept our case that the boat people are economic migrants. The Americans say that those people are returning to a tyrannous Government who operate on the lines of the 1979 Vietnamese Government, not the Government in 1990. I warn my right hon. Friend before she arrives in Washington that the argument about sending back Haitians and Mexicans drips off people there like water off a duck's back.

Mrs. Chalker: We shall have to continue our efforts to bring those who are not yet up to date in the United States up to date with the realities of Vietnam. As my hon. Friend said, that is being done day in and day out in Washington. It is obvious that we must bring people in the United States further up to date.

There is perhaps one piece of good news, which relates to a point that my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe also mentioned. There seems to be a slowdown of the departure of people from Vietnam and of arrivals in Hong Kong. That is due to the fact that the Vietnamese have responded especially now by prosecuting the people who were organising others to leave Vietnam and who go first by land and then by sea to Hong Kong, with the hope that they could be resettled somewhere else. That policy is beginning to work, although it is early to say that after only a couple of months' figures this year.

Mrs. Clwyd: Does the Minister accept the point that we have all been making continually, which is that it is sheer grinding poverty that drives many of these people to leave Vietnam and to try their luck elsewhere? Many of them believe that, once they get to Hong Kong, relatives in America will assist them to get to America. While we were in Vietnam in September, the Vietnamese authorities were already making strenuous efforts to keep their own people in the country. However, unless we address the problem of poverty in Vietnam, there is no point in talking about persuading the Vietnamese to keep their people or to take them back. Unless we address that problem, we shall not solve it.

Mrs. Chalker: I used the very same words at the beginning of my remarks—the grinding poverty in Vietnam. I fully understand what the hon. Lady, my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe and the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun have said. That is the very thing that the Vietnamese Government, particularly since 1987, are trying, with economic reforms, to put right. But I also accept that they cannot do it on their own and need assistance.

When my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office visited Vietnam in February, he had, as I have already mentioned, some pretty wide-ranging discussions. Indeed, he signed an agreement that would speed up the voluntary return of the boat people from Hong Kong. We have already told the Vietnamese Government of the financial assistance to help them to manage the return of their people from Hong Kong. While it is not the financial assistance for which the hon. Lady has been asking, it is important to the Government of Vietnam.

My hon. Friend also explained that the continued failure to come to a real decision—the thing about which we are now in correspondence with the Government of Vietnam—is very important. It is fair to say that a month after his return from Hanoi we hope for better news from Foreign Minister Thach, because we believe that the Vietnamese are concerned to settle this issue, having accepted that over a three-year period, as part of the comprehensive plan of action adopted by the international conference on Indo-China refugees in June last year, they will abide by that.

I turn from those matters, which are the inevitable background to the whole question of assistance to Vietnam, to the heart of the problem. I mentioned certain figures in answer to questions on 12 March and on other occasions. I will now give the hon. Lady and the House an update on the question of the arrears so that there is no disagreement between us.

The figures I gave on 12 March were for the end of last year. We have been notified that the arrears outstanding to the International Monetary Fund are $133·3 million and to the Asian Development bank $6 million. But the hon. Lady is quite right in saying that the situation has now stabilised, because repayments have started again. We very much welcome that, just as I welcomed the economic reform programme upon which Vietnam has embarked. I was not the least bit grudging about it; I am delighted that they are doing it. They are going in the right direction, I believe. They have declared that they wish to free their economy from the controls that they have previously imposed upon it and to let market forces assist in the regeneration of the economy.

There is evidence that these figures are beginning to work, particularly in agriculture, although the hon. Lady is right to say that they can be realised only when they have the capacity at least to use fertilisers wisely. I use those terms because I think that the overuse of fertilisers in a fairly fertile land would be a mistake for our environment in the future. So we hope that that information on how to use modern techniques wisely in rebuilding their land will also be part of any future aid programme. We are not at that stage yet; there is a long way to go in that reform programme; but I very much hope that progress can be made and that we will see sustained programmes of economic reform which they will agree with the IMF and the World bank.

I hope that perhaps a shadow programme will be put in place. I believe that I am right in saying that this can be done by Vietnam before there is IMF board agreement. I mention this because the hon. Lady laid great stress on the IMF staff report on the situation. It is a good report—nobody denies that—but I think that she knows that until the IMF board has accepted it, an economic recovery programme cannot be worked out. That is why we all regret that the situation was blocked at the meeting in September last year by the United States and Japan. It cannot be unblocked without the agreement of those

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countries because of the percentage of agreement which has to be reached in the board before a programme can go ahead.

I have been considering carefully what can be done in the meantime before full agreement has been reached with the IMF. We have made it clear to the Vietnamese authorities that we will be prepared to consider a modest bilateral aid programme once we have their co-operation in reaching a comprehensive solution to the boat people returning from Hong Kong. We think we will then be able to assist in three ways, one of which I have already mentioned in the House.

The first is by supporting financially the programme for NGOs for community-based humanitarian development activities in Vietnam, not only in the areas from which the boat people have come but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe indicated, in other areas, because overall regeneration will be helpful. We believe that the NGOs, certainly in the first instance, may be the best way of generating activity. It takes quite a long while to set up any aid programme in a country where one has not previously been active, or where one has not been active over a long period. Certainly the NGO proposals which we have received are being examined in that way.

The second proposal is to consider a modest technical co-operation programme, initially emphasising training for Vietnamese people in the English language, both in Vietnam and possibly for some in the United Kingdom.

The third and most important proposal in regard to the debate is that once Vietnam has reached an accommodation with the international financial institutions, the United Kingdom would be prepared to join the international organisations and the other bilateral aid donors in supporting an adjustment programme through the provision of programme aid. But all those things depend not only on getting progress soon in Washington but on getting progress from Hanoi, too. It is in Vietnam's best interests that it should reach as quickly as possible a comprehensive solution to the problem of the boat people in Hong Kong.

I want to say a further word about the NGO programmes. I have said that I am anxious that they should be able not only to help the people in the areas from which the boat people come but more generally. As I said on 12 March, we first discussed this with the NGOs on 14 November when the Secretary of State and I had our first meeting with them. In recent weeks we have had a number of further approaches about help and aid to Vietnam. Some have come from agencies that have their own programmes in the country, sometimes operated by sister organisations from different countries. I am actively considering how best to move in that direction.

I agree with very much, though not quite everything, that has been said in the debate. Obviously my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe felt sincerely that we should have had a programme up and running for the time when the Vietnamese withdrew from Cambodia. That would have been exceedingly difficult, because programmes cannot be arranged in an on-off fashion. In other words, situations change and the programme needs to be very much up to date. I have no doubt that our European partners, like ourselves, will be prepared to consider sensible reconstruction programmes hand in hand with the economic recovery which we hope to see starting very soon in Vietnam. We shall go on working to clear the obstacles, but there is more than one signatory to clearing the obstacles, as with any agreement.

We need the agreement of the Vietnamese to take on the responsibility for the return from Hong Kong. We also need a change of heart and an updating of attitudes in the United States so that once and for all we can resolve this awful problem which has been to the detriment of the ordinary Vietnamese people for far too long. We shall do all that we can to resolve it as quickly as possible, but we need the agreement of the United States and of Vietnam if we are to make good progress.

Poll Tax (Northumberland)

3.59 am

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The purpose of this debate at almost four o'clock in the morning is not to continue the general argument about the merits and principles of the poll tax—an argument which rages not only between parties but within the ranks of the Conservative party, the party currently governing the country, some of the potential future leaders of which wish to make it clear that they did not support the tax in principle. I am opposed to the poll tax; I believe it to be an unfair tax—perhaps the most unfair in the recent history of this country. Administratively, it is also an unduly expensive tax to collect, which adds to the burden on the taxpayers. I hope that we shall soon see the back of it, and have a local income tax instead.

The purpose of the debate is to plead for something to be done urgently about the position in the parts of Northumberland that I represent, even within the limits of the poll tax in its first year. Clearly, this year we are talking about modifying the applications of the community charge system rather than about being able to remove it at this late stage. However, it is my wish that next year we get rid of the tax completely and replace it with something better.

I shall refer to Northumberland as a whole, and to the Berwick and Alnwick districts. I shall draw special attention to the borough of Castle Morpeth—I have given the Department of the Environment special notice of that intention—because of the particular difficulties that arise there. I shall refer to other specific problems, such as those facing people in sheltered housing, and the questions of second homes, of bed-and-breakfast accommodation and of village shops.

Northumberland is one of the largest counties in England, but one of the smallest in population. Delivery of services to so small a population in so large an area is a great deal more expensive than delivery of services in a compact urban area. Associated with the scattered nature of the area are various other problems. The education system has been built up on a three-tier basis to cater for the particular needs of the area. Whether that was the right way to proceed is a matter of some argument, but it is undoubtedly a costly system to operate and presents specific problems.

Other problems have recently been brought to our notice, such as the large number of timber-framed buildings among the county's schools. That was the subject of a deputation with which I visited the Department of Education and Science. Many costly repair jobs need to be carried out in such schools, a number of which had to be closed for the day during the recent storms because they are unsafe in high winds.

Therefore, we have all sorts of problems, some of which are common to many areas, but many of which apply especially to an area as scattered as Northumberland.

The county council element of the poll tax accounts for over 80 per cent. of the charge, with a further 6·5 per cent. being attributable to the police authority. I submit that it was impossible for the county to peg its spending to the Government's recommended level. Northumberland has lost out badly in the change in the system of central Government support. If the formula had not been changed, the county would have had a standard spending assessment of about £149 million, instead of £142 million. That difference means £30 per head for community charge payers.

The Government seem to be under some misapprehension about the county's finances. The county treasurer tells me that the Government still seem to think that the county has balances of £24 million, earning interest of £4 million, whereas its balances amount to only £11 million, earning interest of £2 million. In setting its budget, the county council had to allow for care in the community and for highway maintenance. The county's roads have been described by the district auditor as having deteriorated relative to the national position and therefore need greater expenditure. It has also had to cater for property maintenance. The Audit Commission said that budget provision for maintenance needed to be increased. So there were several reasons why it had to make additional provision.

Liberal Democrats on the county council argued that it would be possible for the county to set a somewhat smaller budget and, therefore, levy a lower community charge. They put forward proposals which would have reduced the county precept by about £20 a head. Before the Minister gets too excited and says that it is all the fault of the Labour-controlled county council, he must take into account the fact that the Conservatives on the county council did not agree with us. They took the view that the budget should be reduced by only about £60,000, which would have reduced the charge by less than 50p a head. I make that point not to enter into a party-political wrangle, but simply to show that no party believed that there was scope to come anywhere near the Government's recommended level for the community charge. The party that came nearest to it was my own. Even then, it achieved only a £20 reduction, mainly by proposing to withdraw from the budget items that were not likely to be completed in the current financial year, for which budgetary provision was inappropriate.

So much of the community charge is accounted for by the county precept that the boroughs and districts can do little to affect the level of charge in their areas. But they, too, have been affected by changes in the system of calculation. The borough of Berwick-upon-Tweed has complained that its SSA is inexplicable compared with similar authorities. It made the comparison, for example, with Teesdale, which is similar in size and population. The two authorities have among the smallest populations in the country. Both serve large, rural areas with scattered populations. But they have different levels of community charge, which arise almost entirely from different SSAs, for which there is no clear, understandable explanation.

Alnwick district council complains that the real rate of inflation is simply not recognised in the figures. After the county precept, that is the reason why poll tax levels in those two districts are £321 and £342 respectively—each just over £70 above the Government figure. It means that anyone lucky enough to obtain transitional relief does not receive relief on the £70.

In Berwick and Alnwick many people are on wages just above the rebate maximum. Therefore, many families face increases of hundreds of pounds in their liability. I am talking about families whose incomes are just above rebate levels. They are on genuinely low incomes and cannot meet such increases. They do not know where they will find the money to pay. Many couples will be over £5 a week worse

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off than before the poll tax in the first year, with worse to come in future years as transitional relief and safety net provisions are removed.

Families with a low-earning 18-year-old in the house will, in many cases, face financial disaster. People just do not know where the money will come from. Many live in remote communities with limited services. I have had representations from one family facing a poll tax bill of £1,000, who have never had a dustbin emptied. They have never seen a dustman because they live in a remote cottage way up in the forest, to which it would be difficult to provide regular refuse collection services.

Some communities have greatly increased parish precepts added to their poll tax bills because their villages have lost business rate income. Some villages had particularly good business rate income if there was some industrial undertaking, mine or quarry in the area. Many people in such areas are farm workers who previously lived in rate-free accommodation on low wages. That relief from rates and rent was part of the wage structure. The wages board has not seen fit to make any provision to compensate for the disappearance of the rate-free facility. Some of the large estates, such as that of the Duke of Northumberland, have decided to pay their employees' poll tax. But many farmers, especially small farmers, still have to face that decision. Some do not see how they can manage it in current agricultural conditions. Farm workers do not see how they will be able to manage such hugely increased costs and a level of outgoings for which they do not have the means.

So far I have referred mainly to the Berwick and Alnwick districts of my constituency, but the most dramatic effects of all, about which the Minister will be aware if he has studied the details, are found in the Castle Morpeth borough. Unlike other councils in the north, that council contributes to the safety net system. I believe that it is the only council between Humberside and the Scottish borders to be a contributor. Its neighbours have had their poll tax bills reduced by substantial safety net grants; the charge in neighbouring Wansbeck has been reduced by £127 per head.

Castle Morpeth spends per head about the same as Alnwick and significantly less than Wansbeck district council, but its charge payers will pay £90 more than those in the neighbouring authorities. They will pay substantially more than those under another authority that spends more, which makes complete nonsense of the Government's intention that the system should make councils accountable for the level of services and the cost of them.

The problem has arisen because the average rateable value in Castle Morpeth is boosted by the wealthiest suburbs of Newcastle, such as Ponteland and Darras Hall, and by substantial areas of executive housing in places such as Heddon-on-the-Wall and Lancaster Park. Those areas include many of the gainers under the poll tax system. In the communities that I represent in the northern and eastern parts of Castle Morpeth and in parts of Morpeth in the neighbouring constituency rateable values are low. Those values reflect the lower incomes of the residents of those areas, many of whom live in old colliery houses that they have bought. Some families are in their first home and they struggled to buy such houses because they knew that they had a low rateable value and because they were relatively cheaper to buy. Those houses represent such families' only chance of getting a start in housing.

I plead with the Minister to consider the plight of people living in old colliery houses, some of them unmodernised, in places such as Stobswood, Broomhill, Ellington colliery, Linton and Lynemouth. The Minister should also consider the large areas of council housing such as at Widdrington Station and Hadston and the small rural cottages in areas such as Scots' Gap, Cambo and Middleton. He would discover that people in such places face horrific increases.

Every couple living in Castle Morpeth in a house with a rateable value of less than £155 will pay £408 more than they paid in rates last year. Most of the houses in the areas that I mentioned have rateable values of less than £155. Unless the families concerned are on rebates, they face increases of £408.

The Minister should consider some specific examples. During the debate on the Budget I referred to a couple who wrote to me whose income is just above the rebate limit. The man is a joiner who earns £136·89 a week. His rates were £255 a year, but the poll tax to be paid by that couple after all reliefs will be £672 a year. Where can that couple find another £400 on an income of £136 a week? The Minister should try to tell me how those people can find that money.

In another family the mother and father work and their joint income, after tax, is just under £200 a week. Their eldest son has started work, he brings home £80 and another teenager is still at school. On a three-bedroomed house they paid £440 in rates. However, the total poll tax that the family will have to pay will be more than £1,200 a year, an increase of £840 a year. I cannot see, and they cannot see, from where that extra money will come.

These villages and communities are in uproar. I have 800 petition forms from a village of 1,000 people. Will the Minister look up from his notes to see—if I can engage his attention for a moment—the number of people who have signed the forms not only to show how angry they are, but to say that unless they get a satisfactory explanation, they will seriously consider not paying the community charge. Those are not people engaged in a political demonstration, but people who do not know where they can find such money.

I have another set of papers that were passed to me at one of the packed meetings that I have been attending in my constituency. On them people have listed the hundreds of pounds by which their community charge exceeds the amount they paid in rates. The petition forms are from the village of Widdrington Station and the letters are from the village of north Broomhill. They are all from people in relatively poor communities who are being asked to find huge amounts of additional money.

I do not understand how the people are to find that money. Therefore, will the Minister look seriously at the gross anomaly which has made the position in Castle Morpeth so much worse that it is in other comparable and neighbouring areas? I plead with him to make some provision to ease the terrible plight of people facing such a level of poll tax.

Many of the calculations, not only for Castle Morpeth, but for other areas, assume that people will receive the limited transitional relief up to the poll tax level that the Government said each authority should set. We already know that many people will not receive that relief; for example, people who move after 1 April will lose any entitlement to that relief, and additional household members will not qualify for it. However, few people realised, particularly when the Minister of State made his commitment at the Conservative party conference, that the promise did not apply to pensioners living in flats in sheltered housing schemes such as those provided by Anchor Housing, the Royal British Legion and local housing trusts, where the rates are paid to the housing association which, in turn, pays the local authority.

Such people definitely paid rates. They are well aware of that now, as many of their rents are being reduced by up to £30 a month because the housing association is no longer responsible for paying over rates. The people have become responsible for a personal community charge, and the rates element has been removed from the rent.

However, to their surprise, some local authorities have been told that they cannot pay transitional relief to such people because they were not ratepayers. If they are not classed as ratepayers, as they expected to be, the alternative would seem to be that they were non-ratepayers and were, therefore, entitled to special transitional relief.

One of my local authorities asked the Department of the Environment whether this was the answer to the problem, but was told that such people could not have special transitional relief because they contributed to the rates by the process which I have just described. Therefore, those people cannot win. When I raised this matter during the debate late on Monday night, I asked the Minister of State to have a closer look at the matter. He was unconvinced, to put it mildly, that the position was as I have described it. However, I assure him that local authorities were being given such advice. I sincerely hope that, since then, the Government have devised some fresh advice and found some way of getting transitional relief, or special transitional relief, to many of those pensioners, particularly pensioner couples living in sheltered housing schemes.

Such couples have often taken on more expensive housing to meet their needs in old age. The decision to go into a sheltered housing scheme has usually committed them to quite a high rent. They have come to the conclusion that it is best for them to be in such a scheme where there is a good heating system, they can be kept warm, and there is a warden on the premises. As they become older and perhaps more frail, it will be a secure and sensible place in which to be housed. They have committed themselves to the limit to do so, and have no margins to spare. If they are not given the benefit of transitional relief, the impact on them will be very severe. Some of them would have to give up being in sheltered housing. I hope that the Minister will be able to bring us some better news on that score.

The poll tax brings other pressures and problems. A major feature of my constituency is second homes. There are many of them, and that is not without attendant difficulty. In some areas there is a strong feeling that properties that have become second homes would have been better kept in full-time occupation as homes for families. That has made the councils feel that it is morally justifiable, and in many ways desirable, that second homes should bear the full burden of the double community charge. That is the standard community charge at the normal two-person rate. All local authorities in the area have decided to opt for this system. It seemed to them to be a reasonable response to the growing pressure to create second homes in areas where there is a housing shortage.

Some of the properties faced with the double community charge will be converted to properties that are subject to business rates under regulations that the Government have brought forward. I refer to properties that are let for a minimum number of weeks in the year. That will still leave a number of properties that will be the subject of contention. It is doubtful whether some properties are suitable for long-term human habitation for other than in the summer. Some properties used as holiday cottages would, without substantial improvement, be unsuitable for winter use.

The councils have had to consider some of the special cases and difficulties, and I have drawn their attention to a number of them. I have received quite a few letters from clergy who live in vicarages and plan to retire to homes in my constituency. There seems to be a tremendous number of clergy from Lambeth at this end of the country—not the Archbishop of Canterbury but members of his staff—ranging to the other end of the country who are all hoping to retire to my constituency. Many of them live in vicarages and are buying a house for their retirement. They find that it will be beyond their means to pay the double community charge. For example, there is a missionary couple who are working in Africa for no salary. They are being maintained on a mission station. They are keeping a house—it is only a cottage—for when they return to the United Kingdom. They have no means to pay the double community charge, and they are not entitled to rebates because they are not in the country.

There are difficulties with service personnel who are required to live in married quarters, to pay rent for those quarters and to pay a community charge at the quarters, and who are liable also to the double or standard community charge in my constituency. If the councils were to exempt those who are required to live elsewhere because of their work, as the Government have suggested they could, and levy a nil community charge on their properties, there would be a huge loophole. People could easily say, because they have a second home in my constituency, "We are required to live elsewhere." Many of them would have well-paid jobs which enabled them to own a substantial second home somewhere in my constituency. Many people in that category can well afford the double charge. It is a legitimate charge which they should contribute to the community. The councils have a serious problem, and it has not been satisfactorily resolved, in distinguishing between those who can reasonably be levied the double charge and those who are in real hardship.

A further problem that seems likely to arise is that the provision of bed and breakfast, one of the staple features of the tourist industry, may not prove economical as a result of the introduction of the 100-day limit, which means that those who come within its terms stay on the community charge and are not charged business rates as well. The tourist traffic in the area which I represent is not so great that it ensures that if someone makes rooms available for bed and breakfast for 100 days in the year he can obtain an income that makes it worth while to engage in that activity, bearing in mind the investment that it is necessary to make. There are anxieties among people who provide bed and breakfast.

There are anxieties also among people who have village shops. The families which do so find that they may face

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business rates plus double or treble poll tax. I know of many instances where a village shop is the home for a family of three. There are the mother and father and the son or daughter who works in and helps to run the shop. His or her only income comes from the shop. People greatly fear that we shall add still further to the spiral of closing village shops that has created such serious problems in our rural areas.

Many of the matters to which I have referred are the subject of recently published regulations which have not been debated in the House. With the introduction of the poll tax only days away, I find it extraordinary that many of the regulations have not been debated, even though prayers have been tabled to enable them to be discussed. The implementation of the poll tax is the most awful shambles. One can make that comment irrespective of whether one is in favour of the poll tax or against it. Even if I were an enthusiastic supporter of the poll tax, I should still think that the present state of affairs was an appalling shambles; as an opponent of the tax, I feel it even more strongly.

I ask the Minister to look again at the specific cases that I have drawn to his attention. First, will he concede that help will be given to tenants of sheltered housing schemes? By help, I am talking not about rebates but about transitional relief or special transitional relief. It was clear to me that the Minister responsible was in some doubt about the position as recently as last Monday evening. Now that there has been time to look at the matter further, it would help if the Minister could clarify the position—if not now, certainly before 1 April.

Secondly, will the Minister look again at the position of Northumberland generally? When will we know whether we are to be capped? I know that the Minister will not make an announcement now, at 4·25 am, about which authorities are to be capped. But it would help if the hon. Gentleman told us when we shall know. Will we know by 1 April, or will all the poll tax notices have to be retrieved and the whole process started again? We need to know not least because if Northumberland is to be capped, there could be severe implications for council services.

Will the Minister re-examine in particular the case of Castle Morpeth and consider giving more transitional relief to the ratepayers and charge payers whom I have described? If, for example, he extended transitional relief in some way, it would help only those living in low-rated properties. The help would not go into the pockets of the gainers in the wealthier part of the area—the rateable values of which have put it into this difficult position. By its very nature, transitional relief goes only to people in low-rated properties. I could certainly suggest ways of easing the position on transitional relief to bring help to those suffering the greatest hardship. At the very least, will the Minister or the Secretary of State agree to meet representatives of the local authorities concerned and of Castle Morpeth, where the problem is most acute, so that they may put their argument to him?

The political atmosphere that the poll tax creates is one in which the opposition parties and the Government's critics can make hay. But that is not my purpose this morning. I can say with the strongest of feeling that in nearly 16 years as a Member of Parliament I have never seen such widespread dismay and distress in my constituency as I have seen over the effects of the poll tax. Ministers and local authorities will find that, if nothing is done, as the year progresses more and more people will come up against the authorities because they have not paid the tax. They will fail to pay not because they are part of a political campaign—although there are those who are trying to organise such a campaign—but because they simply cannot find the money for the charge. The anxiety, distress and upset that such people feel are so great and so widespread that I must plead with the Minister to do something before it is too late.

4.28 am

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): I echo many of the remarks of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) about the problems of setting a poll tax and protecting local services in Northumberland and throughout the country. In the northern region as a whole, one of the major problems arises from the loss of money for local authority services in that region as a result of the change.

I have here the results of an analysis that was carried out by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) after he had questioned the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities about the northern region. The column headed

> "Net change in income to local authority (without safety nets)"

shows that the northern region lost more than £170 million. The next column shows that, even with safety nets, that region lost more than £38 million. Obviously this is having an effect on all county and district councils in Northumberland.

The Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, who will reply to this part of the debate, is not ignorant of the situation. I understand that, not long ago, a delegation from Wansbeck district council told him about the problems they were encountering in setting the community charge. That council claims that it has lost about £7·9 million in Government grants as a result of the expenditure changes. That means that every person liable to pay has to find an extra £169. As the Minister was aware of the situation, the people of Wansbeck can hardly be blamed for feeling aggrieved and very angry.

I echo the remarks of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed about Castle Morpeth borough council. Having spoken to my hon. Friends who represent constituencies in that area, I can say that many many dozens of villages end up contributing to the safety net. It is absolutely ridiculous. This applies to many villages in my constituency, but certainly not to the same extent. The fact that more than half of the ratepayers of Castle Morpeth will pay less under the new system does not minimise the fact that the remainder will have to pay substantially more towards the safety net for other regions. The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed said that there ought to be some special transitional relief.

Of course, similar situations are to be found in many other regions. What is happening in respect of very low-rated properties in whole mining villages is grossly unfair. It is little wonder that there have been such uprisings against the poll tax, which has been forced on the local authorities. I have spoken to my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) about this matter. The local authority in his area has received about 20,000 rebate applications.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed has said that he does not want to treat this as a party political matter. I can tell him that his friends in Blyth Valley want to treat it as a party political matter. I have here a letter from the leader of the Liberal Democratic group on the council, arguing very strongly indeed the case about the need to cut services and to use savings to keep the poll tax down. Nobody likes having to levy the poll tax.

I say to the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed and to his friends in that area that transitional relief in Northumberland is very poor and that the safety net, which is also poor and fails to help all those who need help, will be removed at some time in the future. In those circumstances, it is wise not to use reserves immediately but to leave them to help people when other relief has been removed.

I hope that the Minister will try to explain the anomalies that have occurred in Northumberland. The setting of poll tax rates by councils has highlighted what has been demonstrated throughout Britain—that the poll tax is a pernicious tax, which not only fails to take into account people's ability to pay but is unfair as between households and districts.

I could go on all night about how unfair it is, but Northumberland probably highlights many of the problems of the poll tax which should have been taken into consideration months, if not years, before it was levied on the unfortunate people of Northumberland to maintain their present level of local government services.

4.34 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Christopher Chope): I shall do my best to deal with the points that have been raised in the debate. It is always interesting to see the extent to which authorities that are complaining, particularly about the grant settlements, have helped themselves. Everything that the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) has said has to be seen against the background that Northumberland county council is spending £102 per adult above its standard spending assessment. That is some 14·9 per cent. above the income that is raised in 1989-90.

It may be said that Northumberland did not do so well as some under the grant settlements, but it cannot be denied that it is spending £102 per adult over the SSA. Saying that it is still £30 per adult worse off as a result of the changes does not explain why it is £102 per adult over its SSA. The accountability in the new system becomes clear when one compares the amounts by which the individual districts of Northumberland are spending above their SSAs with the amounts by which they increased their incomes this year.

The hon. Gentleman referred a great deal to Castle Morpeth, but Castle Morpeth is increasing its income by no less than 59·7 per cent. above its 1989-90 level. It is hardly surprising that the people there are complaining. If I lived there, I should be complaining about the overspending of my local council. Why has that council not done more to control its expenditure and to act in the best interests of its community charge payers?

If we look at other districts in Northumberland, we see that Tynedale has increased its income by 46·7 per cent. above its 1989-90 level, Blyth Valley by 35·3 per cent., Wansbeck by 24·1 per cent., Berwick by 21·8 per cent. and Alnwick by 13·5 per cent. The increases in spending are a predominant element in any explanation of why people in Northumberland are complaining.

It is important to put that on the record at the outset. It is always important that the House should be able to consider the extent to which councils have tried to help themselves. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that the councils in Northumberland have tried to take advantage of the new system to disguise substantial increases in spending.

Mr. Beith: It should also be placed on the record that not only councillors of my party but those of the Conservative party would, to a man, reject the view that the figures that the Minister has quoted describe a process by which their councils have unreasonably overspent by comparison with their previous expenditure or by what would be a reasonable amount of money to provide their services. There is agreement across all the parties about the unreasonable position in which they have been placed.

Mr. Chope: The hon. Gentleman said that at local level his party said that charges could have been reduced by £20 per adult. If people are as hard pressed as he was describing earlier, £20 would be a welcome reduction.

Mr. Beith: The Tories do not agree.

Mr. Chope: There is the continuing problem that a number of people involved in local government see themselves on the side of the producer rather than on the side of the consumer. If more local government councillors identified with the consumer there would be lower levels of expenditure and better value for money.

I think that the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed and I agree about one thing—that the rating system had to go. Of all the alternatives to the domestic rates, the community charge is by far the fairest system. Many people say that they would like not to have to pay anything towards the cost of local government, but if we have to pay, everybody should contribute and we should have a system which will ensure proper accountability and discretion at local level.

The Government have listened to the representations that have been made because of the change in the system. We have put many transitional arrangements in place to ease the change. That is fair. Most of those arrangements were made in response to representations—for example about capital limits being too low in relation to the cut-off point for community charge rebate entitlement. The Government responded to the representations made and raised the limit.

The Government have also listened to those people who said that, as a result of the change from the rates to the community charge, some people face a significant increase in their bills. That is why we introduced the transitional relief scheme, which limits the increases arising from any structural change to no more than £3 a week. I emphasise the expression "structural change" because increases in bills arise for reasons other than changes in the system. Where community charge bills are higher than the Government's assumptions, it is for local authorities to justify them. It is not for the Government to validate them by compensating individuals for increases that arise from the spending decisions of individual authorities.

We announced last July that total standard spending, in the context of the revenue support grant settlement, would

[Mr. Chope]

be £32·8 billion in 1990-91. That represents an increase of 11 per cent. over the equivalent amount for 1989-90. It is nonsense to suggest that the Government have not allowed enough for inflation. Total standard spending is about 4 per cent. higher than local authority budgets for last year, but that is because last year local authorities spent almost 7 per cent. more than their grant-related expenditure assessments.

As is the case for transitional relief, the validation of past spending decisions is not the role of Government. The figure that we have announced for total standard spending shows a significant increase over last year's equivalent figure, and Government support for local authorities in the coming year will be 8·5 per cent. higher than in the present year. That is a fair settlement.

Nor is it unrealistic to expect authorities to be able to budget within their standard spending assessments. The Audit Commission has identified £900 million per year in savings which could be achieved by local authorities. Some progress has been made on that front, but there is still plenty of scope for improvement.

At the heart of the revenue support grant is the system of standard spending assessments, which take into account the social, geographic and demographic characteristics of individual authorities and, using a methodology that has been carefully researched and developed, arrives at a figure that represents the amount that it would be appropriate for that authority to spend to provide a standard level of service.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed referred to the different problems in Northumberland. Those differing needs, compared with other areas, are reflected in the standard spending assessments. The criteria that we used were extensively discussed with the local authority associations.

I shall deal with the question of low rateable value grant, as it applies to Castle Morpeth. That grant applies when the average domestic rateable value of a district is less than £150, with the result that the change in domestic rates to the community charge, even taking into account safety net contributions, would have resulted in significant increases for householders. The Government thought that it was right, in such circumstances, to provide some extra protection for charge payers.

The way in which the grant is calculated means that people in one district may benefit from it, while others in a neighbouring district living in identical houses may not. That is inherent in the system. The point is, however, that in administering low-rateable-value grant we are looking at the revenue-raising capacity of an authority as a whole. Within any district council area there will be properties with rateable values below the average and properties with rateable values above it; but it is the average rateable value which is important, because an authority with a higher average than its neighbour will have been able to raise more in domestic rates from a given poundage. There will thus be a correspondingly smaller difference between the revenue base of that authority under rates and its revenue base under community charge. Whatever the rateable value of an individual's home, the position of charge payers will not be affected as significantly in an authority with a higher average as in one with a lower average.

Individuals in Castle Morpeth living in houses with low rateable values have the protection of the transitional relief scheme, which was designed specifically to provide protection at the individual as opposed to the authority level. In Castle Morpeth, any property housing two or more people will benefit from transitional relief if its rateable value is less than £157·45. I am pleased to see that the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed agrees with that calculation.

As I mentioned earlier, transitional relief is calculated on the basis that an authority's community charge is set in line with the Government's assumptions. In the case of Castle Morpeth, the assumed community charge is £310·96, but the charge actually set—£438·49—exceeds that amount by £127. That means that charge payers in Castle Morpeth will have to pay £2·45 a week extra over and above the threshold for transitional relief, which for most people is £3 a week.

As I have said, Northumberland county council has set a precept substantially above its standard spending assessment, and Castle Morpeth's budget repesents spending of more than 30 per cent. above its SSA and almost 60 per cent. more in income in 1989-90. It is for the individual authorities to justify those increases to their charge payers.

Mr. Beith: Even if Castle Morpeth and Wansbeck had each charged only the Government's recommended target, Castle Morpeth charge payers would still by paying £70 a head more than those in Wansbeck.

Mr. Chope: That may be the case in the first year of the system, because of the operation of the safety grant and the transitional reliefs. That is because of the current differences in rateable values in those areas. Under the existing domestic rating system, ordinary individual householders living in Northumberland cannot tell from their rates bill how efficient their council is compared with an adjoining district council in the same county. Under the new system, everyone will be on a standard basis and one community charge can be compared with another. The higher charge will clearly reflect either inefficiency or extravagance or, in some cases, a higher level of service.

It is inevitable, however, that if the principle of a transitional arrangement is to be accepted—I am sure that the hon. Gentleman does not disagree with it—the problems that he cites will be thrown up. That reflects the fact that average rateable values have been higher in one area than in another.

The hon. Gentleman referred to transitional relief for those living in sheltered accommodation. When the Government announced the transitional relief scheme last October, it was the subject of detailed discussions with local authority practitioners. It was clear from those discussions that local authorities would, in general, be able to adapt their systems to incorporate transitional relief, provided that the scheme was administratively straightforward and based on information readily available in local authorities.

At the heart of the scheme is a comparison between rates and the assumed community charge. It emerged quickly from the discussions that this necessitated using, as the basic unit of the relief scheme, hereditaments with a rateable valuation shown on the valuation list. Most domestic hereditaments have a separate entry on that list, but there are cases where a single entry is shown for a hereditament comprising a number of separate residential units. That can occur in the case of houses in multiple occupation, barracks and bases occupied by service personnel and some sheltered housing developments.

In such cases, the effect is that, although there is no theoretical bar to the grant of relief, it is likely that the rateable value of the hereditament, which is the basic unit of the calculation, will be too high to give a rates bill that is more than £156 a year under either one or two community charges. There is, however, no practical solution. Where there is no rateable value for a particular residential unit, there is no assumed rates bill to form the basis of the comparison.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman understands and accepts that it would not be sensible to ask the valuation office to establish domestic rateable values for individual units within the collective sheltered accommodation box to which he referred. That would be a difficult exercise to perform, just as we near the end of the domestic rateable value system. It means that some people cannot benefit from the transitional relief scheme. However, it does not mean that they are worse off. It simply means that they do not fall within the scope of the scheme, which was designed to provide additional help in specially defined circumstances. Residents in sheltered accommodation who have low incomes and savings—the recently announced increase in the capital limit will benefit many pensioners—will be able to claim community charge rebates which will provide substantial reductions in their community charge bills.

In the discussions leading up to our announcement on the rate support grant settlement for this year we received a good many representations, including representations from Northumberland local authorities, all of which we considered carefully.

Mr. Beith: I hope that the Minister will clarify the other side of the coin. When the point that he has just made was put to the local authority it asked whether it could make special transitional relief payments to these people; as they are not ratepayers it asked whether they could be dealt with under the special transitional relief arrangements for non-ratepayers. However, it was told that it could not do that, either. The Minister ought to open that door, thereby providing some help for those people who, I am sure he agrees, are, in principle, proper beneficiaries, if only those arrangements could be made.

Mr. Chope: I shall look again at that point, but the principle is that residents do not get relief—not because they are not ratepayers but because they do not qualify on the basis of the comparison between rates and the community charge. The special scheme to which the hon. Gentleman referred is for non-ratepayers. However, I understand his point, and with my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities I will see whether there is a way round it. Nevertheless, this was all done in the context of the arrangements that we made with local authorities to try to devise a scheme which could be easily implemented. Some people may say that it is unfair that a person who moves house should be disqualified from assistance under the transitional relief scheme, but any transitional relief scheme has to be based upon firm principles. I do not believe that there is any way out of that difficulty.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman recognises that when we considered all the representations, including those from Northumberland local authorities, we did not simply go through the motions of doing so. We were persuaded by the representations that, because of the weather conditions in Northumberland during the winter, authorities there should benefit from changes that we made to the winter maintenance element of the standard spending assessments. Where we are persuaded that adjustments to the system are justified, we are prepared to make them, and we believe that we have set for authorities in Northumberland SSAs that are fair. Our decisions took into account all the relevant factors, including those brought to our attention by the authorities. I am glad to have had this opportunity to make that clear.

Fossil Fuel Levy

[illegible]55 am

Mr. Malcolm Moss (Cambridgeshire, North-East): Had I been here at this early hour 20 years ago, I would have been making a very different speech about energy. It would have been along the lines of the lectures that I used to give to my geography A-level students in those days. Twenty years ago, a different set of challenges and priorities were on the agenda. For instance, I probably would have spoken about the problems of Britain's huge and relatively uncompetitive coal mining industry, employing at that time over 250,000 people. Today the mining industry is leaner and fitter. A staggering increase in productivity has been achieved, and credit must go to the management and work force for that.

I would never have dreamed 20 years ago how important private enterprise would become in Britain's energy production and distribution. Gas has been successfully privatised; private enterprise is booming in the North sea, with a record number of jobs in the offshore industry, and record investment; and shortly the electricity supply industry will be in the private sector, where it belongs.

Perhaps most striking of all, until recently, nobody, least of all me 20 years ago, had any inkling of the connection between the environment and energy generation. Now, in the 1990s—thanks in part to the efforts of the Prime Minister and others—the protection of the environment is at the top of the political agenda. That is crucial, not only to those in the energy industry but to the future of the planet.

Issues such as the protection of the ozone layer and the need to reduce gases such as sulphur dioxide, which cause acid rain, and carbon dioxide, which contributes to global warming and the greenhouse effect, are now matters of great urgency. There are many ways to mitigate the influence of energy production and consumption on the environment, and one thinks of the impact of renewable energy. Energy efficiency and conservation will become increasingly important in the next decade.

We also have a contribution from the nuclear industry. Nuclear power has three clear advantages. First, it produces no sulphur dioxide or nitrous oxide, which contribute to acid rain; it produces no carbon dioxide, which is a major contributor to global warming; and it produces no gases which harm the ozone layer.

Secondly, nuclear power enhances the security of supply against abrupt changes in fuel availability and fuel prices, or disruption of indigenous supplies by the action of unions. We recall the great impact in recent years of the miners' strike.

Thirdly, nuclear power promotes, along with renewables, a diversity of supply. Nuclear is the only proven long-term alternative to fossil fuel power stations. At issue is not only the environment: we are also considering the future of the world's population and the ever-increasing demand for energy.

At present, 90 per cent. of the world's needs are supplied by fossil fuel. Clearly, the global geochemical system is incapable of accommodating fossil fuel combustion products at the current rate of production. To stabilise carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere, it will be necessary to reduce emissions by about 20 per cent. by the year 2005, the Toronto target that was agreed not long ago. Given that scenario, it would seem irresponsible and short-sighted to rule out the contribution of nuclear power.

Despite its obvious advantages, nuclear power is at the moment a beleaguered industry and the subject of much vilification. Much of it is emotional—understandably, in the wake of Chernobyl. However, nuclear power is increasingly under attack on the economic front. As my hon. Friend the Minister will understand, many of the misunderstandings concerning nuclear power at present arise from uncertainty over the Government's position on it and its role after the privatisation of the electricity supply industry.

The Government's courageous decision to withdraw all the Central Electricity Generating Board's nuclear power stations from the privatisation process has been seen in some quarters—especially by the Opposition—as a sign that the Government have abandoned nuclear power. To put the record straight, I should welcome my hon. Friend's assurance that the Government remain committed to a continuing nuclear programme.

Nuclear Electric plc is the company which will inherit on Saturday, its vesting day, all the nuclear power stations of the CEGB. That must mean a commitment by Nuclear Electric to complete Sizewell B. I seek an assurance from my hon. Friend about that commitment, as I believe that it is vital to the morale of the new company. I say that despite the real problems surrounding Sizewell, not the least of which seems to be the escalating costs, which require the closest scrutiny by the new company and by the Department of Energy. Sizewell B is needed to maintain the status quo in nuclear power generation as the Magnox stations are closed down and decommissioned. By the time of Sizewell's completion in 1994, we shall be in a far better position to review the whole nuclear industry and its future. The successful completion of Sizewell, coming in at cost without great overruns—and, at the time of switching on, its proving the engineers and the scientists in the nuclear industry correct in their design of this unique pressurised water reactor—will enhance the future for the nuclear industry.

The other area of criticism to which I alluded was cost. At present, nuclear-generated electricity is undoubtedly more expensive than that generated by conventional fuels, but everything is relative. Nuclear power may be more expensive now than fossil fuel sources, but it would take a brave man to predict future movements in the price of energy and of world fuels.

Privatisation has, for the first time, exposed the real back-end costs of nuclear power, by which I mean the costs of fuel reprocessing and decommissioning. Fossil fuel generation does not, at present, have those extra costs to bear, but around the corner is the high cost of flue gas desulphurisation to remove the sulphur dioxide from the emissions from our coal-fired power stations. One of the problems is that much of our indigenous coal has a high sulphur content. If we are to meet the agreed European targets on the reduction of emissions, much work will need to be done. It is estimated that 6,000 MW to 8,000 MW of coal-fired generation will need to be fitted with flue gas desulphurisation processes.

The supporters of coal-fired generation are simply ignoring reality if they believe that a carbon tax of some description can be postponed idefinitely. It is, after all, from coal-fired generation that the bulk of the carbon dioxide that is pumped into our atmosphere comes. The options for the future could be greater research and development into means of removing carbon dioxide from the emissions. There obviously are technologies, albeit small scale at the moment, that could be adopted—fluidised bed technology, for instance, which does reduce some of the emissions. But as a solution to the problem in the short term, I do not believe that these will offer anything like the scale of change that is necessary.

A second option will be to switch from coal-fired generation to gas, particularly combined cycle gas, which emits far less carbon dioxide per unit of energy than coal-fired.

Thirdly—this has nothing to do with what we want in this country but comes out of the European dimension or a worldwide dimension—in an effort to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, there may well be a tax on carbon, coal-fired and oil-fired generation of electricity. Each of these options will add significantly to the cost in the future of electricity generated from fossil fuels.

Despite the current higher costs of nuclear power, I believe that the nuclear programme must be secured. This means, under privatisation, the introduction of the non-fossil fuel obligation and of the fossil fuel levy.

The obligation will oblige the new supply companies to contract for some 8,000 MW of nuclear-generated electricity over the period 1990-98, and to spread this addition fairly over all electricity suppliers there will need to be the fossil fuel levy. This levy must not, of course, be an extra cost for customers to bear. After all, the costs of nuclear power are already included in our electricity bills. One of the great benefits of the privatisation process, I believe, is that it has made these costs transparent for the first time. It would be helpful if my hon. Friend would confirm that the levy will reduce over the eight-year period of the initial sales contracts.

Another series of myths is growing up—stoked by Opposition Members—about the decommissioning costs of nuclear power and therefore the long-term financial position of Nuclear Electric. Of course nuclear power has its decommissioning costs. Unlike coal, it has to clear up after itself, and that is an expensive process. One of the benefits of privatisation is that it has shown up these costs and presented the industry with a fresh set of challenges, but it does place Nuclear Electric in something of a special position with regard to long-term debts and liabilities. I should be most grateful if my hon. Friend could make it clear this morning what action the Government will be taking to ensure that, when the full decommissioning costs of nuclear are drawn up and included in Nuclear Electric's balance sheet, the new company will remain solvent in the early years of trading.

I believe that the privatisation of electricity has revealed many challenges, to which the nuclear industry must respond positively and effectively. This is not an uncritical apology for the nuclear industry—many mistakes have been made in the past, not least by politicians—but the continuation of nuclear power in this country is vital, first in keeping our options open for the future; secondly in protecting our security of supply; and thirdly in assisting in the battle to preserve the global environment. It would be a significant contribution, on the present scenario, to world energy needs right into the middle of the next century.

As the world's population increases at an ever-expanding rate, the demand for energy is going up and up. The countries of the Third world, the southern hemisphere, have no prospect of building nuclear on any scale. They will turn for their energy needs to fossil fuel.

Our contribution internationally to world energy needs could be to take the strain off the fossil fuel problem by going over more to nuclear. Of course, nuclear is an important component in energy production for many of our EC partners—in France particularly, but also in Germany and in Belgium.

Privatisation has put the nuclear industry under greater scrutiny than ever before. There will no longer be a blank cheque. The industry must become more commercial and competitive. I am confident that Nuclear Electric will rise to the challenge, and I wish its management and work force every success.

5.10 am

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. the hon. Gentleman will require the leave of the House.

Mr. Barron: I do not know whether I should congratulate the hon. Gentleman——

Madam Deputy Speaker: For the record, the hon. Gentleman should seek the leave of the House.

Mr. Barron: With the leave of the House, I do not know whether to congratulate the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) on being lucky enough to get a spot in the Consolidated Fund Bill debate at 5.10 am so that he could discuss the nuclear industry. On behalf of the Opposition I wish to comment on some issues that he brought up in his speech.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the role that the Prime Minister has played in the debate on the environment. I do not want to rehearse recent debates in the House, but I would have been happier with the Prime Minister's stance on the environment if she had stuck to her promises and especially to the commitment that she gave to the international community last year about the reduction in sulphur dioxide emissions from coal-fired power stations. In recent weeks she seems to have been back-tracking on that.

Mr. Moss *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Barron: The hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but in his own words he agreed with it because, after he had mentioned the Prime Minister, he talked about the necessity to retrofit between 6 GW and 8 GW of electricity production with flue gas desulphurisation. The Prime Minister and other Ministers were talking about 12,000 MW of retrofit only last year.

Mr. Moss: The most important point is the commitment given by the Government to reduce sulphur dioxide emissions in accord with the agreements in Europe. How that is achieved is not crucial. The most important point is that those reductions will be achieved. If it is done by a transfer under privatisation to more gas-fired generation, that of itself will take out some of the sulphur dioxide emissions. The hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways. The commitment is there to reduce the sulphur dioxide levels. It will involve flue gas desulphurisation retrofitting, but the level will have to be determined after privatisation by the companies.

Mr. Barron: I am grateful for that intervention. It enables me to say to the hon. Member and to the Minister that the Government were able to negotiate lower levels of sulphur emissions from power stations and electricity generators in Britain at that time on the basis of the case that they put forward to the Commission; they said that they wanted lower levels because of the sulphur content of British coal and the necessity to protect the British coal industry. The hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East will have to take my word for that although we are seeking the records that were made at the time. Over the last few weeks the Government have talked about low-sulphur coal imports. I believe that those imports will create even more problems with our balance of payments which is in deficit on energy already.

Although I do not want to go too deeply into such matters, I refute the idea that gas or the importing of coal with a lower sulphur content will help us to meet those targets. As with many other things in the game of poker of electricity privatisation, on the retrofitting of flue gas desulphurisation, John Baker has won once again and has got away from the commitment of a £2 billion programme that the two new generators would have to make to retrofit FGD to power stations. I refer to that simply to illustrate that things are not settled and that because the Government are tied into a tight timetable with a general election in the next two years or so, they cannot afford any more slippages. The two new generators have been able to get off the hook over the retrofitting of FGD only at great cost to the nation.

The major point of the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East related to the nuclear industry. He is right to say that Opposition Members and the Labour party are not the nuclear industry's biggest supporters. I have no problem in admitting the truth of that analysis. However, if the hon. Gentleman were to talk to those in the nuclear industry or in Nuclear Electric and to ask them who their biggest enemy has been in this country, they would not refer to the Opposition, but to those who have spoken from the Government Dispatch Box over the past six months. I refer especially to what the hon. Gentleman described as the "courageous" decision to withdraw Nuclear Electric from the privatisation of the electricity supply industry.

I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman paid tribute to the British coal industry and to its productivity increases. One of his next comments was to say how surprised he is about the extent to which private enterprise has become important to the British energy industry over the past 20 years. That has certainly been the case with North sea oil and gas, but a fundamental problem facing the nuclear industry is the lack of commitment from the Government who did not think that the industry was sustainable enough to be put into the framework into which the Government appear to be prepared to put all the other energy industries that are currently in the public sector.

It is true that the nuclear industry is beleaguered. I refer now to a comment made today at the annual British nuclear forum for Members of Parliament——

Mr. Moss: It was yesterday.

Mr. Barron: The hon. Gentleman says that it was yesterday. That is generally correct, but as far as Parliament is concerned, today is still Tuesday.

Our annual British nuclear forum for Members of Parliament was delayed because of the Government's statement last November. Indeed, Mr. John Collier called the Secretary of State's statement a "setback" for the industry. There can be no question about that—it was more like a wake than the annual British nuclear forum for Members of Parliament. It is recognised that the present position is not sustainable in the short term.

What will happen at Sizewell B in the not-too-distant future has been a matter of some concern. Obviously, the forum is concerned that it should be built and brought on stream, but we must recognise that the costs of building Sizewell B have escalated by 10 per cent. I do not know whether the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East knows that an announcement is to be made within a month about the extra cost of Sizewell B. There will not be the replication that people had believed would occur when the other three pressurised water reactors were expected to follow straight on. In the nuclear programme, from Magnox to AGRs, the lack of replication meant that, perhaps not in the short term but in the long term, nuclear costs were far outside that of any fossil fuels for electricity generation. The total cost to the nation of Sizewell B has not yet been settled.

As we have found throughout the nuclear industry, much of the capital cost of building the nuclear power station, was found to be, although not small, not as big as we had thought. The costs of decommissioning and reprocessing were the significant factor.

The hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East suggested that the costs of reprocessing have been exaggerated by Opposition Members. Decommissioning time scales and the costs of the different forms of decommissioning, while still not fully settled, have massively increased. It is not Opposition Members who have given those costs but BNFL.

One issue that worries BNFL—to some extent I agree with it, as do many people in energy management and planning—is that with the privatisation of electricity the Government have introduced a new commercial framework that does not bode well for the building of new generator plants, nuclear or other. BNFL is worried that generator plant that is built does not have a life-term contract. I went to the United States a couple of years ago and spoke to people who have privatised the industries over the years. The idea of building generator plants that do not have life-term contracts for the supply of electricity to area boards or state-run companies is not on there. America does not work like that. People are more likely to buy the fuel source—whether a coal mine or anything else —and the site for the plant so that they know that although the plant will not pay the same price for years, it will have longer-term contracts than we have here. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the flotation of the electricity industry has caused chaos in the British energy market.

Mr. Moss: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. How does he square that with the fact that there is no shortage of companies coming forward to build new plant, even given the scenario of the length of contracts to which he refers? Plenty of schemes are coming on to the books, from combined cycle gas through to renewables.

Mr. Barron: Plans for combined cycle gas and other plants have been submitted. Clearly everyone wants to build small plants that will be environment friendly. The nuclear industry, the coal industry and the gas industry want to do that. If all definite plans are put together, they would amount to about 7GW of generation of electricity. Combined cycle gas is wasteful. Gas is not a long-term resource for this country. Two planned large coal-fired plants have been cancelled just in the lifetime of this Government. Along with PWRs, that does not come anywhere near the cancellation that might take place.

At this stage we may be able to take stock of generation to see what capabilities we have to generate electricity in this country. That does not get away from the fact that the new framework that has been created with the privatisation of electricity supply industry means, as the nuclear industry and everyone else agrees, that the lack of long-term contracts is not good for expenditure or the building of new generators.

Because of the short-term commercial outlook that people have been forced to adopt they must seek to recover the capital cost of building generating plant in 25 years rather than 35 years. That is extremely damaging not only to the nuclear industry, but to many others

Many of us believe that the privatisation of the electricity supply industry is fundamentally wrong as it does not take into account the need for any long-term planning for our needs. The market will be unable to supply a coherent framework of generators capable of providing our electricity in the coming decades.

I accept that mistakes were made with central planning in the past—they are there for all to see—but the framework provided by the privatisation of electricity is not a coherent one by which the country will be able to make proper strategic judgments and planning decisions to ensure the supply of electricity to our communities and industries in the future.

Obviously we could go on and on debating the issue, but the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East should be aware that many people in the nuclear industry are unhappy about what has happened in the past two years. Many others unconnected with the industry are unhappy with the headlong rush to privatise the electricity supply industry which is similar to an ideological crusade. Privatisation has not taken into account the need for strategic planning or its knock-on effects on the nuclear and other energy industries.

5.26 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Tony Baldry): At this early hour it requires an interesting debate on an important topic to retain the attention of even the insomniacs among us. I am glad to say that this debate, although comparatively short, has been interesting. No one doubts the importance of the nuclear industries to the United Kingdom.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) on initiating the debate—I know that he is a distinguished member of the Select Committee on Energy. Before I seek to answer the points raised by my hon. Friend and those of the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron), I wish to put the debate into context.

In less than 36 hours from now, the United Kingdom electricity industry will be totally different from the one that we have had for the past 40 years. The Central Electricity Generating Board, the 12 area electricity boards and the two existing Scottish boards will cease trading. At midnight on 31 March, all the assets of those major companies will pass to 19 new public limited companies which will form the electricity industry in the United Kingdom from then on.

Within the next 36 hours, a unique spot market in electricity will begin to operate, ensuring that the demand of millions of customers is met and that power stations are turned on and off so that the electricity is generated at least cost. Right now, the owners of generating stations are considering the prices to bid into the sophisticated computer model which will set prices and match supply and demand half hour by half hour.

This is clearly a major reorganisation of an industry on which every person in this country relies. Competition, which has been kept out of the industry for the past 40 years, will be released. Experience all over the world shows that that will benefit the consumer by keeping downward pressure on costs and encouraging greater efficiency. Electricity consumers will also enjoy customer rights for the first time ever.

At the same time, the standards of security of supply and safety that we have come to expect from the industry will be maintained and the operation of the integrated national grid will continue largely as before. The Director General of Electricity Supply will watch over the industry, regulate the parts which are natural monopolies and protect consumers' interests.

I know that many Members on both sides of the House have a strong interest in environmental matters, particularly energy efficiency. A number of points on this have been made today. We all accept that the electricity industry has a large role to play in helping to control the effect of man's activities on the natural environment. The reorganisation of the industry therefore includes specific duties on electricity suppliers to meet set standards in promoting energy efficiency. The renewable sources of power are being given a considerable boost by including them in the non-fossil fuel obligation. More importantly, perhaps, because the market rather than a Whitehall bureaucrat will determine investment decisions, both consumers and producers of energy will have the right signals to use energy in the least wasteful way.

This reorganisation will be a major step towards the most radical privatisation ever undertaken anywhere in the world. Within a year and a half, subject to the right market conditions, we shall have offered for sale the shares of all the area distribution companies in England and Wales, and of the fossil fuel generating companies which will come out of the CEGB.

We are, therefore, at a new dawn in more ways than one this morning. The electricity industry is moving into a new era in which it will go from strength to strength.

No one can doubt the importance that the Government place on the role of nuclear power in the electricity industry. We stated our commitment to nuclear power in the 1987 manifesto on which we were elected as a Government. Since then, preparation for privatisation has revealed many of the costs of nuclear power which were previously hidden, but our aim has not altered. Nuclear power has always made an important strategic contribution towards diversity of supply. We intend to retain the continuing benefit of this option.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East said, nuclear stations also bring considerable environmental benefits. Each gigawatt of nuclear power saves about 6 million tonnes of CO_2 emissions per year.

[Mr. Tony Baldry]

Nuclear power does not contribute to acid rain. Those are important benefits which it would have been wrong to allow to be lost under the new competitive industry structure.

The non-fossil fuel obligation will ensure that nuclear power continues to play its important strategic role in electricity generation. The order setting the non-fossil fuel obligation was laid before Parliament on 16 February. It requires the public electricity supply companies in England and Wales to contract for roughly 8 GW of power from nuclear stations over an eight-year period. The figure drops slightly in the early years as some of the old Magnox stations retire, but rises again towards the end as Sizewell B comes on stream. That obligation will ensure that all existing nuclear capacity in England and Wales is contracted for well into the next decade, and that the construction of Sizewell B is completed and its output contracted for. I hope that that reassures my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East.

Having set a non-fossil fuel obligation, it would have been quite wrong to fail to take account of the extra costs that the public electricity suppliers will face as a consequence. To ignore that would have put them at a considerable competitive disadvantage in what has already become a highly competitive market. All electricity customers benefit from the environmental and strategic benefit that our nuclear stations offer. Indeed, customers are paying for nuclear power in their bills at present. The fossil fuel levy for the first time identifies this element and ensures that the extra costs of non-fossil power are fairly shared out. The levy regulations were also laid before Parliament on 16 February. They set down in great detail —clearly, more detail than some Members feel that they can manage—the method by which the levy rate will be calculated and the levy collected by the director general. The Secretary of State announced on 12 February that the initial levy rate would be set at 10·6 per cent., but that it was expected to fall significantly over the next eight years.

The Electricity Act 1989 also contains a provision to permit the Secretary of State to pay grants for reprocessing, waste management and decommissioning of power stations. I shall return to that issue because there is confusion about it.

Those three main elements—the non-fossil obligation, the fossil fuel levy, and grants for nuclear back-end costs —complete the regime which is being put in place to ensure that nuclear continues to play its important strategic role. But there is an important point to understand here. All those measures would have been needed whether the nuclear stations were in the public or the private sector. All those measures were conceived and included in the Act before the premium that the financial markets would demand before investing in nuclear became clear. Certainly the fossil fuel levy is lower as a result of the decision to keep all the nuclear stations in the public sector, but a non-fossil obligation and a levy would have been required come what may.

I now turn briefly to the future of nuclear power in the United Kingdom. I was concerned about the slight pessimism reported by the hon. Member for Rother Valley. Since we took our decision last November to remove nuclear from the privatisation, some commentators have said that the nuclear industry has been abandoned. The hon. Gentleman said that it had been referred to as a setback. Let me spell out the Government's position on nuclear once and for all.

Mr. Barron: When I described it as a setback, I was using the word that Mr. John Collier used at the British nuclear forum yesterday. As the Minister knows, Mr. Collier takes over Nuclear Electric this weekend.

Mr. Baldry: I understand that to be the context in which the hon. Gentleman reported it.

I will spell out the Government's position on nuclear once and for all. We are committed to a continuing nuclear programme. That commitment is being made manifest in solid concrete through Sizewell B, which will be completed by a substantial public sector company employing 14,000 people, running 12 nuclear stations and contributing up to 20 per cent. of our electricity needs.

Nuclear power was withdrawn from privatisation for two reasons. So far as the Magnox stations were concerned, the earlier estimates for decommissioning and waste management were simply not high enough, and it would have been quite wrong to expect future electricity consumers to pay for those past costs. Those costs are much lower per unit of output for AGR and PWR stations. The second decision, taken by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last November, to withdraw PWR and AGR from the sale reflected the private sector's different perception of the financial risks associated with nuclear power.

The private sector's solution to the high prices that it required to cover those risks was Government guarantees against virtually all commercial risks in the future. We were simply not prepared to underwrite such commercial risks in that way. Our solution was the fairest to both taxpayer and consumer.

Mr. Barron: Is not that precisely what the Government are doing now with the nuclear industry? They are keeping it in the public sector so that they can make grants towards all its costs, including its back-end costs.

Mr. Baldry: By ensuring that the nuclear industry remains within the public sector the Government are in a much better position to observe its costs. I shall have something to say about the costs and the financial position of Nuclear Electric. There has been some misunderstanding about those matters.

The separate decision to postpone immediate construction of PWRs beyond Sizewell B came about partly because of our success in stimulating diversity and competition in the electricity market. We recognise that the NFFO necessarily distorts the market to safeguard diversity and security of supply. Given that the prospect of a competitive, privatised market has attracted independent generators burning gas and renewables projects, and has encouraged own generation, there is no need to include new nuclear stations beyond Sizewell B in the NFFO for the present. Life extension of the Magnox stations, where economic and subject to the requirements of the nuclear installations inspectorate, will provide a continuing nuclear contribution and the Government will make justifiable investment available to Nuclear Electric for this purpose.

Those were our reasons for the policy decisions on nuclear power. They were not taken because nuclear power is inherently uneconomic, whatever that means. In recent years, economic conditions, such as the low price of oil and the increased cost of capital, have not favoured nuclear's adoption on strict cost terms, but those conditions can, and probably will, change again. Should fossil prices climb, perhaps because of a recognition of the environmental cost of burning them, nuclear power should again become much more attractive.

Those are all strong reasons for maintaining the nuclear option, and that is why we have placed the portfolio of nuclear stations, together with the PWR under construction at Sizewell B, in the new public sector company, Nuclear Electric. The management and staff of the new company, drawn primarily from the CEGB, have worked tremendously hard to set up their new company in the short time available. I know that the skill and dedication that they have shown during this exercise over the past few months and, indeed, throughout the excellent generation record of the CEGB, will continue in the new company. John Collier, Nuclear Electric's chairman is determined to prove nuclear as the generating source of the future, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have every confidence that he and his staff will succeed. He has set the company the challenging goals of increased nuclear generation and a progressive reduction of the levy, getting the best out of the Magnox and AGR stations.

Sizewell B will be completed to time and cost to maintain the PWR option, and Nuclear Electric will be looking at the possibilities for fusion and small reactors, as well as assessing its priorities in research and development. As the inheritor of the CEGB's acknowledged nuclear safety expertise, Mr. Collier and his company will ensure that safety remains the No. 1 priority in running nuclear stations. The nuclear installations inspectorate continues as the ultimate independent guarantor of stringent safety at Nuclear Electric's nuclear power stations.

One of John Collier's other stated goals is to increase public confidence in nuclear power. I do not deny that our unavoidable policy decisions on the industry have not made his task any easier, but one of the benefits of privatisation has been to make clear to the consumer for the first time the actual cost of nuclear electricity. We know the rate of the fossil levy, and consumers will be able to watch it decline over the next eight years as Nuclear Electric continues to improve the efficiency of its plant.

Nuclear Electric will be publishing audited accounts in which the costs of nuclear power will be open to scrutiny rather than subsumed in the bulk supply tariff. That should help to overcome much of the uncertainty over costs that has dogged the nuclear industry, and which has come into sharp focus recently. The arguments over the costs of nuclear power can then be based on hard facts, rather than on supposition and conjecture. It is a hard fact, for example, that the price of nuclear power under the primary nuclear contract will be about 5p per kWh; this price, which we fully recognise is higher than that for fossil power, buys diversity, security of supply and a cleaner environment. I believe that they are well worth the cost, and John Collier has set himself the task of making the bargain even better.

These tasks are quite enough to be getting on with, and Nuclear Electric will not be building any new nuclear stations before 1994, when the Government will review the prospects for nuclear power. By 1994 Sizewell B will be ready to come on stream, and Nuclear Electric will have a breathing space in which to get its existing stations running well and the chance to reassess the costs of nuclear power; the new competitive electricity market will be maturing, with independents established and the larger generators investigating new sources of power; the world's considered response to the greenhouse effect may have been more clearly set out. It will be a new world, and the ideal time to look again at nuclear power. I am confident that our nuclear expertise will be maintained over the next few years, with the prospect of a wide-ranging review in 1994.

The Government were keen to secure a future for nuclear power in reaching our decisions last November and I think that we have achieved the right balance. We very much hope that the industry will make the most of its new opportunity, as I am sure it will.

I should now like to say a few words about Nuclear Electric's financial position to clarify a number of points that have clearly been misunderstood recently.

Nuclear Electric has been set up as a public limited company, although all its shares will be owned by the Government. However, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State intends that the company will, in one crucial respect, be no different from the private sector companies that, together with Nuclear Electric, will constitute the new electricity supply industry following privatisation. I mean, of course, that he will expect Nuclear Electric to operate commercially, effectively and efficiently. By the separation of Nuclear Electric from the other companies, and through the structure and arrangements for privatisation, Parliament and the public at large will for the first time be able to see how efficient and economic are the company's operations.

The generating licence requires the company to publish separate accounts in respect of its nuclear business. The costs of nuclear power will be transparent. My right hon. Friend made clear to the House, in his statement of 9 November 1989, that the company will not be given capital expenditure approval for any new power stations until after the review of the nuclear industry in 1994. A major aim of the chairman of the new company is to ensure that, by the time of the 1994 review, nuclear power generation will have been demonstrated to be an economic proposition.

None the less, immediate financial circumstances have required the Government to take special action. The balance sheet that the CEGB published in its 1988-89 report and accounts showed vastly increased provisions to cover the cost of decommissioning nuclear generating stations. Nuclear Electric has inherited these huge liabilities. A great deal of work is now in hand on the company's accounting policies, and we shall not be able to form a definitive view on the company's assets and liabilities until its opening report and accounts are published in the summer. However, it is clear that Nuclear Electric will require an assurance that the Government will stand behind the company to ensure that it remains able to meet the tests of solvency under the Insolvency Act 1986.

This is a matter of simple necessity, in order to assure the company's trading partners that it will be able to meet its debts as they fall due. It also serves to reassure the directors that their company will not be allowed to slip into fraudulent or wrongful trading.

My right hon. Friend has therefore been granted powers under schedule 12 to the Electricity Act 1989 to provide Nuclear Electric with financial assistance, once he has obtained Treasury approval, in respect of qualifying expenditure. This qualifying expenditure is defined in schedule 12, but I should say that, in general terms, it

[Mr. Baldry]

refers to the costs of reprocessing spent fuel and decommissioning. Schedule 12 limits the assistance that may be given to an aggregate of £1 billion.

If, in the fullness of time, it should prove necessary to increase this amount of support, schedule 12 explicitly permits the Secretary of State to seek Parliament's approval to do so, to an upper limit of £2·5 billion. Expenditure under schedule 12 must be voted through the normal Supply Estimates procedure. Hon. Members will be well aware of this provision as schedule 12 was fully debated in the House during the passage of the Electricity Act 1989.

More recently, my right hon. Friend made clear, in a departmental minute that he laid before the House on 6 March this year, that it was his intention to provide Nuclear Electric with a letter of assurance. The letter simply notifies the House of the Government's intention to assure the directors that a grant would be available to the company under schedule 12 to the Electricity Act to enable it to meet its obligations.

I should take this opportunity to allay some of the misconceptions that some hon. Members clearly hold on this issue. The Government's obligation under schedule 12 will not involve a cash payment in the foreseeable future. It is an assurance, not a grant, and it will result in a cash payment only if the point is reached where Nuclear Electric cannot fund its own liabilities.

As I pointed out earlier in the debate, the Government will employ the necessary controls to ensure that Nuclear Electric operates on a commercial and competitive basis. Indeed, my right hon. Friend has told the House that the company will remain cash positive. Moreover, hon. Members should not confuse schedule 12 with the fossil fuel levy. The fossil fuel levy is an entirely separate matter on which regulations have been laid. It is important to remember that any money that may eventually need to be spent under schedule 12 will be provided by the Government, not by the consumer, and will not increase prices.

We have, of course, obtained the necessary approval of the European Commission for the progress we have made so far. Should any longer-term support prove to be necessary, it will, of course, be subject to any appropriate further approval from the European Commission. No assistance will be granted unless such approval is forthcoming.

I welcome the opportunity that the debate has afforded to clarify some issues relating to nuclear power and to the Government's commitment to nuclear power and nuclear energy, and some misunderstandings that have arisen in recent days. I hope that this has been a useful debate.

Community Charge Capping

5.49 am

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): I am grateful for the opportunity to seek considerable clarification from the Minister on the proposals for community charge capping, or, as it will popularly be known, poll tax capping.

On Second Reading of the Abolition of Domestic Rates etc. (Scotland) Bill, which introduced the poll tax in Scotland, the Government spelled out the long-standing benefits that they felt would come from the community charge. The then Under-Secretary of State said:

> "The Bill is no short-term stop gap. It is no hurried or temporary expedient. It is a well considered and well worked out reform which sets up a new and viable system for financing local government for generations to come."—[*Official Report*, 9 December 1986; Vol. 107, c. 275.]

It is now clear that, within three years of introducing the tax in Scotland, and within two years of introducing it in England, the Government will no longer be in office and the tax will be swept away and consigned to the dustbin of history.

We are puzzled about why any sort of capping should now be necessary. The benefit of the system was to be the accountability which the tax would bring to local authorities and local councillors. On Second Reading of the Local Government Finance Bill, which introduced the tax in England and Wales, the Secretary of State for the Environment said:

> "The objectives of the Bill are, first, to abolish the inequities of the present domestic rating system; secondly, to make local councils more responsive and accountable to their electors".—[*Official Report*, 16 December 1987; Vol. 124, c. 1115.]

But the poll tax does not make local councils more accountable or responsive to their electors. If that is necessary, local people know that they can vote out their local councillors at elections, and that that is the democratic way of doing it, not by the underhand method that the Government have pioneered and have for 10 years imposed on local government—juggling with support figures to make sure that some councils appear to be overspenders because they had high rates and will now have high poll taxes, when the truth is that they are due much more to the diminished levels of support as the Government have welshed on their responsibility for funding local councils, and less to do with overspending. That is why so many Conservative authorities now are likely to be threatened with poll tax capping.

The Bill was originally commended in 1986 as one which would help to get rid of the unfair burdens of the old rating system. The Secretary of State for Scotland said:

> "The pattern of gainers and losers which the analysis shows gives the lie to Opposition claims that it is a measure which is simply aimed at helping the rich at the expense of the poor."—[*Official Report*, 9 December 1986; Vol. 107, c. 209.]

He made no apology for the fact that the Bill did not contain details of the rebates scheme. Before the rebate scheme has even been introduced in England and Wales, it has been thoroughly discredited. This week and last the Government have had to act fast to make the rebate scheme slightly more generous—certainly more generous than it was during its first year of operation in Scotland. The Government know that the poll tax is deeply unpopular in Scotland and that the rebate scheme has brought benefits to few people there.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) rightly asked the Secretary of State for the Environment how the poll tax could be fair when someone living in a house worth £1 million pays exactly the same as someone living in a hovel, with rain pouring down the walls. He failed to get a satisfactory explanation. When I asked the Secretary of State, during the debate on Second Reading, if it was unfair that rural councils such as Orkney should have to pay a high proportion of the community charge because of the phoney nature of the rebate scheme, the Secretary of State said that I would not expect him "to know the details."

That is one of the tragedies and the flaws of the Government's case for the poll tax. They have not concentrated on the details. They have not considered how it will affect individual poll tax payers and they have not bothered themselves about the deep concern, the aggravation and the problems that they have forced upon many people—particularly senior citizens and the disabled —with a flat rate tax, for which it is difficult to claim rebates, and which has caused a great deal of suffering to many people.

After standing firm against those who suffer from Alzheimer's disease, the Government were forced to concede that it was possible to give a rebate to sufferers. That was after they had made statements saying that there was no proper medical test for Alzheimer's disease and after the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland said that the symptoms of the disease appeared to increase and decrease in severity and therefore could not be properly measured. The concession was wrung out of the Government, but many more concessions are needed if widows, people on low incomes, the sick, the disabled and senior citizens are to get any sort of fair deal under the tax.

All the expert opinion given to the Government about the poll tax spelled out that it was unworkable. Churches, charities, the Confederation of British Industry, the Institute of Directors, the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses all warned the Government that the tax would not be workable.

The Economist labelled it the "bad" tax. The Confederation of British Industry stated that it could not support the proposals because of the social and political problems of the community charge. Little did its members think that the political problems would result in the Government losing a seat which had a massive Tory majority, that Conservative party members would resign from the party and that Conservative councillors would be packing up in disgust.

My hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) then shadow Secretary of State for the Environment, spelled out all those things, but he was ignored. It is interesting to look over recent records of what hon. Members have said and how they have voted on the issue.

When the poll tax was first debated on 1 December 1986 during the Second Reading debate on the Scottish aspects of the tax, there were no fewer than six Conservative contributers—the then hon. Members for Oxford East, for Edinburgh, Central, for Edinburgh, South, for Fife, North-East, for Strathkelvin and Bearsden and for Aberdeen, South—who subsequently lost their seats. There is no doubt that they did not have the confidence of the electorate when they explained that this tax was one of the key parts of their election manifestos.

Other hon. Members who did not contribute to the debate, but who voted for the tax on Second Reading, and raised not one voice of dissent were the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), the hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor), and the right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson), all of whom are now so vociferous in spelling out the problems of the tax to the Government. Sadly, they voted to foist it first on Scotland and now on the people of England and Wales. At least two hon. Members had the good sense, decency and consistency to absent themselves from that Second Reading debate—the hon. Member for Selly Oak and the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour).

When we consider how poll tax capping will affect local authorities—and, more important, those who have to pay it—we move into a legislative minefield. We know that local authorities are already expected to handle both poll tax rebates and the transitional relief measures that the Government were forced to bring in at the last minute; we also know that rebate—according to the Government—is supposed to be calculated on the basis of the "relieved" bill. But, as the Government have not given local authorities time to organise the relief by 1 April—next week—poll tax payers will receive, and are currently receiving, a bill that has been rebated on the basis of the "unrelieved" figures.

That means that, when the relief is worked out, the rebate will have been overpaid. Local authorities have been advised by the Government to recover the overpayment by reducing the future relief: goodness only knows how the poll tax payer is expected to understand that. However, if the relief reduces the rebate to below 50p a week for any given claim, no rebate will be payable. The claimant could therefore lose more in rebate than the amount of the relief that he or she would otherwise receive.

To prevent that, the Government have advised local authorities to work out whether the problem would arise in each and every case, and, if it would, not to award the relief. The local authority associations have informed the Government that the calculations will create major computer programming problems, especially as they are being introduced at the last minute.

As we bring in any form of poll tax capping emanating from the House, the confusion will become even greater. Poll tax capping means that the relief and the rebates, and the relationship between them, will be automatically wrong in capped councils and will have to be recalculated. We have three different factors with which to juggle. We know only two of the estimates at present, which is why it is important for the Minister to spell out the implications of poll tax capping and to give us an idea of the criteria that he will apply.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), the shadow Secretary of State for the Environment, yesterday expressed his fear that the criteria would be based on only one factor—whether the political complexion of a council began with L or T. Perhaps I can assist the Minister's reply by asking him about a number of Conservative authorities that seem to have embarrassingly high poll tax figures.

In Derby city council, for instance, the figure is £458, against a Government target of £315. In Dartford, Kent, the poll tax figure of £324 is 40 per cent. above the Government's estimate. Its Conservative leader, Malcolm

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Nothard, has said that he deeply resents his council being considered inefficient, and has been highly critical of the tax. He said:

> "our legislators"—

referring to the Minister and his colleagues—

> "were unaware of the true consequences of much of what they were doing."

They continue to be unaware of the consequences of what they are doing.

The figures for Tory Essex are above the Government's guidelines. Tory-controlled Blackpool in Lancashire has announced a poll tax figure of over £350, compared with a target of £261. It is hardly surprising that, throughout the country, with Conservative councils overshooting Government guidelines by a considerable factor, Labour is winning by-election victories. In Braintree in Essex, Labour overturned a Conservative majority with a swing of 11 per cent. There was a 19 per cent. swing to Labour on Portsmouth city council. Again Labour took a seat from the Conservatives.

Conservative councillors throughout the country are criticising the Government for having introduced an unworkable poll tax. Labour candidates are winning elections and becoming Labour councillors. Conservative councillors are quitting in disgust. The leader of Lancaster city council, Geoff Hannah, resigned and six Conservative councillors resigned their chairmanships of other councils. In other councils, such as Beverley, Conservative councillors have quit, again in disgust, and resigned the Tory whip. One of the Beverly councillors explained that this was

> "as a direct result of the unfairness of the Government's implementation of the poll tax."

Councillor Stephen Parnaby, the chairman of the finance committee, spelled out more clearly and convincingly than we can, because he is a Conservative, the feeling about the modern Conservative party. He said that Conservatives

> "feel unable at the present time to be aligned with a government which constantly refuses to listen".

That is at the heart of the debate.

For a number of years, from the day that the poll tax was first suggested, the Government have refused to listen to critics on all sides. Even worse, the fears that were spelt out, not just by the Labour party but by the CBI and other groups that are normally friendly towards the Government, have proved to be true. Their predictions have come true. The Government have no one else to blame for the chaos that has ensued. As Mr. Parnaby, the Conservative councillor, said:

> "The poll tax has got nothing to do at all with Labour councils."

The unpopularity of the poll tax is due to the fact that the Government want to cut their local authority expenditure commitment. They seek to shift the blame for the cuts on to local councils. It is about time that the Minister stood up, took full responsibility for cutting the Government's contribution to local authority expenditure and acknowledged that that has led to declining standards, whether it be in street cleaning, schools or other local authority services, and that where services have been improved it is due to councils standing up for their local communities and ensuring that, by hook or by crook, proper revenues are raised.

If we look at the type of people who are standing up to be counted with the Labour party on the poll tax, we get a clear idea of just how beleaguered the Government are on this issue. Take Mr. Arthur Lester, who joined his local Conservative club in Morecambe 37 years ago. He spoke for club members when he said:

> "There is a strong feeling among a majority that the present charge is unjust and immoral and can't be justified".

He continued:

> "We are very concerned with the financial burden that is going to be placed on many people who cannot get a rebate."

Those concerns are being voiced not on the basis of misinformation allegedly supplied by the Labour party and others, but because in Scotland people have not received rebates in the last year and because even with the rebates announced last week, few people will benefit.

Mr. and Mrs. Lester, who are disabled, have a state pension. He has a small occupational pension. In many ways he typifies the person who commands respect, who prudently set aside some money for an occupational pension but who is being heavily penalised because of the new poll tax system. The Lesters spent £275 on rates last year. This year they will have to pay a combined community charge of £771. The increase will swallow up the bulk of Mr. Lester's occupational pension and part of his disability benefit. He feels that he has not received a sympathetic hearing from the Government. He said:

> "When ordinary decent people are referring to the Prime Minister as a dictator, there is something wrong."

Remember, he is a member of a Conservative club. He said he was taking up the matter with his local MP, and added:

> "I suppose we will only get excuses. There is nothing he can change."

That has proved to be right. Little wonder that Mr. Lester is so disaffected with the party with which he has had links for over a quarter of a century.

The former Conservative mayor of Brighton, Bob Cristofoli, announced earlier this month that he was resigning from the Conservative group. He has for long been opposed to the poll tax and feels that he cannot be associated with the Government, who are increasingly out of touch with the people, including their own supporters. That is why people walked out of their homes as Conservative voters in Mid-Staffordshire last week and into the polling stations to vote Labour for the first time. If the poll tax remains in place until the next general election, people in increasing numbers will vote Labour.

The pressure on the Government on this issue has never been greater. There is disarray among Ministers and Conservative Back Benchers seem to be torn between blaming profligate councils, many of them Tory-controlled, the Secretary of State and, unfairly, his Department, for miscalculations. The problems caused by high poll tax levels were inevitable as the Government sought to relieve the rich from the burden of paying their way. There were property taxes in Britain during nine previous poll taxes, the last one ignominiously consigned to the dustbin over 300 years ago.

A survey of local councils carried out on behalf of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy showed most councils coming in at well above the Government's original estimates. Of 370 councils surveyed, the average target charge was exceeded by 34 per cent. in most cases. The average Conservative council was paying 81 per cent. above the Government's predictions.

We want the Minister to recognise today that those are the very councils which are likely to suffer from any poll tax-capping measure. We need the Minister's assurance that poll tax capping—which I do not support—will be applied fairly. The Minister should explain the criteria for poll tax capping and also tell us the type of councils—I have given him a few Conservative councils from which to choose—that will be capped when legislation is introduced next week.

The reason why the Minister is having to introduce poll tax capping gives the lie to the crucial argument behind the poll tax, which was that it would make councils more accountable to their electorate. If the electorate will automatically know that where councils levy a charge, it will be placed on them as individuals, and if they will be careful—as they have been anyway—about how they exercise their vote because they will, as the Government argue, for the first time have to pay directly any higher costs for improvements, services or any mis-spending by local councils, why do the Government not leave councils to suffer the consequences?

The answer to that rhetorical question is that the type of Conservatives whom I have mentioned know that the councillors are not to blame. They know that the Government are clearly to blame and that, when the Government allowed only 3·8 per cent. for inflation in grants to local authorities in the coming year, that was a bogus figure which was bound to lead to the burden being shifted from the Government on to the local poll tax payers when inflation is running at almost double that level, at 7·5 per cent.

Those Conservatives know that, when the Government calculate their figures for the contributions to local authorities on a 100 per cent. collection—which was never achieved under the rating system and will never be achieved under the poll tax system—they are deliberately trying to deceive councils and the electors. However, the electors are too clever for that.

The Government make no calculation for service improvements for which people are crying out. One has only to walk around the streets outside this building to know that the cleaning requirements are greater than ever. People are willing to pay for those service improvements, and they believe that it is only right that the Government should pay their fair share from all the taxes they collect, yet they have not been doing that.

The reason why the Government have been withdrawing their support is a mystery to many people. Ten years ago, my own authority—Edinburgh—was receiving a two thirds contribution towards local spending. For every pound spent by the local council on behalf of local residents, 66p to 67p came from central Government. That two-thirds contribution to local services has been cut drastically to about one half. The impact of that was to send rates bills, as they were, and now poll tax bills, soaring.

It beggars belief that the Government thought that they could bring in the poll tax in England and Wales at a lower level than rates, especially as there has been no revaluation in England. In Scotland, we had the twin blows of the Government withdrawing support from local councils and then we had revaluation, which shifted the budget burden from industry and from large businesses and heaped it on to small businesses and individual ratepayers. In England, people have moved from the system of rates straight to the system of poll tax, without revaluation. That is one of the key reasons why the poll tax is proving so high. The way to tackle that is not to attack councils and, through councils, the levels of services, but to honour commitments made by previous Governments to give a fair contribution to local councils and services.

Even the distribution is now so skewed as to be ludicrous and beyond comprehension. In Edinburgh, for instance, if my constituents were to receive the same support for their local services as people in the west of Scotland, in Glasgow, do, the poll tax figure in Edinburgh would be cut by £166 to £272. The Secretary of State has offered no explanation why the figures have been rigged to ensure that Edinburgh gets so little in the way of support, or why Glasgow gets inadequate support—because even those higher figures for Glasgow are not enough for a city which has legendary problems to overcome and has suffered from the collapse of the industrial revolution in Scotland.

When the Minister is spelling out which councils he wishes to poll tax-cap and giving us details of the criteria that he will apply, I hope that he will also turn his mind to the complexities of administering the poll tax. In particular, I hope that he will be able to tell us how he expects local authorities to spend on reprogramming computers and interviewing all the individuals who will be eligible for a different set of rebates when the poll tax-capping figure comes in and is imposed on councils.

I hope also that the Minister will take note of the fact that, in Scotland, the cost of implementing the poll tax —the real cost, not the hypothecated cost that we are getting in England—has been two and a half times the cost of collecting the rates. Millions, hundreds of millions, thousands of millions, of changes in the records have been required as people have moved house and disappeared or come on to electoral and poll tax registers.

In the Lothian region, it is costing some £20 per poll tax payer to collect the poll tax.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): In the countryside, it can be more.

Mr. Griffiths: As my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) rightly says, more than that, because an extra £10 is being charged to individuals for the capital cost of implementing the poll tax.

Mr. Dalyell: There are particular problems in the rural areas. My hon. Friend represents a city; I represent some of the rural areas, and they are a special problem.

Mr. Griffiths: My hon. Friend is, as usual, vigilant about the problems that his own constituents face in a rural area. I certainly recognise those problems, and they are recognised by Lothian regional council and by councils and councillors throughout the country.

It is impossible to achieve the 100 per cent. collection figure, not least because people are coming on to and leaving the register. The Government have created an army of bureaucrats to administer this unworkable tax. They have substantially increased the amount that each person has to pay. In my constituency—indeed, in every constituency—people would rather see the £20 that has been heaped on their poll tax for administrative charges go direct to services or to reducing their charge. The last place they want to see it going is on the added bureaucracy that the Government have imposed on local councils.

That added bureaucracy has been justified by Ministers as allowing a direct relationship to be forged between each individual poll tax payer as an elector and the councillors

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and the decisions that they are taking. We know that this debate and the announcement that legislation is to be brought in next week, give the lie to the accountability argument. The Government are not prepared to sit back and allow councils to face the consequences at the polls. The reason is clear. It is not because councils are overspending but because the Government are underfunding local services.

The Minister should spell out the criteria. It is only fair that councils should be given some warning five, six or seven days before the tax comes in. While we expect him to do that in the interests of fairness, we do not think that he is likely to do so if the Government's track record is anything to go by. Everyone should know the criteria that are being applied. The same criteria should be applied to all councils, whether they are Labour, Conservative or of another complexion. However, the Government's record on rate capping shows that they are unlikely to be applied fairly.

The people, having seen through the Government and their bogus tax, will see through any sleights of hand or attempts to rig the system to pass the buck to local councils. It is time for a Minister to stand at the Dispatch Box and say, "I accept full responsibility for this unpopular tax. I defend this tax unequivocally. We do not intend to repeal it." We have yet to hear anyone with a shred of sense saying that. I await the Minister's response.

6.26 am

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): From the many hours that we have spent together in Committee on the Property Services Agency and Crown Suppliers Bill, the Minister will know that I do not spin lines either in Committee or on the Floor of the House. I hope that I have always said what I meant.

It is against that background that I seek to address questions being asked by Conservative Members. Is the poll tax situation just a matter of teething troubles? Are there not difficulties in introducing any new tax? Will it not settle down soon, as our parliamentary and governmental leaders tell us? Those are the questions that are being asked repeatedly.

In the 27 years in which I have had the privilege of being in the House of Commons, I have never endured such continuing, sustained constituency misery as that caused by the poll tax. I fear that it will not get better for a number of reasons, only one of which I give. There is a geological flaw in the tax, in that people are mobile. The tax will never be any easier to administer. The figures ably deployed by my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) are only too true. As he said, there are 70,000 people in our region who have not yet paid. It is not a question of their not being willing to pay—in the overwhelming majority of cases at my surgeries, people genuinely cannot pay.

There is mounting resentment. The whole question of poinding is incredibly unpleasant. What does one say to people who not only have sheriff officers coming to their door but the fear of that action? That fear can cause physical illness. I am not spinning a yarn. That is what is happening in the second year of the tax. Many Conservative Members are friends of mine and I advise them that they had better understand—I say this to them publicly and privately—that year two is more miserable than year one, with an endless number of difficulties which will go on and on.

At my surgery at Winchburgh only last weekend I encountered two cases of widows whose husbands had died more than 12 months previously but had poll tax demands addressed to them. It is no good Ministers saying that the local authority is incompetent or that the officials have been careless. The truth is that they are going demented trying to operate this thing. It is difficult not to make such insensitive mistakes. For pity's sake, let the Government of this country have a second thought about the poll tax.

I owe the House an explanation. As can be seen from the Order Paper, I was lucky enough to get the ninth Consolidated Fund debate—on the circumstances of the acquisition by William Cook plc of the Atlas Steel Works at Armadale. As usual on Consolidated Fund debates, I telephoned the Minister to explain exactly what I wanted to ask. The hon. Member for W[illegible]ngham (Mr. Redwood) listened courteously and said that he had a problem. He was due on a train at 8.10 am for important ministerial engagements in the city of Liverpool and it looked as though my debate would begin at 8 am or thereabouts. I do not think that it serves any purpose if Ministers of whatever party have to cancel, at the shortest notice, long-set-up ministerial engagements for which many other people have gone to a great deal of trouble.

In those circumstances, I willingly accepted the Minister's suggestion that he write to me, and indeed he has sent me a most helpful letter. He says:

> "You and the industrial companies concerned are doing exactly the right thing in making representations to the Director General, who is currently carrying out a preliminary study of the case.
>
> I promise you that we wish to see the advice in this office as soon as possible for the Secretary of State to make his decision. I am told by the Director General's office that they will use their best endeavours to bring this to a Mergers Panel within two weeks following our discussion. I hope that all of the necessary information from those wishing to make representations will be available to him in good time, so that he can meet that timetable. He would then aim to get the advice for the Secretary of State as quickly as possible following that Mergers Panel meeting.
>
> Meanwhile you might like to know that the Chairman of William Cook plc has given the OFT a verbal assurance that they will take no precipitate action to dismantle the foundry. This assurance is still to be put in writing.
>
> I hope that this is satisfactory to you. You will appreciate that I cannot comment on the merits of the case as the Secretary of State does need first to seek advice from the Director General.
>
> Thank you for agreeing that this letter can be in place of replying to a Consolidated Fund debate."

The hon. Member for Wokingham has honourably done exactly what he said he would do, and I thank him for it.

6.32 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Christopher Chope): In one sense, there is a short answer to this debate. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, and my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for the Environment are currently considering information about local authority budgets and when that consideration is complete, announcements will be made about whether there will be capping in the coming year. Those announcements would also cover any criteria that would be applied. I cannot go further than that.

We have been treated to a speech lasting over half an hour from the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths)——

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: How long has the Department had the data from the local authorities?

Mr. Chope: Data are still coming in from the local authorities. I believe that all local authorities have now set their budgets but that budget information has to be delivered to my Department and to other regional Departments and then considered. That is what is happening at present.

We had a speech of over half an hour from the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South. I thought that we would be treated to a resumé of all the merits of the roof tax. I know that the Labour party in Scotland is leading the field on developing the roof tax proposal and I am aware of the Labour party's enthusiasm for it nationally. I wondered whether the hon. Gentleman would compare a capping scheme for the roof tax with a capping scheme for the community charge. He avoided talking about the roof tax or any alternative to the community charge. He referred only in passing to the problems caused by a revaluation under the rating system.

When I was in Scotland recently, the feeling came through strongly that the rating system was unjust. That injustice was made manifest by the revaluation. Many people in Scotland felt that if there had been a domestic revaluation in England, the manifest injustice of the domestic rating system in England would have become even more apparent, as the effects of revaluation came home to people. The hon. Gentleman seems to agree with those points; I shall give way to him.

Mr. Griffiths: Does the Minister accept that the injustice that he has omitted is the injustice of the Government's abolition of the Labour scheme that gave a 100 per cent. rebate to widows, the disabled, the elderly and those on the lowest incomes? Does he agree that it was a terrible injustice to abolish that 100 per cent. rebate?

Mr. Chope: I believe that it is reasonable that every adult makes some contribution towards the costs of local government services. If a person is on income support, the level of support reflects the fact that a contribution has to be made towards the cost of local government services. It is reasonable that someone on income support who lives, for example, in the London borough of Lambeth, will end up paying 20 per cent. of the charge in Lambeth. If the person lives in Wandsworth he will pay 20 per cent. of the charge in Wandsworth. The amount that he has to pay will be 20 per cent. of £148 in Wandsworth and 20 per cent. of about £600 in Lambeth. That brings home even to someone on income support the way in which the council conducts its affairs. That is an important element of accountability.

Many people living in Lambeth, whether on income support or not, will realise during the forthcoming local election campaign exactly the extent to which they are victims of the extravagance of their council. People will vote for lower community charges. Even if people have to pay only 20 per cent. of the charge, they could make a real saving. That is why they will vote for Conservative candidates.

Mr. Dalyell: Is it true, as some of us read, that Wandsworth is receiving favoured son financial treatment from the Government? Are we to believe it, or is it wrong?

Mr. Chope: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman raised that. If we make the comparison between Lambeth and Wandsworth, we see that external support per adult in Lambeth is £324 more than in Wandsworth. Notwithstanding that amazing extra generosity of the taxpayer in Government support to Lambeth community charge payers, Lambeth borough council proposes to set a community charge which is roughly £450 more than that in Wandsworth. If it does, Lambeth will be spending some £775 more per adult than Wandsworth. Most of that additional expenditure is simply wasted. I speak with some feeling on that, because my address in London happens to be in the London borough of Lambeth. I see the poor quality of the services and the inefficiency with which they are delivered. To suggest that the difference between the two boroughs can be put down to the grant going into them is a red herring.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, South may be surprised and amazed at the figures I have given, but he must realise the extent to which Labour councils have a propensity to waste community charge payers' and ratepayers' money. Under the new system a ready reckoner is provided so that one can compare the position in one borough with that in another. That is why it is so helpful, as it introduces accountability and ensures that, overall, pressure is brought to bear to achieve better value for money in local government services.

A political environment is all about choice—the choice between a Conservative council and a Labour one, and the choice between a roof tax or a community charge. I understand that there is serious consternation in Scotland about what a roof tax will involve, whether or not a capping scheme is attached to it. I am told that in Scotland a roof tax could cost £1,000 plus per adult. The more exemptions and reliefs associated with that tax, the higher it will have to be for everyone else.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) recently confirmed that the Labour party believes that the same amount of money should be raised locally from ordinary citizens as is currently raised by the community charge or the domestic rating system. The Labour party has not said that the local contribution should be smaller, but that it should be distributed on a less fair basis, which would penalise those who wanted to improve their homes.

Mr. Griffiths: The only consternation felt in Scotland is among the staff of Conservative central office, who are worried whether the Conservatives can hold a single parliamentary seat at the next election.

Mr. Chope: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. I was in Scotland a couple of weeks ago and I happened to be in Alloway. Within the past three weeks, at a local government by-election in that area, the Labour majority of more than 400 was reduced to one of just over 100. That shows the way in which the people of Scotland are increasingly disillusioned with the Labour party, particularly its alternative to the community charge.

I must pay credit to the shadow Secretary of State for Scotland for coming clean with an alternative proposal so that the Scottish people can judge the community charge against the roof tax. I have seen some of the posters in

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Scotland that show a picture of a house with vultures sitting on top of its roof. Those vultures represent the Socialists, the Labour party, and that campaign is having a major impact in Scotland.

I am sure that, when the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) becomes a little less coy about the Labour party proposals for England, we shall witness growing consternation about the threat of a Labour Government introducing a roof tax, which would be extremely unfair. As with all its proposals, the more the Labour party alternative to the community charge comes under scrutiny, the more it wriggles about and suggests that everyone would be better off under the roof tax. In reality, most people would be a lot worse off.

The roof tax would be extremely unfair and bear heavily upon widows, widowers, single householders and people who live in areas where the capital values of property go up because of market demand.

The roof tax would also bear heavily on the sort of people I met yesterday when I visited Stoke-on-Trent and a local improvement area in which the value of properties had gone up substantially as a result of improvement grants and the efforts of the council, housing associations and the private sector to improve the quality of the properties. I said yesterday—the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley), who was present, did not deny it—that under the roof tax people who benefit from improvements to their properties will be expected, by reason of that benefit, to contribute significantly more towards the cost of local government services. Opposition Members may think that that is fair. I do not, and nor do most of the British people.

Mr. Dalyell: Ornithologically, the vulture is a bird of warning. May this particular vulture give the Minister a word of warning? In disputed cases in Scotland we find that there is argument about where a person was at a particular time. That has to be established, and people are then asked where they were on a particular night. That question easily becomes interpreted as the question, "With whom were you?" Such a situation shows that it is difficult to tax mobility. At least property is static. The general idea of the roof tax, which is actually the rates wrapped up under a new name, is basically as good as one will get.

Mr. Chope: That is an interesting observation, but the roof tax goes further than the old rating system because the document produced by the Scottish Labour party states that it not only taxes on the property value, but takes into account the income of those living in it.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths *indicated assent.*

Mr. Chope: I see that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South confirms that that is so. If it takes into account the income of those living in the property, it has to identify them and be able to work out their means. That means that the roof tax proposal is even more complicated than the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) seems to be prepared to accept, and certainly much more complicated than the community charge, which does not require another property valuation every time there is a change in the market, an improvement is carried out to somebody's home or facilities are added on for the disabled.

Mr. Griffiths: Under the Labour proposal, it is not intended that every time an improvement is made in the home another valuation should be made. That makes it completely different from the poll tax, under which every change of circumstance and every move that people make, no matter how temporary, affects their assessment. Under the Labour scheme, with 100 per cent. rebates, the very widow to whom the Minister and Prime Minister enjoy referring will gain. The poor widow will get a 100 per cent. rebate. At present, the Minister makes such widows pay tens of hundreds of pounds.

Mr. Chope: Under the existing domestic rating system in England, widows and widowers pay many hundreds of pounds, often thousands of pounds. Single pensioners will be the main beneficiaries from the abolition of the domestic rating system in England.

I think that the hon. Gentleman is saying that, in Scotland, vast numbers of people, regardless of their means and merely because they are widows—even if they are millionairess widows—will be entitled to a 100 per cent. rebate.

Mr. Griffiths: No.

Mr. Chope: Oh, so not all widows and widowers will be exempt? Gradually, we are getting the information about this scheme. How many people will be exempt from the roof tax in Scotland or England, and what would be the extent of those exemptions? It is clear that the overall impact would be average bills of about £1,000 per adult, if not more. It would be a bureaucratic nightmare; most people in Scotland can see that, which is why they are increasingly rejecting the idea. When it is developed further in England, people here will also wish to reject it.

Politics is all about alternatives. It is easy to criticise a system, particularly a taxation system. Most people agree with Conservative Members, and say that they feel in their bones that most of our town halls could spend much less money, and be substantially more efficient. We need a system that will bring pressure to bear to ensure that those efficiency savings are made.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh, South referred in passing to some selected examples of increases in spending in England. I shall take him to task on one or two of them to show that he is entirely out of touch with reality. He criticised Derby, which is Conservative-controlled and has a well-run council. He said that there would be a substantial community charge in Derby. That is right, but whereas Conservative-controlled Derby city council has a budget below its standard spending assessment—in other words, it is providing services with greater than average efficiency—Derby county council is spending at 25 per cent. above its standard spending assessment. That spending amounts to £157 per adult on top of what would have to be paid if the council spent in line with its standard spending assessment.

The hon. Gentleman has scored an own goal. Whereas Derby city council, under Conservative control, has shown that it is well able to live within the standard spending assessment and provide good quality services, Labour-controlled Derbyshire county council has shown that it is extravagant and has no regard to the means of the people living in its area to meet high community charge bills. There are those who say that Derbyshire county council should be capped to provide some protection to the hard-pressed community charge payers in that area.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: What about Beverley?

Mr. Chope: The situation in Beverley is not dissimilar from that in Derby. Humberside county council is Labour-controlled, and it increased its spending dramatically. Some of the Beverley councillors fear that it will not come across clearly to the people that the increase in spending and the high community charges are associated with the high-spending Labour policies of the county council. When the bills come through, however, that should become apparent. The hon. Gentleman would wish that not to be so, but the reason will become increasingly apparent.

Perhaps it would help the House if I said a little about the relative spending levels of different counties and districts that are under different political control. Labour-controlled counties are planning precepts that are £82 a head more than their standard spending assessments, whereas Conservative-controlled counties are planning precepts that are only £25 more than theirs. On average, Labour-controlled counties are overspending by three times as much as Conservative ones.

Labour-controlled shire districts are planning precepts of £45 per head more than their standard spending assessments, whereas Conservative districts are planning spending only £7 a head more than their assessments.

The starkest contrast is to be found in the London boroughs. Many regard the London Labour-controlled boroughs as the heartland of the Labour party. Much Labour party policy is developed in these areas, including high spending by local authorities. These boroughs dominate the Labour party. In London, the Labour-controlled boroughs are spending £223 a head above their standard spending assessments, whereas Conservative boroughs are spending only £3 a head above theirs. In other words, £220 per adult more than the standard spending assessments is being spent in Labour-controlled boroughs compared with the small excess of Conservative-controlled boroughs. That is a strong message that is going out to the people of London. It will bring home to them and to others nationally the extent of Labour extravagance and overspending.

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): My hon. Friend was talking about Derbyshire and Humberside. He might like to know that Nottinghamshire is in the same position as those counties. It is overspending and overcharging the Nottinghamshire people by £80. The Conservative opposition drew up a budget that would have been almost on target and would have saved charge payers £80 each. My hon. Friend might also like to know that, last year, Nottinghamshire could not even balance its education budget. It was overspent by £2·5 million. Worse still, the authority could not account for £750,000. Those are the sort of people who are running Nottinghamshire.

Mr. Chope: I hear what my hon. Friend says, and I sympathise with his constituents who have to live under that council.

The essence of the new system is that it will bring increased accountability so that people can choose between the better councils and the worse councils. Almost without exception, Conservatives in opposition are proposing substantial reductions in the community charge when they are elected to office.

Let me conclude by referring to the position in the Labour-controlled metropolitan districts, which are spending £93 a head over their standard spending assessments, whereas Conservative-controlled metropolitan districts are spending only £20 over the SSAs. We see a pattern across the country of Labour spendthrift policies and Labour overspending. That is why the Labour party despises the community charge. The community charge puts a premium on accountability and the Labour party does not like accountability. It does not like local people to realise where the blame for high spending and high bills lies—almost without exception in Labour town halls.

Opposition Parties (Financial Assistance)

6.50 am

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I am delighted to have been called, as I was uncertain that my debate would be reached. When I checked on the progress of the debate last night, I was told that it had only a small chance of being reached by 9 am, when the debate ends, so I was surprised to find that I was to be called earlier. I had imagined that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) would not be up quite so early, as I know that the Scots oppose the early introduction of double summer time. I thought that the hon. Gentleman would at least ensure that his hon. Friends allowed him to stay in bed a little longer. I had some difficulty in getting my application for the ballot in by 9 o'clock on Monday, and I am indebted to my hon. Friend the Member for Cornwall, North (Mr. Neale) who got my name into the office in time.

I have chosen this subject because I believe that most of the public are ignorant of the fact that more than £1 million was given to the Opposition parties to enable them to conduct their opposition. The history of that goes back a little. The Library has given me a note of the development of the various Acts which have brought the present system about. They go back to 1937, when the Leader of the Opposition was first granted a salary to help him in his job. In 1975, we had the granting of Short money, followed by the Houghton committee report in 1976 and a Hansard Society commission report in 1981, both of which came down in favour of helping active political parties as an essential part of a healthy democracy. I think that we would all agree with that, in the light of developments in eastern Europe.

The money is paid on condition that it is used exclusively in relation to parliamentary business. I wish to clarify whether the money is being used for that purpose, in view of some of the failures of the Opposition parties to conduct themselves in a proper democratic fashion. In 1975, when the Short moneys were introduced, we had a responsible Opposition, who I am sure would not have condoned some of the practices that we have now. We have a list of Labour Members who signed a declaration, published on 19 January, that they would refuse to pay the community charge. As it is taxpayers' money that is funding the Short moneys, I question whether it is right for the Labour party to continue to include among its whipped Members those who refuse to pay a legitimately raised tax. Why should people pay tax for others who refuse to pay it although they are clearly able to do so? It is for purely political purposes that they refuse to pay—purposes which go beyond the political process.

The declaration that the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) issued on 19 January 1990 says:

> "Labour MPs are linking up with the only force which can defeat the legislation—the mass action of millions of ordinary people involved in the Non-Payment Campaign organised into the All Britain Federation, which will become a mighty force in the coming weeks."

Is that parliamentary action or unparliamentary action by the official Opposition party—financed by the taxpayer?

I call on you, Mr. Speaker, to find a way in which payment of these moneys—I understand that payments are made monthly—can be suspended while that party condones such action. Why does not the official Opposition leadership condemn it and throw out the Members who signed the declaration?

The press release issued on 19 January makes the intriguing statement that "nearly 30 Labour MPs" have given their backing to the action. I have tried to check exactly who has given this backing. On the papers that I have been given, there are 29 names. I think that 28 people signed up on 19 January but that a list published by *The Daily Telegraph* on 9 March contains an additional name.

To clarify the situation, I should like to put the names on the record. The hon. Member for Coventry, South-East included the names of the following Members: the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields); the hon. Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Canavan), against whom there are currently legal proceedings, which in themselves, I should have thought, were grounds for immediate withdrawal of the official Opposition Whip; the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden)——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not dealing with cases that are sub judice.

Mr. Thurnham: That is the only sub judice case of which I am aware. There is no such impediment in the other cases—at any rate, not at this stage.

The list includes also the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon); the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan (Mr. Wray); the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) who, of all those Members, I should have thought would want to obey the parliamentary process——

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. What has this to do with the financial aid given to Opposition parties? I have looked in the Library, just as the hon. Gentleman has done, but I can see no reference to any material of this sort. The hon. Gentleman seems to be getting very wide of the subject of debate.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has just started and is outlining his case. However, he must not deal with matters that are sub judice.

Mr. Thurnham: Let me make the position absolutely clear. The note that I have received from the Library says that, if the Accounting Officer has any reasonable doubt about the validity of any claim for official money, he should refer the matter to Mr. Speaker. The purpose of this debate is to establish whether there is some ground for an investigation by the Accounting Officer into whether any of the official money being paid to the official Opposition party is in any way leading to unparliamentary activity. If there is any doubt, either the Leader of the Opposition must withdraw the Whip from the 29 Members or the Short money should be suspended. Why should taxpayers pay nearly £1 million a year to help the official Opposition to oppose in a parliamentary fashion, when that Opposition clearly condone unparliamentary activity by allowing those 29 Members to continue?

I will resume my reading of the list. The right hon. Member for Chesterfield——

Mr. Grocott: Will the hon. Gentleman develop his argument a little and tell us what he thinks should be done about taxpayers' money which goes to the governing party, one of whose members has been suspended from this House?

Mr. Thurnham: We are debating Short money. The point that the hon. Gentleman has raised is absolutely irrelevant. The hon. Gentleman questioned the relevance of what I was saying, but how can the right hon. Member for Chesterfield, of all people, condone something that is totally unparliamentary?

Then we have the hon. Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo) and the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), who is not here. However, he is one of the few people who has been consistent in the matter. If my recollection is correct, he voted against the payment of Short money when we last debated the subject two years ago.

Then we have the hon. Members for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), for Bradford, North (Mr. Wall)—the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) seems to have been left behind—the hon. Members for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer), for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) and for Tottenham (Mr. Grant).

Now we have the hon. Member for Bradford, South and the hon. Members for Bow and Poplar (Ms. Gordon), for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Mr. Sedgemore), for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes), for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell), for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry), for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway), for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) and for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone). It sticks in my throat to call them honourable Members when they seek in an unparliamentary way to reverse legislation that has been passed by the House. Then there are the hon. Members for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott), for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) and for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay).

That is 28—not "nearly 30" as described in the press release. The hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) gets me to 29—the nearly 30 names which were claimed. There may be another name that I have not yet had note of.

It is most unsatisfactory that the official Opposition should continue to allow those Members to take the Labour Whip. The Labour Whips' office is the principal beneficiary of the money that is provided, so it would surely be consistent to withdraw the Whip.

The hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) said that there will be a national demonstration this weekend, so surely now is the time for the Opposition to make a decision on the matter. Certainly 29 Labour Members have put their names to the declaration and will be involved with the demonstration this weekend. The Opposition Front Bench spokesmen are clearly condoning unparliamentary activity and they must come to a decision. Either they must withdraw the Whip or ask you, Mr. Speaker, to suspend the payment of the Short money to them because they are clearly not carrying out their Opposition duties in a parliamentary fashion.

The hon. Member for Coventry, South-East said that that was the only force which would defeat the legislation, but it is not. The force that can defeat the legislation is a vote in Parliament, not a mass demonstration organised outside the House in an attempt to persuade people not to pay the tax, which only imposes a greater burden on other taxpayers.

Some people may feel that the Short money should not be paid anyway. Perhaps it should be an optional extra on the community charge. When people pay their community charge, they should be asked whether they want to opt in to give the Opposition some money. Then we would know whether community charge payers wanted to encourage an Opposition who allow 29 or 30 of its members to say that they do not want to pay. We would then see exactly how much the British people want to pay towards Short money to assist the Opposition in carrying out their duties.

If the Opposition act in such an unparliamentary way, people will feel less inclined to opt into the extra payment on their community charge. I have not done the arithmetic, but payment of a few pence on the community charge would be voluntary. The Opposition would then find out how keen the British people were to pay the Short money to them, and unparliamentary activity would obviously work against them.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to consult your parliamentary Accounting Officer as to whether he is entirely satisfied that none of the money being paid is encouraging those 29 Members in their activities. As Members of the official Opposition, they are benefiting from the Short money. How can we condone such a situation?

I have a printout of newspaper articles from the Library, which quote many of the hon. Members whose names I have read out. I shall be pleased to provide this as evidence to the Accounting Officer, if he has any doubts. There is plenty of evidence here that Opposition Members are prepared to condone unparliamentary activity to reverse a parliamentary matter. It is most unsatisfactory that we should have had a great increase in the money paid at a time when the Opposition are failing to discipline their Members. The amount paid to the Labour party has doubled. According to the latest figures that I have found, in 1986 it was £440,000, in 1987 it was £436,000 and in 1988 it was £883,000, so the amount given to the Labour party to enable it to conduct its affairs in a parliamentary fashion has virtually doubled. What does the extra money do? It seems to encourage 10 per cent. of Labour Members to behave in a totally unparliamentary way.

If we cannot suspend the Short money altogether, perhaps it would be best to have a debate on whether it should be reduced to its previous level as a discipline on the Labour party, which seems quite unable to discipline its own members.

I thank you for the opportunity to raise this subject, Mr. Speaker, in a short debate at such an early hour this morning. I hope that it will encourage the Opposition Front Bench to think carefully about their position in the next few days before the weekend demonstration, and to discipline its members. If the Opposition cannot discipline their own members, I think that the House should discipline the Opposition.

7.11 am

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): When the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) reads his speech or watches it on the video, I do not think that he will be proud of it. The phrases that kept creeping in about disciplining Opposition parties would have tripped easily off the tongue of people usually associated with more totalitarian methods of ruling. Let us be crystal clear about the matter. If the income of whichever party is in opposition—I shall return to that point in a minute, because it is of particular interest, given the opinion polls today—were to depend on the whims of the Government majority, and on an assessment by Government Members

[Mr. Bruce Grocott]

of whether the Opposition were worthy of the money, and if the subject could be raised in debate whenever the Government felt it was appropriate, it would be a dangerous constitutional precedent.

The power of the House is awesome. It can do anything by a majority vote. If the hon. Member wanted to use the effective electoral dictatorship which the majority has it could make the Labour party illegal. However, the House can operate only if the principles are observed and if there is no suggestion of the kind of attitude and principle—or rather lack of it—that the hon. Gentleman has displayed by his suggestion that the Labour party's money should depend on a daily assessment and on the jurisdiction of the majority party in the House.

I was about to say that the hon. Gentleman will be on the Opposition benches soon, viewing a party that he does not like in power. But he will not be with us when that occurs. Therefore, he has a certain freedom of speech on the subject, knowing that he will not be held accountable, although we shall ensure that some of his hon. Friends are held accountable, as soon as the happy day arrives when Government and Opposition are reversed.

I fully understand—I suspect that it will be exercising the minds of many of the hon. Gentleman's colleagues between now and the next general election—the importance of the rights of Opposition parties. That has been recognised over the years by those who have subjected these matters to serious debate. I make no apology for quoting Lord Prior—as he is now—although I have done so in the past. In July 1974, when his party was in opposition, he said:

> "Concerning additional cash for Opposition parties, I suppose that one of the benefits of the change in Government in recent years is that it has brought to the notice of Governments the very great difficulties from which Oppositions suffer, particularly Shadow Ministers. . .
>
> But certainly, as far as this proposal goes, I believe that Front Bench spokesmen, with the additional correspondence and additional research work that is now required of them —which is far greater than it was even a few years ago—do need the sort of assistance that the right hon. Gentleman has mentioned."—[*Official Report*, 29 July 1974; vol. 878, c. 33–4.]

Anyone who honestly reviews our work over the past 16 years will know that that work load has greatly increased since 1974, and that, given all the pressures and demands on Opposition parties which were rightly referred to then, the case has become stronger and stronger.

I might add that the money that Opposition parties have with which to deal with those pressures has not increased in anything like the same proportion as the money that we pay to keep the Prime Minister in office. The hon. Gentleman gave the Labour party's 1986 figure as £440,000 and the current figure as £883,000. I took the precaution of putting down a question about the cost of running the Prime Minister's office, which I thought might be relevant to the debate. I was told that in 1987 the cost was £5,418,455.

Mr. Greg Knight (Derby, North): So what?

Mr. Grocott: I shall be pleased to hear the hon. Gentleman intervene after the next figure. I know that he is tired; he has probably been here for a long while. The duty of a Whip——

Mr. Thurnham: I have been listening carefully, but, although I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would want to begin his speech by condemning the action of the 29 hon. Members whom I mentioned, I have not heard a word about it. After all, we have come to hear him answer the points that I made. I am surprised that he has got so far without even mentioning that.

Mr. Grocott: The strange thing is that I am speaking to a subject put down by the hon. Gentleman, not me, entitled "Financial Assistance to Opposition parties". Had he wanted to discuss the poll tax, he could have put down a motion accordingly. Obviously he got up rather late this morning, grabbed the nearest set of notes, rushed into the Library and constructed the best job he could. I understand the problem; I also understand the hon. Gentleman's wish to interrupt my comments about the cost of running the Prime Minister's office. Lest he forget, the cost in 1987 was £5,418,455; the estimate for 1989 is £7,924,979. That is a 50 per cent. increase since the general election.

Last week the people of Mid-Staffordshire were able —among other things—to judge whether they had been obtaining value for money over that period, and I think that the answer was pretty conclusive. We will not take from the Conservative party—during the months in Government that remain to it—lectures about Opposition expenditure, when Government expenditure has increased on a vastly greater scale than ours. In any case, the Conservative party has support that is well out of our reach.

The Leader of the Opposition has a smallish office. Each of his shadow Secretaries of State has one researcher. That has to be compared with a Civil Service of over 500,000, which is what the Prime Minister has at her disposal. The disparity will become all too clear to Conservative Members before too long. Anyone who is concerned about democracy should be worried about the growing gap between the resources that are available to either side. When the positions are reversed, the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East will not find me, on that side of the House, arguing that the amount of money that is made available to the Opposition, however bad they may be, should be reduced.

The Government have increased massively the resources that are available to them. They have increased the amount of money that they spend on advertising their wares. There has been a sixfold increase in Government expenditure on advertising, particularly television advertising, since they came to power. In 1984, Department of Industry expenditure on television advertisements amounted to £32,000. In 1989, that amount had increased to £13 million. The Government's power has greatly increased since they took office. They use television advertisements to try to persuade the electorate of their advantages over the Opposition. The water privatisation advertisements were party political advertisements. They had nothing to do with Government administration. In the cold light of day, a few Ministers and Conservative Members must have felt some guilt over the way in which that money was spent.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that the taxpayer should be able to opt in and out on the question whether the Opposition should be given any money. The taxpayers in Mid-Staffordshire clearly opted out of wanting to give any more money to the Government. I have not checked the hon. Gentleman's voting record, but I wonder whether he would argue that shareholders should have the right to opt out when payments are made on their behalf to political parties—always, of course, to the Conservative party.

I do not think that the hon. Gentleman will be thrilled with his speech when he reads it. It was recognised overwhelmingly by previous Parliaments that money should be made available to Opposition parties. In my view, not nearly enough money is made available to them. The disparity is growing and is becoming frightening. I have given the figures relating to the cost of running the Prime Minister's office.

With their parliamentary majority, the Government can take that money away from Opposition parties. If a kangaroo court consisting of Conservative Back Benchers ever said, "We do not like the way that that Member of Parliament is behaving; take away the Opposition's money," or, "We do not like the way that that shadow Minister is behaving; take away the Opposition's money," it would be a sad day for democracy. In fact, it would be a near-terminal day for democracy. This is an unnecessary and not very good subject for debate. I hope that no one will take it too seriously.

7.25 am

The Parliamentary under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Christopher Chope): In contrast to the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott), I have no hesitation in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) on scoring a bullseye in this short debate. He gave the Opposition an opportunity to comment on the actions of Labour Members, and the hon. Member for The Wrekin, their spokesman, declined to comment. Perhaps he does not have sufficient discretion or flexibility to do so.

I would have hoped that all Members of Her Majesty's loyal Opposition would have no hesitation in saying that they believe in loyalty to the sovereign and the rule of law. The rule of law is fundamental to a democratic society, but a number of Labour Members seem to saying that they wish to reject the rule of law——

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): Get on with it.

Mr. Chope: I get the impression that the Opposition Whip wishes to interrupt, albeit from a sedentary position. Perhaps he would like to take this opportunity to condemn his hon. Friends who are going round the country encouraging people not to pay the community charge, thereby imposing a higher burden on those who will pay, and at the same time saying that they themselves will not pay. What an appalling example to set.

Mr. Dixon: Really!

Mr. Chope: Clearly, the Opposition Whip must be as concerned about that as are others. The hon. Gentleman cannot take the medicine. Only when Opposition Members show themselves to be worthy upholders of the rule of law will they be taken seriously in the country. They have an opportunity now, at 7.25 am, to say unequivocally that all those Labour Members who say that they will not pay the community charge are wrong. I hope that not only words but actions will follow and that the Leader of the Opposition will say that, if they continue to encourage people not to pay the community charge and not to uphold the rule of law, they will be expelled from the Labour party.

Mr. Grocott: Will the Minister be clear on one point, for his remarks are obviously more serious when uttered from the Dispatch Box than when said from the Back Benches? Is he saying, as a Member of the Government, that the Opposition's money should be dependent on his assessment—the Government's assessment—of how well they are doing their work?

Mr. Chope: I am not saying that. The Opposition's money is not their money but the taxpayers' money, and I should have thought that they were entitled to know whether the money that is going in their name to the Opposition is going to a responsible or irresponsible Opposition. That is the point that my hon. Friend raised in this debate.

It will be noted that in his intervention, the hon. Member for The Wrekin resolutely declined to criticise in any way the action of almost one seventh of parliamentary Labour party members, who have said that they are not prepared to pay the community charge, who are encouraging others not to pay it and who, in other words, are not prepared to uphold the rule of law. They are picking and choosing which laws they wish to obey. To do that is not democracy but anarchy.

Forensic Entomology

7.27 am

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): I am grateful for the opportunity to put before the House a subject which I believe has not been debated in the House before but which will become increasingly important in the future of forensic science. It is the subject of forensic entomology, and I wish in particular to highlight the case of Dr. Zakaria Erzinclioglu, a forensic entomologist, and the funding of his research.

I begin with a riddle to which I will give the answer shortly. When is a corpse not just a corpse?

During the night, when I was huddled in an armchair in a distant corner of the Palace of Westminster, I had a dream—this is the truth—about you, Mr. Speaker. In the course of this dream, which I had at about 4 am, I dreamed that there was one of those noisy scenes which have made you, something of a star of the small screen since television reached this House. During that noisy scene—it was no doubt an anxiety dream, as I was the target of some of your irritation, if I can be forgiven for using that word —a forensic scientist suddenly came to your rescue with a magical spray which enabled you to quell the wrath of hon. Members with each other, and to bring the proceedings to order in an instant.

The forensic scientist in that dream was not Dr. Zakaria Erzinclioglu, who is the subject of this debate, but another forensic scientist, Professor Alec Jeffreys of Leicester university. He is a forensic scientist who has come to fame in recent years because of his discovery of DNA fingerprinting or DNA profiling, as it is also known.

I had the privilege in a prosecution that I conducted at Mold Crown court in north Wales of calling Professor Jeffreys as an expert witness and of seeing the ability of DNA profiling to prove a rape charge that would otherwise have been completely unprovable. There was no more substantial evidence against the defendant than the DNA profile, of which Professor Jeffreys gave evidence.

When I started to practise at the Bar in 1971, if somebody had said to me that a scientist would come along in fewer than 20 years and produce what was in effect a photograph that looked as though it had a bar code on it, and which would identify one man from the whole population as a rapist, I should have said that he was quite mad. Yet fewer than 20 years later, it happened. Forensic science is gathering pace and forensic entomology is a growing aspect of forensic science that I believe will develop greatly in the next 20 years provided that it is given Government support.

Britain's only full-time forensic entomologist is Dr. Zakaria Erzinclioglu to whom I shall now refer for shorthand as Dr. Zak. I know that he does not object to that and everyone else seems to refer to him in that way. Dr. Zak is youngish and brilliant and the only full-time forensic entomologist in the United Kingdom. He works at the department of zoology in the university of Cambridge. He likens his profession to that of an archaeologist. He says:

> "A forensic investigation is building up a picture of the past. We're faced with evidence of what has happened and we aim to reconstruct those events."

In one case which he helped to solve, a 13-year-old girl has gone missing and a man suspected of her murder was found to be in possession of human bones which he had hidden under his floorboards and at various other places around the house. Now comes the answer to my riddle earlier: when is a corpse not just a corpse? I promise you, Mr. Speaker, that that is not meant to be a rude reference to the other place.

In this case, the accused had told the police that the bones were for medical research and that he had hidden them because he did not want to upset friends who visited him and who might have felt a little offended to see bones lying on the dining room table. But Dr. Zak was able to cast doubt on that story by finding a small fly called leptocera saenosa living among the bones. Thus, in a corpse there may be living organisms—indeed, living insects—which will give clues to what has happened.

The presence of that small fly—whose name I shall not attempt to pronounce again—showed that the bones were far from sterile, as the insect in question typically lives in unhygienic environments.

Even more damaging was the discovery that bones kept on a concrete base under the floor boards had living on them fly larvae and mites that are found only in soil. This, of course, demonstrated that the bones had until recently been buried in a grave and had been put under the floorboards later.

As Dr. Zak said:

> "the police suspected that somebody wouldn't dig up something from a grave unless they had something to hide."

The man was found guilty. We see there one example of the great help that Dr. Zak has been able to give to the police.

On the television programme "Suspicious Circumstances", shown in the summer of 1988 on Yorkshire Television, the very distinguished pathologist Professor Alan Usher said:

> "My infallible way of determining the time of death is to find out when the victim was last seen alive and when the victim was first seen dead, and then to presume that death occurred somewhere in between."

That was something of a joke, but there is an element of truth in it. I have seen many brilliant, top forensic pathologists giving evidence in courts throughout this land and I think that they would all agree that, as Professor Usher implied in those remarks, forensic pathology is often as much art as science and sometimes more art than science, particularly in determining the time and date of death.

I appeared as junior counsel in one case in which a skull was found in a Cheshire bog. The pathologist who examined the skull said that he thought that it was something over 20 years old. Being concerned about such an estimate, I suggested to those instructing me in the case that an attempt be made to date the skull more accurately. It was sent to a laboratory in Cambridge and there it was discovered that the skull was not 20 years or so old but 1,800 years old. Unfortunately for the accused, he had already confessed to a murder committed some 20 years or so before, of which he was duly convicted, despite the fact that the body was never found and the trial took place some 20 years or more later, and the conviction stood.

That example shows that pathological evidence on its own is often insufficient to answer the very important questions: did the deceased die and is the body found that of the deceased?

There are many examples of cases in which Dr. Zak has been able to assist the police. The notorious Dixon case, involving the killing by shotgun of two entirely innocent holidaymakers, in June 1989 in Pembrokeshire is an example of a case in which Dr. Zak's evidence will still, it is hoped, be useful. The entomological evidence was instrumental in determining the time of the murder. In the Anthony Samson Perera case, in 1985, a 13-year-old girl was murdered in west Yorkshire. Dr. Zak helped in that. In the Karen Price case, in Cardiff in December 1989, he was able to assist. Those are but three examples from a very long list in my possession.

Dr. Zak believes that forensic entomology is in its infancy in this country. It seems to be used more fully in other countries. In Hungary, for example, there are a number of forensic entomologists who have been able to carry out research on this subject, and it seems to be more widely used there. One can say that forensic entomology may acquire the status which has already been acquired by genetic profiling, or DNA fingerprinting.

I turn, therefore, to the funding of Dr. Zak, for this is at the root of the problem. Are we to have a forensic entomological service available in this country or not? If we are, there must be funding for it. For the past five and a half years, Dr. Zak's zoological and entomological research had been funded by the Field Studies Council, but the original five-year grant, already extended for a further year, will run out in August 1990. The good doctor receives token fees from the Home Office when he helps it, but he finds it difficult to extract adequate funds, due to financial pressure on the Home Office and on the police. He works for independent firms on projects and finds it much easier to obtain funding from them for such one-off projects. It is surprising that the police and the Home Office cannot value his work in the same way.

To be fair, it has been revealed in two parliamentary answers given to me by the Minister that the Home Office is looking into ways of funding Dr. Zak's further work. I hope that we will hear from the Minister that a conclusion to that review will be reached soon and that it will be favourable. It would be scandalous if the result was not favourable, having regard to Dr. Zak's potential and value, and to the need for more forensic entomologists.

The Home Office has circulated a letter to several forensic pathologists in the United Kingdom, seeking their view of the value of Dr. Zak's work. I have seen some of the replies. I understand that everyone who has replied so far has been in support of that work. I believe that it has the support of such distinguished pathologists as Professor Usher, whom I have already mentioned, and of Professor Bernard Knight of south Wales, another pathologist of extreme distinction and skill.

Apparently the problem is that it is very difficult for a person to obtain funding for research once he reaches the terrible old age of 35, which Dr. Zak has reached. It causes me much concern to discover that one is over the hill for original research when one passes the age of 35. Dr. Zak is finding that, if he were 22, it would be much easier to obtain research grants. It is right that young researchers should be given every encouragement, but I am sure the House would also agree that it is extremely important that research work should be judged on its merits. If a 79-year-old scientist comes up with original work which may be of public benefit, that should be supported. I hasten to add that Dr. Zak is much nearer 40 than an older age group.

Dr. Zak has been consulted by the Home Office 60 times in recent years. Each year his case load increases. That is directly attributable to wider knowledge of his existence and of the service that he provides. Despite the fact that his expertise and availability are still poorly publicised to the vast majority of police forces, he has found that once he has been discovered by a police force it keeps coming back to him because his work has been so helpful.

Another reason for Dr. Zak's relative obscurity until, I am pleased to say, I could raise his case in this House, is the fact that decisions about when a murder investigation is entomologically intriguing are made by the wrong people. The common misconception is that, for an entomologist to be called in, the corpse must be infested with maggots. This is fallacious. Often, the absence of insects sheds light on an enigmatic investigation.

This branch of science and the scientist to whom I have referred—the brilliant, determined and redoubtable Dr. Zak—deserve the support of the House and, above all, the financial support of the Government. If the Minister cannot give an answer this morning about funding, I am sure that he will take into account what has been said and I hope that he will be able to confirm that the Government will shortly make an announcement about such funding.

7.45 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): As an over-35-year-old myself, I appreciate—at this time in the morning, perhaps I should say that I understand—why the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) has taken the trouble to initiate the debate about the case of Dr. Zakaria Erzinclioglu, the distinguished entomologist.

Forensic entomology is not a new science but, as the hon. and learned Gentleman has implied, it has developed slowly and its potential has not yet been fully assessed. As he says, forensic entomologists rely from time to time on entomological findings in their investigation of suspicious deaths, particularly where time of death can be estimated from the amount of insect activity present on or around a corpse. The forensic entomologist can also provide details of time of the burial of a body, the environment where death occurred and whether a body has been moved.

In practice, however, the advice of a forensic entomologist is needed in comparatively few serious cases, perhaps up to 50 a year. The forensic science service does not employ anyone on a full-time basis to do this sort of work. Such expertise as has been required in the past has been obtained from university departments. In fact, the forensic science service rarely consults forensic entomologists direct—the entomologists almost invariably gives his advice to the police or to the forensic pathologist involved in the case. Although forensic entomologists become involved in the investigation of only a small proportion of very serious crimes, their advice can often be crucial. One of the small group of specialists in this field is Dr. Zakaria Erzinclioglu. I, too, shall call him Dr. Zak.

We are aware from the representations that we have received in the past few months, to which the hon. and learned Gentleman has referred, how well regarded Dr. Zak is, especially by forensic pathologists who have worked with him, and of the occasions when he has given much valued assistance to the police. Unfortunately, as we have heard from the hon. and learned Gentleman, Dr. Zak's research contract at Cambridge university will terminate later this year. With this in mind, we have been consulting widely on the use made of his services and the value of his work in criminal investigations. We hope soon

[Mr. Peter Lloyd]

to be in a position to decide whether we shall be able to provide funding to enable him to continue his research at Cambridge, and we shall be writing to him and, as I have undertaken, to the hon. and learned Gentleman in the near future.

I am sorry that I cannot be more precise and informative this morning but I am grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman for drawing on his professional knowledge as a barrister and for directing the House's attention to Dr. Zak's merits and predicament, and for the chance to assure him again that we have them very much in mind.

Late Abortions

7.48 am

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone): I am immensely grateful for this opportunity to raise the recent historic ruling of Mr. Justice Brooke. I understand that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health will be joining the debate shortly, and I should like to put on record my gratitude to him, as he has answered a number of debates on abortion, usually at unseasonal hours. He also answered an earlier debate during the night. Indeed, I am usually accompanied on these occasions by my hon. Friends the Members for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves) and for Basildon (Mr. Amess). The last time that my hon. Friend the Minister answered a debate of ours, on 27 July, he asked, "When shall we three meet again?" I am afraid that on this occasion, there are only the two of us, but the others join me in the remarks that I intend to make.

The ruling by Mr. Justice Brooke was in the case of a mother who had sued a health authority because she bore a handicapped son. She had asked the health authority, or at least the doctors, to abort the son at 27½ weeks. To their credit, the doctors refused. They said that, even though handicap was present, under the Infant Life (Preservation) Act 1929, the pregnancy had advanced too far and they refused the abortion.

In ruling in favour of the doctors and the health authority and against the mother who had claimed damages, Mr. Justice Brooke took the opportunity to give a long overdue and much-needed clarification of the Infant Life (Preservation) Act, which states that it is an offence of child destruction to destroy a child capable of being born alive. It goes on to say that there is a presumption that the child will be born alive at 28 weeks, but if a child is capable of being born alive before that time, it is still protected under the Act. The Act says that, after 28 weeks, there is prima facie proof that the child could be born alive. The burden of proof would be on the doctor performing an abortion after that time to show that the child could not have been born alive. Before the 28th week, the burden of proof lies on those who would prosecute the doctor.

The words

"capable of being born alive"

have been construed in different ways. I am glad to see my hon. Friend the Minister in his place. I refer him back to the debate on the Carlisle baby on 8 June last year. I asked several questions in that debate. I asked why, when the child had been born alive as a result of an abortion which had gone wrong, and had survived gasping and with a pulse rate for three hours, resuscitation was not provided. My hon. Friend the Minister replied that the doctors had decided that this was not a viable birth. I asked why the child was not registered for birth or for death. I obtained the same answer in each case. The doctors had decided that it was not a viable birth.

Mr. Justice Brooke ruled that the meaning of the words

"capable of being born alive"

was that a child was capable of surviving independently of its mother

"even if only for a short time".

Those are the crucial words, and that is the crucial clarification. Many of my hon. Friends and I have claimed over a long period that that was the correct interpretation of the Infant Life (Preservation) Act 1929. The Carlisle baby, who survived for three hours—a short time, but nevertheless it survived—was therefore born alive.

The medical profession and, I regret to say, the Department of Health, however, have tended to define life in terms of long-term viability. That does not stand up in logic. If I were terminally ill, I might have no long-term viability but no one would suggest that I was not alive. We do not say that our hospices are full of unviable beings. They are full of current living people. The Carlisle baby was a living child.

If Mr. Justice Brooke's interpretation of the Infant Life (Preservation) Act 1929 is true—at present, that is the ruling that we have in law and the only recent judicial clarification that I know of on the matter—it follows that all those children who are aborted in National Health Service or private clinics at an age when they are capable of surviving, if only for a short time, are protected by the Infant Life (Preservation) Act 1929 and that those who destroy them commit the offence of child destruction.

Does the Minister agree that, under the terms of Mr. Justice Brooke's ruling, at least 2,000 illegal abortions are carried out every year in National Health Service and private clinics? The medical profession says that, at 22 weeks, there is a 5 per cent. chance of long-term survival, yet 2,000 abortions are carried out after 22 weeks. How is that compatible with Mr. Justice Brooke's ruling on the Infant Life (Preservation) Act? The medical profession tells us that, after 24 weeks, there is a 15 per cent. chance of survival. We know that children of 24 weeks are regularly born breathing and with a pulse rate. Every year, however, there are some 20 abortions after 24 weeks. How are those abortions compatible with Mr. Justice Brooke's ruling that, if a child is capable of surviving for even a short time, that child is covered and protected by the Infant Life (Preservation) Act? Does my hon. Friend the Minister agree that in all those cases the Act has been violated?

We must remember that Mr. Justice Brooke gave his ruling in the case of handicap. He did not say that there were exemptions to the Infant Life (Preservation) Act. He said in a straightforward manner that, if a child is capable of surviving, albeit for a very short time, it is protected. What is a very short time? Let us consider abortions at 20 weeks. We must remember that the Carlisle baby was 21 weeks, but it survived for three hours. Surely there must be cases of earlier survivals for shorter periods. Let us take the 20th week as the guide, which surely must be logical, given that the NHS has clear guidelines that, after the 20th week, resuscitation equipment shall be available.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): The hon. Lady is talking about being logical, but could she make it clear where she stands on the issue?

As I understand it, 1 million women are at risk from an unplanned pregnancy. During the course of a year, a third of them become pregnant—half of them have an unplanned child and the others have an unplanned abortion, which is much to be regretted. The hon. Lady's solution to the problem is to lock up the doctors, but does she accept that she is approaching the problem from the wrong direction? We are all sorry about any abortions, particularly late ones, but why does the hon. Lady approach the matter from the legal angle, when we should be approaching it from the opposite direction? Why does she believe that there is a hard and fast point at which the law can decide whether a child is viable? Surely those matters should be left largely to the medical profession.

I believe that the hon. Lady is wrong to think that the law can be used as some kind of a weapon in her campaign against abortion. She should consider the practice in Holland, where, the number of abortions is half that carried out here, although the laws are much more liberal.

Miss Widdecombe: The hon. Gentleman has already spoken once today. I gave way to him out of courtesy, expecting an intervention, but I got another speech. I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman again, no matter how pressing the points that he wants to raise.

The hon. Gentleman has totally misunderstood the nature of the debate. I am willing to engage with him on the general principles of abortion at a time that will come shortly. I am not talking about what I think is the right line, what I want to do with the doctors or where I want to define women's rights, but about Mr. Justice Brooke's legal ruling. I want to know what the Department of Health is doing about complying with that legal ruling. As Mr. Justice Brooke has talked about survival which lasts for only a short, unspecified period, as the basis of the Infant Life (Preservation) Act, is the Minister satisfied that abortions which are carried out when a child can survive, albeit for a short time, are within the law?

When he replied to my debates on the Carlisle baby case and to the administration of the Abortion Act 1967, last June and July respectively, the Minister said that he accepted that his Department had to work within the confines of the Infant Life (Preservation) Act. In view of the recent judicial ruling, does he think that his Department is doing that?

Another case has recently made headlines—that of Ashley Gardiner, a child of eight months gestation, who died when an allegedly reckless and drunken driver killed his mother. In that case, the Crown prosecution service decided that it would not prosecute for death caused by dangerous driving. I appreciate that my hon. Friend the Minister cannot answer for the Attorney-General's decisions, but there is a similarity of language in the replies to those two cases.

My hon. Friend the Minister gave a thorough reply to the Carlisle baby case debate, for which we were all most grateful. He said that it was a distressing and sad case, but nothing would be done about it. The Attorney-General said exactly the same. He said that it was sad that an eight-month-old child had been killed in the womb, but he was not actually going to do anything about it.

We have had Mr. Justice Brooke's ruling, and at eight months that child was clearly capable of being born alive. Therefore, it was capable of being destroyed under the Infant Life (Preservation) Act, so it was capable of being killed. I do not understand why the man alleged to have caused the incident is not being prosecuted for causing death.

Does my hon. Friend the Minister accept that viability in the long term is not an accurate interpretation of the Infant Life (Preservation) Act? What investigations will he demand into the alleged King's college baby case, the facts of which emerged in Sunday newspapers two weeks ago after a member of staff was so distressed by what had happened that she wrote to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) setting out the facts. That incident has shades of the Carlisle baby case.

[Miss Widdecombe]

The alleged facts in the King's college baby case are that a child of 27 weeks, clearly more than capable of being born alive, suffering from a relatively minor but certainly not a serious and incapacitating handicap, was killed in the womb while its healthy and fit twin was allowed to go on living. That was described as a selective reduction, in which a pair of children are growing in the womb and the doctors decide which one shall be allowed to live and which one shall die. Can the Minister honestly say that such a policy complies with the Infant Life (Preservation) Act? If it does, why is that so? If it does not, what steps does he intend to take?

I return to some of the questions that I raised in July about the administration of the 1967 Act. The Minister is familiar with the questions. Mr. Justice Brooke's ruling has changed the answers that I was given then, or certainly should do. My question was this. If a child is not capable of being born alive, what is the point of the lethal injection of urea or saline that is given in the administration of the prostaglandin method of late abortions? That method is widely used in the National Health Service, as opposed to the dismemberment method which is so grotesquely used in the private clinics and which the Minister continues to allow. The prostaglandin method involves inducing an early birth and administering a lethal injection which, in the words of the medical text books, ensures that the child is born dead.

If the child is not capable of being born alive in the first place, what is the purpose of an injection to ensure that it is born dead? If a doctor is giving an injection deliberately to kill a child which he believes to be capable of being born alive, surely he is violating the Infant Life (Preservation) Act 1929. Under Mr. Justice Brooke's ruling, which has nothing to do with long-term viability but everything to do with short-term survival and short-term independent breathing—he talked not about existence but about independent breathing—how can lethal injections be compatible with observation by the Health Service of the Infant Life (Preservation) Act? Surely that is illogical and wrong.

Does the Minister accept that there is a lack of will throughout the Health Service, and certainly within the Department, to ensure that the Abortion Act 1967 is policed in its own right? Surely the effect of Mr. Justice Brooke's ruling is that the amendments to be tabled to the Embryology Bill by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) and myself will be unnecessary. If the Act was properly policed and if the Infant Life (Preservation) Act was properly enforced, the abortions that we wish to outlaw would be outlawed already. Is it not the case that, under Mr. Justice Brooke's ruling, those abortions which are already outlawed are greater in number than those which we would outlaw?

We have been obliged, reluctantly but of necessity, to exempt all cases of severe handicap. Mr. Justice Brooke has not made that exemption. Indeed, his ruling was based on a case of handicap. Mr. Justice Brooke is saying that, if the law were properly administered, no changes would be necessary to the 1967 Act to bring about the limitation on late abortions that is desired by the majority of Members in this place.

Surely there is a clear responsibility on the Minister, first, to outlaw the use of lethal injections and, secondly, to outlaw all abortions for whatever reason except saving the life of the mother after the 22nd week at the latest, and probably after the 20th week if we take the judge's views as they stand. If my hon. Friend does not accept that, how does he interpret Mr. Justice Brooke's ruling? What will he do to ensure that the Health Service and private clinics observe the ruling? What has already been done to observe the ruling, which is several weeks old?

I turn to the dismemberment method. Surely there must be a clear case for saying that if a child that is capable of being born alive is protected by the Infant Life (Preservation) Act, what goes on in the private clinics—live dismemberment of babies after the 18th week of gestation without anaesthetic—is a violation of the Act and a gross atrocity under the Act. We have been claiming that for some time, and the Minister's standard response has been to say that the method of abortion chosen has to be down to clinical judgment.

I ask my hon. Friend this question. We know that the eight-month-old baby in the womb who died as a result of a road accident is claimed not to have died. If that baby had already been born and was being transported in an incubator when it met with the accident, the death of a live person would have been recorded. There is no doubt that the law would have said that that was a death. Yet because the child was in the womb he was deemed not to have died.

Does the Minister accept that we would not countenance or even dream in our worst nightmares of the live dismemberment, for whatever reason, of a child in an incubator? We would not even dream of creeping up and giving that child a lethal injection, and live dismemberment would be utterly repugnant, so why is it acceptable when practised on a child of identical age and development in the womb? Is it because we see the one and not the other? Is it the fact that we can see the pain and the reaction of the child in the incubator that makes such an act unthinkable?

It is very convenient that we do not see the pain of the child in the womb—it is hidden from us. Is that the reasoning—that we can do wrong so long as we cannot see that we are doing wrong? Is it really down to medical judgment whether a child shall be dismembered alive? Now that there is no longer a shred of doubt that such children are protected under the Infant Life (Preservation) Act, will my Friend consider outlawing that method?

Perhaps the fact that that method is permissible does not come down to whether its effects are seen or not seen. Perhaps we now define life in terms of our perception of life. If a child is wanted it is a person. If it is not wanted —even if it is an identical twin, as in the case of the King's college baby—it is not a person. That is the slippery slope. If we start to define humanity in terms of our perception of humanity we shall be doing what was done by a regime in the 1930s which defined an entire race as sub-human. That is what is done—if not in theory, in practice—by racially repressive regimes everywhere. If we start to define humanity according to our wants and perceptions rather than on objective criteria, we are heading for a very dark age indeed.

I said earlier that Mr. Justice Brooke had protected even the handicapped, and Mr. Justice Brooke is to be congratulated. During the passage of the Bill unsuccessfully introduced by the hon. Member for Mossley Hill, any handicapped person could switch on the television or radio at any hour of the day or evening and hear politicians such as myself glibly discussing whether they had the right to be born. That is not an insult that we would offer to any racial or religious group. How dare we single out the handicapped for such an insult and treat them as a race apart? Will the Minister now accept that, as a result of Mr. Justice Brooke's ruling, handicapped children capable of being born alive are as well protected under the Infant Life (Preservation) Act 1929—and under the Abortion Act 1967, which must comply with the terms of that Act—as fit and healthy children, who account for 92 per cent. of all abortions after the 18th week? If the Minister does not accept that, can he tell us how he squares Mr. Justice Brooke's ruling with that refusal?

Mr. Justice Brooke has done something that we have been requiring for a long time, but it should not have been down to Mr. Justice Brooke to make that decision. The terms of the Infant Life (Preservation) Act have always been abundantly clear. A child does not have to be born alive or to survive long term—it merely has to be capable of being born alive. What we have been given by Mr. Justice Brooke is a definition of "born alive"—breathing independently for only a short time.

Perhaps the Minister will be able to tell us what is the earliest recorded birth or abortion in which the child breathed for only a short time. With regard to the Carlisle baby case, is it not true that there were precedents, that other children had been born breathing, at earlier stages of gestation? They may not have been capable of surviving, but clearly they were capable of being born breathing. I suggest the test that I mentioned earlier. If a doctor really believes that a child is not capable of being born alive, there is no point in a lethal injection. I suspect that if a lethal injection were not given, and if the NHS guidance were that the child must be given every possible chance, there would be many fewer abortions because doctors would not be willing to take the risk.

The other point about which I am concerned is the lack of will to enforce the Acts in their own right—long before the passage of any amendment in this parliamentary Session. How many doctors have been prosecuted for aborting children who were capable of being born alive? I think that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to tell me that over a very long period there has been only one. Yet there is clear evidence, as in the Carlisle case and in the King's College case, that this abuse is going on all the time. Any child who is aborted after a certain stage of gestation would have had a chance, however slim, of being born alive. For that reason, there should be more prosecutions. It is as simple as that.

Those of us who have worked to have the legislation amended have been channeling our energies in the right direction, but there is another way—mere enforcement of the law as it stands. As I have said, Mr. Justice Brooke has made it abundantly clear that the law is already adequate to do all the things for which the hon. Member for Mossley Hill, my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point and my hon. Friends the Members for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves) and for Basildon (Mr. Amess) and I have been calling. The legislative changes for which we have been asking would be unnecessary if only the law were applied.

Will the Minister please look again at the guidelines on resuscitation? During the debate on the Carlisle baby case, on 8 June, he told me that resuscitation equipment had to be available from the 20th week. But "available" means simply "on the premises". The equipment does not actually have to be used; it merely has to be there. The mere presence of equipment does not mean that any effort will be made to save a live baby.

To qualify for a licence, a private clinic must have resuscitation equipment if it is to abort after the 20th week. But even if that equipment remained unused, uncleaned, unmaintained, its mere presence would enable the clinic to comply with the guidelines issued by the Minister. Should there not be a very clear requirement that if a child is born alive, resuscitation equipment must be used? If the child is not capable of long-term existence, the resuscitation equipment will ultimately be unsuccessful, but at least we should know that efforts had been made to save the child.

The Carlisle case, to which I keep referring, is the clearest demonstration largely because it was the result of a coroner's inquiry and we have sworn affidavits and do not have to rely on rumour or newspaper reports. We have a clear legal guidance as to what went on.

The Carlisle case epitomises what I suspect goes on a great deal. I doubt whether there are children gasping for three hours on kidney dishes in wards up and down the country—I do not wish to paint such a horrible picture—but in a lesser sense, I suspect that there are many Carlisle babies born alive who breathe for just a short time and who are treated as though they had never breathed at all, as though they were the foetuses which the pro-abortion lobby claims them to be.

That is the problem. It is one of misuse of language. If a baby is wanted, it is a baby. It is referred to as a baby from the moment of its conception. If it is not wanted it is a foetus, even while its identical twin, in the King's College case, is a baby. What sort of doublespeak, dual standards and misuse of language is that?

Will the Minister seriously consider investigating fully the allegations surrounding the King's College baby and give an absolute undertaking that he will consider referring that case for prosecution on the facts as they are alleged, because there almost certainly should be such a prosecution?

We are told that that case caused great distress to members of staff, but, as so often, as the Select Committee on Social Services has been hearing while it considers the conscience clause, a member of staff writes and says what happened but asks not to be identified. Is there an atmosphere of fear in the Health Service? Has the Minister considered whether that conscience clause is being adequately upheld? If, in horrifying cases such as the Carlisle case and the alleged King's Cross case, staff are afraid to speak out, how much less ready must they be to speak out over smaller, routine—if I may put it that way—violations of the Abortion Act 1967 and the Infant Life (Preservation) Act 1929?

The pressure of fear should be removed. No member of staff, either of an NHS department or of a private clinic, should ever have to write to any Member of Parliament, as they do in droves, and ask not to be named. One of the most difficult features of the investigation now going on in the Select Committee is not the lack of evidence but the utter unwillingness of people who believe that they have been discriminated against because they do not believe in assisting at abortions, to be named for fear of their careers, their future progress, and sometimes of jeopardising their jobs.

We heard, oh so eloquently, from one consultant that he was prepared to come forward and give his name

[Miss Widdecombe]

because he was now a consultant, but a few weeks earlier, when he sent his initial letter to the Committee, he did not want his name made public. What sort of atmosphere are conscientious objectors working in in the Health Service —I assume that they would not be in a private clinic because they are dedicated clinics—that even in the worst hospital cases and the worst excesses of abuse they do not want their names to be given?

I sum up by putting some questions to my hon. Friend the Minister which I would be grateful if he could attempt to answer in the time left for the debate. He has always answered debates on this subject thoroughly. We are grateful for his careful explanations and for his almost invariable follow-up in writing. I know that he will answer my questions to the best of his ability.

Does my hon. Friend accept that Mr. Justice Brooke's ruling must be observed in the Health Service and in the private clinics? If he does, and if he accepts Mr. Justice Brooke's decision that they are capable of being born alive, does he also accept that, already, without any changes to the 1967 Act, thousands of illegal abortions are being carried out in this country by the NHS and by private clinics?

Does he accept that the ruling given by Mr. Justice Brooke now protects the handicapped child in exactly the same way as it protects the fit and healthy child? Does he accept that the use of lethal injections means that a doctor must believe that there is a chance that the child is capable of being born alive and, therefore, under Mr. Justice Brooke's ruling, such injections should not be given? Does he accept that long-term viability can no longer be used as a criterion for assessing whether a birth is live, because his answers in the Carlisle baby case about the birth and death registrations were not that it was not a live birth, but that it was not a viable birth? Will he accept that there is now a clear contradiction between Mr. Justice Brooke's ruling and assuming long-term viability to be the criterion?

Will the Under-Secretary consider revised guidelines specifying not only that resuscitation equipment must be available, but that it must be used if a child is born breathing? Once again, I ask the Under-Secretary to accept that there has to be a case in humanity, never mind in law, for reconsidering the social, legal and moral acceptability of live dismemberment without anaesthetic? Will he undertake to investigate thoroughly the allegations surrounding the King's College baby case? Will he state clearly that there is no case in law, as it stands, particularly under Mr. Justice Brooke's ruling, for saying that a handicapped twin can be "selectively reduced", as they delightfully described it—I would call it by a stronger term, but I will not use it because I have tried to avoid emotive terms such as murder—in the womb at 27 weeks, while its twin is allowed to live? Will he say that, if that did happen, it is illegal?

Will the Under-Secretary of State say whether he believes that there is an atmosphere of fear in the NHS among people with conscientious objections? Although I understand that he will wish to await the report of the Select Committee before responding to any courses of action that might be recommended, will he at least state his concern that those with conscientious objections should be fully protected under the Act?

Will the Under-Secretary of State say that, if the Act were properly policed and enforced, there would be no need for legislative changes and that those changes are needed because the Act is not properly policed and not properly enforced?

Will the Minister say what revised guidance he has issued in the light of Mr. Justice Brook's ruling? if he has not issued any revised guidance, why not?

In short, will my hon. Friend state what effect that historic ruling has on the conduct of late abortions in this country, and will he guarantee that if there are clear violations of either the Abortion Act 1967 or the Infant Life (Preservation) Act 1929, it is his Department's view that those violations should be referred for prosecution? In other words, will he guarantee that the Acts are vigorously enforced, rather than loosely conducted? I should be grateful if he could answer those few queries.

As I said earlier, I understand that he cannot comment on the case of the child who died in the accident, but he may perhaps like to reflect on what would have happened if it had been a child in an incubator, and whether there is need for further clarification.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): With the leave of the House, I call the Under-Secretary of State.

8.28 am

The Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Roger Freeman): I was going to seek your leave, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Thank you for giving me the chance to speak twice in this debate.

I believe that both I and my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Ann Widdecombe) are somewhat surprised at her good fortune in being called at what is likely to be the conclusion of this debate.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's undoubted energies. To be as fresh and as lucid as she has been at this hour of the morning is no mean feat, but to maintain the enthusiasm and dedication to the causes which she holds so dear is a most remarkable quality. I pay tribute to her: to speak so eloquently for nearly 40 minutes without notes is an incredible achievement, and one of which the whole House should be proud.

My hon. Friend has raised a number of important issues. I think that she will understand if I am reluctant to comment either on case law or on matters that are really for my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General. She will not expect a Health Minister charged with administering the present law to venture too far down the path of commenting on recent cases, but I shall do my level best.

Let me say at the outset that abortion is not a convenience but a tragedy, in each and every case. Those are my personal feelings, but I am sure that they are shared throughout the House. We sometimes fall into the trap of believing that abortion, at whatever stage of gestation, is a medical convenience rather like minor surgery, but it is always a tragedy for the mother—indeed, for both parents of the life that is involved.

The scale of abortion is significant, not only in Britain but in other western European countries. Earlier in this Consolidated Fund Bill debate we talked at some length about the pressures on the National Health Service. It should be noted that some of the demands are created by ourselves, and not by the natural misfortunes of life—the afflictions that we, as human beings, may not be capable of controlling.

There are substantial pressures on the obstetric and gynaecological departments of NHS hospitals arising from the demand for abortions. I make no moral judgment, as a Minister of the Crown, about the need for such abortions, because the law provides for such services under the 1967 Act; I merely comment that we should not dismiss the pressure for them lightly, as some minor convenience that is provided for all who seek it.

It may be helpful if I review briefly the legislative background to abortion issues. As my hon. Friend said, it is an offence under the Infant Life (Preservation) Act 1929 to destroy the life of a child that is capable of being born alive, except when that is done in good faith for the sole purpose of saving the mother's life. Although she did not refer to it specifically, I think that my hon. Friend has always accepted that that exemption clause exists, allowing abortion regardless of gestation period to save the mother's life.

The 1929 Act contains a rebuttable presumption that a foetus of 28 weeks' gestation or more is capable of being born alive. In the event of a prosecution under the Act in respect of the death of a child of 28 weeks' gestation or more, the onus would be on the defence to prove that the foetus was not capable of being born alive. In the case of the death of a child before the lapse of 28 weeks, it would be for the prosecution to prove that the child was capable of being born alive.

Let me make two observations. First, I am sure that my hon. Friend would accept that, even with the advance in medical science, it is still difficult to date precisely the gestation period involved in a particular case. We are making best estimates. Our understanding of the gestation process and of the date at which fertilisation occurred and, therefore, of the age of the foetus is improving, but it is still imperfect.

I sense, too, that that there is a growing consensus among hon. Members, based in part on medical advice, that the 28-week period could and should be reduced. I believe that that is a relatively uncontroversial statement, but this is a matter not for the Government but for the House. I merely comment that to reduce the gestation period from 28 to 24 weeks would be a move that the House might find convenient. It would reflect a consensus among the medical profession, due, I suspect, to significant advances in medical technology.

Miss Widdecombe: I believe that the Minister has just made an extremely dangerous statement. Many members of the medical profession believe that the limit should be very much lower than 24 weeks. We have also been assured throughout that there is no Government and Department position on the precise number of weeks. There is a danger that the Minister's statement, although uttered in good faith, will be taken as a pre-emptive statement. I should be grateful if he would state specifically that there are plenty of doctors, consultants, obstetricians and gynaecologists who believe that 24 weeks is too high.

Mr. Freeman: My hon. Friend is right. I was choosing my words carefully.

Miss Widdecombe: But not carefully enough.

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention. It allows me to make it plain that the Government do not have a view and that I was merely reflecting what seemed to me to be a consensus, based upon advances in medical technology. Of course she is right that the difference between 23, 24 or 25 weeks is a matter of judgment. I am merely reflecting the advice received from medical circles: that a reduction from 28 to 24 weeks might be based upon advances in medical technology. However, I fully understand my hon. Friend's position.

The main thrust of my hon. Friend's speech was directed towards the ruling of 5 February. It is a recent ruling. My hon. Friend is very quick off the mark—quicker, perhaps, than the Department of Health, in the sense that we are talking about a judgment that is only six weeks old. She would not expect me at this stage to give a definitive answer as to our view of Mr. Justice Brooke's ruling. That is primarily a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General.

My hon. Friend's main comment was that the definition

> "capable of being born alive"

as commented upon in Mr. Justice Brooke's judgment could have a different interpretation from the one that some people have put upon it. In other words, it is not just long-term viability: it is the ability to survive, if only for a few hours. I shall seek to deal with my hon Friend's comments, but may I preface my remarks by underlining once again that medical technology has advanced considerably since 1929 and that it is advancing all the time. In a clinical sense, therefore, the definition of "viability" is not immutable and fixed for all time. It is changing.

When I visited St. Helier hospital last week—a major London hospital in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman)—I saw the excellent efforts of the staff there to keep alive premature babies of very small birth weight by means of techniques that were undreamed of five or 10 years ago. Another great pressure on resources in the Health Service—I referred earlier to abortions—and one to which we are happy to respond is the pressure to provide the technology, equipment and staff to keep alive premature babies, some born after a gestation period that would not even have been contemplated a few years ago.

The case involving the judgment given by Mr. Justice Brooke has only just been fully reported and its implications will have to be carefully considered. I assure my hon. Friend that we will take great care to interpret the judgment. That is primarily a matter for the Law Officers, but I assure her—prompted by this debate, which has been helfpul—that we shall, with all speed, ensure that the implications of that judgment are properly considered.

Matters relating to the Infant Life (Preservation) Act 1929 are for the Home Secretary, as his Department is responsible for the administration of that Act. It is widely known that the consensus of the main medical and professional bodies is that, with the advances in medical and scientific development in neonatal medicine, it is now possible for some babies born after 24 weeks to survive. I accept my hon. Friend's comment that, while she does not dispute that fact, she would perhaps extend it to include infants born after a shorter gestation period. My Department took steps to draw that view, shared by the relevant royal colleges, to the attention of members of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.

[Mr. Freeman]

Administratively, the 24-week limit has been imposed on those private facilities approved under the Abortion Act 1967. Under that, as my hon. Friend will know, they are authorised to carry out terminations after 20 weeks, and we have taken the step already of imposing the new lower limit administratively. There is of course the exception, to which I referred, in cases where the life of the mother is threatened.

In 1988, the latest year for which figures are available, in Great Britain there were 23 abortions after 24 weeks. I cannot give my hon. Friend the number within that 23 where it could be said that the abortion was necessary to preserve the life of the mother, but when I respond more fully to her in writing I will give her that analysis.

My hon. Friend referred to a case allegedly involving selective termination of pregnancy at King's College hospital. As she said, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) has written to the Minister for Health drawing attention to that and asking a number of questions. Details of that distressing case were reported recently in the *Sunday Express*. My Department's regional liaison division is conducting inquiries into the circumstances of that case and will shortly be reporting, not only to Ministers at the Department of Health but to the Law Officers. I look forward to those inquiries being completed quickly.

I share my hon. Friend's view that the Ashley Gardiner case, which involved reckless driving, was unfortunate. I well understand her anxiety and distress about the outcome of the case. As she rightly said, those are matters for the Law Officers, and she will not expect me to comment further.

My hon. Friend implied that there was a loss of will by the Department of Health in monitoring the 1967 Act. I assure her that that is not the case. She argued that there were imperfections in the Act, and that she wished to see Parliament change the 1967 Act and the Infant Life (Preservation) Act. Given the law as it stands, it is emphatically not the case that there is a lack of will in the Department of Health. My Department maintains a team of investigating officers, including doctors, nurses and administrative staff, and I assure my hon. Friend that any complaints about specific cases, raised from whatever source, are properly and fully investigated and that, where necessary, appropriate action is taken.

Miss Widdecombe: Can my hon. Friend honestly say that the Carlisle baby case would have been referred to a coroner and properly investigated if, after several months during which the Department and medical services did absolutely nothing, a member of staff had not finally gone to a Catholic priest? Did that show that the Act was being monitored properly?

Mr. Freeman: I understand my hon. Friend's anxieties and strong feelings, but we must operate in the real world. My hon. Friend is right to say that we rely on the good will and co-operation of staff, whether consultants, nursing staff or midwives, for advice and information. Ministers in the Department and the Law Officers are not all-knowing and all-seeing, so to that extent my hon. Friend's remarks are accepted. Ministers in successive Governments have seen as highly important the administration of abortion legislation to ensure that no one, whether in NHS or private hospitals, is above the law. A proper implementation of observance of legislation is also important to protect the women who choose to have abortions, and we must not forget the health of the women involved. I resist my hon. Friend's implication that there is a lack of will and determination to enforce the law by the Government and the Department.

My hon. Friend referred to lethal injections. I realise that she finds these techniques repugnant. Whatever one's personal views about abortion, it is always a tragedy when an abortion occurs. The method adopted is, of course, a matter for clinical judgment. It is neither sensible nor practical to define in legislation the method used to terminate pregnancies.

My hon. Friend referred to prosecutions.

Miss Widdecombe: My hon. Friend has not missed the point, but he has not answered the point on injections. If a doctor believes that a child is incapable of being born alive, what is the point of giving it a lethal injection to ensure that it is born dead? Is there not a straight contradiction there? Is not the doctor saying, by administering a lethal injection, that the child could be born alive? If he is saying that, is that not an infringement of the Infant Life (Preservation) Act?

Mr. Freeman: There are two issues here. The first is my hon. Friend's key argument, which is the interpretation of the Infant Life (Preservation) Act—is the child capable of being born alive? I have said clearly that the recent judgment by Mr. Justice Brooke, which appears to interpret the 1929 Act in terms of the ability of the child to survive for only a few hours, is receiving careful attention. I shall not give my hon. Friend a definitive answer this morning and she would not expect me to. The judgment that has to be made by the clinician involved is separate from the techniques, however repulsive and repugnant, used by the clinician to render the medical services necessary to the woman in a particular case. I hope that my hon. Friend will agree that it is not sensible to enshrine in legislation or regulation a precise medical technique.

On the conscience clause, I am aware that officials from my Department have given evidence to the Select Committee on Social Services. We await its report with interest and I assure my hon. Friend, who serves on that Committee and through her the Chairman and members of that Committee that the recommendations and observations of the Committee will be given very careful consideration and attention. I am given to understand that that report is expected shortly, and I know that the whole House will be interested in it.

In conclusion, I repeat and sum up the answers that I have given to the nine points that my hon. Friend made at the end of her speech. I am unable to answer the questions dealing with the legalities. She would not expect me to comment on those; that is not a matter for me or for the Department. of Health. She asked whether Mr. Justice Brooke's ruling should be observed: we are carefully studying that recent judgment, which has great significance for abortion procedures. She asked whether handicapped children are covered: all children are covered. I will take further advice on that matter, but that is my initial response.

I hope that I have dealt with the issue of lethal injections. My hon. Friend referred to lives being "dismembered": the use of medical techniques is a matter for the clinicians involved. She asked whether we will issue revised guidelines on procedures: once we have considered Mr. Justice Brooke's ruling and taken further advice, if revised guidelines are needed we will certainly issue them. She asked whether the King's college baby case will be investigated: I have already given my hon. Friend some assurances on that score.

Regarding the conscience clause and the Select Committee's report, we await that with interest, and any recommendations that may be made will be followed very carefully.

My hon. Friend asked whether the law will be enforced: yes, with diligence. It is a matter for the House to make a judgment on amendment to the abortion law. Each hon. Member will have his or her vote on that most important matter when it comes before the House.

Mr. Nicholas Baker (Dorset, North): I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, by leave, withdrawn.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE (INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION) BILL *[Lords]*

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, notwithstanding that such provisions could not have been proposed in Committee without an Instruction from the House, amendments may be proposed on consideration of the Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Bill *[Lords]* to provide for the seizure, detention and forfeiture of drug trafficking money imported or exported in cash.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE (INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION) BILL *[Lords] [Ways and Means]*

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That any Act resulting from the Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Bill *[Lords]* may provide for the payment into the Consolidated Fund of money representing cash, and accrued interest on cash, forfeit under provisions of that Act conferring powers in respect of drug trafficking money imported or exported in cash.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

PETITION

Mr. Brian Wood

8.52 am

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): I beg leave to present a petition on behalf of Mr. Brian Wood of Woody's Peat, Seabrights farm, Galleywood, Chelmsford, signed by over 1,600 of his concerned and very loyal customers.

They are extremely worried about the enforcement action that Chelmsford borough council has taken against Mr. Wood's one-man peat distribution business, which has been operating out of his premises for the past 11 years. The petitioners are worried that, if the enforcement order is proceeded with, his business will have to cease trading on 13 May 1990. The petitioners pray that

"your honourable House will duly consider this Petition and strongly urge the Chelmsford Borough Council to reconsider a change of heart by allowing Mr. Wood to carry on his business and occupation of Seabrights Farm on a Personal Permission basis which are both wholly related to Agriculture and Horticulture."

To lie upon the Table.

M V Marine

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

8.54 am

Mr. Neville Trotter (Tynemouth): The tale of the loss of the M V Marine is tragic and shocking. All cases in which a ship perishes with its entire crew must, of course, be tragic, but I suggest that in the case of the Marine there was also a shocking story of a ship that was taken to sea with a crew half of whom were inexperienced and quite untrained, and with only three experienced men on board.

The vessel sailed from Liverpool during the night of 9-10 December last, with a cargo of scrap iron bound for Seville. She was 15 years old and 2,800 tonnes dead weight. I shall return later to the time gap before she was reported missing and a sadly unsuccessful search for her was launched.

I draw the attention of the House particularly to the woefully inadequate crewing of the ship. I know that all hon. Members share with me the deepest sympathy with the relatives of those who perished with the vessel. We should also share a sense of outrage at the way in which those responsible for the ship sent her to sea so disgracefully and dangerously undermanned.

The vessel had been sold in October 1989 by its Swedish owners to a Panamanian company, Tropica Armadora, when the new owner transferred her to the flag of the Bahamas. Before the sale, the vessel had a crew of nine —a master, a chief officer, a second officer, three qualified and certificated able seamen, a cook, a chief engineer and a motorman. After her transfer to the Bahamas flag, the vessel sailed with a crew of only six—a master, a mate, a chief engineer and three ratings. Most importantly, those three ratings were unqualified and had been recruited from a jobcentre. They were raw young lads from Tyneside. They were promised training, but it is clear that no serious training in the art of seamanship was given to them. Indeed, in the circumstances of the vessel, it was clear that no training could be given. There were only three qualified men on the ship and the other half of the crew had no experience whatever.

Each of the three deck crew had joined exactly four weeks before the ship sailed. That was the only experience that they had had at sea. One of them, George Cramman, was a constituent of mine. He had been a bricklayer until he had sailed four weeks before on his first voyage. The three lads were completely lacking in any nautical experience or training. By any reasonable criteria, the ship put to sea with insufficient crew.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): Three of the men who were lost at sea were my constituents. Indeed, Mark Rannigan was only 17 years old and had no experience or training when he was recruited for that ship.

Mr. Trotter: I agree absolutely. A particularly tragic aspect of the loss was the age of the three young men. One was only 16 or 17, a mere boy.

It seems that the three lads had been told that the vessel had a crew of eight or nine and that they would be trained. I would expect uncertified and inexperienced deck crew to be taken on a ship on the basis of being additional to the experienced crew responsible for the sailing of the vessel. Indeed, the United Kingdom regulations stipulate that unqualified sailors should not be counted as part of the

[Mr. Trotter]

crew for safe manning purposes. The ship must have sailed without complying with international standards for safe crewing in terms of the size, training and experience of the crew.

So the vessel set off on that December night from Liverpool to the bay of Biscay, in the middle of winter, faced with many hours of severe weather, with only three experienced sailors on board and with three young lads fresh from the jobcentre on Tyneside. Presumably the engineer worked below deck. That would leave only two competent sailors, the captain and the mate, to man the ship—to navigate and to keep watch, presumably turn and turn about. This was a ship of 2,800 tonnes, not a tiny coasting vessel. There was no back-up for anything that happened unexpectedly. Presumably there were times when one of the three young men was left on his own in control of the ship.

If the point came where lifeboats had to be launched, the crew were incapable of launching them, especially in the weather conditions into which the vessel was sailing in the bay of Biscay. The young men had no experience or proper training in lifeboat drills, an elementary part of basic sea training. I understand that the lifeboats could not be automatically lowered and had to be lowered manually. How could three untrained lads cope properly in a storm in those circumstances?

I must comment on the role of the jobcentre in South Shields in the recruitment of the three young men. Apparently, a 20-year-old girl was offered a job on the ship but, fortunately for her, she turned it down. I understand that a company called Laird Line Ltd. asked the jobcentre to help recruit trainee crew members and a ship's engineer. The vacancy that was displayed by the jobcentre, in good faith, stated that no qualifications were necessary, and that training would be provided to enable recruits to obtain deck hand and able seamen certificates, as well as engine room qualifications. The display also explained that suitable applicants would be encouraged to take up full apprenticeships in those occupations.

Given the circumstances of the ship, that was an outrageous description. Serious inquiries need to be made about how such a misleading advertisement was displayed in the jobcentre. In due course, I look forward to hearing the response from the Minister with responsibility for that subject, although today—quite properly—the reply to this debate will be given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Aviation and Shipping, rather than by one of my hon. Friends at the Department of Employment.

Other allegations have been made—with what justification I cannot say. There has been an allegation that the stability of the vessel could have been affected by the structural amendments that were made when she passed into the hands of her new owners. There is also said to have been a history of engine trouble. It has been suggested that the ship sailed with a broken radio. One must ask what surveys had been carried out. Had there been any recent inspections of the vessel? There are regulations for port state inspection. Had the vessel been inspected while she was in British ports?

I turn now to the question of ownership. The owner is officially shown as being Tropica Armadora SA, a company that is registered in Panama, but who are the real owners and who are the beneficial owners? While the company may have been registered in Panama, thousands of miles away, I suggest that there is some responsibility nearer home. There is a relationship between this vessel and the remote highland village of Aberlour in Scotland.

I said that I would return to the action that was taken ashore when the vessel went missing. She sailed on the night of 9-10 December and was never heard of again. She was due in Seville on the evening of 14 December, but the alert was not given until 17 December, a week after she had sailed. It seems that it was only when relatives of the master and the engineer tried to make contact by radio on 16 December that it was realised that something was amiss. By that time, it was nearly a week since she had sailed.

Therefore, we need to ask, why did not the owners act sooner? Who managed the ship? Who was responsible for keeping in touch with her, and who was responsible for such disgraceful manning? According to a relative of the engineer, the Falmouth coastguard told her that the ship had been reported missing by the wife of the mate. The relatives of the other crew were not informed until 21 December, when the police broke the tragic news. There even seems to have been some doubt about who was on board. The relatives of another young lad were woken to be told that their son had been lost when, thank goodness, he was fast asleep in bed upstairs.

Mrs. Cramman, the wife of poor George, eventually received a letter dated 29 December, which was headed "Tropica Armadora", with no address and with a telephone number that I checked last night. It is in the village of Aberlour in the Scottish highlands. The letter was signed by Joanna Smith on behalf of the company. It enclosed a press release telling of the searches that had been carried out and listing the crew.

The press release "offered sincere condolences", but the letter that was addressed to Mrs. Cramman contained only the following words of sympathy:

> "I hope that these details may answer some of your questions on the matter, and I am only sorry that we have no further news of the vessel.
>
> For and on behalf of the company."

I remind the House that the tragic bereavement was suffered over the Christmas holiday. A letter was sent to my constituent's widow on 5 January by solicitors acting for the company. It expressed the deepest sympathy and gave advice about how she should submit a claim to the insurance company.

The Falmouth coastguard gave an anxious relative the name and telephone number of Mrs. Smith in the highlands as being the person to contact about the missing ship. It seems that Mrs. Smith told the relative that she was a friend of the owner, Mr. Chris Douglas. I stress the word "owner" because, as I understand it, Chris Douglas happens to be the name of the vessel's mate. It seems that Mr. Douglas also came from the village of Aberlour. Was he also the owner or the part-owner?

What do we know about the captain of the ship? The engineer, poor man, had also been signed on at the jobcentre in South Shields, although he was an experienced and qualified man. Was the captain also a part-owner? There is a big question mark over who the real owners are. Who are the directors of the company? Who was responsible for sending out this ship undermanned into the bay of Biscay in the middle of winter on a voyage that led to the deaths of the whole crew? Do the people who were responsible for that action reside in this country?

According to the Department of Employment, the advertisement was placed by a company called Laird Line. What is it? What was its role in the build-up to this tragedy? I suggest that a thorough investigation is clearly necessary. What happened to the ship? I suspect that we shall never know. However, we can seek to establish responsibility for the way in which she sailed, her condition and the undermanning of the ship.

If those responsible are within United Kingdom jurisdiction, they should be brought to account. Above all, we must take steps to prevent this from happening again. When the widow and mother of poor George Cramman came to see me in my constituency, the main message that they wanted me to put to the House and to the Ministry was that we must stop this happening again.

The ship was no doubt overwhelmed in a crisis in the stormy weather. Perhaps the cargo shifted. Clearly, the crew could not cope because of its lack of experienced men. The lack of a proper crew must have been a feature in the loss of the ship. An inquiry is needed to establish how that came to pass.

The Marine was a Bahamian-registered vessel. The investigation is therefore, rightly, being conducted by the authorities in the Bahamas. However, as all six crewmen were British, our marine accident investigation branch has asked for and been promised a copy of the Bahamas Government's report. As you will appreciate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a strong British connection. Indeed, there is a stronger connection with Britain than with the Bahamas. I doubt whether the ship had ever been anywhere near the Bahamas. The crew members were all United Kingdom nationals. They were recruited in this country. The ship sailed from Liverpool. It appears to be beneficially owned in this country. It seems that its management was in this country. There is a far clearer connection with us than with the Bahamas.

A further important queston must be asked. Are other ships with the same owners operating in the same way out of United Kingdom ports? That is a matter for inquiry by us rather than by the Bahamas Government. Such ships could be similarly operated by the same owners flying a different flag and would thus be of no concern whatever to the Bahamas Government. It would be interesting to know the terms of reference of the Bahamas inquiry. The British interest in the loss is much wider than that of the Bahamas Government.

I do not wish to prejudge the results of the inquiry by the Bahamas authorities, but serious questions are raised by the tragedy. They are questions of public concern in this country. I hope that the report of the Bahamas Government will be published so that we can all know what it says and can judge for ourselves whether it covers all the serious issues that have been raised. If it does not, the experienced British marine accident investigation branch should be called in to carry out its own inquiry.

9.7 am

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): First, as a Whip I apologise for breaking the convention of the House and speaking in the debate. I have sat here for most of the night and as three of the crew of the Marine were my constituents, I feel that I have an interest in the matter.

Several weeks ago I supported the hon. Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) in an inquiry into the toxic waste plant at Pelaw, which is next to my constituency. I support all that he has said on this matter and the information that he has given to the House is that which I also have. I fully support the disclosure that he made.

As the hon. Gentleman rightly said, the tragedy took place during the Christmas period. Paul Wilson's father came to see me over the Christmas period to tell me of his concern and the lack of information that the families or next of kin had received. I wrote to the Minister on 3 January—I compliment him on having replied quickly—and I had a discussion with him in the Members' Lobby not long afterwards.

The next of kin and I support the call for an inquiry. One of the current problems is that the Bahamian inquiry will be in-house and its terms of reference will be narrow. It will concern only itself with the circumstances in which the vessel was lost rather than exploring the possible crew irregularities to which the hon. Member for Tynemouth referred. It will not consider the possible effect on the stability of the vessel following pre-sail structural modifications, to which the hon. Gentleman also referred.

The three ratings referred to had few qualifications and little sea service. That is in violation of International Maritime Organisation convention No. 74 concerning the certification of able seamen. That convention lays down provisions regarding the minimum age, the minimum period of service and the testing of a candidate's knowledge of seamanship.

I thank the hon. Member for Tynemouth for taking the opportunity to raise this important issue and I hope that the questions that he posed will be answered by the Minister.

9.10 am

The Minister for Aviation and Shipping (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): First, through my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) and the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon), I wish to express my sincere condolences and those of the House to the families who lost relatives as a result of the unfortunate accident. My hon. Friend has made a number of points relating to the Marine and I think that it would be best if I tried to answer as many of them as possible. I shall therefore not dwell on descriptions of the vessel or the accident, which my hon. Friend covered extremely well.

When the marine accident investigation branch learned that the vessel was missing, because of the United Kingdom interest, particularly the fact that all the crew were British citizens, it immediately contacted the Bahamian authorities. It was established that the Bahamas was carrying out a full investigation, and a copy of the eventual report was requested. That has been promised, and the MAIB has been advised that it can expect to receive a copy of that report in the middle of this year. It is understood that the report will be published.

My hon. Friend, from whose constituency one of those who was lost came, has asked that the MAIB should carry out an investigation into the loss of the vessel, and that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State should consider a public formal investigation into the matter.

I accept that there is a considerable United Kingdom interest, and I do not take lightly the loss of six seamen —I am sure that no hon. Members do. The prime responsibility for investigating an accident on the high seas rests with the flag state, but I assure the House that MAIB maintains its contact with the Bahamas. With no survivors

[Mr. Patrick McLoughlin]

and no wreckage having been recovered, the investigation will be very difficult, however much expertise is applied to it.

From its discussions, the MAIB is satisfied that the inquiry is covering the same ground that it would have covered. I have no reason to believe that the Bahamian inquiry will be less than thorough, and it would not be right to anticipate its findings. Therefore, I consider that it would be wrong for a separate investigation to be undertaken by the MAIB or for a formal investigation to be ordered, at present. It is important to emphasise "at present".

Minimum safe manning is a difficult area to regulate because there are no international conventions on safe manning, nor are there any international agreements on minimum safe manning scales for seagoing ships. However, there are resolutions on safe manning standards agreed by the International Maritime Organisation. Those standards are applied within the European region by a memorandum of understanding on port state control.

In the absence of international requirements, the United Kingdom introduced a voluntary safe manning scheme some years ago. That scheme embodies the principles of safe manning contained in International Maritime Organisation resolution A481 and the vast majority of United Kingdom owners see benefit in having safe manning certificates. Assessing minimum safe manning means that the crew shall include sufficient officers and ratings, with the appropriate skills and experience, to ensure safe operation.

My Department has seen no evidence that the Marine had been issued with a safe manning certificate by the Bahamian marine administration. The Marine was a vessel of 1,397 gross registered tonnes operating in an area defined by United Kingdom regulations as the extended European trading area. In making an assessment of the minimum safe manning for a United Kingdom ship, my Department would require detailed information about the ship, including her equipment, the level of automation fitted and the crewing arrangements, together with a study of the ship's plans. It is possible that a visit to the ship would have been made.

My hon. Friend asked when the Marine was last inspected by the Department of Transport. The Department of Transport's marine surveyor from the London marine office inspected the Marine on 18 October 1989 under the port state regulations to which I referred. Six deficiencies were discovered, most of which were relatively minor. They did not warrant the ship's detention. I hope that that shows that the ship had been inspected.

Mr. Trotter: I take it that that was a structural survey. Presumably, there was no checking on the manning.

Mr. McLoughlin: I should like to give my hon. Friend the exact details about that. It would be better if I wrote to him because I wish to cover a number of other points and time is marching on.

The 1978 international convention on standards of training, certification and watchkeeping for seafarers—STCW—specifies the mandatory minimum requirement for officer certification and for ratings forming part of a navigational or engine room watch. The 1978 STCW convention came into force on 28 April 1984 and there are currently 77 contracting states. Both the Bahamas and the United Kingdom have signed the convention.

In terms of ratings forming part of a navigational watch on a seagoing ship of more than 200 gross registered tonnes, the convention requires approved seagoing service, including not less than six months' sea experience in navigational watchkeeping duties unless the rating has undergone special training, which would include a period of seagoing service of not less than two months. There is no evidence that any of the ratings who served on the Marine met this requirement. While the convention does not prohibit the carriage of unqualified or trainee ratings for the purpose of training, any such ratings—as my hon. Friend said—would need to be carried in addition to the minimum crew specified for safe operation.

My Department requires that any person or agency supplying seafarers to a ship in a United Kingdom port should have a licence. To supply seafarers in those circumstances without a licence is an offence, but there are the following exceptions to this rule—the owner of the vessel, the master or mate, or any person in the full-time employment of the owner may recruit without a licence. In addition, an agent may supply his own employees provided that they remain in his employment and he is responsible for paying their wages and for all other conditions of service. The agent is regarded as the owner of the vessel for this purpose and is known as a ship management company or "manning agent".

I now turn to the jobcentre involvement in the recruitment of the crew members of the Marine. On 19 September 1989 South Shields jobcentre was notified by Laird Line Ltd. of vacancies for a ship's engineer and trainee seafarers. The directors of Laird Line were the master and mate of the Marine, who were fully entitled to recruit the crew for that vessel. Sadly, both lost their lives when the vessel sank.

The jobcentre accepted the vacancy for trainee seafarers on the basis that full training, leading to formal qualifications, would be given. As their procedures require, the jobcentre staff checked that the vacancies complied with equal opportunities legislation.

On 25 September 1989, Mr. Douglas, the mate of the Marine, interviewed in South Shields jobcentre people who had expressed interest in the vacancies. Mr. Douglas told the jobcentre staff that he would be offering employment to a qualified engineer and three trainees. However, not all took up his offer, and the crew who sailed on 9-10 December were not all drawn from the original jobcentre recruitment exercise.

Although satisfied that the jobcentre acted correctly, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment has been considering whether jobcentre procedures for handling merchant shipping vacancies need to be revised in the light of the Marine incident. This has been the subject of correspondence between the Department of Employment and my hon. Friend and Opposition Members. I assure my hon. Friend that he can expect a full response in the near future. I hope that he will find it helpful.

Mr. Dixon: I understand that the Minister is trying to answer as many questions as possible in the few remaining minutes of the debate, but does he accept that jobcentres are Government agencies and that any youngsters going to them to be interviewed and then to be recruited will naturally feel that everything is above board and that it will be safe for them to take the job on offer? When incidents such as the Marine tragedy occur, it would seem that youngsters have been misled.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has made a valid point and I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment is examining the matter. I hope that the hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend will be satisfied with my right hon. Friend's response.

As I have said, the death of six seamen is not taken lightly by me or by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. When the MAIB receives the Bahamian report into the accident it will consider——

Mr. Trotter: I appreciate all that my hon. Friend has said, and his response has been helpful, but I cannot help thinking that the Bahamian inquiry will be more restricted than the inquiry that ought to be held. Will he take that on board?

Mr. McLoughlin: I am about to do so.

When the MAIB receives the Bahamian report into the accident, it will consider it very carefully, in the knowledge that the vessel was lost without trace and that there were no survivors. If the chief inspector of marine accidents is of the opinion that the inquiry was any less thorough than an investigation that his inspectors would have carried out in the same circumstances, an investigation by his branch will be given due consideration.

We shall await the report of the Bahamian inquiry and then judge what lessons can be learnt and what action can be taken to avoid such a tragedy ever happening again. It was a nasty tragedy, as is any accident which involves loss of life. Given the time of year and the circumstances, it was especially regrettable. I repeat my condolences and those, I am sure, of the whole House, to all those who lost relatives in the accident. I hope that we shall be able to learn lessons from it so that we can try to avoid any such accident happening again.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-two minutes past Nine o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 28 March 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Douglas: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Before we start?

Mr. Douglas: Yes, Mr. Speaker. If you prefer me to raise it at the end of Question Time, I shall defer to your wishes, Mr. Speaker—but that will not detract from the urgency of the matter.

My point of order is that last Thursday, during business questions, several requests were made for a statement by the Secretary of State for Scotland on capital offsets. No indication has been given that such a statement will be made. My constituents, and those of other right hon. and hon. Members, are being adversely affected because poinding warrants are being issued and executed in respect of bills that are not founded in law. May I have your permission, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman may have an opportunity to raise that matter if we reach questions today that are relevant to that subject. I believe that question No. 16 is the first of them. We must see whether we can do so.

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

Drugs

1. **Mr. Hood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what extra resources he is making available to Strathclyde police to enable them to fight against the significant increase in drug abuse and drug-related crime; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): The provision of resources for Strathclyde police is a matter for Strathclyde regional council as police authority. My right hon. and learned Friend stands ready to pay police grant on the council's net approved expenditure on the police service.

Mr. Hood: I am disappointed by the Minister's reply. Is he aware of the concern felt by thousands of parents in my constituency about the increase in drug and alcohol abuse and in related crimes there? This year, Glasgow is meant to be the city of culture, but it is becoming better known in Europe as the city of drugs. I am saddened by the Minister's response. Is he further aware of the increased use of firearms in drugs offences? Will he take on board early-day motion 771, which deals with the need for gun control, and support Strathclyde police force in calling for stricter firearms laws and controls over those licensed to use guns?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Last year, we tightened up the law on firearms ownership—and I voted through the night for that legislation. As to the number of police officers working on the extremely serious problem to which the hon. Gentleman refers, Strathclyde drugs squad now has 34 officers in comparison with only 18 in 1979. The Glasgow drugs wing of the Scottish crime squad has 10 officers, and another will be added later this year. Uniformed and CID officers also co-operate in dealing with the problem. Strathclyde police are under establishment by 130 officers, and the hon. Gentleman would be well advised to make representations to his colleagues on the police authority, as to the need to bring that force up to strength.

Mrs. Ray Michie: Is the Minister aware that Strathclyde police officers also work in Argyll and Bute on drug-related crime, not least because of the length of the coastline there? Does he agree that they would undertake those duties more happily if they were not seriously disadvantaged in comparison with colleagues outwith that area? Eighty per cent. of police in Argyll and Bute live in tied houses. Although I agree with the provision of such accommodation, police are not permitted to buy those houses, and have been disadvantaged since the rates relief portion of their rent allowance was abolished. Will the Minister examine that anomaly?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We recognised that police officers in provided accommodation were at a disadvantage in comparison with colleagues owning their own houses, which is why we made provision in the regulations that come into effect on 1 April for an allowance of £300 per annum for officers in provided accommodation, which will continue for three years. The right to buy obviously depends on whether the property is surplus to requirements, which is a matter for consideration by the chief constable in each authority.

Mr. Rathbone: Will my hon. Friend encourage police forces in Strathclyde and elsewhere in Scotland to use referral schemes, so that people suffering from drug misuse, and falling within the ambit of police forces, can be referred to voluntary organisations for help with treatment —as well as being brought within the law?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are Home Office plans for the deployment of local drug prevention teams, but they are still at an early stage. We shall be monitoring developments in the first small group of local teams in England. The new central drug prevention unit, as an executive arm of the ministerial group on the misuse of drugs, will have a British role and we are conscious of the need for rehabilitation and education, on which we are spending substantial sums.

Fishing Industry

2. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next intends to meet the executive members of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation to discuss the current state of the fishing industry.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind: My noble Friend the Minister of State and I last met representatives of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation on 7 February, and my noble Friend did so on 8 March; in addition, my officials are in regular contact with the federation. It has not asked for a further meeting.

Mr. Campbell: Does the Secretary of State understand the deep sense of apprehension felt in the fishing community, in the fish processing sector and by all those who derive their living from the fishing industry in Scotland? Will he now undertake to consider a package of measures to alleviate that concern, and in particular give serious consideration to the introduction of a decommissioning scheme?

Mr. Rifkind: I understand that concern. I have had some extremely valuable discussions with the Scottish Fishermen's Federation. I am aware of the concern that a reduction in quotas might have implications for fishermen's income. That is why we have been monitoring carefully what has been happening in the fishing industry since the beginning of the year. So far, it is encouraging that the value of fish landed in Scotland is slightly higher over the first two months of this year than the value of fish landed a year ago. There is no proof that that will continue, but it is encouraging at this stage that the increased prices will help to offset the reduced amount of fish being caught.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Why does the Secretary of State persist with his irrationally vindictive policy of driving the Scottish fleet into bankruptcy? Why does not he take into account the fact that European Community money is available and consider having a proper decommissioning scheme and a proper lay-up scheme? It is no use his saying that prices can take care of the problems when he knows that with boats being allowed to go to sea only 92 days a year, it is quite impossible for the price of fish to rise that much and still produce income without causing great hardship to the owners of vessels and to all those employed in the fishing industry in Scotland.

Mr. Rifkind: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will listen carefully: the value of fish landed in Scotland this year is slightly higher than the value of fish landed last year. As we are only in the early part of the year, that will not necessarily continue, but it is important that we bear it in mind. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the decommissioning scheme was the subject of an extremely critical report by the Public Accounts Committee, and the House and the industry must take into account the critical remarks that were made about previous decommissioning schemes.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: Will my right hon. and learned Friend analyse carefully the financial returns to the industry in the first part of the year? Admittedly, the returns have been good, but they relate to a very small proportion of the fleet. The rest of the fleet has not been able to go to sea on account of bad weather. Because they are restricted to 92 days, they cannot recoup the losses incurred in the early part of the year as they would in a normal year. Will my right hon. and learned Friend please understand the deep apprehension that still exists in the industry, to the extent that fishermen are now considering legal action against him? I ask him in particular to reconsider a decommissioning scheme.

Mr. Rifkind: Naturally, we shall continue carefully to monitor what is happening in the industry. I know that my right hon. Friend will be the first to agree that the financial implications of the reduced quotas must be examined. The value of the fish landed is a factor that determines fishermen's incomes and we cannot ignore the fact that it is marginally higher this year. Obviously, legal challenges are a matter for the Scottish Fishermen's Federation and ultimately, if the matter is considered by the courts we shall all respect the outcome of the judgment, if it goes that far.

Public Housing (Dampness)

3. **Mrs. Margaret Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received from local authorities and other organisations about the need to direct further investment to tackling dampness in public sector housing.

7. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received from local authorities and other organisations about the need to direct further investment to tackling dampness in public sector housing.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No such representations have been received. I am pleased to say that I am today announcing the final housing capital allocations to local authorities for 1990-91. The final gross allocations have been increased by £46·5 million compared with the provisional allocations that I announced last December. That will benefit all housing authorities in Scotland. Of the increase, £41·1 million is in respect of expenditure on local authorities' own stock. Full details of the final allocations have been placed in the Library and the Vote Office.

Mrs. Ewing: Does the Minister recall that the Scottish Development Department's own house conditions survey showed that more than 500,000 houses in Scotland were suffering from dampness, of which 370,000 were in the public sector, and that that dampness was creating major health problems, particularly for youngsters and children with chest problems such as bronchitis? As last week the Secretary of State reshuffled some £4 million to save his political skin and the skin of his party, will a substantial proportion of the allocation that he has announced be spent specifically on the eradication of dampness?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I visited 39 district councils, none of which pressed me to make specific allocations because they want the discretion to choose their own priorities. What the hon. Lady says about the seriousness of dampness is true. Moray district council has today been given an extra allocation of £676,000, and on the non-housing revenue account an extra allocation of £50,000. Every authority in Scotland will benefit from the extra allocation of £41·1 million to the housing revenue account, except West Lothian, which has been allocated everything that it asked for. It also benefits on the non-HRA.

Mr. Welsh: Given that over 520,000 houses in Scotland suffer from dampness, which affects the lives and health of many Scottish people, the amount of money that has been allocated is inadequate to meet the problem. Even to recycle money within the Scottish Office budget, Ministers must go cap in hand to the Secretary of State, who must go cap in hand to the Prime Minister. If the Prime Minister dominates the Scottish Office, she should be answerable, because Ministers certainly are not. When will we get action to solve major health and housing problems, which are nothing less than a national disgrace?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The extra allocation of £46·5 million is being made not as a result of recycling within the Scottish Office but on the basic assumption that it is possible to process council house sales within seven and a half months. Some authorities in Scotland have taken well over a year to do that, but we know that, in two years, processing has been completed within less than eight months. Last Sunday, the *Sunday Mail* said:

> "It's not a shortage of cash that's causing chaos, but massive delays by some district councils' house selling operations."

Mr. McAllion: The Government have created a national housing agency, Scottish Homes, which owns more than 70,000 houses in the public sector. How can it possibly tackle dampness when, according to its strategic investment plan, investment in those 70,000 houses has been placed at the bottom of six different spending priorities? Is not that an obscene order of priorities and does not it represent a sell-out of Scottish Homes' tenants and Scottish Homes' stock?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Special Housing Association and Scottish Homes have a good reputation among their tenants for spending sufficient funds on management and maintenance of council house stock. Most of their houses are in relatively good condition. It is for them to choose their priorities, and obviously they will do so. If the hon. Gentleman has any particular problems in his constituency, I should be glad if he drew them to the attention of Scottish Homes and myself.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that the fact that 74 per cent. of houses that suffer from dampness are in the public sector is a condemnation of the policies of Scottish local housing authorities?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is important that housing authorities have the discretion to choose priorities within their areas. These problems are found not only in the public sector but in the private sector, and today we have made an additional allocation to the non-HRA as well.

Mr. Maxton: Is the Minister aware how blindly complacent he sounds when he speaks on the subject of dampness? Does not he understand the enormous human misery caused to thousands of Scots through their having to live in damp houses? Does he accept the overwhelming scientific evidence that dampness in housing causes ill health? If he does, will he stop mouthing meaningless statistics that no one in Scotland believes and invest the massive amount of money necessary to eradicate that unacceptable and unnecessary scourge for ever?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman seems to think that £46·5 million is to be sniffed at. His authority in Glasgow has today been allocated more than £9 million extra on the housing revenue account and £2 million on the non-HRA. He should address his comments to his district council which, no doubt, will take them seriously. The average increase throughout Scotland is 9·8 per cent., and that should not be underestimated.

Community Care

4. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what extra provision he has planned for the community care of mentally ill citizens and those people who are mentally handicapped in 1990-91.

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Mr. Ian Lang): Government support to local authorities in 1990-91 through revenue support grant will take account of likely additional costs arising from the introduction of the new community care arrangements, including services to those with a mental illness or a mental handicap.

Dr. Godman: Does the Minister agree that one important aspect of community care is the provision of sheltered employment? Is not one of the finest examples of that the sheltered placement scheme, which provides some 350 permanent jobs for those with mental handicaps? As there are about 14,000 mentally handicapped people in Strathclyde region alone, will the Government give an assurance that they will increase their share of that scheme's budget, as Strathclyde regional council has done? When will the Government provide proper community care for those with mental handicap and illness?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to the success of the sheltered placement scheme, which has received strong Government support. Our commitment to the needs of those with mental illness or handicap is reflected in the fact that the social work budget has planned provision increasing over 11 years by 75 per cent. in real terms. That is a substantial increase.

Mr. Andy Stewart: Does my hon. Friend agree that the difference between Labour and Conservative health care policies is the difference between talk and action? The Labour party talks whereas the Conservative party has spent more than three times as much on health care in Scotland over the past 10 years.

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is right. It is not insignificant that the title of our White Paper was "Caring for People". The interests of those in especially vulnerable groups have been brought to the forefront in the provision for community care.

Mr. Worthington: When will the Minister bring together the social work services group and the Scottish Home and Health Department to achieve proper planning and co-ordinated policies for Scotland? One of the advantages of the Scottish Office is supposed to be a corporate approach, but it does not exist. There are twice as many mentally ill people and one and a half times as many mentally handicapped people in hospital in Scotland as there are in England and Wales. When will the Minister and the Scottish Office show some leadership in this matter?

Mr. Lang: The figures show a dramatic improvement in our provision compared with that of the previous Labour Government. Residential places for the mentally ill have increased by 88 per cent. since we took office; there has been a 73 per cent. increase for the mentally handicapped; and the community health services budget generally is up by 57 per cent. in real terms over the decade. That is a dramatic increase. We have found the resources to follow up our care in this important area.

Water Authorities (Debts)

5. **Sir David Steel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if Her Majesty's Government intend to write off any of the current outstanding debts of Scottish water authorities.

Mr. Rifkind: Debt was written off in connection with water privatisation in England and Wales. As we have no proposals to privatise the Scottish water authorities, the issue does not arise.

Sir David Steel: The Secretary of State might say that the issue does not arise, but, as the Treasury gave £5 billion to the water authorities in England and Wales in this financial year, does not that mean that nothing equivalent has been given to Scottish authorities, with the result that every poll tax payer is paying a higher element of community charge than would otherwise be the case? Should not the right hon. and learned Gentleman have another of his cosy chats with the Prime Minister and point out the injustice of that as well?

Mr. Rifkind: The right hon. Gentleman is uncharacteristically misinformed. First, he is unaware that expenditure on water and sewerage in Scotland will be more than £500 million over the next three years—a major increase which we announced recently. Secondly, he is unaware that Scottish water consumers actually pay significantly less than consumers south of the border. The average cost per Scottish water consumer is £40·62 compared with an English average of £55·12. For metered water users, there is a similar difference of which he should have been aware.

Mr. Buchanan-Smith: I acknowledge the extra money for investment that my right hon. and learned Friend has allocated for water and sewerage, but will he also recognise the problem facing regional councils such as Grampian? In recent years, Grampian has had to invest large sums in water and sewerage services because of the service that the council gives to the development of North sea oil. As a result, traditional industries in Grampian such as fish processing, food processing in general and the paper industry must bear charges out of all proportion to those of similar industries elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Rifkind: I am very familiar with the point that my right hon. Friend has raised. He will be aware that water charges in Grampian are much the same as those in England. In addition, Grampian regional council, which has received advice from the Scottish Office about the council's discretion to vary water costs for certain classess of its consumers, has—if I am not mistaken—reduced some of its water charges this year as a result of that discretion.

Mr. Harry Ewing: When the Secretary of State says that he has no plans to privatise the water industry in Scotland, is he aware of the speech made by the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), to what he described as the new Right in Scotland, in which he said that the Conservative party had not yet run out of things to privatise in Scotland? Will the Secretary of State give us an absolute assurance that water is not included in the speech made by his hon. Friend, or is he still afraid of him?

Mr. Rifkind: I can give the hon. Gentleman a categorical assurance that we have not run out of things to privatise in Scotland, and water is not one of them.

Fishing Industry

6. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has had with representatives of the Scottish fishing industry since the announcement on 8 March of measures to restrict fishing activity.

Mr. Lang: My noble Friend the Minister of State met representatives of the Scottish fishing industry on the day of the announcement.

Mr. Wallace: I am sure that, from his contacts with fishermen and the fishing industry, the Minister will know that one of the great weaknesses in the present conservation regime is the number of fish that are discarded into the sea. Does he agree that the measures announced on 8 March will do nothing to stop that fault in the regime? The problem will not be tackled properly until the Government are prepared to come forward with measures that bring the catching capacity of the fleet into line with fishing opportunities. Is it not the case that any efforts on the part of the Scottish Office to do that are being frustrated by its English counterparts?

Mr. Lang: No, that is not the case. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman recognises that conservation is vital, which is also recognised by our colleagues in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food as well as by the Scottish Office. With regard to the announcement about haddock, there was an option to move to nets with a wider mesh of 110 mm, but the vast majority of fishermen opted instead for the more restricted number of days' fishing.

Dr. Godman: The restriction of fishing activities off the west coast of Scotland must have as its aim the protection of the west coast fishermen, who fear—rightly and understandably—an incursion into their traditional fishing grounds by the bigger vessels from elsewhere in Scotland. With regard to discards, mentioned by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace), what consultation have the Government been involved in on the harsh measures threatened by the Norwegian Government and the banning of discards on catches in their waters? That ban will affect some north-east Scottish fishermen.

Mr. Lang: I entirely understand the hon. Gentleman's concern about the interests of west coast fishermen. We are looking closely at that point with a view to bringing forward a consultation paper at an early date, which may, for example, canvass the possibility of a weekend ban on fishing in west coast inshore waters.

School Assemblies

8. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any legislative proposals relating to the conduct of school assemblies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: All education authority schools in Scotland are required by law to practise religious observance. My right hon. and learned Friend intends to issue shortly draft guidance on how this and other aspects of religious education might be strengthened.

Mr. Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that all pupils should have a sound knowledge of the Christian religion and that that can be substantially achieved through well-conducted school assemblies? Does he think that those assemblies would be enriched by the regular singing of "I vow to thee my country", meaning Great Britain of course? Perhaps the singing of that great hymn would enrich our prayers in the House.

Mr. Lang: Yes, or perhaps the singing of "Lead kindly light amid the encircling gloom." It is certainly our intention in bringing forward the consultation paper to find ways of strengthening religious observance and religious education in schools. That is part of our purpose.

Mr. Norman Hogg: Does the Minister agree that the Scots do not require advice on religious education or practices in schools or anywhere else, and certainly not from sources in England where the average attendance in church on Sundays is less than 2 per cent? Does he further agree that perhaps school assemblies could join in observing the Church of Scotland's day of prayer against the poll tax? Perhaps the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), could advise the education authorities and the school chaplains to do just that.

Mr. Lang: I am only a Minister of the Crown and I cannot aspire to those greater insights to which ministers of the Kirk aspire. There is a need for improved religious observance in schools, and the characteristics of that should be more frequent. It should be more regular and of high quality.

Ayrshire and Arran Health Board

9. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the chairman of Ayrshire and Arran health board; and what was discussed.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Michael Forsyth): I regularly meet health board chairmen to discuss a variety of topics.

Mr. McKelvey: No doubt when the hon. Gentleman met the health board chairman in Ayrshire he discussed the question of opting out. I wish that I had been a fly on the wall at the time. Is the Minister aware that in the *Glasgow Herald* of 19 March, Bill Fyfe, the chairman of the health board, made it clear that in his opinion only doctors could decide the question of hospitals opting out, that it could not be decided otherwise, and that opting-out cannot be rammed down their threats? Will the Minister therefore refrain from ramming the idea of opting-out down the throats of doctors and consultants in Ayrshire and elsewhere? Will he give an undertaking to abandon opting-out since little interest in it has been shown by doctors, or will he at least allow opting-out only where a majority of those working in hospitals have agreed to accept it?

Mr. Forsyth: I am very much aware that Mr. Bill Fyfe, the chairman of the health board, rejected the view expressed by the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), in his role as paid columnist for the *Glasgow Herald*, to the effect that the proposals that are being discussed in Ayrshire and Arran for self-governing status for that hospital were in in no way linked to any possibility of development of phase two of that hospital. Whether a proposal comes forward will depend entirely on the discussions that are taking place and on whether the consultants believe that it is in the interests of patient care.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: Will the Minister take time to visit the chairman of the Greater Glasgow health board? He will know from correspondence that he has received from me that some patients in Springburn are not shown on the records of the Greater Glasgow health board as being with their doctors. As a result, some patients who have been with their doctors since 1935 are not recorded as being on their GP's list. That means that the general practitioner is not being paid for those patients. It is ridiculous that Greater Glasgow health board does not have proper records.

Mr. Forsyth: I take that as support by the hon. Gentleman for the proposals by Greater Glasgow health board to privatise its medical records in order to improve the service.

Mr. Dewar: Can the Minister answer the simple question that was put to him initially and say when he met the chairman of the Ayrshire and Arran health board? Does he recall that the working paper on self-governing hospitals that was produced by his Department stated:

> "It will be for boards to give all proposals . . . local publicity. They will seek the views of those with an interest,"

including

> "staff affected, general practitioners, local health councils and the local community"?

Has that working paper become waste paper? Or, if the Minister still believes in an element of democratic consent, how will the promise to consult the staff of hospitals that may opt out be implemented?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman seems somewhat confused. If he has read that working paper he will know the process whereby hospitals become NHS trusts. The first stage is an expression of interest; the hospital in Ayr has not even reached that stage yet. The second stage is that, if the Secretary of State considers it appropriate that the expression of interest should be followed up, a plan will be prepared. At that stage there will be full consultation, not only with the doctors but with the wider community, as spelt out in the document to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Investment

10. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much inward investment has taken place in Scotland over the last five years; and what steps he is taking to encourage further such investment.

Mr. Lang: Over the five years to the end of March 1989, Locate in Scotland recorded planned investment by companies of about £2·4 billion, associated with the intended creation or safeguarding of more than 40,000 jobs. Locate in Scotland is continuing to promote Scotland vigorously as a location for inward investment, and I have recently increased its staffing.

Mr. Cran: Does my hon. Friend agree that, since 1981, a total of 60,000 jobs have been attracted to Scotland as a result of the Government's policies, and that they almost certainly would not have been attracted in those numbers had a Labour Government been in power, because the Opposition are anti-business? Does he also agree that the Government's inward investment programme is being maintained, as is evidenced by the 2,000 jobs that have just been attracted to Scotland as a result of Motorola coming there? Will my hon. Friend kindly leave some jobs for the rest of the United Kingdom?

Mr. Lang: I would not argue with my hon. Friend about the exact number of jobs that have been created, but certainly a number of indirect jobs follow from the direct jobs that have been created, and they are substantial in number. Over the past five years about 300 projects have been attracted to Scotland, which is an average of one a week every week for five years. That is a dramatic advertisement of the qualities that Scotland has to offer.

Mr. Ernie Ross: If the hon. Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran), who has joined us, is looking for a safe seat in Scotland, following the resignation of his Tory councillors, he is wasting his time.

Perhaps the Minister will ask his right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State a question. In "The Thatcher Interview", talking about the effect that high business rates are having on the closure rate of business in Scotland, the Prime Minister said that closures might be the result of bad management or too much borrowing. Does the Secretary of State fall into line with her judgment on this issue?

Mr. Lang: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman should raise the subject of business rates, because the Labour party has been responsible for substantially increased business rates in Scotland over the years, to the great detriment of business. The Government have stepped in with new resources and a progressive plan to reduce business rates in Scotland steadily over a five or six-year period to bring them into line with the rest of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Does my hon. Friend agree that nothing could do more harm to Scotland's prospects for inward investment than a combination of the roof tax and the setting up of a Scottish assembly as the only European haven of socialism apart from Albania—a comparison which is perhaps unfair to Albania?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The reason why we have been so successful in attracting inward investment to Scotland is that we have established an enterprise economy there based on low taxation rates. The high taxes that would result from a Labour Government would drive investment away not only from Scotland but from the whole United Kingdom.

Mr. Beggs: I congratulate the Minister on the success in attracting new industry to Scotland——

Mr. Sillars: But——

Mr. Beggs: But does he agree that Dumfries and Galloway, Stranraer and Cairnryan are as peripheral to the United Kingdom as Northern Ireland is? Is there likely to be inward investment in that region of Scotland?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman will know of my enthusiasm to attract inward investment to Dumfries and Galloway. As for infrastructure, we have substantially increased investment in the A75—about £50 million has been spent on it in the past decade, and more is to follow. That is of advantage not only to my constituents but to the hon. Gentleman's in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my hon. Friend believe that the European Community may soon find that the special measures given to Scotland, over and above those given to England, are going to an area which is no longer one of low income and low economic growth, and that it will not allow them in a free-trade Europe?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend may be assured that the selective assistance that operates in Scotland is part of the United Kingdom scheme which is applied on even-handed criteria and meets the rules and regulations of the European Commission.

Police (Court Work)

11. **Mr. Harry Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the report made to him by the chief constable of Central Scotland police about the amount of police time spent in courts.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Efforts will continue to be made, in consultation with my noble and learned Friend the Lord Advocate, to reduce the amount of police time spent in court, so far as that is consistent with the administration of justice.

Mr. Ewing: I do not know what efforts continue to be made because it is now two years since I came to see the Minister about the absolutely disgraceful situation, particularly in the sheriff courts in Scotland, and nothing but nothing has happened. If anything, it is worse than it was two years ago. Is the Minister aware that the situation in the sheriff courts is nothing short of a national scandal? If anybody should be charged with wasting police time, it is the Scottish Courts Administration and the Minister.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Over the past 18 months the average delay period for summary criminal trials has been reduced from 17·6 to 14·9 weeks. The hon. Gentleman has correctly identified a pressing problem which we have been looking at hard. The main problem is caused by late changes of plea, and no solution has emerged which protects the interests of justice. If someone were required to plead guilty or not guilty 48 hours earlier, many accused would plead not guilty, causing even longer delays, because they wait to see how many witnesses appear in court to see what chances they have of getting off. I am sorry that that should be so. The hon. Member, who once had responsibility for the problem, has identified it correctly. The joint report of the chief police officers and the Crown Office made several important recommendations on the quality and timeliness of police reports and statements, the availability and citation of witnesses and the use of procedures to reduce inconvenience. Some findings may well be put into effect by the summer. I shall keep in close touch with the Lord Advocate on this point.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: Although I welcome the reduction in time that it takes for cases to come to trial, may I enjoin my hon. Friend to reconsider the perfectly simple scheme which I devised for both sheriff courts and High Courts, under which there would be a mandatory meeting of both parties to arrange pleas in time to dismiss the witnesses? It is not only policemen who spend a ludicrous part of their working time hanging round the courts, but witnesses who are reluctant to co-operate in the prosecution of crime.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I will certainly discuss my hon. and learned Friend's point with the Lord Advocate as soon as possible and draw those comments to his attention.

Employment Strategy

12. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next expects to meet the Scottish Trades Union Congress to discuss employment strategy in Scotland.

Mr. Rifkind: I met the general council of the Scottish Trades Union Congress on 10 November 1989 for a general discussion on the Scottish economy. There are no plans for further meetings at present.

Mr. Clarke: Does the Secretary of State intend to raise with the STUC and British Steel the crucial importance of investment at Clydesdale and Imperial mills? Will he discuss with them the recent gossip, rumours and speculation about foreign deals? Will he tell the House whether he considers the Scottish capacity for producing seamless tubes to be important, especially for the North sea?

Mr. Rifkind: When I last met the STUC we discussed those matters and agreed that it would be highly desirable if British Steel could be persuaded to consider further investment in the steel industry in Scotland. That industry has different components, including the category to which the hon. Gentleman referred. The Scottish Office intends to ensure that its views on the future plate mill strategy for Scotland are taken into account by British Steel when it comes to develop its future strategy. At the end of the day these are matters for British Steel, but it is important that it should be aware of the good case that exists for investment in Scotland.

Mr. Robertson: The Secretary of State is only too well aware of the thousands of livelihoods in Scotland that depend on the steel industry. How can it possibly be right for Ministers to abdicate responsibility for all those people and simply to hand over the final decision for this vital industry to the board of directors of British Steel plc?

Mr. Rifkind: The employment opportunities that exist because of the steel industry are important, as are the employment opportunities presented by Yarrow, Ferranti, IBM or any large employer in Scotland. The Government do not directly provide employment. Their responsibility is obviously to encourage an atmosphere and a quality in the economy that encourage job creation. The hon. Gentleman will join me in feeling great pleasure because unemployment in Scotland has fallen by 150,000 over the past two or three years.

Mr. Neil Hamilton: When my right hon. and learned Friend next meets the STUC, will he inquire whether it has changed its policy of opposing job-creating investment, such as that which was to take place at Ford of Dundee, and whether it is still its policy to support Scotland as a museum of industrial archaeology by public sector subsidies rather than supporting the Government's policy to attract private sector investment from abroad, thereby securing the jobs of the Scottish people indefinitely?

Mr. Rifkind: I am glad to say that, unlike the Labour party, the STUC supports the Government's Scottish Enterprise proposals and the way in which training is to be developed to local enterprise companies throughout Scotland. We welcome that support. It is a pity that, so far, the Labour party has felt unable to support us.

Mr. Eadie: Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that, given the serious employment problems in Scotland, it is far too long—four months—since he last met the STUC? Is he aware that the serious position in Midlothian is causing great concern? Recently, Sneddons went into receivership, with the loss of 200 or 300 jobs? Crystal Glass has threatened to close. The coal mining and engineering industries have contracted. I am worried about employment prospects in Midlothian. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman consider giving Midlothian special regional status to tackle the employment problem?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman has rightly drawn attention to the various closures in his constituency, but I think that he would wish to point out fairly that many more jobs have been created in Midlothian over the past few months and years than have been lost.

Mr. Eadie: No.

Mr. Rifkind: If that had not happened, it would have been impossible for me to say, as I can, that unemployment has fallen greatly in Midlothian over the past two or three years.

Mr. Oppenheim: Will my right hon. and learned Friend remind the STUC leaders that there are more people in work in Scotland than ever before, but that that is no thanks to certain trade union leaders who put the interests of their members at Dagenham above those of the jobless in Dundee?

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is right to say that the number of people in employment in Scotland is at its highest ever recorded level.

Mr. Dewar: A month ago at Scottish questions, when replying to me, the right hon. and learned Gentleman agreed that it was important that British Steel was aware of the Scottish Office view that there was a strong case for investing in the Scottish steel industry. Despite the statements of Conservative Back Benchers, that has nothing to do with industrial archaeology. What steps have been taken to get this message across? Have there been meetings at a senior level with British Steel and involving Ministers? Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept that it is essential that he personally takes up the cudgels on behalf of the Scottish steel industry?

Mr. Rifkind: I must ask the hon. Gentleman to await my answer to the next question on the Order Paper, which deals with that very matter.

British Steel

13. **Mr. Sillars:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next expects to meet the chairman or chief executive of British Steel.

Mr. Rifkind: I expect to see the chairman of British Steel in the relatively near future.

Mr. Sillars: Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that there is a different dimension in relationships between the Scottish Office and IBM and the Scottish Office and British Steel, because he deliberately privatised British Steel? When the right hon. and learned Gentleman meets British Steel senior executives, will he discuss the fact that there are lying at Leith docks mile upon mile of welded pipe which will be used to extract Scottish oil from the Scottish waters of the North sea, and not a single mile of it has been produced in Scottish steel mills?

When will the right hon. and learned Gentleman press British Steel to accept—and will he accept unequivocally —the call by shop stewards at Dalziel today that the welded steel mill that British Steel is earmarking for Teesside should go to Dalziel in Lanarkshire, which would increase its take from Ravenscraig and ensure that Scottish steel jobs are created from the massively expanding demand for steel products in the Scottish waters of the North sea?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman is correct to say that there are imports of steel into the United Kingdom in categories that are simply not manufactured in this country, in Scotland or elsewhere. It is obviously a matter for British Steel to decide whether that makes sense or whether it should start manufacturing in the United Kingdom steel that it currently imports. That is a matter for British Steel to decide and, naturally, we hope that if it comes to that judgment, it will choose a Scottish location for the manufacture of products of that kind.

Dr. Bray: Is the Secretary of State aware that the shutdown at Ravenscraig, however unwelcome, is being handled with the customary responsibility and competence of the managers and steel workers there so as not to prejudice the long-term future of the plant? Will he make sure that the chairman of British Steel fully understands the implications of the plate review for the future of Dalziel and Ravenscraig up to and beyond 1994?

Mr. Rifkind: I join the hon. Gentleman in paying tribute to the responsible attitude of shop stewards and work force at Ravenscraig, and I agree with him that it is important for all in Scotland who attach importance to these matters to ensure that British Steel is aware of the attractions of Scotland as a location for investment, either at Dalziel or in respect of its other steel activities north of the border.

Mr. Holt: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that there would be considerable resentment on Teesside if he were to use, or seek to use, undue influence on British Steel? The people of England are just as entitled to produce steel—on Teesside—as the Scots are; let the board of management make that decision. I am sorry that there are no socialists from Teesside here today to fight for jobs on Teesside, as I am doing, and I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend has got the message.

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The decision must be based on the good commercial case that can be put in regard to where investment should go. All parts of the United Kingdom would welcome steel investment, and it is the responsibility of us who live in Scotland to put such arguments as point towards investment in Scotland. I have no doubt that my hon. Friend will be making similar representations on behalf of his constituency and his part of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Dewar: I am genuinely grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, for calling me again. I welcome the fact that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is soon to meet the chairman of British Steel. May I press on him the urgency of doing that in a short time scale, given the imminence of decisions that may affect the Scottish industry? Will he bear very much in mind the fact that British Steel is not just another private sector company but that it has a wider responsibility, given its history and the vulnerability and importance of the industry in Scotland? Its special status is reflected by the existence of the golden share.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman knows as well as I do that the golden share applies only in regard to any attempt by any outside interest to acquire more than 15 per cent. of the shares in British Steel, and I am not aware of any suggestion that that is about to happen or is likely to happen.

As for the overall responsibilities of British Steel, the hon. Gentleman will be aware of the assurance that was given at the time of privatisation, and which has since been repeated—that if at any time British Steel did not wish to continue with its assets at Ravenscraig, it would consider any private sector bid for those assets to ensure the continuation of steel activity north of the border. That is a matter to which I attach importance and to which the Prime Minister referred when questioned about it at this Dispatch Box.

Council House Sales

14. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many council houses have been sold to sitting tenants in Scotland since May 1979.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Since April 1979, over 184,500 public sector houses in Scotland have been sold to sitting tenants. Included in that figure are over 132,000 sales by local authorities.

Mr. Knox: What percentage of the council house stock in Scotland has been sold to sitting tenants? If the figure is still significantly below that in England, what further steps does my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State intend to take to increase the number of sales in Scotland?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The figure is now 18·6 per cent., and south of the border it is 22·2 per cent. The gap has narrowed. On the previous occasion that I reported to my hon. Friend, it had narrowed by 0·1 per cent., and it has closed by at least as much again. We have taken steps, by way of a right-to-buy publicity campaign, to ensure that tenants know of changes in the law. It should not be forgotten that the average rent in Scotland is approximately £20 and the average weekly cost of a mortgage is approximately £23. That is within the reach of thousands of families throughout Scotland.

Mr. Strang: Does the Minister appreciate that, notwithstanding the discounts on these council houses, many people in Scotland who bought their houses are now in arrears with building societies because they cannot afford the high interest rates? Does he appreciate that the

Government's policy of cutting public support for council housing, and thus forcing rents up, led many people to buy houses when they would probably have been better advised not to do so? When will the Government reconsider their whole approach to this issue? When will they start to provide decent support for public sector housing? When will they allow local authorities to avoid increasing rents excessively and start building some of the council houses that are needed?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Obviously, in the case of the public sector housing stock, the level of rents is determined by what is considered to be an appropriate level of management and maintenance. Public sector sales —sales to sitting tenants—greatly benefit the remainder of the public sector housing stock. Fewer than 0·1 per cent. of houses sold to tenants are being repossessed. The overall number is very small. Also, building societies are prepared to discuss with those concerned suitable phasing arrangements to enable debts to be paid.

Mrs. Gorman: Can my hon. Friend tell me what progress is being made in respect of the rents-into-mortgages schemes in Scotland? This is a terrific idea, which I hope can be extrapolated to the new town corporation houses in my area. Changing a rent into a mortgage is a very simple idea.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I was present when the Prime Minister handed over the first deed of contract to a remedial teacher in Uphall, who was gaining her own house under this scheme. There have been more than 500 expressions of interest, and we expect the scheme to be highly successful. Of course, we shall review the success of the operation shortly.

Local Government Finance

16. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has as to how many extra staff have been employed by local authorities for the administration of the poll tax system.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Local authority staffing levels are the responsibility of individual authorities. Information on numbers of staff employed for particular duties is not held centrally.

Mr. Home Robertson: I find it remarkable that, on this question, the Secretary of State is not facing the music. The poll tax is surely one job-creation scheme that Scotland could have done without. Will the Minister take this opportunity to explain how his right hon. and learned Friend's £4 million poll tax panic package will be distributed, and where the money will come from? Can he explain why his right hon. and learned Friend failed to protest in Cabinet last Tuesday; why he required us, on Tuesday and Wednesday, to explain that such blatant discrimination against Scotland was an outrage; and why his right hon. and learned Friend was looking like a right idiot on Thursday? What kind of humiliation will it take to make the Secretary of State resign?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. and learned Friend will make a statement to the House on the details of the scheme. [HON. MEMBERS: "When?"] Shortly. The Budget is, of course, secret until it has been delivered. The meeting to which the hon. Gentleman referred was not a discussion session, but a relatively formal meeting. The matter has been taken up by my right hon. and learned Friend. As to the source of the funds, suggestions that the sum of £4 million will be taken from sensitive Scots programmes are incorrect. The sums involved are marginal in the context of the total resources of £9·5 billion. It is part of the normal good housekeeping practised by all Ministers within overall programmes to adjust resources in response to changed evidence of need. The £4 million for this purpose will be found as part of the normal process of good housekeeping, and not by deliberate cuts in any programme.

Mr. Douglas: Does the Minister accept that, despite the increase in numbers employed, we have rightly had exemptions for Alzheimer's disease, transitional payments and now capital offsets? All those impinge on what Scots should have been paying since April 1989. Therefore, will the Minister instruct local authorities not to pursue poindings and warrant sales against costs that manifestly cannot be substantiated in law? Does he accept that it is not a matter just for the Budget but for the status of the Scottish Office, and that there is a clear indication that Scottish Office officials were not consulted and did not know what was happening in England and Wales?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I will not give any such guidance to local authorities. It is for them to choose the most appropriate measures to raise the revenue due to them from such persons as the hon. Gentleman. I will not give them any advice on that. Further exemptions, would breach the principle of accountability which underlies the whole concept of the community charge.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that on average about 90 per cent. of community charge payers are paying the community charge? Will he take time today to write to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), who is a lawyer, to ask him why he refuses to condemn those of his hon. Friends who wish to break the law?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We look forward to the remarks of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) and other Labour Front-Bench Members on their colleagues who are refusing to pay, which we believe to be wholly irresponsible because defying the law is a short-term policy which is unworthy of any hon. Members who espouse to be a future Government. I can indeed confirm what my hon. Friend said; on average 90 per cent. have paid the community charge in Scotland. I expect that figure to increase in coming months.

Mr. Wilson: Will the Minister clear up the big remaining mystery of last week? Did he threaten to resign, and was that what really pulled the Prime Minister back into step? Is the Minister aware of the statistics that have come out about the change in the number of poll tax registrations in Scotland? Before the whole thing began, the official Government estimate was 800,000 registration changes in Scotland in the first year. The actual number has been 1·5 million, every single one of them generating bureaucracy, expense and confusion. Will local authorities be compensated for the wrongness of the Government's official estimate? Will the Minister assure the House that, whatever else the £4 million comes from, it will not come from local authority budgets within the Scottish Office?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is ironical that the hon. Gentleman should express such concern about registration since he strongly opposed registration in the "Stop it" campaign. Those who have registered amount to 99 per cent. I believe that the system is working well. As to the hon. Gentleman's question about whether I or any of my colleagues threatened to resign, the answer is emphatically no.

Points of Order

3.32 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am rising to ask whether you have received any notification from the Government as to whether they intend to make a statement today about the seizure of nuclear trigger devices at Heathrow airport. I am sure that everyone in the House, on both sides, will agree that this is a profoundly important matter, relating not only to national security but to the United Kingdom's relationship with the Government of Iraq. It is something on which it is necessary for the House to hear from the Government very urgently. I should be obliged if the Leader of the House, who is here, could arrange for a statement to be made later today.

Mr. Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman has made his point. It is indeed a very serious matter. I am sure that what he has said will have been heard by the Leader of the House.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I invite you to make a statement on the following circumstances? Under Standing Order No. 128, a Select Committee governs the operation and compilation of the Register of Members' Interests. On the Order Paper today, there are 32 parliamentary questions tabled by the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith). I have given the hon. Gentleman notice that I would raise the point of order. On the last occasion that similar questions were tabled, at a cost of well over £3,000 to the taxpayers, the hon. Member admitted that it had nothing to do with his constituency but that he had tabled the questions on behalf of Price Waterhouse who wanted the information to form a business plan.

This is an abuse of the House. May I invite you, Mr. Speaker, to deprecate the practice until the Select Committee on Members' Interests has had an opportunity to examine the matter? I recognise that it is the responsible Select Committee. I had hoped, in the past when I raised this matter, that the publicity would lead to an end of the abuse, but that has not been the case. It would be helpful if you could say whether you prefer that sort of questioning about outside interests when an hon. Member receives several thousand pounds a year in his private income. The questions should not be asked in order to reflect that interest.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member is quite right to say that that is a matter for the Select Committee on Members' Interests, and I understand that that Committee is already looking into that practice.

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): On a separate point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am sure that it did not escape your notice that, at the start of Scottish Questions, there was only one Conservative Back Bencher in attendance. In the course of the hour, two other Scottish Back-Bench Conservative Members came into the Chamber, one of whom did not manage to remain until the end of Question Time. Will you convey to them that they have a constitutional responsibility to be here to question the Secretary of State for Scotland and they are not absolved from that by encouraging large numbers of English Members to communicate their wishes?

Mr. Speaker: I like to see the Chamber full for Question Time, but hon. Members' other engagements are not a matter for me.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): I wonder, Mr. Speaker, whether you observed the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) arriving late during Scottish Questions, asking her question and swanning out again? Would you consider that that is a good way to get a question called?

Mr. Speaker: I think that the hon. Lady had a question on the Order Paper today.

Mrs. Fyfe: So did I.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, I know but I do not know why the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) arrived late or may have left early.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Further to the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), Mr. Speaker. In the past, the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) used to do exactly the same with agriculture questions, and the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) has a research assistant who has been approaching all lady Members on the treatise that she is doing on the representation of women in Washington and in the House of Commons.

Mr. Speaker: I think that the House has weightier matters to discuss this afternoon.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Ordered,

That the draft Industrial Training (Northern Ireland) Order 1990 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Fallon.]*

Local Authority Playing Fields

3.37 pm

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to remove from local authorities the power to dispose of land used as playing fields, except in circumstances where ownership is passed on for continued use as playing fields to a recreational association of charitable status under the terms of the Recreational Charities Act 1958.

We have all heard of the man who said, "Whenever I feel like taking violent exercise I go to bed and stay there until I feel better." However, there is no doubt that a healthy body aids the mind to be healthy too. Therefore, I think that people who practise sports or keep themselves fit have a healthy mind and a healthy body to boot.

There are two dangers in sport at the moment. First, some local education authorities have for a long time discouraged competitive sport. I number among them the Inner London education authority which, during the past 10 years, has largely discouraged competitive games within school sport. That authority has now changed its position completely after conducting a thorough and careful investigation, and it is now in favour of competitive sports in schools.

Another example of the disastrous discouragement of competitive games is the headmistress in Bristol who banned an egg and spoon race on school sports day because she thought that it would encourage undue competitiveness in children. Nothing could be more absurd. That type of attitude has damaged sport in schools no end. Eight out of ten children in schools today will not keep up a sport after leaving school; therefore, sport in schools needs every possible encouragement. In addition, with our test team poised on the brink of a possible great victory in the West Indies at this moment, we can see the sheer pleasure for the nation of producing successful international teams. We hope that our soccer team, too, will be successful this evening.

The second danger to sport is the selling of playing fields for building. When playing fields are sold, an amenity is lost which may never be replaced, and the environment is permanently damaged. Competitive sport in schools is regaining popularity, thanks in part to the widespread support of many hon. Members, including the sponsors of the Bill—among them my hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey), the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Small Heath (Mr. Howell) and the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Miss Hoey), to whom I express my great appreciation. But we still have some way to go because playing fields are continuing to disappear for building.

It is said that an area the size of the Isle of Wight is lost every year. That is a huge acreage to lose, bearing in mind the fact that the National Playing Fields Association says that we should have six acres per thousand of the population. Just to achieve that statistic, which is small enough, we should need an extra 6,304 acres of playing fields in the south-east, an extra 2,793 acres in London, an extra 791 acres on Merseyside and an extra 974 acres in the west midlands.

Anyone who seeks to oppose the Bill will have to examine his or her conscience and realise that to do so will be to deny opportunities for sport to our children and to adult members of the community. That is the responsibility the House faces.

In an Adjournment debate on 12 February, the hon. Member for Vauxhall raised a number of these issues in a remarkable speech and kindly allowed me to refer to sports facilities in my constituency. I shall mention those within the broad national context, because the Bill is concerned with playing fields right across the land. In my constituency, Ealing council is seeking to dispose of 17 acres of playing fields at Cayton road for building development. They are in a heavily built-up area with no other leisure facilities for children or the community, and they are absolutely vital to the community.

I understand that the borough is seeking to acquire the substantial playing fields and facilities at the Warren Farm sports complex, but it must be understood that that facility will not serve the neighbourhood of Cayton road. It is too far away and there are no public transport facilities. Moreover, the schools that use the Cayton road playing fields do not want to transfer to Warren Farm and nor do the public. The two sites are not interchangeable.

The loss of local facilities will be particularly hard on the young who require not only somewhere close to home where they can play and practise informally but somewhere to spend a few minutes with their friends playing a game. Most hon. Members have had the pleasure of doing that. The Cayton road playing fields must remain playing fields, and my Bill will secure their future.

Educational and community playing fields acquired through the public purse require further protection, given that they are disappearing at the rate that I have described. The Government are due to produce a much-needed consultative planning guidance note on planning for sport. They have also recently published a consultative paper proposing changes to deemed consent planning procedures whereby local authorities can grant themselves planning permission for more profitable forms of development in advance of the sale of playing fields.

Do these steps go far enough? I believe not. I propose that local authorities be prevented from disposing of playing fields. Some may consider that an excessive and inflexible requirement, but there is a duty on all of us to look beyond the 20th century and the early 21st century. Land lost for building or for any other purpose is lost for ever, and that should be on the conscience of anyone who opposes the Bill. Future generations will not thank us if we take the short-term view and allow the sporting endowment of a century to be frittered away.

The only way of safeguarding land for public recreation and sport is to establish charitable trusts for a particular area under the Recreational Charities Act 1958. If a local authority wants to dispose of playing fields, it should be allowed to do so only in circumstances in which their use as outdoor playing space is legally assured. Provision should be made for such land to be disposed of to appropriately constituted recreational charities—and not for either private or public building, ever. The land can then continue to be used as playing fields, and will become subject to the charities Act and to the oversight and control of the Charity Commissioners. The Bill will enable people with an interest in the sports facilities in their neighbourhood to take the initiative and to exercise self-help.

In the longer term, my Bill will establish a partnership with local government in introducing expertise and new potential sources of financial support. It will also increase the likelihood of reductions in public expenditure, so that money can be beneficially released for the development of other recreational and community initiatives. The Bill is not mandatory. Its purpose is to protect the recreational or playing fields land bank that is our heritage in such a way that local authorities can, if they choose, transfer the ownership of such land at reasonable cost to responsible bodies within their own communities. The public interest and public benefit of any such transfer will be guaranteed by the limited scope of disposal to recreational charities only.

This nation has a particular duty to our children, and to those who are no longer children but who enjoy sport, to ensure that facilities are available to learn sports, and to enhance public enjoyment of them, at all levels and ages, by those of every creed.

3.47 pm

Mr. Sydney Bidwell (Ealing, Southall): I do not take second place to the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) in my zeal to ensure that the existing playing field stock is not only sustained but substantially expanded. I myself was a schoolboy sports enthusiast, and I remain an ardent supporter of sport in general.

I oppose the Bill because, although the hon. Member for Ealing, North raises a point of general principle that no right hon. or hon. Member would oppose, he could not resist the temptation to let fly and seriously to attack the Labour-controlled London borough of Ealing, despite the difficulties that confronts it at this time. It is well known in the locality that the hon. Member has been involved in a running battle with Ealing borough council for a considerable time.

The school playing fields to which the hon. Gentleman referred are connected with Ealing Green boys' school in my constituency, with which I have had a great deal to do over many years. With my encouragement, groups of boys from that school come to see debates and 10 o'clock Divisions in this House. From time to time, I visit the school to explain the workings of the House—although occasionally, I find that difficult to do. Never in all those years have I heard any complaint from the school or its headmaster about the local authority's plans for the playing fields of which the hon. Member for Ealing, North spoke.

I wish to put on record the practical difficulties faced by the London borough of Ealing and its plans to allow the Notting Hill housing association to develop 10 of the 17 acres of the Cayton road playing fields for social housing. The rest of the site, which is currently underused grassland, will be developed into a public park. The site is currently used as a sports ground by Ealing Green high school and is some distance from the school. It is not open to the public and has no ecological merit. The council proposes to relocate the school's playing fields if a suitable alternative site can be found, and there is a strong chance of that.

No relocation proposals will be considered without extensive consultation and the school can expect to remain at Cayton road for some time. There was extensive consultation on the proposals last year, including a public meeting organised by the planning and economic development department of the borough council.

On 22 June, the Department of the Environment issued a direction preventing planning permission from being granted. That may have something to do with pressure from the hon. Member for Ealing, North, who will have quite a struggle to retain his seat because of the poll tax. People in flats and young couples who have taken on mortgages on their houses will struggle to pay twice as much under the community charge——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We must not widen the debate into that.

Mr. Bidwell: I digress, and I shall now return to the subject.

The additional housing that will be provided will help to combat the homelessness crisis and reduce the burden of the bed and breakfast bill on local ratepayers. Ealing has 1,700 people in temporary accommodation and 9,500 households on council waiting lists. The council has been told by central Government to provide 9,000 new homes in the borough. There is a great scarcity of land for private and public development. At the same time, under the proposals a new park will be opened for public use, and Ealing Green high school will be relocated to an equally suitable site.

No decision on the Cayton road application has yet been made, and the views of local people will be fully considered. The London borough of Ealing will consult Ealing Green high school about finding a suitable site. The public will save because such housing will relieve the colossal cost of bed-and-breakfast accommodation. Those are the facts.

I have been looking up the record of the hon. Member for Ealing, North in debates. He warmly supported the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981 against anxieties expressed by some Opposition Members. Locally, he is regarded as the ooslam bird who tries to fly in all directions simultaneously and he will come unstuck because of those antics today.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Harry Greenway, Mr. Richard Tracey, Mr. Denis Howell, Miss Ann Widdecombe, Miss Kate Hoey, Mr. David Amess, Mr. John Carlisle, Mr. Edward Leigh, Mr. Phillip Oppenheim, Mr. David Evennett and Mr. David Evans.

LOCAL AUTHORITY PLAYING FIELDS

Mr. Harry Greenway accordingly presented a Bill to remove from local authorities the power to dispose of land used as playing fields, except in circumstances where ownership is passed on for continued use as playing fields to a recreational association of charitable status under the terms of the Recreational Charities Act 1958: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 20 April and to be printed. [Bill 114.]

Royal Assent

Mr. Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified Her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Consolidated Fund Act 1990.
Strathclyde Regional Council Order Confirmation Act 1990.
British Film Institute Southbank Act 1990.
Birmingham City Council Act 1990.

Social Security Bill (Allocation of Time)

Mr. Speaker: Before we proceed to the allocation of time motion, I must announce to the House that I have selected all the amendments in the name of the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer), with the exception of amendment (c).

3.55 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Sir Geoffrey Howe): I beg to move,

That the following provisions shall apply to the remaining proceedings on the Bill:—

Report and Third Reading

1.—(1) The proceedings on consideration and Third Reading of the Bill shall be completed in two allotted days and shall be brought to a conclusion at the times shown in the following Table:—

TABLE

Allotted day	*Proceedings*	*Time for conclusion of proceedings*
First day	New Clauses 19, 21 and 22	9:00 p.m.
	New Clauses 23 and 26	11:00 p.m.
	New Clauses 1 to 6	Midnight
	New Clauses 7 and 8	1:00 a.m.
Second day	Remaining New Clauses	7:00 p.m.
	Amendments to Clauses; New Schedules and amendments to Schedules	9:00 p.m.
	Third Reading	10:00 p.m.

(2) Standing Order No. 80 (Business Committee) shall not apply to this Order.

Order of proceedings

2. No Motion shall be made to alter the order in which proceedings on consideration of the Bill are taken.

Dilatory Motions

3. No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of, proceedings on the Bill shall be made on an allotted day except by a member of the Government, and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

Extra time on allotted day

4.—(1) On the first allotted day paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings on the Bill for three hours after Ten o'clock.

(2) Any period during which proceedings on the Bill may be proceeded with after Ten o'clock under paragraph (7) of Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) shall be in addition to the said period of three hours.

(3) If an alloted day is one to which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 stands over from an earlier day, paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 shall apply to the proceedings on the Bill for a period of time equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion; and on the first allotted day that period shall be added to the said period of three hours.

Private business

5. Any private business which has been set down for consideration at Seven o'clock on an allotted day shall, instead of being considered as provided by Standing Orders, be considered at the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill on that day, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the private business for a period of three hours from the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill or, if those proceedings are concluded before Ten o'clock, for a period equal to the time elapsing between Seven o'clock and the conclusion of those proceedings.

Conclusion of proceedings

6.—(1) For the purpose of bringing to a conclusion any proceedings which are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order and which have not previously been brought to a conclusion, other than the proceedings specified in sub-paragraph (2) below, Mr. Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others)—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed (including, in the case of a new Clause or new Schedule which has been read a second time, the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill);

(c) the Question on any amendment or Motion standing on the Order Paper in the name of any Member, if that amendment is moved or Motion is made by a member of the Government;

(d) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded;

and on a Motion so made for a new Clause or a new Schedule, Mr. Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(2) For the purpose of bringing to a conclusion any proceedings which the Table in paragraph 1 above specifies are to be brought to a conclusion at Nine o'clock on the second allotted day and which have not previously been brought to a conclusion, Mr. Speaker shall forthwith put (so far as they are applicable and notwithstanding any Order of the House relating to the order in which the Bill is to be considered) the following Questions (but no others)—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed (including, in the case of a new Schedule which has been read a second time, the Question that the Schedule be added to the Bill);

(c) the Question that the new Schedule (amendment 22) be added to the Bill;

(d) the Question that all remaining amendments standing in the name of a member of the Government be made to the Bill;

(e) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded;

and on a Motion so made for a new Schedule, Mr. Speaker shall put only the Question that the Schedule be added to the Bill.

(3) Proceedings under sub-paragraph (1) or (2) above shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

(4) If an allotted day is one on which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) would, apart from this Order, stand over to Seven o'clock—

(a) that Motion shall stand over until the conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order, are to be brought to a conclusion at or before that time;

(b) the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this order, are to be brought to a conclusion after that time shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

(5) If an allotted day is one to which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 stands over from an earlier day, the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which under this Order are to be brought to a conclusion on that day shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

Supplemental orders

7.—(1) The proceedings on any Motion made by a member of the Government for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after they have been commenced, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings.

(2) If on an allotted day on which any proceedings on the Bill are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended,

before that time no notice shall be required of a Motion made at the next sitting by a member of the Government for varying of supplementing the provisions of this Order.

Saving

8. Nothing in this order shall—

(a) prevent any proceedings to which the Order applies from being taken or completed earlier than is required by the Order; or

(b) prevent any business (whether on the Bill or not) from being proceeded with on any day after the completion of all such proceedings on the Bill as are to be taken on that day.

Recommittal

9.—(1) References in this Order to proceedings on consideration or proceedings on Third Reading include references to proceedings at those stages respectively, for, on or in consequence of, recommittal.

(2) On an allotted day no debate shall be permitted on any Motion to recommit the Bill (whether as a whole or otherwise), and Mr. Speaker shall put forthwith any Question necessary to dispose of the Motion, including the Question on any amendment moved to the Question.

Interpretation

10. In this Order—

"allotted day" means any day (other than a Friday) on which the Bill is put down as first Government Order of the Day, provided that a Motion for allotting time to the proceedings on the Bill to be taken on that day either has been agreed on a previous day, or is set down for consideration on that day;

"the Bill" means the Social Security Bill.

Hon. Members do not need me to tell them that my right hon. Friends and I do not table timetable motions without due consideration. We believe that it is important for all legislation, including this important Social Security Bill, to be debated and scrutinised properly by Parliament. For that reason alone, it is a matter of importance that one feels obliged to move such a motion, particularly on this fairly short Bill.

It was striking that the Bill's Committee stage was orderly and compact. Subsequently, we reached what I thought was a sensible agreement between the usual channels to allocate a day and a half for Report and Third Reading. Both sides judged that sufficient, so it should have been, and so, indeed, it was. For that reason, I attach some significance to the fact that the motion means that the House will spend more time on the Bill, not less, than was originally planned by the usual channels.

The Committee stage was, in many respects, a model of how the detailed scrutiny processes of the House should operate. Opposition Members moved about 120 amendments, some significant but others less so, and four new clauses which in their view would have improved the Bill. Where the Government were able to agree with them, my right hon. and hon. Friends accepted their points. The Government moved about 145 amendments and the whole process was completed in about 30 hours.

In his remarks at the end of the Committee stage, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security summed it up:

> "Some difficult issues have been discussed and I think we have managed to discuss them, despite the vigour and enthusiasm of the Opposition in attacking us, with good humour. That is very important, and in no way would I underestimate the strength of feeling of the Opposition about some of the measures."

On the same occasion, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short)—I am pleased to see her taking her place with such zeal and diligence—who led for the Opposition, said:

> "It has been a civilised but serious Committee."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee G,* 8 March 1990; c. 462-63.]

That was a sensible judgment. I think that all my right hon. and hon. Friends who had participated in or followed the proceedings of the Committee agreed with her.

What happened subsequently, however, revealed a startling and far less constructive attitude by the Opposition. They have tabled no fewer than 21 new clauses and a further 21 amendments for consideration on Report. Few of the new clauses relate to subjects that were discussed in Committee. The remainder have been tabled to widen substantially the scope of the Bill and as pegs on which to hang a series of debates about matters not directly related to its main purposes. Unless we take sensible steps now, the debate will become unmanageable.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Did not the Government table new clauses on matters not related to the substance of the Bill when it went before the Committee, precisely because they found themselves in difficulty with other legislation? The clauses that have been tacked on bear no relation to the substance of the Bill in its original form. The Government have extended the agenda and turned the Bill into a holdall to pick up the pieces of other shoddy legislation.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I do not accept that analysis. I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, and I shall deal with it shortly. The usual process for the handling of a Bill is for the main substance to be debated in Committee and for discussion to focus more sharply when it returns to the Floor of the House. What has happened with this Bill has paralleled what happened with the National Health Service and Community Care Bill. The House will remember that that Bill made good progress through Committee, only to be brought to a virtual standstill on the Floor of the House by the behaviour of some Opposition Members when we began to make headway on Report.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Has the Leader of the House forgotten what really happened? That Bill was obstructed and eventually guillotined for what some might say was exactly the same reason as this Bill will be obstructed—I understand by the right hon. and learned Gentleman's Back Benchers—and guillotined. We are debating the same issue—the charges in residential homes. Do not the Government bear responsibility for that? It has nothing to do with my hon. Friends.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: If the hon. Gentleman believes that, he will believe anything. What happened on the National Health Service and Community Care Bill was overwhelmingly the result of the time taken by Opposition Members. That Bill could continue its passage through the House in a sensible manner only after the successful moving of a timetable motion by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health. He did so only after many hours of debate on Report.

The Social Security Bill is a much smaller Bill. Because of the similarity in the way in which the Opposition are apparently proposing to handle the Bill, it is sensible to let the House make a decision at the outset of the Report stage on the amount of time to be devoted to consideration

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of the Bill. Indeed, that view is in line with the view increasingly often aired in more than one part of the House, that timetabling is generally helpful.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton) *rose*——

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I thought that that might provoke my hon. Friend.

Sir Peter Emery: Will my right hon. and learned Friend cast his mind towards the two Procedure Committee reports about the Committee and Report stages of Bills? If the Government had followed our advice, this debate might have been unnecessary. Our reports make two recommendations similar to what I think my right hon. and learned Friend is now attempting to do. Is not he attempting to ensure that all parts of a Bill are debated in Committee, and that only new factors of apparent importance are debated on Report? Would not it be better to timetable in that way and so ensure that this sort of position does not arise?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend gives me such comprehensive support that I must welcome it. However, I must take care to ensure that my response is not so enthusiastic that it makes him feel that the argument is already over. There is a great deal in what my hon. Friend said. One point about the recommendation for more timetabling that emerged from what he said is that the earlier that that is undertaken the more value it has.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will be cautious about those recommendations, which touch on the heart of what the House is about. The Government, through their hubris last year, introduced 11 guillotines. That meant that much legislation was unargued, unreasoned and caused difficulty in the country through the necessity to defend our position. Our fear about the guillotine is that many of the issues arise as a consequence of debate, and are not matters of settled judgment beforehand. In a spirit of humility, I ask the Government to be cautious about such arguments.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I would not imagine my hon. Friend making a point of that kind except in a spirit of the utmost humility and I accept it in that sense.

The time foreshadowed for the Report stage was a day and a half and that is not unreasonable. We are now providing for rather more time than that to be devoted to debate and for that to be carried out in a more orderly fashion. That should command reasonable support.

I hope that the House will agree that it makes sense to keep within reasonable bounds the amount of time that can be devoted on the Floor of the House to topics that were touched on or discussed in detail in Committee. There is much to be said for a fair, but disciplined approach to debating the new clauses and amendments that will shortly come before the House and the timetable motion will encourage that process. If the House approves the motion, the more self-disciplined we can be, the more new clauses and amendments we shall be able to debate.

I repeat the central point that the Bill will now have longer for debate than the one and a half days agreed through the usual channels. Therefore, I see no merit in accepting the amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer).

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): The Leader of the House has repeated his earlier point that there will be more time to debate the Bill and its new clauses. How can that possibly be so when the first six Opposition new clauses are being squashed into one hour and when the most important of these is about poll tax benefit, and all hon. Members know that that will take up the whole hour on its own?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The total time allotted exceeds the normal one and a half sitting days——

Mr. Battle: That is time to debate Government new clauses.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The Government new clauses deal with important matters with which it is perfectly sensible to deal at this stage. For example, the social fund amendment is a response to events that have occurred since the Bill's introduction. The measure relating to income support payments for people in residential care and nursing homes is a sensible response to the concerns expressed earlier this month by hon. Members on both sides of the House. That is a complicated area and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was understandably concerned to get it right. That new clause was tabled yesterday.

The new clause on occupational pensions' tabled last Friday improves the existing provisions, following further and useful consultations with interested parties. The overwhelming majority of the Government amendments are simply designed, as you would expect, Mr. Speaker, to improve the detailed drafting of the Bill. I see no reason to apologise for bringing any of the new clauses to the House on Report.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): Will the Leader of the House explain what possible justification the Government have for tabling a three-and-a-half page new clause on the duties of fathers to maintain their children if that saves social security costs—as seems to be the Government's only interest? When the Prime Minister made her speech about that in January we had plenty of time left in Committee. Why did the Government not bring that important issue forward sooner? We will not have enough time to discuss it properly now because of the guillotine motion.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will explain, it is important that that matter should have been thought through carefully before it was debated in the House. The new clauses, including the one to which the hon. Lady has referred, have intrinsic merits and they will provide an opportunity for hon. Members to air their views on those issues.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): The Leader of the House has just made a very serious point. He has suggested that the reason why the new clause has only just been introduced is that the issue had to be thought through. Was it not thought through when the Prime Minister made her speech in January?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Of course it was. Speeches made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister are lucid and effective, but even her speeches require a little time to be translated into clauses and then find their way into Bills such as this.

The time that will be made available under these arrangements is a sensible allocation, not least in the light of the experience on the National Health Service and Community Care Bill to which I have referred. It is a sensible way to ensure that these matters are discussed in an orderly and sensible fashion. No Government can stand back and allow the proper management of the business of Parliament to be threatened by the unreasonable prospect that could have followed from handling the Bill without a timetable motion. I commend the motion to the House.

4.10 pm

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): I shall try to be helpful, but I doubt whether the Government will take my advice. I cannot help reflecting that I have had the job of opposing a guillotine motion in the House on only one other occasion. The Government decisively rejected my advice and I have the feeling that they have regretted that decision ever since. It was made during the guillotine debate on 22 February 1988 on the poll tax Bill. I advised them that it was not a good idea to rush it through. There were 317 of them and 223 of us and, accordingly, the vote to rush the legislation through as quickly as possible was carried. The old phrase about turkeys voting for Christmas inevitably comes to mind. Having made the mistake once, perhaps the Government will listen more carefully today.

I am disappointed that the Leader of the House has chosen to bring forward the motion. I approach my job with a little caution, because I know that guillotine debates have a certain sameness about them, and I also know that it will not be long before the Government and Opposition are reversed. I do not disagree with the Leader of the House when he says that it is important to get sensible consideration of Bills in Committee. However, he stretched matters to excess in pretending that the guillotine on this series of debates constitutes the orderly management of Government business.

I had some hopes that the right hon. and learned Gentleman would be a reforming Leader of the House. He has made promises about the private Bill procedure and I thought that he would find better ways to deal with such things. I am afraid that, increasingly, he is becoming a party hack putting through business as effectively as he can and stifling opposition and debate. He has been a little disappointing. The guillotine motion is not business management, it is crisis management.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): The hon. Gentleman talks about crisis management. As a fellow retread, he will recall that some years ago when he sat on the Government Benches as the hon. Member for Lichfield and Tamworth, we both witnessed the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) standing at the Dispatch Box and moving five guillotine motions in one day. Does the hon. Gentleman think that that was orderly and that it was good management?

Mr. Grocott: The hon. Gentleman neglects the critical difference. At that time there was a deliberate attempt, helped by the House of Lords, to throw out major pieces of legislation to which we were committed. There was a different state of affairs at that time and the motions were presented much later in the parliamentary year. We had fewer guillotine motions than the present Government. I will not bore the House by reading the list of all the guillotine motions that the Government have presented. In the two and a half years since the general election more guillotine motions have been brought forward by the Government than were brought forward during a similar period by the last Labour Government. That has happened even though the Government have a large majority, a supine press and a largely docile House of Lords. I hope that the hon. Gentleman understands that the state of affairs is totally different.

What are the possible explanations for the Government bringing in a guillotine motion on this legislation at such short notice? The first might be that we were running out of parliamentary time at the end of a parliamentary year. Clearly that does not apply to this legislation. I know that, to Conservative Members, it must seem a long time since the Queen's Speech, but I remind them that we are only three months into the parliamentary year.

A second possible reason is that the Government's legislative programme is threatened. I know that they are losing by-elections, but the Government still have a substantial majority in the House, so surely they cannot claim that their programme is threatened.

Have the Opposition behaved irresponsibly when considering the Bill? That cannot be the reason: Second Reading was on 22 January and the Committee had 12 sittings, so there can be no suggestion of filibustering or of the Opposition behaving unreasonably.

The reason for this guillotine is that the Government are in a panic. Just for the record, let us get straight how the Government tabled their five new clauses, which are complicated and which deal with important issues. One was tabled on Monday; two more were tabled early on Tuesday morning; a fourth was tabled a little later; and the final one, on residential accommodation, appeared only at 5 pm yesterday. The first we knew about the guillotine motion was yesterday morning. If that is not crisis management I do not know what is.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Surely the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that the residential care provisions were changed because the Government were responding to the wishes of the House? He cannot grumble about that.

Mr. Grocott: The hon. Lady did not have the advantage that I had of being in Mid-Staffordshire on the day the Government lost the vote of residential accommodation and of seeing the panic at the Tory press conference when Conservatives had to explain how the Government were operating. I am sure that that panic has fed back to the Cabinet by now. The Government were in an indefensible position, so they are not being reasonable and sensible: they are panicking.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Grocott: I shall not give way as I have already been speaking for some time.

The Government are panicking because they can no longer rely on many of their Back Benchers. On Tuesday night in the debate on the flagship of their legislative programme, the poll tax, they were deserted by the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) and by the

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former Chancellor of the Exchequer, so it is not surprising that run-of-the-mill Back Benchers without big jobs are failing to support the Government.

As the Leader of the House rightly pointed out, our 21 new clauses touch on crucial areas such as residential care, the poll tax, the uprating of benefits in line with earnings, people with disabilities—important new clauses tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) deal with them—and the compensation of victims of radiation. Either all these new clauses, some of them supported by Conservative Members, will not be considered at all or debate on them will be grossly foreshortened. No Government with a majority of 100 or more, three months into the parliamentary year, should be doing this, and they would not be if they were in rational control of their programme.

I said at the beginning that I would try to be helpful, but I have a feeling that I am not striking a chord among Tory Members. If they will not take any notice of us I suggest, in their own interests, that they take a look at their record of rushing legislation through Parliament, to see what happens when they make a mess of it. The three guillotines on the "great" Social Security Bill still failed to produce a sensible Act. Time after time, with the poll tax legislation and social security legislation, the Government have not listened to reasoned argument and allowed enough time for debate, so they have looked stupid and sometimes have ended up in the courts thereafter.

The guillotine motion is not moved so that there can be sensible scrutiny of the Bill, but because the Government are in a panic. That is why we shall vote against it.

4.19 pm

Sir George Young (Ealing, Acton): Like the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott), I hope to be helpful. His speech was short on enthusiasm and seemed to be a bit of a ritual. Perhaps it was a word-processor-written speech with "social security" inserted for the name of the previous legislation on which he may have opposed a guillotine motion.

I spoke on Second Reading, but did not serve in Committee. We had a reasoned debate, with support from both sides. I understand from my hon. Friends who served on the Committee that it was a civilised procedure. Therefore, at first sight it may seem that the legislation does not deserve a guillotine motion. The reason for the guillotine and why I support it is what happened a fortnight ago.

A fortnight ago, I voted in every Division through the night. The notion that if one allowed this debate to proceed through the night there would be a civilised and rational discussion of new clauses is betrayed by anybody who was here a fortnight ago or anybody who reads *Hansard*. We got through about one clause in four hours and did not put the time to good use. If this measure were not guillotined, we would waste the small hours, and tomorrow afternoon the Government would have to introduce a guillotine motion. Against practice and even the declared intentions of Labour Members, it is sensible to introduce this motion to ensure a civilised debate in reasonable hours.

Although I have not always supported guillotine motions in the past and I did not support one on the community charge, I shall vote for this one with enthusiasm.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): I have followed the drift of the hon. Gentleman's argument, but it is inconsistent. Is it not better to debate matters at length than not debate them at all, which is what he will vote for if he votes for the motion?

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman misses my point. If one provides extensive time for debate, it is not put to productive use. I am not sure whether he was here a fortnight ago and listened to some of the debate——

Mr. Howarth: I was.

Sir George Young: The hon. Gentleman was. I challenge him to say that the hours between 10 pm and 7 am were put to the best possible use, that we got through a whole series of new clauses and had a useful discussion. We did not. Labour Members filibustered. They used the time to spin out discussion——

Ms. Short: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir George Young: No. The hon. Lady will be able to make her own speech.

That is why I have no hesitation in supporting the guillotine motion. We shall make more sensible use of time than if we did not have the guillotine and sat all through the night listening to boring speeches from Labour Members who are simply trying to spin out time. That does the House no good. People outside the House and Conservative Members wholly understand why the Government have introduced the motion.

4.23 pm

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): I am glad to have this opportunity to speak in the debate. I have spoken on one or two guillotine motions before and I shall refer to them.

The Leader of the House should have waited to listen to the debate. Whenever I moved a guillotine motion, I at least had the courtesy to listen to the debate. This is an important occasion, and he was at his lucid and most effective best—those were the words that he purloined from the Prime Minister—when he spoke to us. To run away immediately afterwards is grossly discourteous. It is not how the House of Commons should be run. He should be here to listen to the debate.

I mean no disrespect to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Patnick), who is left on the burning boat and serves alone. He is probably better than his colleagues and if he had the chance to speak, it might be better all round. It is shocking for a Leader of the House to move a guillotine motion and to skedaddle off as though it were nothing to do with him. The Patronage Secretary moved the previous timetable motion because the Leader of the House was not present to move his own motion—he was off in Chile or somewhere. The right hon. and learned Gentleman's absence during that previous debate is all the more reason why he should have stayed today.

The behaviour of the Patronage Secretary was bad as well. I have never in all my time as a Member seen a more raucous, demonstrative Patronage Secretary. I thought that he had been appointed to the Chief Whip's Office to bring a much-needed touch of elegance and courtesy. All his measures outside are matched when he comes into the Chamber. He sits next to the Leader of the House, shouts and interrupts everyone who wants to make a speech. He skedaddles off when he has the chance, leaving the hon. Member for Hallam, who is not allowed to reply, although I am sure that he is more capable of doing so than Ministers.

This is a discourteous way of treating the House of Commons, especially if the Government want the motion to be treated seriously, as it should be. I agree with the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) that it is dangerous for the House of Commons as a whole if we become used to the idea that we just need a guillotine motion to get business through.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): If the right hon. Gentleman thinks that it is discourteous for my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House not to be here, does he think that it is also discourteous for the shadow Leader of the House not to be here?

Mr. Foot: My hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) made an effective speech from the House of Commons' point of view, and everyone who heard it knows that it was a good speech. He is here to listen to the debate. I should have thought that every Conservative Member would understand that for a Leader of the House to move a motion and then clear off without having heard any of the replies is a discourteous way to treat the House of Commons. When I was Leader of the House, I stayed pretty well throughout the debates, certainly on these matters, to listen to the view of the House of Commons.

I underline the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin. It is foolish, even from the Government's point of view, not to listen to the House of Commons. The main purposes of a Leader of the House are not only to listen and move motions but to take messages from here to the Cabinet. Perhaps the breakdown in the Government's operations has occurred because that main task has not been performed. Cabinet does not learn what the House of Commons says, for example, in the early hours of the morning, when some of the most interesting developments take place—such as the debate a week or so ago that led to the other guillotine motion.

If such events are not reported to No. 10 Downing street by the Leader of the House, it shows a great weakness in our government and injures Cabinet government. Whenever there is a fresh Government crisis, the Leader of the House says, "We shall go back to Cabinet government." He says that almost twice-weekly now, but he is one of the chief offenders. He should tell No. 10 Downing street and the Prime Minister around the Cabinet table each week what is happening here. He cannot do so if he is not here to see what happens. Even in the Government's own interests, it would be better for the Leader of the House and the Patronage Secretary to pay attention to the House of Commons for a change and learn some wisdom from this place.

I was provoked into making those comments by the conduct of those on the Government Front Bench, but I now wish to start on a different note. I agree with the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills that this is a serious matter for the House of Commons as a whole, although I disagree with the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young), who has great knowledge of the House. It is a serious matter if Governments of any complexion get into the habit of thinking, "We can always introduce a guillotine motion to deal with these matters. If we get into trouble, we need not worry too much, and we need not even think of it at the beginning of a Bill." Indeed, a proposal to that effect is sometimes put forward by the Select Committee on Procedure.

That idea has always in the past been rejected by the House, and it should be rejected. I regret that the Chairman of the Procedure Committee, the hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), is not in his place because he could learn something by listening to this debate. It is important for all concerned to hear what the House of Commons as a whole has to say on issues such as this.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) is attending a meeting upstairs.

Mr. Foot: The hon. Gentleman may have a good cause for not being here, but he makes interruptions in debates such as this and has suggested that the House should conduct itself in this way. As I say, he might attend here on occasions such as this because people can learn by listening to what is said in the Chamber.

The idea that we should have a cut and dried timetable for every Bill, with utter certainty about each measure going through in an allotted time, would do great injury to the House as a whole. After all, every Government, even the next Labour Government, would like such powers. We never sought such powers when we were in office. I accept that I introduced, and urged the House to introduce, guillotine motions on particular Bills. Indeed, we introduced five in a single day, as some people are kind enough to recall—*[Interruption.]*—but even then I said exactly what I am saying now, which is that it would be a great injury to the House of Commons to have cut and dried guillotine motions on all Bills. The Government would love to have such a power but, by the same reckoning, it would greatly injure the power of the House, including the power of Government Back Benchers.

That that is true is borne out by the experience of the last few years, and Conservative Members will recall the debates that took place on what is now the Official Secrets Act 1989. A guillotine was introduced on that measure at a late stage—not to control speeches by my hon. Friends, but to gag Conservative Members.

Is there anyone who does not think that that measure would have been better had the Government listened to what Back Benchers said, and had even gone to the extreme length of incorporating into the legislation some of the amendments tabled by their supporters? The Government would have done better from their point of view and from that of the legislation.

I urge the Government—as I urge the new Government who will be coming into office; nobody knows exactly when, but it is within a measurable time—not to be tempted by the idea of saying, "Let us have a cut and dried procedure so that we can get every Bill through in exactly the way we want."

If the Government take that attitude, they will, as my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin said, finish up with legislation with gross defects. No measure has ever been pushed through with grosser defects than the poll tax

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legislation. The Government could have saved themselves a great deal of trouble by listening to what hon. Members in all parts of the House said about that legislation.

Had the Government not used the guillotine, they might even have had time to think up some of the brilliant ideas on the poll tax about which we have heard in the last week or two. Indeed, they might even have put those ideas to the House and got them approved. That is the purpose of debates in the House. I have found over a number of years that debates in Committee are some of the best. Those debates, be they late at night or early in the morning, are some of the most important of all.

A prime example of the point I am making occurred only a week or so ago, when the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton voted against the Government, and I accept that he has had a creditable record on the type of issue that was then before the House. He did his best to persuade the Government to adopt his view. Although he did not quite succeed, anyone who listened to that debate—and I listened to most of it—could see that that is what the House of Commons is for.

My hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) made his case very effectively, but it was the cross-play of argument with several Conservative Members that made the debate a most memorable one. In the end, the Government had to give way, but it was not only because of the vote. I claim that those who listened to the debate could come to only one conclusion: that something had to be done.

If only the Government had been wise enough not to introduce the guillotine, the debates on the poll tax legislation could have been much better. The Government could have learnt something from the House of Commons and could have had second thoughts, but, far from learning from experience in the House of Commons, they rushed off to introduce the guillotine to deal with the situation.

I do not want to elaborate a point that has been made quite clearly, but I have to say that, so far as I can judge —and I am an expert on the subject—that is why the present Government's use of the guillotine has been far more dangerous, extensive and elaborate than that of any Government since the introduction of the mechanism by the Liberal party before the first world war. Previous Governments took some care. They paused before introducing the guillotine. That is the purpose of debates such as the one that we are now having, but even this debate has been cut down—to some extent, in my opinion, wrongly.

As things are going, it seems that the Government would like to make introduction of the guillotine a simple formality. The procedure is used so often that one might almost think that it was a formality already, that in every Bill there was a clause providing that, when the Committee stage or the Report stage has been reached, the guillotine will be brought in. The present Government have introduced more guillotines to curtail debate at this stage of Bills than any other Government in British history. By doing so, they have done injury to the House of Commons, but principally to themselves. The more this is done, the worse the government of the country becomes. I hope, therefore, that my right hon. and hon. Friends, when they are given the chance to run affairs, will resist any temptation to follow the present Government's example in this field—as in any other field. Indeed, I am sure that they will.

The Leader of the House comes into the Chamber with a real hangdog look on his face. Time and again he appears looking as if he has just come from a meeting with the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine). *[Interruption.]* I am glad to have from such high authority, confirmation that that is what the Leader of the House has been doing. That is his excuse. He will have to troop round the country to keep up with his right hon. Friend the Member for Henley.

Let me give the Leader of the House some advice. If he wants to finish off his right hon. Friend, we shall help him. We too think that the right hon. Gentleman is not fit to be Prime Minister. When it comes to a comparison, there is not much choice—"small choice in rotten apples", as Shakespeare would have said. If the Leader of the House really wants to deal with the right hon. Member for Henley, he has only to ask him why he voted so eagerly for the application of the poll tax in Scotland when he knew that it was going to be so injurious to England. I do not know whether the right hon. Gentleman has had the nerve to cross the Scottish border when he has been on his tours. He takes trips everywhere else. He should be invited to Scotland soon and asked to reply to that question.

All these matters could be dealt with properly if only the Government learned that they should provide time in the House for arguments to take place properly. That is why I oppose the motion in good conscience. The Minister for Social Security, who is to reply to the debate, knows something about the Bill. I am sure that he will try to defend the Government's position. No doubt he is as good a person to defend it as anybody; certainly he will be much better than the Leader of the House or the Patronage Secretary, with whose eloquence we had to content ourselves on the last guillotine motion.

It is better that the Minister should deal with the motion. He starts with a measure of good will. I am trying to dissipate some of it so that he does not have too easy a time. The Minister has a long record. I do not know who will be Leader of the House in the next Parliament, but I am sure that some hon. Members who are now on the Government side, and perhaps the Minister himself, will be on the Opposition Benches, remembering what I am saying today. They may reflect then on how wise I was.

If only the Government would get the message, how much better it would be for the country. When the Minister replies to the debate, I ask him not to make the formal reply which he has been given by the Leader of the House but to express the view which he would get from this side of the House in this and future debates.

4.41 pm

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): It is always a pleasure to listen to the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), with his not infrequent strictures on the introduction of guillotine motions. One feels that one is listening to a maestro who had the opportunity, when he was in a similar position to my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House, of obtaining an entry in the "Guinness Book of Records" for the greatest number of guillotine motions introduced in one day. We are well aware of that and we shall continue to remind the House of it when Opposition Members complain that we are guillotining happily.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Given that his Government have extended the guillotining process, does not the hon. Gentleman consider that there might be a danger that the next Government, whoever they may be, will extend the process further? Does not the hon. Gentleman worry about that?

Mr. King: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point. It pre-empts what I intended to say in a few moments; perhaps I may come to it now.

The main problem that we face in the House is that we have opposition for opposition's sake. It has been going on for many years. Opposition Members recounted that the Government introduced a guillotine on the Local Government Finance Act 1988, which introduced the community charge. If my memory serves me right, we debated that measure for 180 hours or longer. Try as we might, we could not obtain from the Opposition one element of their alternative policy. It was just mindless opposition for the sake of opposition. Not one shred of policy came from the Opposition. There is still not a shred of policy on their alternative to the community charge, although they have a vague idea of values about which they trumpet in by-elections, but no one knows what the values are. It is like saying, "If you do not like my principles, I have plenty more where they came from."

Mr. Holt: Did my hon. Friend hear the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) on the radio the other morning? When he was asked by the interviewer if the Labour party had made up its mind on whether the future funding of local government would be by a property tax or a tax on each individual in the property, he said that that was one of the little points that Labour had not quite worked out.

Mr. King: That is right, but we are not here to debate the community charge. I should welcome that opportunity because we might have the chance to flush out Opposition policy. My point is that after 180 hours of endless debate in Committee and on the Floor of the House we could not obtain one shred of policy from the Opposition.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): My hon. Friend and I had the honour of serving in Committee on that Bill. Does he recall that Labour policy has changed twice since the Committee stage? Such policy as we were able to get out of the Opposition changed immediately afterwards, and it has subsequently changed again. What conclusions does my hon. Friend draw from that?

Mr. King: My hon. Friend invites me to draw conclusions. I note that the Labour party has introduced a flexible membership card, a credit card. It is like the party's policy—extremely flexible depending upon which by-election the party is contesting.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North) *rose*——

Mr. King: I am not giving way. I must get on because other hon. Members want to speak.

Not only did we have problems in flushing out any worthwhile opposition to the community charge and in obtaining concise, realistic debate, but we suffered the same experience on water privatisation. In my book that was an outstanding achievement for the Government. It has transformed the water and sewage industry and put it on a sound financial footing, which will deliver quality and efficiency to the consumer. Try as we might, all we got from the Opposition was mindless opposition with not a shred of alternative policy.

Mr. Wilson: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There is a danger of the House being misled by the hon. Gentleman, although I am sure he has no intention of doing so. No doubt he would want to confirm to the House that he and the hon. Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) were members of the Standing Committee on the Local Government Finance Bill, yet in all the hours of debate to which he referred they never opened their mouths.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I should like to hear a little more about the Social Security Bill.

Mr. King: I shall not travel along the path that I have been invited to follow, except to point out that the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) obviously does not yet know the workings of the House. He does not realise that as Parliamentary Private Secretaries my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) and I were not by convention entitled to make a contribution in Committee. Of course, our views are well known to the Government.

If we were to conclude the debate on the motion fairly abruptly, we should have about 14 more hours' debate on the Bill. That is a considerable amount of time. Not only will we continue until 1 o'clock tomorrow morning, but we will come back next Tuesday to complete consideration of the measure.

The experience that we have obtained in the House over the past few years with the introduction of a 10-minute limit on speeches at certain times shows succinctly that contributions to the point can be made in a short time. Open-ended debate encourages excessive waffling and flannel, which is often all that we hear from the Opposition when they do not like a measure but have no realistic alternative to offer in its place.

We owe it to the country to have clear, concise debate. There is an argument for having a timetable for Bills when they receive their Second Reading. We should debate that issue. Those of us who spend considerable time in Committee debating a measure come back to the House to hear the same points being debated all over again. Long hours are required to accommodate that debate. Timetabling a debate would not mean glossing over some points. On the contrary, it would concentrate the minds of hon. Members in an efficient debate on the matters at the core of the legislation. For that reason, I welcome the motion, so that we can get on with the real business, which is to improve social security benefits.

4.48 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): I feel that it ought to be said from this side of the House, relative to the intervention of the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) during the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), that the reason why my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) is not here is that he is attending a funeral, that of my late hon. Friend the Member for Bootle, Allan

[Mr. Alfred Morris]

Roberts, whose untimely passing is so widely mourned. I am sure that the hon. Member, with his customary decency, will now understand.

If the guillotining of the National Health Service and Community Care Bill was a disgrace, the Government's action today plumbs new depths of infamy. Whereas the NHS Bill was debated in Committee for weeks of late night sittings, the Social Security Bill never disturbed Ministers' schedules beyond 1pm on but two days a week. That alone makes this a preposterous motion. It is one about which I feel very strongly and, unlike the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young), I shall certainly oppose it.

There has never been any suggestion of filibustering: nor did the Order Paper suggest that the Bill's remaining stages could not be completed in due time and without this motion. The only portent of filibustering has come from the Secretary of State himself, who, by yesterday, had tabled four new clauses, one new schedule and 65 amendments.

Social security affects the lives of every family in this country and they expect their concerns to be fully debated on the Floor of this House. Our new clauses and amendments—and indeed those tabled by hon. Members on both sides of the House—reflect their concern. Yet with this motion the Government are treating not only Parliament with studied contempt but all of our constituents who will be the victims of the huge cuts in public spending under this Bill.

Are Social Security Ministers so ashamed of their record that they wish to avoid debate? Do they not want to hear how people with AIDS are being forced to beg from charities for essential food and for items which the Department used to provide before 1986? Last year, charities provided £350,000 to people with AIDS, not for luxuries but for basic subsistence. Is not that both extremely cruel and deeply scandalous?

Does the Secretary of State not want to defend in detail the laughable claims that private occupational sick pay schemes provide adequate earnings-related cover for long-term sickness? Is he afraid to have fully debated in the House how severely disabled young people have their severe disablement allowance withdrawn? Is he hiding from the vast evidence of the need for personal care and assistance revealed by the independent living fund? Does he want to avoid having to make a definitive statement about the independent living fund's current financial crisis, which, if it is not resolved soon, could lead to people with disabilities having to return to lives of dependence?

The guillotine is calculated to prevent any meaningful debate on new clauses and amendments which are of the first importance to disabled people and which now have scant, if any, likelihood of being discussed. As the Secretary of State must know, many of these suggested changes to the Bill reflect the deep concern of the all-party disablement group.

Does the Secretary of State want to avoid discussion of the comments flowing from all sides on that pitiful document "The Way Ahead"? Many of the organisations of and for disabled people say it should have been christened "The Way Backwards". Peter Large, of the Disablement Income Group—than whom no one is more qualified to comment—has described "The Way Ahead" as

> "Nothing but a narrowing stony ledge",

and he says that ministerial

> "talk about a more coherent system of benefits is a sign of delirium."

The Secretary of State may recognise new clause 18, since it is practically identical to the clause inserted into the Social Security Act 1973. When Labour came to office in March 1974 it was abundantly clear that the outgoing Tory Administration had given no thought at all to the requirements of that part of the Act. Yet in six months the then Labour Government had published its proposals for the mobility allowance, which now goes to 615,000 people; for the invalid care allowance; and for the non-contributory invalidity pension.

I must congratulate Conservative Members on one thing. When they were in opposition there were no more enthusiastic proponents of increasing the social security budget. Indeed it became a standing joke in the Department that their next ten-minute rule Bill would seek to extend mobility allowance to pole-vaulters.

The Secretary of State is backing this motion only because he is profoundly ashamed of the record of the Government in which he serves. The House should reject the motion with the contempt that it demonstrates for the countless needful people who will lose from the provisions in the Bill.

Mr. Holt: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In the light of the statement made by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), I feel that my criticism of the shadow Leader of the House may well have been misplaced and in the circumstances I should like to withdraw it.

4.55 pm

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): The real reasons why we are debating a guillotine motion today are not those given by the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott), who opened the debate for the Opposition, but are given in the *Morning Star* and the *Daily Mirror* yesterday. On page 8, the *Morning Star* said:

> "Labour MPs plan a 23-hour all-night Commons sitting tomorrow",

and the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) is quoted in the *Daily Mirror* as saying:

> "Labour MPs plan to force an all-night Commons session tomorrow".

We know what all-night Commons sittings are about, and they are certainly not about debating Bills in detail. They are about filibustering and ensuring that time is wasted to prove some sort of parliamentary virility symbol.

We want a proper debate on the important subject before the House. I recall that, during the debates two weeks ago on the National Health Service and Community Care Bill—I was a member of the Committee on that Bill —I sat in the Chamber at 3 o'clock in the morning listening to a speech by the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr Michael) that went on for 32 minutes. The whole purpose of his amendment was merely to make local health district boundaries and community health council district boundaries the same as the local authority districts. It took him 32 minutes to say precisely that.

Labour Members then went on for another two and a half hours, making the same points over and over again. The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) made two speeches, one lasting one hour and 48 minutes and the other lasting more than an hour, on small points in the

Bill. Having had that recent example, we are right to take heed of the public warnings in the national press that they intend to do the same with this Bill.

We know the reasons why the Opposition made all that fuss two weeks ago about the National Health Service and Community Care Bill. In Committee, we had a reasoned debate and went through the Bill sensibly, but their union paymasters in the National Union of Public Employees and in the Confederation of Health Service Employees were unhappy about the reasoned and moderate debates on that Bill and were determined that there should be a fuss on the Floor of the House.

Now the Opposition are seeking to do the same on this Bill. Having had a reasoned and sensible Committee stage, they want to create a rumpus on the Floor of the House, because that is where the television cameras are. That is why the Labour party is taking that attitude on Bill after Bill. We have reasoned debates in Committee; then there is a row and rumpus and synthetic indignation in the Chamber.

I listened with great interest to the speech by the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot). When it comes to timetable motions, as my right hon. Friend the Member for—I am sorry I am promoting him before his time—my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) said, the right hon. Gentleman is an expert. He takes the cake for guillotine motions. He never missed an opportunity to speak on them. The right hon. Gentleman is entirely consistent. When in opposition, he is always against guillotine motions, and when he is in government he is a firm supporter of them.

Mr. Holt: The right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), who was Leader of the House, criticised my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House for not being here. I wonder whether we shall hear similar criticism of the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott), who is standing in for the shadow Leader of the House, for not being here to listen to the debate.

Mr. Bennett: My hon. Friend makes a good point. What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.

As we know, the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent is the expert on these matters. No one has beaten his record for introducing five guillotine motions in one day, which he did on 20 July 1976—a date that will no doubt live for ever in the right hon. Gentleman's memory.

The right hon. Gentleman has spent a lifetime proclaiming himself a great libertarian and constitutionalist and a great upholder of the rights of the House of Commons. We heard it all again today. We should be more prepared to listen to the right hon. Gentleman and believe what he said if we had not had experience of his record in office from 1974 to 1979. First, as Leader of the House, he introduced five guillotine motions in one day. Then, as Secretary of State for Employment, he moved motion after motion to enforce the closed shop and force people to join trade unions.

When this great libertarian, who has spent his life telling us what a great constitutionalist he is, had the power to put his principles into practice, he did exactly the opposite. I shall bear that in mind when I listen to his lectures.

I want to conclude by quoting from *Hansard.*

Mr. Roger King: The lesson for the day.

Mr. Bennett: As my hon. Friend says, the lesson for the day.

My quotation is this;

> "We see a Labour Government as having a right and a duty to legislate against any attempts to frustrate us in the end from exercising our rights of legislation, whether in this House or in another place—and, of course, it is a particular illustration of the malice, folly and absurdity into which right hon. and hon. Members on the Opposition side have got themselves that when we exercise those ancient rights it is cheating and when they exercise them it is freedom."—[*Official Report,* 20 July 1976; Vol. 915, c. 1543.]

Those were the words of the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent when he moved the five guillotine motions on 20 July 1976.

As I said, what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. If the right hon. Gentleman's Government were entitled to move those guillotine motions, the present Government are entitled to move the guillotine motion on the Social Security Bill to ensure that we can have a proper and rational debate on this important measure and that we do not face a filibuster—the macho-virility symbol of a weak and divided Opposition.

5.2 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): For a weak and divided Opposition, we did not do badly in Mid-Staffordshire where the electorate decided on a swing of 21 per cent. in favour of Labour. The previous speech came from one of the most noxious Tories, although there are a number of candidates for the title so it is difficult to single out the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett).

Both the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) said that they would support the guillotine motion because of their experience of the National Health Service and Community Care Bill. Anyone capable of an objective assessment could fairly claim that not only did we have a debate on important issues throughout the night on that Bill, but that a number of Labour Members were not called in the debate. We were anxious to talk about the balloting provisions for the opting-out process, and so on. So many of us were present that we could not all be called. In all, four Opposition Members were not called, not because there was a guillotine but because the House wanted to get on to another subject. It is simply not true to say that there was an organised filibuster.

The National Health Service and Community Care Bill is of extreme concern because its effects will be so damaging. We therefore wanted to get our remarks on the record in *Hansard* to make it clear beyond peradventure that we oppose the damage that the Bill will do to the National Health Service and that we shall restore the National Health Service as a full public service after the next general election when we will be swept into office with a mandate to do that.

The same is true of the Social Security Bill. It may be shorter than the National Health Service and Community Care Bill, but it is important. The Minister knows full well that his Department produces some of the most shoddy legislation with some of the most shoddy appendages of secondary legislation. It is responsible for the most errors and its legislation is subject to the greatest number of court cases. The Bill is shorter than the NHS Bill, but it still has 18 clauses, six schedules and 55 pages and includes in its provisions the repeal of nearly 100 sections of several other Acts. Perhaps we should help the Minister to avoid further

[Mr. Bob Cryer]

court actions. One of the new proposals tabled by the Minister would reverse a court action that his Department sustained, which reversed the aim and effect of legislation previously passed by the House. It might not be a bad idea to spend some extra time on a matter which, by common consent of hon. Members on both sides of the House—it is a question of fact—is subject to the most challenges in court.

The reason for that is that Social Security Bills affect most people in the country. This Bill will affect as many people as the National Health Service and Community Care Bill, if not more. Fortunately, some people go through life without ever having to be treated in a National Health Service hospital. Some go through life without even having to see their GP. But it is rare for people not to have to consider some aspect or other of social security, for themselves or for a relative. That is why the allocation of time motion is ill advised and ill judged.

The guillotine motion will have two effects. In the ordinary course of debate, the House creates its own discipline. There is usually the sense that hon. Members want to move to a vote. People say, "Do not speak for too long because we want to vote at 10 o'clock." Everyone knows that that happens. In addition to removing that voluntary discipline, which requires no imposition by the Whips, the guillotine removes the initiative from the Opposition and places it with the Government. With a guillotine, the Government and their supporters know that they can talk for as long as they choose and rob the Opposition of the opportunity to advance their case. The longer they take, the less time the Opposition will have, and the guillotine will fall, irrespective of who takes up the time.

In Committee, it is an entirely different matter. My hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) raised a point of order about the situation that obtained in the Committee on the last Local Government Finance Bill. We have heard expostulations from the hon. Member for Northfield to the effect that we have had plenty of discussion. We know that, in Committee, he kept quiet. The general instruction to Government supporters in Committee is to keep quiet and not to take up the time because the Government want to get their Bill through. That means that the initiative is with the Opposition, and that is right and proper.

We are here to criticise and it is interesting to hear Tory Members say that Opposition Members are here simply for the sake of opposing. They say that they want an opposition in eastern Europe. They have not said that they want a tame opposition in Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and the other eastern European countries. They did not say of Romania that Ceausescu should have an opposition but only if they were a tame opposition who did not challenge Ceausescu's Government. But that is what they say they want here. They say that we are opposing for the sake of opposing. That is patently untrue. We seek to challenge the Government and we need time to do that.

The trouble with guillotining is that it diminishes the opportunity for proper debate and robs the Opposition of their main job of scrutinising legislation. That has to be done because most Conservative Members are subservient and will not challenge their own party's legislation. They are frightened to do so after the Mid-Staffordshire by-election.

Mr. Roger King: Opposition for opposition's sake is not a good thing. Opposition against a background of proper policies is something else, but Labour does not have any *policies*. Will the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) say whether he is in favour of a timetable motion —yes or no?

Mr. Cryer: I am opposed to the timetable motion before the House and shall vote against it, and I have tabled amendments to try to make the motion more equitable.

When a Labour Government introduced timetable motions, which have been well debated this afternoon, Lord Hailsham described that Government as an elective dictatorship. At the time, we did not have a majority, so we were never certain of getting anything through the House —let alone a guillotine motion. We had to convince the minority parties in debate that they should vote with us.

What of the comments of Lord Hailsham and his cronies today? Given that the Government have an overall majority over Labour in this House of 150, and over other Opposition parties of 100, the timetable motion is a good example of an elective dictatorship imposing its will on this House and robbing the Opposition of an opportunity to oppose legislation—in just the same petty way that the Government introduced several statements yesterday, to try to rob us of the opportunity to present the victor in the Mid-Staffordshire by-election at a time convenient to most right hon. and hon. Members, and when my new hon. Friend would have been seen by millions taking her seat. The Government's tactic did not work but merely focused more attention on the newest Member of the House—showing again that the Government are losing their touch.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Does the hon. Gentleman recall this quote:

> "A timetable motion is an exceedingly sensible addition to a Bill . . . The principle of a timetable motion is highly commendable as a general rule. It is not cutting down debate".—[*Official Report*, 20 July 1976; Vol. 915, c. 1728-29.]

Those were the words of the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) on 20 July 1976, when speaking to timetable motions on the Rent (Agriculture) Bill and Education Bill.

Mr. Cryer: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for drawing attention to my words on that occasion. I am all in favour of quoting from *Hansard*. Right hon. and hon. Members are on record for the very purpose of ensuring some accountability. The Government are trying to remove that accountability from the Opposition and to fill out the time available within a guillotine with speeches by Tory Members, thereby robbing Opposition Members of the right to place their views on the record.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): The hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) does not have a good record for consistency. He spoke of the National Health Service and Community Care Bill, on whose Committee I also served. The hon. Gentleman is on record as signing an early-day motion in support of enrolled nurses having a right to training, yet when I moved an amendment for that purpose he voted against because he thought that that would go unnoticed in Committee.

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend makes the valuable point that all the comments and views expressed by right hon. and hon. Members are open to scrutiny. I am certainly willing to stand by my own past comments.

Ms. Short: All right hon. and hon. Members would agree that there must be guillotines in some circumstances, because every Government must get their business through Parliament. However, today's debate centres on our desire to raise a series of questions on social security measures that have hurt people throughout Britain. I refer to the Government's failure to provide proper pensions, child benefit, treatment of the homeless, and so on.

My right hon. and hon. Friends and I are willing to stay up through the night to debate those matters. We have made it clear that we are not trying to jeopardise tomorrow's business. The timetable motion is an attempt to prevent Opposition Members from raising those issues so that lazy Conservative Members can go to bed.

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend echoes my point that the Opposition have a serious purpose in mind in opposing the timetable motion. We are concerned that legislation leaving the House should be as clear and unambiguous and equitable as possible. If any Conservative Member wants evidence of my genuine concern, I remind the House that I spent hours, as Chair of the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, ensuring that that was done. Statutory instruments of the Department of Social Security have often had to be reported to the House because of their ambiguity and unusual use of power. We make a just and valid claim when we say that our action is motivated by concern about the Government's attempts to compress, for example, Government new clauses 23 and 26 into one hour of debate, as they intend to do also with new clauses 1 to 6 and new clauses 7 and 8. My amendment would extend the final guillotine from 1 am to 2 am, which would give the House an opportunity to debate more thoroughly new clauses 7 and 8.

New clause 7 is complicated, and relates to applicable amounts, and new clause 8 encapsulates a private Member's Bill dealing with Crown employees exposed to radiation. I refer to service men who ran that risk in the service of their country, and who are a body of people normally much admired by Conservative Members. My amendment would allow the House to debate and reach a decision on the provision of compensation for former Crown employees suffering from leukaemia; cancer of the thyroid, breast, pharynx, oesophagus, stomach, small intestine or pancreas; multiple myeloma; lymphomas except Hodgkin's disease; cancer of the bile ducts or gall bladder; or primary liver cancer, except if caused by cirrhosis or hepatitis B. Those diseases have been contracted by people as a result of their service to the Crown and exposure to radiation, and they now rightly seek compensation—such as that paid in the United States of America, where proper legislation already exists.

The House should have an opportunity to debate new clause 8 extensively, but it is squashed into one hour together with new clause 7. What is the betting that the Tory Whips will organise Tory Members to vote against it?

New clause 8 does not have the support only of Labour Members, which is why my amendments place particular emphasis on giving more time to debate that new clause in particular. Eight Tories, 11 Labour Members, two SDP Members, one Liberal, and one Scottish National party Member put their names to that new clause, so it has the support of a cross-section of the House. I hope that the Government will encourage their own Members to support new clause 8 in the Lobby, and so provide a little help to literally hundreds, if not thousands, of people who have suffered ill effects as a consequence of their service to this country. We shall see what happens.

New clause 8 was tabled because a handful of Tory Members set out to sabotage the private Member's Bill on the same subject, which should have enjoyed a consensus of the House. Instead, there was filibustering on its Second Reading to prevent the Bill from progressing further.

My second amendment would extend the time available for Third Reading by two hours, to 12 midnight. I am willing to remain here for that length of time, as are my right hon. and hon. Friends, because the legislation is important enough to justify doing so. The guillotine is trampling on the rights of Parliament and the good work of the Opposition, but it will avail the Government absolutely nothing, as the Mid-Staffordshire by-election amply demonstrated.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. Gentleman wish to move his amendment (a)?

Mr. Cryer: Yes, formally.

Amendment proposed: (a), in paragraph (i), leave out '1.00 am' and insert '2.00 am'.—*[Mr. Cryer.]*

5.19 pm

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): We are here as citizens chosen by our fellow citizens to represent them here in what used to be referred to when I was growing up as parliamentary Government. It reflects the truth that Churchill identified, which is that the people are sovereign. We give authority to Governments and substance to the rule of law. I remind right hon. and hon. Members, following the speech of the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), the former Leader of the Opposition, that our authority, springing from the people, is the very basis of that power and, as Burke said, parliamentary democracy is not just the number of our people divided by two plus one; it is the whole process of argument and reason. Although we may disagree, ultimately authority is secured for acquiescence on the basis of the process of argument and reason.

It is not on the merits of the guillotine today or another guillotine that I rise to make that remembrance. Last Session we passed 11 guillotines with the greatest parliamentary majority conceivable in a parliamentary democracy. In 1945, when a Labour Government were elected with perhaps the most radical programme of any Government in the history of our nation, they did not use the guillotine as far as I can recall, and if they did it is almost unidentifiable. That Government brought in legislation that transformed the nation and touched on great passions for the right and for the left. Yet they were able to secure the business of the country without truncating and cutting out debate.

I reflect on that time because it is discussed in Leo Amery's book "Thoughts on the Constitution" which examines the legislative programme of that Labour Government to which he was not particularly well disposed. In one parliamentary Session they passed some 70 pieces of legislation without the need to resort to a guillotine.

Mr. Holt: My hon. Friend has just identified the nub of the problem we face today, which is not the size of the Government's majority or the Government's radical proposals, but the actions and behaviour of the Opposition. Attlee's Government were not faced with an intransigent mob as we are today.

Mr. Shepherd: I note what my hon. Friend said. Perhaps as Milton said in "Areopagitica", we ought to have a little tolerance of each other. That is true, but it is not a requirement of membership of the House to be particularly tolerant. Our duty is to scrutinise legislation because on our authority it becomes the law of the land.

I said that last Session we had 11 guillotines and supplemental guillotines—something I had not encountered before. I well recall that we used a guillotine motion to secure one hour's debate because the Government were so nervous.

The prejudgment of issues is a foolish approach to our business. After all, it is perhaps during debate that we realise the wrongness or the weight of arguments that we had not prejudged or considered would have arisen. I have been in the House for 11 years and I have watched Ministers and right hon. and hon. Members discover the point of opposing and conflicting arguments. That is an extremely important process which would be damaged by a rush into curtailment of debate.

My purpose was not to take up much of the time of the House but to reinforce time and again that it is in the interests of the Government that I support to be extraordinarily cautious in their approach to guillotines. There has been much reference to going through the night and the poverty of discussion through the night, but there is no reason why we should go through the night. There is nothing wrong with the parliamentary year. We could stage the Bill over three days.

Leo Amery, the father of a very distinguished right hon. Member, pointed out that Second Readings, which often contain the principles of Bills, often took two or three days. Now we are shocked at the very thought of something taking a day. In some instances I have sat here when important pieces of legislation have been given only half a day for Second Reading. We then think that 180 hours in Committee—after all, it is to our advantage for there to be scrupulousness in Committee—justifies condensing important legislation covering, in some instances, hundreds of clauses into a few hours of debate. That serves us ill.

Last year when the Water Bill was under a guillotine, we considered about 300 additional amendments, a large number of which were tabled by the Government and 80 of which were substantive. It is a shame to ourselves as citizens representing fellow citizens that we charged that through. Of course, our courts are now lumbered with cases trying to identify what we intended through the legislative words that we used.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Will the hon. Gentleman also take into consideration the fact that more than 500 Government amendments to the Local Government and Housing Bill were tabled, and that about 600 Government amendments were tabled to the Local Government Finance Bill which dealt with the poll tax? Many of those amendments were not discussed, but we now know the result of incorporating them.

Mr. Shepherd: I presume that the hon. Gentleman's intervention was intended to support my contention.

Governments are formed and given authority by the House. Now, all too often the tail wags the dog. This is parliamentary Government and it requires us properly and responsibly to return to our fellow citizens and say that we have honourably considered the legislation. There is nothing partisan in that as one day we may be in opposition and all the calls that we now hear from the Opposition will be our calls.

It is true, tedious, tiresome and sad for our nation that Ministers one day demand the necessity of a guillotine and the following day, as we have just heard from the Opposition, they stand on the other side of the House and say that it is outrageous. I have never been given the Queen's commission to serve on the Treasury Bench, and I do not expect that call immediately, but I know that that dual approach, that almost duplicity of saying one thing from the Treasury Bench and another thing from Opposition Benches as if it were only a partisan exchange, loses the essential flame of what we are about and our authority. Our authority is to redress the grievances of people and to give authority to the Government so that they may govern, as the Treasury Bench exists only because of the House of Commons being given authority by the people out there. Consistently, time and again, we are throwing through ill-considered legislation.

I am sorry that my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House has more important business elsewhere, as has the Patronage Secretary, and I am sorry that those on the Labour Front Bench have responded in like measure. [HON. MEMBERS: "We are here."] I apologise, as those on the Labour Front Bench have returned.

The guillotine ill serves my party's interests, but most of all it diminishes the authority of the House when it is treated so disdainfully by the constant pressure to get ill-considered legislation through the House.

5.29 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), who made a powerful and passionate speech with which I agree entirely.

Governments must reserve the right, in principle, to table guillotine motions, but they must be used more sparingly than they are being used by this Administration. For that specific reason, I object to the motion.

If I understood the justification for the motion given by the Leader of the House, it is that too many new clauses have been tabled. However, that applies not only to the official Opposition—I understand that the usual channels operate principally between the two major parties—because other parties are involved. Back Benchers must also be considered, yet the Leader of the House ignored them when trying to justify the motion.

There is no justification for the motion. The Government forget that we return to the subject of social security every year. Therefore, it is not open to them to say, "If we do not seize this opportunity it will be five or 10 years before we can deal with these issues." There is no reason for the Government's indecent haste in tabling the new clauses that they have inflicted on the House.

I could not agree more with the point made by the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills. It does the House no service for the Government so regularly to table guillotine motions. I object to the fact that they have complete control of the time that is allocated. If they said, "We shall allocate the time and the Opposition can use it how they wish," it would allow more efffective opposition and enable them to have their legislation within the limits of their timetable.

The Government's new clauses take up much space on the Amendment Paper. Clause 21 is three and a half pages long. We have been given ludicrously little time to scrutinise clauses of such length. That demeans the process of democracy and makes it impossible for Opposition Members effectively to scrutinise legislation.

The Government could have waited before tabling new clause 19. They have had the report of the Occupational Pensions Board for almost a year. It has been tabled because they made a hash of drafting the Bill. Instead of being pushed through under the guillotine, it should have waited until next year.

New clause 21, which is three and a half pages long, which applies to the liability for maintenance of dependants, is of fundamental and far-reaching importance. That idea appeared in the Government's mind after a fevered sleepless night. Instead of waiting until next year's Social Security Bill, they have stuck it on to the fag end of the Report stage of this Bill, without any justification whatever.

New clause 22 is a direct response to the Government's duffing up by the courts. The courts will not be grateful for the Government's response. The new clause acts retrospectively and changes the provisions that have obtained since 1975 to what the Government thought they should have been in the first place. Earlier, the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) said that that is not how we should amend legislation. That procedure is not guaranteed to succeed and will not make it simpler for the courts to interpret the Bill.

New clause 23 results from another bloody nose that the Government got from the courts on the iniquitous way that the social fund is being administered. It is ridiculous that the Government have tabled it at such short notice. The same applies to new clause 26. We had a substantial debate on income support on the National Health Service and Community Care Bill.

The Government's new clauses are not necessary to amend social security legislation and are not in the interests of proper and effective scrutiny. After we have considered those new clauses, what time will be left for other amendments?

I take exception to the suggestion of the Leader of the House that, on Report, hon. Members can only refine what was done in Committee. My party was unable to serve on the Committee that considered the Bill. I make no complaint about that, because the minority parties were as well represented as they could have been, but some hon. Members do not have the benefit of serving on Standing Committees. It is wrong for the House to accept that on Report hon. Members are doing only a wee bit of fine tuning.

The Standing Committee did honest and sensible work, but it is an important part of hon. Members' work to scrutinise de novo the work done in Committee as well as that done on Second Reading. The Chair is advised, perfectly properly, about the priority of the amendments, but the idea that we should only refine what was done in Committee should not be given currency or support.

I make a plea on behalf of the minority parties for less business in the House. Other legislative processes in other constituent parts of the United Kingdom might make the Minister's job easier. The Government should take the sensible course and establish a Scottish Parliament with responsibility for some of these matters. The House could then discuss legislation at its leisure. The legislative process would be none the worse for that.

Members of the official Opposition are girding their loins for retaliation. If guillotine motions are being moved before the long, hot summer season starts, goodness knows how many long and tedious nights we shall spend not doing ourselves any credit because we cannot properly scrutinise legislation in the early hours of the morning. That is not a sensible way to run the country. I hope that the Government will think seriously before moving future guillotine motions, which are bad for business and bad for the legislation that hon. Members have to scrutinise.

5.28 pm

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I shall be brief. Later this evening, we shall debate new clause 1 on community charge benefits, which was tabled by the Opposition. The political issues of the greatest significance and most interest to our constituents are those surrounding the community charge.

Before we dispatch the Bill, it is important that we have further discussion and debate on the amendments, and perhaps further amendments on how to deal with some of the problems that will face our constituents because of the community charge. I believe that that is vital and——

Mr. Richard Shepherd: Essential.

Mr. Marlow: Yes, essential.

I speak as someone who supports the principle and idea behind the community charge. It is right that everyone should pay towards the costs of local government and it is wrong that people should be able to vote for a local authority, and sometimes vote in extravagant local authorities, when they do not foot the bill.

The levels of community charge that are being presented are way above the levels that Conservative Members and even the Government anticipated. That is due, in part, to local authorities being extravagant in their expenditure. However, that is the position with which we are faced.

Like other hon. Members, I recently canvassed my constituents. I knocked on one door, said who I was and asked the lady what she thought about the community charge. She burst into tears—[AN HON. MEMBER: "She saw you standing there."] I am trying to make a serious speech on a serious issue. That lady's distress had nothing to do with being anti-Government or anti-Tory; it was because she was confronted with the problem of trying to cope with the financial burden being put on her household. She is probably entitled to transitional relief or rebate, but she was not aware of that. She lives in a small terraced house and she has been confronted with an additional financial burden with which she cannot cope.

Some couples with relatively low pay will have to find an additional £5 per week virtually from thin air. Where will they find it? Other couples have to find up to an additional £9 per week virtually from thin air. In some

[Mr. Marlow]

cases, their pay has risen little or not at all. I am talking about relatively low-paid people living in small houses in inner-city areas.

Pensioners are deeply concerned about the attrition of their savings. I am glad that the Government have done something about that, but I wonder whether it is enough. There is a great deal of anxiety about the levels of community charge, which range between £250 and £500, and it is an unfair anxiety. I know that the Government are aware of the problems, as they, too, have been taken by surprise by the levels of community charge. I know that they want to do something about that, but they say that they will do it next year. That is no good; it must be done this year. The current position is unfair and unreasonable.

The levels of community charge—whether £250, £450 or £500—must be reduced. Local authorities have made their predictions and set their budgets, so there is no point in saying that we cannot put more money into the system because local authorities will spend it. Any money that we put into the system now will go straight to our constituents to reduce the fearsome burden that concerns them so much.

We can and should do that, but how? There should be a national rebate of the community charge. That will cost money, which must come from somewhere. Last week's Budget will be followed by a Finance Bill, and we can change the Budget details through that. Instead of increasing tax thresholds, they should be maintained at their current level and the tax raised used to reduce each person's community charge by £42. There could be a 1p increase in income tax. People are concerned that the community charge is regressive rather than progressive. If 1p is put on income tax, those who earn the money would pay more towards it.

By those two means, we could reduce each person's community charge by between £80 and £100. That would bring charges down to between £150 and £350. No one will whinge or think it unfair if they have to pay £150 for everything that is provided by local government. Those who would pay £350 would say, "Why are we paying more?"

The main purpose of the community charge is to introduce accountability, and under those circumstances accountability would work. Presently, everyone feels that he has an unfair burden and is paying too much. If there are problems on the streets and if there are problems with non-payment, to a certain extent people will sympathise and the community charge that I support and that I believe is the only proper and sensible way to finance local government will never be properly launched. The Government must bring down the levels this year, find the money from central taxation and so remove the anxieties of many people.

If the community charge is a fair and proper system, it will work and there will be accountability. There will be problems over the next six months if the Government leave it until next year to introduce changes. How will accountability work if the system is different next year, and the fudge by local councils this year of increasing expenditure will also happen next year? It is only fair that there should be changes and that they should be made now. There should be a national rebate of between £80 and £100, and that could be done through this Bill. I very much hope that the Government are listening.

5.45 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Occasionally, in what are becoming these all-too-frequent debates, our politics are rightly called back to some of the basic principles and practices of parliamentary democracy. That was shown in the speeches of my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) and the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd). To my mind, what characterises Parliament under this Government is that it is pushed to its limits. The legislative programme is far too heavy. Controversial material is introduced which is clearly not thought out and which is then forced through by whipping rather than being properly considered. It appears that legislation is now the Whips' business rather than an issue for debate and scrutiny.

I was surprised by the speech of the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow), because there is no proper discussion. Two years ago, Opposition Members, in Committee and again on the Floor of the House, outlined precisely the effects of introducing the poll tax and showed who would pay the price. The record shows that in Committee we asked whether there would be any transitional relief. "No," was the reply at the time. Judging from the shouts across the Chamber the other night, it appears that Conservative Members still think that there can be a 100 per cent. rebate. Most of us, and certainly the public, know that, on the instruction of the Prime Minister, every person must pay a minimum of 20 per cent. of their poll tax, regardless of ability to pay.

The hon. Gentleman called upon the Government to take action now, not next year. They had the opportunity to take action not last year, but the year before. We are slightly encouraged that at least some Conservative Members were willing to listen to the argument and the debate and to vote for sensible clauses to ameliorate the destructive elements of the poll tax.

It is not long since we faced a similar position with the National Health Service and Community Care Bill. I sat in the Chamber throughout the whole of the Report stage, waiting to speak. As the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills reminded us, we are elected to raise matters on behalf of our constituents. I did not have the privilege of serving on the Committee that considered that Bill. Although my constituents face proposals for self-governing hospital trusts, and although there are great worries about doctors' contracts, I could not raise those matters on behalf of my constituents because the timetable motion ruled out those clauses from the business of the House.

I served on the Committee that considered this Bill and, as has been said, the Committee stage was both reasonable and sensible. One reason for that—we make no apology for it—was our right to reserve our position and not to vote on every item in the Bill. We did not want the Bill to be guillotined in Committee. The Government accepted that we would again raise certain topics when the Bill returned to the Floor of the House. Those matters are of great importance, and hon. Members need to hear the arguments and vote on the issues.

That is why we tabled new clauses. As a result of the guillotine motion, I will not be able to speak on the clauses to which my name appears. Those new clauses deal with the uprating for pensioners and social security benefits for the families of prisoners, who do not receive them at the moment because of an anomaly in the law. In Committee, the Minister said that, if we brought that issue back to the Floor of the House, we could sort out that minor anomaly. That will not happen, because of the guillotine motion. I represent one of the most overcrowded prisons in the country, and because of the guillotine motion I will have difficulty in representing my constituents today.

The Bill originally had 18 clauses, but there are 17 Government new clauses on the Amendment Paper today. That represents almost a new Bill. The new clauses introduce completely new material as a result of the Government's failure in shoddy legislation in other Bills.

One of the Government new clauses results from the fact that the High Court overruled the Government on the social fund regulations. That new clause is not the result of Opposition filibustering; it is the result of bad legislation, which the Opposition opposed at the time. The Government were caught out by the courts and they have been forced to alter the Bill to try to sort the matter out and ratify their position.

The Government lost a vote on Report on the National Health Service and Community Care Bill on the issue of residential care, so they have had to find a convenient Bill on to which to tag an alteration to correct that position. That explains the reason behind another of the Government's new clauses. That new clause and the one about the social fund have nothing to do with issues that we discussed in Committee.

We are entitled to ask what the Government are scared of. Are they scared of the official Opposition, or are they afraid of opposition on the Government Benches? The Government appear to be afraid of opening up the issues that surround the Bill and the new clauses, because this Government will go down in history as the Government who punished the poor and presided over increasing poverty in our society.

The poor are being economically and socially marginalised. They are also being politically marginalised off the agenda through the arcane guillotine games that the Government are playing. The Government are prepared to redefine the poor away by refusing to accept a standard definition of poverty. They are also attempting to manipulate discussion on those issues off the agenda. The Government can ignore contradictory evidence and they will distort the language, but they have consistently avoided any serious debate of the devastating impact that social security legislation has had on poverty.

It is important that we raise such issues if we are to understand the relationship between the Budget and social security legislation. There is a deliberate hidden fiscal policy to price out the poor. When we consider the inter-working of taxation and the Budget with the benefit system, it is clear that taxes have been redistributed. Income is being taken from the pockets of the poor and put into the wallets of the rich.

The most blatant example of that was the poll tax referred to by the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow). It is amazing how late in the day Conservative Members have woken up to the effects of legislation which the Government are putting through the House. The poll tax has plainly been designed to fall more heavily on the poor than on the rich. That is what the Secretary of State at the time claimed that it was designed to do. It was not supposed to offer real protection, because it takes no account of the ability to pay.

Late in the day, after the poll tax Bill has been passed and after Conservative Members voted for it, they are now voicing their disquiet. At least some Conservative Members listened to the debate and perhaps voted accordingly. However, it is amazing how many Conservative Members now pretend that they did not vote for the poll tax Bill and that they did not vote against the Opposition clauses which warned people what would happen.

This guillotine motion prevents us from considering the Bill which contains reductions in the severe disablement allowance and in the reduced earnings allowance. In Committee, we served notice on the Government that we would bring those issues back to the Floor of the House, because the country has a right to know what the Government are doing in social security legislation.

We have not had an opportunity to discuss the report from the Government Actuary. It is about time that we had an opportunity properly to discuss the distribution of wealth and income and the condition of the poor in our society. The Government have initiated no such debate. The document to which I want to refer is entitled the "Report by the Government Actuary on the drafts of the Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 1990 and the Social Security (Contributions) (Re-rating) Order 1990" and was published in January.

The report offers an interesting clue to the future, which does not appear in any other Government document. Paragraph 10(i) contains an assumption that the number of unemployed people in Britain will rise to 1·75 million in 1990-91. That is a clear prediction that unemployment will rise. Paragraph 21 is more interesting, in that it relates to the effect of different assumptions on unemployment and earnings. It states that, if the average number of unemployed people was to be 100,000 higher and corresponding assumptions were made,

> "the contribution income in 1989-90 would be £110 million lower and expenditure would rise by £65 million."

That means that there will be an 8·5 per cent. fall in the national insurance fund as a result of rising unemployment in the next financial year. There will be a net loss of £175 million.

It is not good enough for the Government to tell us now that they cannot pay the pensioners their uprating, and that they must push the poor down. It is no good the Government saying that they cannot do more at the margins to assist people facing the poll tax and that they can only tinker at the edges of the savings concessions. It is not good enough for them to say that there is not enough money. They are taking money by failing to uprate benefits and pensions. Government reports state that it is more politically expedient to take funds from the poor and excluded in our society, including the unemployed, than to have a system under which there is a fairer and more equitable distribution of taxes at local or national level.

It is about time that we had a thorough debate on those matters. In its original form, this Bill contained only brief bits of policy on a wide range of topics. It has turned into a rag bag as a result of the Government's failure in other areas of policy, and that failure was highlighted in the High Court. Other Bills have been thrown into this one as a result of court decisions and because the Government failed in other Bills.

[Mr. John Battle]

While I have been a Member of this place, a huge amount of legislation has come before the House. A great number of Bills have come before the House every Session. Despite the Government's attempt to bludgeon those Bills through, as a result of our failure to give those Bills full and proper critical scrutiny, the public have been delivered of a raft of shoddy legislation.

It is amazing that Conservative Members will vote for the guillotine motion and then vote without considering the issues in the amendments and new clauses. Conservative Members will wake up late in the day and wonder why they did not vote against this motion because the public are upset about what the Government are doing. If Conservative Members will face up to that, they should consider whether they should vote against their guillotine motion.

We could then have proper consideration of the major issues. The poll tax rebate system is a major issue, so let us discuss it now. We should spend what time it takes to get it right; otherwise, the public will be short-changed and the people who pay the price for short-changing legislation at the moment are the poorest.

5.59 pm

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Last week some of us spent much time and exercised our consciences in voting down, regretfully, a measure put forward by our Government on residential care. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security, for whom I have profound respect, has put forward a clause that some of us will be able respectably to support. Some £70 million will ensure that what I am confident the Government did not want to happen will not happen. If they had listened to us before, much embarrassment could have been saved over the community charge benefits. I say with no sadness and with great pride that the principle of this measure has a tremendous amount to recommend it. However, as a practice it has almost nothing to recommend it. I voted against it from the start. I have served on Committees examining Bills and over a period of three years nowhere can my name be found supporting the community charge.

Mr. Salmond: Did the hon. Gentleman's votes against the poll tax legislation also apply to the Scottish legislation or did he vote to impose it on the Scottish people even though he finds it so distressing for his own constituents?

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned that. He was not here at the time, but some of his Scottish colleagues will remember that I came here late at night to speak against the legislation being imposed on Scotland. Some hon. Members who are now in the Chamber will remember that.

It is sad that this is the last time that we shall have a chance to debate this issue. It is even more distressing that, in spite of all the so-called changes that have been made, the Government have not yet grappled with the simple fact that the principle of everybody paying something towards local government services is entirely sound and proper. Local government services, even more than central Government services, affect nearly everybody in the country.

I repeat the question that I asked some three years ago when we debated the matter: I save money but who pays for my savings? I shall save some £1,200 a year on the community charge or poll tax—it is much better to call it that—but people who live not half a mile from me in a one-bedroomed flat will pay £480 more than I pay. I live quite well, although modestly. I will be £1,200 better off and the people in that flat will be £480 worse off. There is neither logic nor justice in that, for one simple reason. Throughout our history all taxation has been based upon the ability to pay. Many of us argued in the long hours of the night and have argued within our party and in the country that ability to pay has to be the bedrock of any sensible or just tax. Many of us have said to our Government colleagues again and again, "Why not bring justice in this year? Why does it have to be next year?"

It is nonsense to talk about a safety net. What safety net is it, for God's sake, when some people have to pay for other people's so-called safety? What happens next year? Of course local government has to be paid for. The Opposition should not take too much heart from the discomfort that my party finds itself in, because nothing is for nothing. Somebody has to pay for local services. It is no good putting forward some grandiose scheme and saying that matters will be put right because Opposition Members and Conservative Members must be honest and say that local government requires billions of pounds.

I spent more than 20 years in local government and I can say with absolute conviction and honour that I warned my party and the Government that the poll tax would be a disaster. I was wrong because it has been a cataclysmic disaster and the by-election in Mid-Staffordshire showed that. There should be no pussy-footing about it: the poll tax was one of the great reasons that lost us that by-election. I warned the Government at the time that I gained from the poll tax and that I felt guilty about that. I live among people who have gained from the poll tax, but I have yet to find one person who says, "Goody, goody, I have gained." On the whole people in Britain do not say such things because they care about who pays.

At this very late stage I appeal to the Government to bear in mind that people do not think just of themselves. They ask the question that I asked some years ago when I said that I stood to gain £1,250. Of course it has narrowed and is now £1,200. I asked, "If I gain, who pays?" Of course everybody should pay something. I have always thought it hugely unjust that under the rating system 40 per cent. of the people paid and 60 per cent. of them voted for other people's charges. That system was hugely unfair, but it is nonsense to replace one unfair system with an even more unfair one.

I should be happy to debate the community charge benefit day after day and week after week until we could find a fair system. This is our last chance to debate fairness and I ask the Government not to tell people what they will do next year and the year after. They should admit that there has been a cock-up and should do something about it now. Why should people have to subsidise my poll tax? I know that the Government will say that I pay more income tax than some people, but that is because I have a higher income. It is nonsense to draw such an analogy. I stick by the principle of ability to pay and I am tired of people thinking that others should pay their tax. Everybody should pay something towards the service that he receives.

Local services should matter even to people who are on social security and they should have to pay something, but it is nonsense that I, in my home, should pay exactly the same as someone in a one-bedroomed flat. That people in Scottish crofts who used to pay £60 should now pay £480 is huge nonsense. To build a just and fair society we must be able to argue, with those who receive and with those who pay, that a tax is fair. My conscience and guts tell me —Mid-Staffordshire told us all—that people will not accept an injustice however long we argue that it is fair.

The time for change has come. For God's sake, let us not defend the indefensible; let us defend the people's right to a fair system of taxation.

6.10 pm

Mr. Clifford Forsythe (Antrim, South): Like most right hon. and hon. Members, I am very disappointed that the House is being asked to debate the merits of this important Bill under the guillotine. I was more than a little surprised to hear the Leader of the House complain about the number of new clauses and amendments tabled since the Committee stage, given that, on the Amendment Paper for debate this evening, the Government have no fewer than 15 new clauses and amendments, and that only two Opposition new clauses will get an airing by 11 pm. Perhaps other Members will now know exactly how hon. Members from Northern Ireland feel when, for instance, an education order is put through the House in a similar way—not under the pretext of the guillotine but by Order in Council.

Although I have friends on both sides of the House, I get a little tired of the yah-boo type of debate that seems to go on continually here. Referring to what the other party did when in power or what it may do when not in power probably provides good political ammunition, but such debates between the major parties can be instrumental in avoiding debate on the merits or otherwise of the subject in hand. I agree with the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), who talked about those who were not on the Committee being represented. I represented the minor parties, and I can say that it was an excellent Committee stage. Arguments were forcefully put and some amendments were even accepted. However, other Members did not have a chance to serve on the Committee and they should have the chance to table amendments and have them debated at length. That is the weakness of the guillotine motion: it will cut off much debate on important subjects.

Even if Mr. Speaker or Mr. Deputy Speaker exercise great dexterity and care, many Back Benchers cannot speak in many of our debates. I notice that my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux), the leader of my party, is in his place. My party has always voted against guillotine motions on the basis that they are a negation of democracy, curtailing debate on matters that involve millions of citizens, many of whom feel cut off from the many benefits which they are told are flowing from the affluent society.

For instance, a constituent has written to me:

> "In 1980 the State Pension received by a married couple was worth 40 per cent. of full-time average earnings. By 1988 the same pension was worth only 31 per cent. full-time earnings. Yet there have been statements by Government Ministers that pensioners are increasingly better off."

Why cannot we debate that?

Ms. Short: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have seen that new clause 2 would enable us to discuss the failure to uprate pensions, but the Government have given us only one hour in which to deal with the poll tax, the uprating of pensions, the offsetting of costs of child care for people working or on supplementary benefit, the disqualification of people who have been unemployed for 26 weeks rather than six weeks and the issue of young, pregnant, homeless girls. That is what the guillotine is about.

Mr. Forsythe: That fully illustrates the dangers of the guillotine motion. Why should we not spend time on debate? It is what we are paid for. We are sent to the House to debate these matters on behalf of our constituents.

Mr. Wilson: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that he and his Northern Ireland colleagues are placed in an invidious position because of the activities of the Conservatives in Northern Ireland? It appears to be their declared intention to offer the people of Northern Ireland the poll tax, so the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues face the prospect of all the rubbish that has been forced through for the rest of Britain, in the form of the poll tax, being inflicted subsequently on them without warning and without the opportunity for debate, either under primary poll tax legislation or under the legislation pushed through the House tonight.

Mr. Forsythe: The hon. Gentleman puts the case well. I should be interested to see what would happen if the Conservatives put the idea to the people of Northern Ireland. The people in the street gave their answers in a recent television programme, and I assure the hon. Gentleman that none of them supported the poll tax, and very few will support the Conservatives.

Without the guillotine we might have made a case about the community care grants and the social fund, and, in particular, about grants underspend. Underspend in Antrim last year was 44 per cent.; in Coleraine it was 54 per cent. We could have debated that, had it not been for the motion.

Hon. Members representing constituencies in Northern Ireland are exhorted by hon. Members on both sides of the House to talk—to talk and to continue talking. They say that we will reach a solution by talking. Yet, on this occasion, this honourable House, in the country that is the mother of Parliaments, is doing the opposite: it is curtailing debate.

Finally, I am sure that we all remember what the guillotine did: it cut off the heads of people in France. There is a great danger that if we continue using guillotine motions we shall cut off the head of democracy. As we all know, without a head the body dies, and this honourable House should remember that.

6.19 pm

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): Thank you for calling me to speak in this important debate, Mr. Speaker. I followed the logic of the hon. Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe) and I was led to wonder whether he was advocating that at the beginning of each Session legislation which he and his hon. Friends felt was so important and interesting compared with anything else should have almost limitless parliamentary time. Time is a finite commodity and we shall always have to have a mechanism for allocating it to ensure proper and fair debate of the

[Mr. Michael Jack]

huge range of subjects that the House must consider. The hon. Gentleman's line of argument did not reflect the fact that not long ago he and his hon. Friends benefited from time available to the House to discuss Northern Ireland orders at considerable length, and rightly so because matters about the Province are as important as those about any other area.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jack: I shall give way when I have developed my point a little further.

The hon. Gentleman would not have the luxury of that amount of time if the Government did not arrange their affairs to ensure adequate time to discuss the many items before us.

If time is abused—there was newspaper evidence to suggest that the Opposition intended to use tactics, including moving amendments and proposing ideas, which would take up a disproportionate amount of time—the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues will suffer next time Northern Ireland business is to be debated because there will be insufficient time.

Mr. Forsythe: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware that, even if we had talked all night about the Orders in Council, we could not have changed one word, comma or full stop. Unfortunately, he is wide off the mark.

Mr. Jack: I must disagree with the hon. Gentleman. My point was not about the nature of the orders, but that time for their discussion was not truncated. That luxury, if I may describe it in that way, can be afforded to different sections of the House only if we all respect the fact that time is finite. Whenever the House abuses the privilege of time, we must ration the available time.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that Northern Ireland Members do not have a right to debate in the House matters that directly affect Northern Ireland? Does he agree that if the business were properly arranged, legislation would apply to the whole of the United Kingdom and there would be no need to set aside time specifically for Northern Ireland matters?

Mr. Jack: I take entirely the hon. Gentleman's most reasonable point. Each of us who represents a different section of the United Kingdom wants time to debate our special needs. I should dearly love to have a debate about the problems of Lancashire and Fylde. That would be illuminating. It might well be that the way in which we debate Northern Ireland legislation could do with being sorted out, but that is for his hon. Friends to suggest.

My point is simply that if we have a limited amount of time, we must ration it. The guillotine motion was introduced because of strong evidence that there was to be an abuse of the time available for the discussion of the Social Security Bill. Newspaper reports suggested that the Opposition would table many amendments in an attempt to gain concessions from the Government. Sadly, when that happens we must allocate our time.

The hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) made an impassioned plea against the motion on the ground that the Bill was a piecemeal approach to social security legislation. He knows a great deal about social security and housing and I respect his views and contributions to our debates, but he is a member of the "Ah Whoopee" tendency. In other words, we have a Bill dealing with pensions, technical social security matters and insulating grants—all important matters—and the "Ah Whoopee" tendency says, "Ah, here is an opportunity. We can put into the Bill all our pet theories and ideas on social security. Here is a vehicle for them." Instead of having the courage to put forward a comprehensive view of the Opposition's approach to social security, properly costed and argued out, the Opposition themselves adopt that piecemeal approach and seek to amend the Bill. They are guilty of their criticism of the Government.

Mr. Cryer: The hon. Gentleman has accused the Opposition of abusing the House because we have tabled some amendments. Does he feel that the Government are abusing the House more because they have tabled more amendments?

Mr. Jack: No. I was about to come to that point and I am glad that the hon. Gentleman raised it. The essence of the House of Commons lies in our flexible system of legislation, from which we benefit. In the Bill we have an opportunity to react quickly to the court judgment on the social fund and the Government have seized it. Rather than take additional parliamentary time to introduce a special Bill—which would reduce time to discuss Northern Ireland matters, for example—the Government have used this Bill as a vehicle to respond to the court judgment. They are to be congratulated on that.

I hope that the House will pass the timetable motion. I shall be interested to hear what the Government have to say about the operation of the social fund. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will address the problems put to me when I last visited my local social security office and discussed the operation of the social fund. I hope that he will tell us about the management changes in the local administration of the fund. There is considerable concern at local level about monitoring. If accountability at local level is to mean anything, social security managers will need powers under the social fund to run their budgets as they are requested. They must not be leaned on too much by regional or national officials. It is right that we should explore those matters when we debate the amendments on the social fund.

Mr. Battle: The hon. Gentleman accused me of spending the Committee's time on this, which I did, but he may like to read the Committee reports before he makes his ill-informed comments. Because of the guillotine motion, it is hardly likely that many of us who would like to debate the social fund will have the opportunity to do so. Will he sign a letter with me to his right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House, asking for a half-day debate on the social fund so that we all have time to put our constituency points? Will he accept that offer?

Mr. Jack: There is a far more effective way than signing letters. On Thursday at business questions the hon. Gentleman may wish to make his own point in his own particularly effective way.

I support the timetable motion because it is right that we should have a chance to debate many of the amendments—for example, new clause 1, which deals with the community charge. However, I wonder whether the Opposition will be enthusiastic about those amendments when they realise what may come out during the debate. Will they be pleased to learn that in Lancashire the community charge could be £60 less than it is? Will they be pleased to learn that the reason is that the county council is topping up its coffers, refunding its overspending from last year and not making money available to local authority rest homes for elderly people? Yet those are Opposition concerns. Will they be so pleased to learn that at the county council budget meeting the Labour group imposed a guillotine on discussion when good Conservative ideas were yet to be heard? Those truths could come out in such a debate.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Is my hon. Friend aware that, on 20 July 1976, in supporting a guillotine, the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) said:

> "Let us accept that the democratic will in this country, and the instrument of it, is the ability to command a majority of votes in a House of Commons debate. That is what we shall do at the end of this debate, and we shall then see an end to the cant and humbug that we have heard from the Opposition"?—[*Official Report*, 20 July 1976; Vol. 915, c. 1656-7.]

Why does the hon. Gentleman oppose guillotines now when he was in favour of them in government?

Mr. Jack: My hon. Friend's assiduous research overwhelms me, but he makes his point in a uniquely effective way.

New clause 26 is about residential care. I am delighted that we shall debate it because that will give us a chance to explore some of the hidden recesses of the income support regulations. I hope that the Government will make a positive announcement to deal with the points that come up in debate.

I should like my Front-Bench colleagues to address a problem that causes difficulty for some of my constituents living in residential and nursing homes. They would like my right hon. and hon. Friends to consider the income support regulations that deal with the way in which properties are handled. Two elderly people may have been living together as friends. One may go into a nursing or rest home and apply for income support but find that he or she is not able to get that help—even at its more generous levels—because the couple are deemed to have capital through the joint ownership of a house. It is impractical for those elderly people to sell half a house. My right hon. and hon. Friends may like to reflect on that important point and allude to the opportunity to discuss it in another place. That issue is important and has been flushed out into the open by the discussion on residential and nursing homes.

There is much important business in the Bill to discuss and the sooner we do so, the better.

6.31 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The speech by the hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) would have benefited if he had been in the Chamber more than five minutes before rising to speak. If he is so anxious about Members from various parts of the United Kingdom being able to represent their constituents, perhaps he and his colleagues will stop disrupting Scottish Question Time every month and give Scottish Members a chance to question Ministers.

Mr. Jack: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Salmond: I shall not give way. The hon. Gentleman has taken too much time already.

I suppose that, after the speech of the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow), we should welcome another rebel to the Tory anti-poll tax standard. We must be charitable on these occasions, but we remember the hon. Gentleman's enthusiastic support for the poll tax. We in Scotland remember that, unlike the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark), the hon. Gentleman enthusiastically imposed the poll tax on the Scottish people—the very tax that he now finds so unamenable when it is imposed on his own constituents.

The Leader of the House referred once again to deals that were supposedly done between the usual channels. We in the minority parties are irritated when we hear that guillotine motions are introduced because of some breakdown in the usual channels, of which we are not a part, like the majority of Members. That is no reason for restricting the ability of hon. Members to debate.

Mr. Grocott: For the record, I should like to make it clear that there has been no deal whatsoever on this guillotine motion.

Mr. Salmond: I fully accept the hon. Gentleman's word. I was referring to what the Leader of the House implied in his opening speech.

I was wondering whether to concentrate on the brass neck or the arrogance of the Leader of the House in proposing the timetable motion—his brass neck in complaining about the number of Opposition amendments, when the Government themselves have tabled no fewer than 70 new clauses and amendments, or the arrogance which makes him think that the tabling of amendments is a sign of improper opposition. It is not up to the Leader of the House to decide which amendments are proper and which are improper. If an amendment is in order, it can be put on the amendment paper; if it is selected for debate, it can be debated; and if the House so decides, it can pass the amendment. It is not the role of the Leader of the House to decide that, because a number of amendments have inconvenienced his business timetable, that is a justification for imposing a guillotine.

I should like to consider specifically the limitation of the debate on new clause 1 and the other new clauses and amendments that will be debated between 11 pm and 12 midnight. One hour is by no means adequate to debate even new clause 1, never mind the other important amendments. The increase in capital limits in the Budget has raised substantial expectations among old-age pensioners who believe that they now will be entitled to a poll tax rebate.

It would have been extremely helpful for hon. Members to have a prolonged debate on those issues. It would then be realised that, because the taper and the income assumed have not been changed, the income and interest assumed will bite into the rebate level well before they get anywhere near £16,000 of savings. It will be a great disappointment to many old people to learn that, even on tiny incomes and with modest capital, they will qualify for the tiniest of rebates, if any at all.

Last Friday, I appeared on television with the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland. I saw his expression of surprise when I detailed how some of his own constituents would qualify for the tiniest of rebates because they had £12,500 in capital. All Tory Members

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would have benefited from a prolonged debate on this subject so that they could realise how limited that concession is.

Several times during the past week we have been denied the opportunity to hear the Secretary of State for Scotland fully explain to the House last week's remarkable events —remarkable in the sense that he was exposed as marginal to Cabinet decision making; as so dim-witted that last Tuesday he did not even refer in Cabinet to the position in Scotland; as so insensitive that he described the immediate outcry as "bogus"; and as so craven that within 48 hours he had done a political somersault to save his political skin. The right hon. and learned Gentleman refused to make a statement. He would not even personally answer our questions during Scottish Question Time this afternoon. The timetable motion makes it unlikely that he will contribute to the debate this evening.

The timetable motion is not a convenience for the House of Commons. It is a convenience for the Government, so that they can get through some more sloppy legislation as part of the shoddy programme of this shabby Administration.

6.36 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): Every hon. Member knows that there have been occasions when protests about the guillotine have been tinged with at least a margin of synthetic ire, but no one could possibly say that that applied here. By any standards, the Government's move to impose a panic guillotine is an abuse.

That is the view not just of many of my colleagues who have argued so cogently against the guillotine, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) in his eloquent and witty speech. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) for his moving, brave and, as we always expect, principled argument against the practice of guillotines in general. I am sure that the House listened also to the powerful pleas of other Conservative Members.

They are not here to hear me say this, but it is not often that I congratulate the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow), who is not often a rebel in our cause, and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark). It is an outrage that matters as important and contentious as the poll tax and residential and nursing home charges should be allocated no more than a handful of minutes for discussion.

We have three main objections to the guillotine. First, it is being imposed before the House has even embarked on the Report stage. By definition, therefore, there can be no evidence of filibustering or time-wasting by the Opposition, even to the slightest degree, in Committee or at this stage. It is a totally unprovoked curb on free speech.

Secondly, it is the sheerest hypocrisy for the Government to impose a guillotine when they are responsible for importing five new, highly contentious issues into the Report stage, all of which are extraneous to the content of the Bill but which, by convention, must be debated first as Government new clauses.

The gap between income support and residential nursing home charges features in the Bill only because the Secretary of State for Social Security and the Secretary of State for Health adopted such an offensively insensitive posture over the National Health Service and Community Care Bill that it provoked a rebellion on their own Benches, which caused them, despite their 100 majority, to lose the vote. That is the only reason why we have returned to the issue tonight.

The social fund features in the Bill only because the Government acted illegally in their advice to local social security officers, which caused them to be overruled in the High Court. Child maintenance features in the Bill only because the Prime Minister, belatedly and following an Opposition initiative which I launched three weeks before her—*[Interruption.]* That is a matter of fact which Conservative Members can check. She decided that the Government had at least to be seen to be doing something. The Department of Social Security was caught on the hop. Nothing had been drafted or, one suspects, had even been thought about at that point. Hence, nothing appeared in the Bill about that on Second Reading. It has taken until now to produce what is merely a holding clause on that matter.

The retrospective effect of section 165A of the principal Act features in the Bill only because of the Government's incompetence in believing that they had dealt with the matter in the 1985 Act, when it is clear now that they had not. The limited price indexing of pensions in the payment under occupational pension schemes features in the Bill only because the Government miscalulated the matter on Second Reading. They have now been forced to rethink their position in the light of the indefensibly feeble posture that they adopted on Second Reading.

On every one of those issues, the Government alone are responsible, having tabled five new clauses at the last moment, four of them, almost unprecedentedly, in the last 24 hours. For the Government now to impose the guillotine is simply to pre-empt the lion's share of debating time for their new material, while telescoping into what I can only describe as relative insignificance the time available for discussion of the issues in the Bill.

The third major reason why we object to the guillotine —my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) dealt strongly with this—is that it is designed to prevent debate on the whole range of issues on which we have tabled new clauses. The Government have a disreputable record on social security and our new clauses focused on each main element of that record. I refer to the break in the pension uprating link with earnings; the refusal to assist lone parents at work with child minding expenses; the draconian extension of unemployment from six to 26 weeks; the refusal to give compensation to radiation-exposed ex-service men; the iniquitous "actively seeking work" criterion; and the freezing of child benefit for the last three years.

We appreciate the Government's embarrassment about, and anxiety to avoid debate on, those matters. But to use the procedural device of the guillotine to restrict, if not eliminate, debate on them is, frankly, contemptible.

It is impossible, if the guillotine is accepted tonight, for there to be any debate on six of the first seven Opposition new clauses. In addition, it will leave next week a maximum of six and a half hours for debate on 13 remaining Opposition new clauses, no fewer than 37 new amendments to the Bill just tabled by the Government, 18 amendments tabled by the Opposition and the Third Reading.

To suggest that all that can be completed, or even reasonably broached, in six and a half hours is farcical. If there is any decency and respectability to be preserved in the principle of proper debate in the House, hon. Members will reject the guillotine.

6.44 pm

The Minister for Social Security (Mr. Nicholas Scott): Before dealing with the meat of the motion, I wish—I hope that I shall not embarrass him in doing so—to add my congratulations to those of the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) on a speech of considerable passion and vigour. I know his consistency in this matter and make no complaint about the assault that he launched on us for tabling the guillotine.

I know, too, my hon. Friend's feeling about the weight of legislation that is put on the House and our need to get it through. As a Minister, I have been guaranteed a Bill on social security in every Session of Parliament, so far at least, and there are evenings when I have some sympathy with my hon. Friend when he talks about that weight of legislation. The House as a whole—perhaps the main responsibility rests on the Government—should be concerned about that weight of legislation, about the way in which it is handled and about some of the constraints on us.

In my 24 years in the House, I have listened to innumerable debates on timetable motions. One has an awful sense of seeing the whole thing through again from one side of the House or the other and listening to the same speeches being recycled. All Governments have had recourse to this weapon, with the possible exception of the 1945-50 Government. But I wonder how many pages of legislation were passed in that Parliament compared with the weight of legislation that we have today.

The hon. Members for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) and for Oldham, West—although they gave different figures about the tabling of Government new clauses—were mistaken. It is not true to say, as the hon. Member for The Wrekin said, that one new clause was tabled early on Monday, two early on Tuesday and another on Tuesday afternoon. The first new clause was tabled last Friday, the bulk were tabled on Monday and only one, on residential care, was tabled on Tuesday. That mirrors well the Opposition's performance in tabling new clauses and amendments right up to the last minute, so I see no reason to apologise for the timetable.

None of the issues contained in our new clauses could conceivably have been included in the Bill. They were all matters that we were still considering from a policy point of view. We were taking legal advice, were concerned with tidying-up procedures or, in the case of occupational pensions, were still in consultation with the industry about the detail. I believe that it was right to go ahead with the publication of the Bill as it was and to produce the clauses and amendments once we had carried out the legal and other consultations that we were having.

The timetable motion presents the House with three definite advantages. First, as it will be acknowledged, there were discussions between the usual channels about the time needed to take the Bill through the House. There was to be one and a half days, in round terms, to be agreed between the usual channels. We shall now have more time available as a result of the timetable motion than we would have had if we had interpreted that allocation of one and a half days in the way that it is normally understood in the House.

Nobody suggested, until the hon. Member for Oldham, West was rash enough first to table his new clauses and then to issue his press release, that the House would anticipate a sitting of 23 hours on this sitting day.

Mr. Meacher *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Scott: The hon. Gentleman was quoted in the press. No doubt he will take the appropriate opportunity to complain to those who put that out in his name.

Mr. Meacher: I shall say only that I never said any such thing. As is well known, one does not necessarily believe what one reads in the press. I said that we had an opportunity for open-ended debate. My hon. Friends and I had no intention to filibuster. But we insist, in view of the Government's record, which has been appalling over the past 10 years, that there should be adequate time, and an open-ended debate on the first day would give far more time than the Government are allotting under the guillotine.

Mr. Scott: It is rather strange that both the *Daily Mirror* and the *Morning Star* carried such similar coverage of the hon. Gentleman's intentions.

We shall have more time than we would have had, had there been a normal interpretation of the understanding to which I referred. Most of the time will be at the disposal of the Opposition. I think that we shall be able to get through the Government's new clauses very rapidly.

The second point is the overwhelming one that our discussions will be conducted at a civilised hour. The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) said that we are not at our best in the wee small hours of the morning. We shall be able to discuss these matters in what, in a sense, is prime time, and I think that the House will do better in scrutinising what the Government have put forward. Indeed, we intend to subject the Opposition's new clauses and amendments to scrutiny.

Thirdly, we shall be able to organise our time in an orderly and predictable way, with as much flexibility as is possible within the broad terms of the Opposition's right to exercise their judgment on these matters.

Ms. Short: In effect, the right hon. Gentleman is saying that we may not take as much time as we need to discuss the Government's social security changes to which we object. The Government are telling us when we must finish and go to bed. They are simply unwilling to be inconvenienced by allowing us to use the platform of this House to put before the nation what we think is wrong with their social security policy.

Mr. Scott: I do not want to embarrass the hon. Lady, but I have to say that she knows that, week by week, in Committee, we had considerable discussions on whether we should sit not only in the mornings but in the afternoons and even, if necessary, in the evenings. *[Interruption.]* Precisely. I am about to come to that point.

It seems to me that Opposition Members are using a new tactic—not to say a great deal in Committee but to seek to exploit the time of the House on Report in a way that has not been the tradition. To show the tremendous

[Mr. Scott]

change of attitude that is reflected in the Opposition's behaviour in this case, I shall come later to what has happened in the case of previous social security legislation.

Ms. Short: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Scott: No.

Ms. Short *rose*——

Mr. Scott: I do not have to give way.

Ms. Short *rose*——

Mr. Scott: Very well, if the hon. Lady is upset.

Ms. Short: The right hon. Gentleman knows that the Opposition put forward a timetable for the Committee and that the Government adhered to it. We did not play games or filibuster, but did the Committee business seriously. Indeed, as a result of our action, the Government made some changes. We take a different view about what properly comes to the Floor of the House of Commons and about our ability to make a case before the nation. In the Bill there are broader issues of social security policy —matters that are quite in order—that we feel should be brought to the Floor of the House and put to the nation. We make no apology for the entirely proper strategy that we have adopted, both in Committee and in the House.

Mr. Scott: I have little time to respond to the hon. Lady's point, so I shall say simply that I disagree with her.

As ever, I listened with great respect to the speech of the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot). We all know his record on this front. He complained about the absence of my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House. Acting as I did in Committee, I shall make sure that I am a conduit for messages to my right hon. and learned Friend. I shall see that the points that have been made today are brought to his attention. However, I have a slight suspicion that the anxiety of the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent to take part in these debates is rather like a criminal's return to the scene of his crime —recorded not so much in the pages of the *Police Gazette* as in the "Guinness Book of Records", because of the fame that he enjoys for that particular day when he was Leader of the House.

In the last couple of minutes, I want to deal with the point on which the right hon. Gentleman asked me to reflect. I believe that Governments should be very sparing in their use of timetable motions. Certainly, I agreed to the introduction of this motion with great regret. The House has filled up slightly, but during this afternoon's debate there was hardly any sign of great passion among Opposition Members. I tried to average out the numbers present at various stages during the debate, and I think that the average came to 13. That figure may be of particular interest to the two Ulster Unionist Members from County Antrim constituencies who are in the Chamber, because of the history of their part of the United Kingdom, but the number present does not demonstrate any great passion on the part of the Labour party to oppose the motion. Indeed, it may very well be that a considerable number of Labour Members were relieved at our decision to introduce a timetable motion.

Once more, I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) for his research. The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) waxed eloquent in his opposition to the timetable motion. These are the hon. Gentleman's words on an earlier occasion:

> "The principle of a timetable motion is highly commendable as a general rule. It is not cutting down debate; it is making it more meaningful, cutting out aeons of waffle that fill *Hansard*, page after page after page. Many speeches which take 45 minutes could be cut to 10 or 15 minutes and still contain the germ of what was intended."—*[Official Report*, 20 July 1976; Vol. 915, c. 1729.]

That is what I am offering the House tonight.

Amendment negatived.

Main Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 321, Noes 204.

Division No. 143] **[6.55 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr)*

Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal

Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo

Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Waller, Gary

Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Alastair Goodlad and
Mr. Tony Durant.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Boyes, Roland
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*

Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil

Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie and
Mr. John McFall.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the following provisions shall apply to the remaining proceedings on the Bill:—

Report and Third Reading

1.—(1) The proceedings on consideration and Third Reading of the Bill shall be completed in two allotted days and shall be brought to a conclusion at the times shown in the following Table:—

TABLE

Allotted day	*Proceedings*	*Time for conclusion of proceedings*
First day	New Clauses 19, 21 and 22	9:00 p.m.
	New Clauses 23 and 26	11:00 p.m.
	New Clauses 1 to 6	Midnight
	New Clauses 7 and 8	1:00 a.m.
Second day	Remaining New Clauses	7:00 p.m.
	Amendments to Clauses; New Schedules and amendments to Schedules	9:00 p.m.
	Third Reading	10:00 p.m.

(2) Standing Order No. 80 (Business Committee) shall not apply to this Order.

Order of proceedings

2. No Motion shall be made to alter the order in which proceedings on consideration of the Bill are taken.

Dilatory Motions

3. No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of, proceedings on the Bill shall be made on an allotted day except by a member of the Government, and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

Extra time on allotted day

4.—(1) On the first allotted day paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings on the Bill for three hours after Ten o'clock.

(2) Any period during which proceedings on the Bill may be proceeded with after Ten o'clock under paragraph (7) of Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) shall be in addition to the said period of three hours.

(3) If an allotted day is one to which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 stands over from an earlier day, paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 shall apply to the proceedings on the Bill for a period of time equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion; and on the first allotted day that period shall be added to the said period of three hours.

Private business

5. Any private business which has been set down for consideration at Seven o'clock on an allotted day shall, instead of being considered as provided by Standing Orders, be considered at the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill on that day, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the private business for a period of three hours from the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill or, if those proceedings are concluded before Ten o'clock, for a period equal to the time elapsing between Seven o'clock and the conclusion of those proceedings.

Conclusion of proceedings

6.—(1) For the purpose of bringing to a conclusion any proceedings which are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order and which have not previously been brought to a conclusion, other than the proceedings specified in sub-paragraph (2) below, Mr. Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others)—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed (including, in the case of a new Clause or new Schedule which has been read a second time, the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill);

(c) the Question on any amendment or Motion standing on the Order Paper in the name of any Member, if that amendment is moved or Motion is made by a member of the Government;

(d) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded;

and on a Motion so made for a new Clause or a new Schedule, Mr. Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

(2) For the purpose of bringing to a conclusion any proceedings which the Table in paragraph 1 above specifies are to be brought to a conclusion at Nine o'clock on the second allotted day and which have not previously been brought to a conclusion, Mr. Speaker shall forthwith put (so far as they are applicable and notwithstanding any Order of the House relating to the order in which the Bill is to be considered) the following Questions (but no others)—

(a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed (including, in the case of a new Schedule which has been read a second time, the Question that the Schedule be added to the Bill);

(c) the Question that the new Schedule (amendment 22) be added to the Bill;

(d) the Question that all remaining amendments standing in the name of a member of the Government be made to the Bill;

(e) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded;

and on a Motion so made for a new Schedule, Mr. Speaker shall put only the Question that the Schedule be added to the Bill.

(3) Proceedings under sub-paragraph (1) or (2) above shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

(4) If an allotted day is one on which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) would, apart from this Order, stand over to Seven o'clock—

(a) that Motion shall stand over until the conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order, are to be brought to a conclusion at or before that time;

(b) the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this order, are to be brought to a conclusion after that time shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

(5) If an allotted day is one to which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 stands over from an earlier day, the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which under this Order are to be brought to a conclusion on that day shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

Supplemental orders

7.—(1) The proceedings on any Motion made by a member of the Government for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after they have been commenced, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings.

(2) If on an allotted day on which any proceedings on the Bill are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before that time no notice shall be required of a Motion made at the next sitting by a member of the Government for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

Saving

8. Nothing in this Order shall—

(a) prevent any proceedings to which the Order applies from being taken or completed earlier than is required by the Order; or

(b) prevent any business (whether on the Bill or not) from being proceeded with on any day after the completion of all such proceedings on the Bill as are to be taken on that day.

Recommittal

9.—(1) References in this Order to proceedings on consideration or proceedings on Third Reading include references to proceedings at those stages respectively, for, on or in consequence of, recommittal.

(2) On an allotted day no debate shall be permitted on any Motion to recommit the Bill (whether as a whole or otherwise), and Mr. Speaker shall put forthwith any Question necessary to dispose of the Motion, including the Question on any amendment moved to the Question.

Interpretation

10. In this Order—

"allotted day" means any day (other than a Friday) on which the Bill is put down as first Government Order of the Day, provided that a Motion for allotting time to the proceedings on the Bill to be taken on that day either has been agreed on a previous day, or is set down for consideration on that day;

"the Bill" means the Social Security Bill.

Orders of the Day

Social Security Bill

[1st Allotted Day]

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered

New clause 19

ANNUAL INCREASE OF CERTAIN OCCUPATIONAL PENSIONS

'.—(1) The following section shall be inserted after section 58 of the Pensions Act—

"*Annual increase in rate of pension, other than guaranteed minimum pension or money purchase benefit.*

58A.—(1) This section applies in relation to any occupational pension scheme—

(a) which is neither a public service pension scheme nor a money purchase scheme; and

(b) whose rules do not require the annual rate of every pension which commences or has commenced under the scheme to be increased each year by at least an amount equal to the appropriate percentage of that rate.

(2) On and after the appointed day, Schedule 3A to this Act shall have effect for the purpose of providing annual increases in the annual rate of pensions under schemes to which this section applies.

(3) In this section—

"annual rate", in relation to a pension, means the annual rate of the pension, as previously increased under the rules of the scheme or under Schedule 3A to this Act;

"the appointed day" means the day on which this section and Schedule 3A to this Act come into force;

"the appropriate percentage", in relation to an increase in the annual rate of a pension, means the percentage specified in the last revaluation order made before the increase is to take effect as the revaluation percentage for the last revaluation period of twelve months;

"money purchase scheme" means a pension scheme under which all the benefits that may be provided are money purchase benefits;

"pension" does not include—

(a) a guaranteed minimum pension or any increase in such a pension under section 37A above; or

(b) any money purchase benefit;

"revaluation order", "revaluation percentage" and "revaluation period" shall be construed in accordance with section 52A above."

(2) After Schedule 3 to the Pensions Act there shall be inserted the Schedule set out in Schedule [Insertion of Schedule 3A to the Pensions Act] to this Act.'.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

7.10 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Tony Newton): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 22 and 23.

Mr. Newton: I hasten to assure the House that I shall not read the contents of the new clause, still less the two amendments linked with it. I shall seek to keep my speech brief, in line with anxieties expressed by the Opposition about whether they will have sufficient time to develop their arguments on these undoubtedly important issues.

[Mr. Newton]

The House will recall the wide welcome that was given to an important part of our aim in the Bill—to give members of occupational pension schemes greater protection in various ways. Most of the proposals flowed from an important and valuable report by the Occupational Pensions Board and I wish to renew my thanks to the board for that. There were proposals to reduce the scale of self-investment in pension schemes to try to reduce the risk that members of schemes might otherwise face—a double risk to their jobs and to their pensions; and proposals for improved protection when a pension scheme was wound up, particularly to reduce the scope for such schemes being exploited by those who might be described as asset strippers. There was a range of measures designed to improve the advice, information and help available to members of occupational pension schemes with the creation of a pensions ombudsman, the strengthening of some of the aspects of the work of the occupational pensions advisory service and the creation of a tracing service to help people who might have pension rights in a wide variety of schemes to establish precisely where and what they are.

In general, those aims have been welcomed by hon. Members on both sides of the House, by many people throughout the country and by the industry.

Some reservations have been expressed about some aspects of our proposals on self-investment and we have modified those to meet what we thought were legitimate criticisms. We shall mount a survey of the scale and extent of self-investment before deciding precisely how to use the regulation-making powers in the Bill. That has also been thought to be sensible.

The second main area of our proposals about which reservations were expressed, while the general principle was welcomed, was the proposal to require pension increases according to certain formulations when a scheme winds up. Some people—certainly the official Opposition—have said that I should have gone further and placed a similar requirement for pension increases on schemes that continued as well as those that were wound up. Other people have pointed out the possible consequences for some businesses of the original winding-up provisions in the Bill. They said that in certain cases at least the employer would have faced additional contingent liabilities for which they had had no opportunity to plan, and if they had to meet those requirements the viability of their businesses might be put at risk in certain circumstances.

Having listened carefully to those arguments, having had a number of discussions with representatives of the industry, and having listened carefully to what Opposition Members said in Committee and to suggestions made in those quarters and the industry that there are other ways to achieve the basic objective, we came to the conclusion that we could strike a better balance between the different aims of pension policy.

7.15 pm

The principal element of that conclusion is that it is better to make general requirements about the payment of pension increases after members retire if the requirements that we are now proposing apply to schemes that continue as well as to schemes that wind up.

The new requirements are set out in new clause 19 and the associated amendments. We will avoid forcing employers to put new money into schemes to fund commitments to past service. That was the issue in our original proposals which caused so much unease.

The new clause makes two requirements. First, schemes will have to pay annual increases to members for pension rights which they build up after an appointed day. For those rights derived from future service, members should be guaranteed increases in line with the retail prices index up to a maximum of 5 per cent. a year. There is nothing in that proposal to prevent schemes from continuing to pay more than that or starting to if they wish to do so, and if they feel able to.

That new provision for improving rights for future service is an important step forward which will give members of private sector schemes, in particular, increasing security in the future. It has been widely welcomed in the industry, by the press and in other quarters as a sensible step forward. However, on its own it does not go far enough, because it does nothing for existing pensioners who have rights derived from past service.

The latest statistics from the Government Actuary suggest that about 80 per cent.—four fifths—of members of schemes are getting annual increases, mostly in the 3 to 5 per cent. range. That is obviously welcome, but it follows that some 20 per cent. —one fifth—are getting no increase. Frankly, that is not good enough, especially when the strong investment performance of pension funds in recent years has continued to yield large surpluses which could be used by many schemes to provide some measure of indexation.

Therefore, we are proposing a second requirement in the new clause and associated amendments so that from an appointed day schemes will have to use surpluses to pay increases to members for pension rights which they have already built up. That should include pensions that are now in payment. The guaranteed rate of increase that each scheme will have to pay will depend on the surplus in the pension fund, but the target rate of increase for schemes will be the rise in RPI up to 5 per cent. a year, with the rate to be guaranteed by each scheme, depending on the amount of its surplus. In other words, schemes that have surpluses will have to use them to guarantee increases at target level before taking a contribution holiday or a refund. Schemes will be able to continue or to start to do more than the basic requirement if they wish.

I expect that the appointed days in both cases—both in the first requirement and the latter requirement—for the use of surpluses will be no later than the end of December 1991, although the date that could turn out to be convenient and sensible is 1 January 1992.

I have asked my officials to begin discussions with the actuarial profession to determine the appropriate methods and assumptions for calculating the size of scheme surpluses and the guaranteed increases that would flow from them.

The proposal offers a sensible balanced and affordable measure of security to existing pensioners. For many in the private sector it will turn existing discretionary increases into rights. That can only be an advance in making such schemes even more attractive to their members.

The new requirement will cover benefits paid to widows, widowers and dependants. It will apply to all retirement benefits paid by occupatonal pension schemes with two exceptions. The first is guaranteed minimum pensions and any increase in these pensions under section 37A of the Pensions Act. Those benefits are already protected through the contracting-out arrangements of the state earnings-related pension scheme.

The second exception is money-purchased benefits, including personal pensions schemes to which I believe rather different considerations apply. Their members aready have an opportunity to use the proceeds of their investments to choose a pension that increases after retirement—or not, as the case may be. No doubt one could argue about whether that choice ought to be restricted, but, in my view, this is not the time to attempt to make any decision on that. The question of pension increases in those schemes would be best resolved as part of the review of the terms for contracting out of SERPS that is due to start next year.

Under the new proposals, the position when a scheme winds up will match the general requirements for pension increases. In the event of a scheme winding up it will be a liability on the employer to provide increases at the prices up to 5 per cent. rate in respect of pensions accruing after the appointed day. For pension rights based on service before then, increases will depend on the extent of increases already guaranteed as a result of the new requirements and any additional surplus emerging when the scheme winds up.

The new provisions will give members of occupational pension schemes growing certainty about the rate of pension increases that they will receive after retirement. Increases will be guaranteed for future service in line with prices up to 5 per cent. a year. For benefits already accrued —including pensions in payment—guaranteed increases will become the first call on scheme surpluses.

It is well understood that the Government have placed considerable weight on people's own occupational and personal pension provision—building over and above the basic state retirement pension—as a central element in placing retirement provision on a secure foundation for the future. The gathering success of that policy is clear. As the House knows, by 1987, the average value of occupational pensions received by people over pension age had increased by 77 per cent. in real terms since 1979 when we took office. That means that for many pensioners their occupational pension is now their most important source of income. For pensioners receiving an occupational pension the average amount received in 1987 was £44·80, and that was nearly three years ago.

The increasing importance of occupational pensions underlines the need to ensure that we have the right framework for the schemes. We have introduced a long series of measures to achieve just that. In 1985, we introduced the protection for early leavers so that pensions could no longer be frozen. We introduced the right to a transfer value when leaving the scheme and we passed legislation to enable scheme members to be provided with information about their scheme as of right. In 1986, we brought to an end compulsory membership of occupational schemes and extended the choice available to individuals planning for their retirement to include personal pensions, which have been an outstanding success.

The Bill provides increased protection for scheme members. In future, early leavers will have all their preserved benefits revalued by prices up to 5 per cent. a year—and not just those rights built up since 1985. For members needing help and advice we are ensuring that the occupational pensions advisory service is put on a firm financial basis. We shall also put in place the pension ombudsman to give members a quicker, more effective means of seeking redress of grievances and we shall expand the range of tracing services that we already provide to cover occupational pension schemes. We are limiting the scope for self-investment. The requirement in the new clause for schemes to provide pension increases is a further major step forward and may prove in time to be among the most important that we have taken.

I commend the new clause to the House.

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): I welcome the fact that the Government have accepted our argument that a pensions scheme that does not guarantee reasonable increases in pensions is a bad scheme. But it is quite clear that the proposal to limit increases to only 5 per cent. a year still gives inadequate protection against inflation.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Meacher: I cannot understand how the hon. Gentleman can shake his head, given that inflation is now rising towards 9 per cent., but I do not wish to provoke him.

We believe that it is both practical and desirable to give a higher level of protection—a point which I emphasised strongly on Second Reading. Frankly, the 5 per cent. limit is not high enough. The average employee can now expect to live 20 or more years into retirement and we need a measure that provides adequate protection over that sort of lifespan. It is a relevant consideration for the House that if someone who retired 20 years ago had had only increases on the basis that the Government now propose, his benefit would be worth only about 40 per cent. of its initial value. With inflation rapidly rising towards double figures, a measure that purports to protect the real value of members' benefits but allows them to fall to less than half their initial value is—not to put too fine a point on it—a fraud.

If anything, pensioners' needs increase as they get older and the Government's proposal is a recipe for continued poverty for the very old. We are therefore opposed to the 5 per cent. limit. We consider that schemes should be required to increase pensions fully in line with the retail prices index.

The argument that has always been advanced against such a measure is that it is too costly. It has been suggested that it would be too expensive to legislate for larger increases and that to do so would frighten employers away from providing pension schemes. We reject that argument, and I want to say why. Employers provide pension schemes because it is in their interests to do so. They need to attract and retain staff. They also need their staff to retire as they get older. It is therefore in their interests to provide attractive schemes with a competitive level of benefit.

The big increases in the current cost of providing a pension scheme arise when a scheme that makes no provision—the Secretary of State said that about one fifth of schemes made no provision——

Mr. Newton: I would not want to mislead the hon. Gentleman. My statistics related to the members of the scheme. Rather more than one fifth of schemes would be involved, I think, because, on the whole, the large schemes have been making the increases.

Mr. Meacher: The right hon. Gentleman simply strengthens my point. The big increases in the current costs of providing a pension scheme arise when a scheme that makes no provision for increases is improved to provide RPI increases limited to 5 per cent. It has been estimated that that could increase the cost of a scheme by up to one half. But most schemes do not start from that position; we all agree about that. Most employees belong to schemes that already guarantee or make provision for increases at or near the Government's proposals—3 to 5 per cent. is probably the norm. The relevant point is that the move from limited increases to full RPI increases without a limit is much less significant than the move from no increases at all. That is because in most cases the assumptions made by the actuaries that determine the contributions to be paid are in practice similar whether or not there is a limit. The key factor is the difference between the assumptions made about future investment returns and assumptions about future pension increases.

I am the first to recognise that these are complex matters, but I am told that, although there are probably as many different sets of assumptions as there are actuaries, broadly speaking, the difference will be similar for schemes that guarantee increases, whether or not there is a 5 per cent. limit. Opposition Members therefore consider it reasonable to require schemes to provide full inflation-proofing for future benefits, for the reasons that I have given. In practice, many schemes, particularly the larger schemes, are already providing increases in line with what we propose. We are the first to recognise that. The current cost for those schemes will be even smaller; they may even be nil.

As to past service benefits accrued before the appointed day, they should also be increased in line with the RPI, as far as surpluses permit. For as long as a scheme has a surplus, there is no reason why it should provide for employer refunds or contribution holidays before it is used to protect the real value of members' benefits. The money was paid into the scheme to provide pensions as part of the employee's contract of employment, so why should any of that money benefit the employer before being used to increase pensions in line with the RPI? I hope that that argument will commend itself for general support.

7.30 pm

The cost of our proposals should not prove to be a deterrent against good pension provision. Over the past five years, the pension schemes to which most people belong already adopt the practice that we propose. Watson's index of pension increases—Watson is a firm of actuarial consultants which I gather is quite famous—shows that, allowing for a lag in implementation, average pension increases have more or less kept in line with the RPI. Clearly there is no practical objection to making that practice a legal requirement of all schemes.

The only opposition is likely to come from a minority of employers who want to take money away from their pensioners and use it for their own purposes. We reject entirely the suggestion that surpluses are in any sense the employer's money. Each year, the employer paid in an amount that was considered to be right at the time, and therefore it is a perversion of the language to refer to any surplus as overpaid employer contributions.

This matter is not of a highly party political nature, so it should not be considered in a partisan way. I hope that the Government will see the sense in our argument. I agree entirely with the Secretary of State's concluding comment concerning the importance of these matters. They are far more significant than many of the issues that cause so much commotion in the House.

Mr. Tim Smith: If a surplus is not an employer's overpaid contribution, what is a deficit? Who would the hon. Gentleman expect to make up any deficit?

Mr. Meacher: Deficits do not exist except in a minority of cases. I cannot off the top of my head say what proportion of all schemes are in deficit. At present, total surpluses are estimated as being in excess of £50 billion, so it is difficult to believe that any schemes are in deficit. If there are, they must have evaded the requirement that pensions legislation of successive Governments placed on schemes to ensure an adequacy of contributions to meet the retirement pensions that they must honour.

Deficits are not the real problem. The important questions are who owns the surplus, how should it be used, and who has first rights to it. Our view is that unquestionably the first rights to any surplus are with employees now in retirement. I repeat that as long as a surplus exists, we do not believe it right that there should be employer refunds or contribution holidays.

The basis of the Bill is that members are entitled to adequate protection against inflation, and that that priority should have first call on any surplus. There is no dispute between us on that, so I hope that I carry Conservative Members with me in arguing that it makes no sense to impose a 5 per cent. limit while allowing employers to benefit from any surplus.

The Secretary of State's announcement is something of an about-face, but I do not want to embarrass him—and I am glad to see him turning in our direction. Nevertheless, a large number of practical points remain to be clarified before a final judgment can be made. We are keen that new schemes should be obliged to pay increases along with the existing obligation to revalue deferred benefits, and there is a responsibility on the Government to ensure that schemes are adequately funded for that purpose. If employers are to commit themselves to paying benefits that meet legislative standards, members are entitled to more reassurance that adequate financial provision is being made.

At present, pension scheme members can look only to the disclosure requirements, which entitle them to some important but essentially limited information about benefit provisions. That approach does not provide scheme members with the kind of yardstick by which they can readily judge whether a scheme has enough money to meet its liabilities and whether contributions are sufficiently high.

The Secretary of State should take power to lay down standards on funding rates that schemes must meet. That has not been done up to now. Such a provision takes on particular significance as this country enters a recession and the risk of deficits mentioned by the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) arises.

The Secretary of State will have powers to lay down the basis on which any surplus is calculated. That raises two questions. The first is whether there will be a surplus, and hence whether increases must be paid on past benefits. The second is whether there is sufficient surplus to entitle the employer to take a contribution holiday. In either case, it would be wrong if employers were able to manipulate the requirements of the legislation simply by making a choice between extreme financial assumptions or unreasonable valuation methods. We do not believe that it would be reasonable to leave that decision simply to actuarial judgment—just as actuaries are not left to their own devices in undertaking statutory valuations in life assurance companies. We envisage a period of consultation on the rules to be laid down. Ultimately, the Government will have a duty to ensure that the system that they propose cannot be used against the interests of scheme members.

We welcome what we view as a Government U-turn as a consequence of the pressure that we put on them on Second Reading and in Committee. However, we remain critical of the Government's half-measures, which still fall far short of what is properly required. We shall continue to press our case until our proposals are fully implemented.

Mr. Timothy Wood (Stevenage): I welcome the new clause and the amendments. Before going further, I must declare that I am a parliamentary adviser to BZW Investment Management, though it has not pursued the Bill with me. However, there are within my constituency a number of firms engaged in the provision of pension funds, some of which have contacted me about the Bill.

It is important that a fair balance is struck between the possible liabilities placed on the employer and the benefits to be enjoyed by the employee or retired employee. The new clauses and amendments are an important step in the right direction. I agree with both my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) that, when there is a significant increase in inflation, the first call on any pension fund surplus should be to the benefit of employees or retired former employees.

However, one must also be wary of discouraging employers from providing pension funds by presenting a vision of future liabilities. It is all very well for the hon. Member for Oldham, West to say that pension funds are currently in surplus, but I recall a period eight or 10 years ago when that was far from true. At that time, unfortunately, companies were not making satisfactory profits and producing for the pension funds that had invested in them sufficient income to provide adequate pensions, which caused serious problems to develop.

One cannot assume that the current success in terms of profitable companies generating the necessary funds for pensions will continue, especially if there is a change of Government. That is one of the difficulties that actuaries face—they cannot predict with absolute accuracy who will be in power in the next 20, 30 or 40 years. We should like it to be the present Government, which would give actuaries more confidence in the future.

I welcome the new clause and the protection that has been provided to ensure that surpluses are used to benefit the pensioner who has first call on the pension fund. It also recognises that placing excessive contingent liabilities on employers could cause some employers to decide not to provide pension funds on behalf of their employees. That would be totally unfortunate, so I welcome the steps that have been taken today.

Mr. Tim Smith: New clause 19 constitutes a major step forward for millions of occupational pensioners in the United Kingdom and I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on introducing it. It represents a sensible balance between the interests of the employers and of employees. What my right hon. Friend has done is the right way to proceed in legislation affecting occupational pension schemes. He gave us some figures on the present position.

Of course, occupational pension schemes are voluntary arrangements. The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) said that employers provide occupational pensions for their own benefit because they want to attract or retain staff. I recognise that, but such schemes are voluntary arrangements, so it is sensible for legislation to reflect what is already best practice. Practice has improved over the years and the occupational pension schemes have changed out of all recognition in the past 20 years. By the new provisions, my right hon. Friend is reflecting what is already best practice and telling occupational pension schemes to bring themselves up to best practice.

If we were to go as far as the hon. Member for Oldham, West wants, we would be in a different position, because we have to consider the trade-off between improving existing schemes, as the new clause will do, and extending the coverage of occupational pension schemes. Although millions of employees are members of occupational pension schemes, many employees are not. In an ideal world, everyone who had a job would belong to an occupational pension scheme, but if we were to impose upon occupational pension schemes the open-ended commitment that the hon. Gentleman has in mind it would be very difficult because we do not know what future rates of inflation are likely to be.

It would be difficult to fund the schemes and would act as a major deterrent to any employers considering starting up an occupational pension scheme for the first time. Those employers are usually small employers, because most large employers already have such schemes. We are talking about what is a sensible burden to place on small businesses. I do not believe that what the hon. Gentleman has in mind would be sensible. It would be seen as a great burden by small businesses, so they would simply decline to introduce occupational pension arrangements for their employees, and very little would be achieved in the process.

Mr. Meacher: I hope that the hon. Gentleman has taken on board the essential point that I was making. Whether inflation is high or low, there tends to be the same ratio between investment yields and the retail prices index, which is the basis of pension increases. Even if the RPI rises, in the middle or longer term investment yields tend to rise roughly in the same proportion.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman forgets what happened in the late 1970s when, it is no coincidence to report, we had the misfortune to have a Labour Government. On Second Reading, I referred to two interesting tables which appeared in the report of the Occupational Pensions Board which show the way in which the investment yield on occupational pension schemes has improved over the past 10 years, as a result of which we now have large surpluses. We are not entitled to assume that we will always have large surpluses on pension schemes.

7.45 pm

When we had the misfortune to have a Labour Government, pension schemes were regularly in deficit. Of course, the employees expected the employers to make up the deficits and that is exactly what they did. They sometimes had to transfer considerable additional sums to the pension schemes to ensure that they could meet the liability.

We are now considering a further extension of those liabilities, and I accept that it is the right time to make that extension. However, if we were to go further and make the change that the hon. Gentleman has in mind, and if we were to return to those dark days of poor economic and investment performance, it would be extremely difficult for employers to meet the commitment that the hon. Gentleman has in mind. The past five years have been very different from the six years of Labour Government. There has been a great transformation and no comparison can be made. However, we are not entitled to assume that that will continue for ever.

By definition, occupational pension schemes are instituted for the long term. We are talking about long-term commitments, long-term investments and long-term liabilities. That is why it is sensible to proceed cautiously. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who has great expertise in these matters, has always taken a cautious approach.

The new clause constitutes a sensible balance. I accept what the hon. Member for Oldham, West said about actuaries and how they always produce different figures and assumptions, but actuaries may say that, as a result of the new clause, which will involve an extra commitment for many schemes, it will be necessary to increase the funding of those schemes by increasing the employers' or the employees' contributions.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Oldham, West realises that Members of Parliament have to pay such a large contribution to their pension scheme because we already have indexation. Our contribution is 9 per cent., which is very high.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): That is because we have so many early leavers.

Mr. Smith: Early leavers are an occupational hazard here. I was an early leaver once and I do not wish to repeat the experience, and I am not expecting to do so. That may be a particular difficulty, but we pay 9 per cent. because of the generous indexation provision in the House of Commons pension scheme. It is the open-ended arrangement that the hon. Gentleman wants. A contribution of 9 per cent. is nearly double what most employees pay as members of occupational pension schemes, and during the recent debate on the matter there were complaints about the contribution which hon. Members make.

I am not sure that such a high level of contribution would be welcomed by people in industry generally. We should understand that, if we were to introduce the change that the hon. Gentleman has in mind, employees or employers would have to pay such a rate. There would be a substantial increase in contributions and that would be a considerable additional burden on business, would make it particularly difficult for small businesses and would lead to a reduction in the number of members of occupational pension schemes. Presumably that is exactly the opposite of what the hon. Gentleman hopes to achieve.

My right hon. Friend has found a sensible balance in the new clause. It will involve a major improvement for millions of members of occupational pension schemes, and the House should welcome it.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I intervene briefly to ask only a couple of questions, because I am more interested in progressing to the later stages of the Bill.

I welcome new clause 19, which is complicated. It enshrines a schedule and brings the benefits that have already been mentioned. Why did not the Government take the power to vary the 5 per cent. limit? The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) made a valid criticism of the new clause, because there may be circumstances in which the 5 per cent. ceiling is considered onerous and unfair. In the past, Social Security Ministers, in a variety of guises and on a variety of benefits, have resorted to the power of regulation to amend such things as child benefit, which the Government have the power to increase annually but have not exercised. The Secretary of State could use such devices to ensure that yearly returns on schemes are fair and in line with the retail prices index. No doubt there is a technical reason why that is not possible, but it is worth pursuing.

The welcome changes made by new clause 19 may not take effect until 1 January 1992. The Government have had the report of the Occupational Pensions Board for several months, and Ministers have been considering the new clause for many months. Why might it be January 1992 before the benefits take effect? If it will take the Government that long to finish their homework, why did they not move the new clause during next year's Social Security Bill?

I am sure that the Minister will deal with that, but subject to those qualifications I give the new provisions a warm and enthusiastic welcome.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): I welcome new clause 19. The improvements in private sector pension schemes under this Government are to be welcomed. The proposal for guaranteed minimum increases is extremely good.

As an accountant, during the period of office of the previous Labour Government in the late 1970s, I had some experience of company audits. One of the major accounting tasks for the year was to examine a company's pension fund to ascertain the deficit and whether the company was capable of making available the financial resources to meet it. During the period of price and dividend restraint, deficits increased enormously as profits were curtailed. Deficits in pension funds often were not capable of being met within a year or two, and as auditors we had to take a strong view of whether a company could survive. Many companies did not and their auditors had to say that the directors were unable to continue in business. While the Labour Government were in office between 1974 and 1979, companies closed because of deficits on their pension funds. Dividend restraint had a severe effect, because 40 per cent. of all dividends are paid into pension funds and life insurance schemes. The significant amounts that are paid can contribute to whether a pension fund is in deficit or surplus.

I further welcome new clause 19 because it will benefit about 10 million people. I am sorry that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State did not say that it will benefit many women who have jobs for the first time as a result of the growth in employment under the Government. It will be good for women generally, who have taken the opportunities for equality provided by the Government, and as a result the pensions and economy will be fairer and more balanced.

It is churlish for Labour Members to criticise the limiting of the increase to 5 per cent. During the late 1970s, they were unable to provide significant investment returns and much of British industry showed minus investment returns. They should not complain that the Government are trying to ensure increases in private pension plans. I do not know why they want to hark back to the late 1970s, when British industry showed negative returns and growing deficits in pension funds.

There is a danger of getting trapped in the wording of the legislation. One moves into theoretical areas, whereby if the legislation says that there will be a 5 per cent. increase, one assumes that such an increase is possible. Legislation is not responsible for growth in the economy. Growth in the economy provides increases in pensions. Legislation provides only a best intention and a practice that might be followed. Without growth in the economy, which we have had under the Government, there will be no growth in pensions. Unless the economy continues to expand as it has under the Government, and unless we have another decade of Thatcherism——

Ms. Short: Another decade of Thatcherism?

Mr. Shaw: Unless we have another decade of Thatcherism, there will not be the increases in pensions that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) would like. I know that the hon. Lady sincerely wants increases in pensions, but she must accept that that will not happen under a Labour Government. She must accept that the pension increases under this legislation would not be possible under a Labour Government.

Ms. Short: The thought of another decade of Thatcherism is unbearable to me, to the rest of the nation and, if they are honest, to many Conservatives Members. We had economic growth before we had the present Prime Minister. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is aware of it, but he will find that since the second world war, and under different Governments, growth has increased by about 2·5 per cent. Pensions have been uprated and standards of living have increased. I am afraid that that was not invented by the present Prime Minister.

Mr. Shaw: I must disagree with the hon. Lady. The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) said that investment returns are the key. We have had economic growth since the second world war. The Conservative Government between 1951 and 1964 achieved phenomenal economic growth, which worked its way into investment returns. Under the Labour Governments of 1964-70 and 1974-79, not only was there a lower rate of economic growth than under Conservative Governments, but far more important was the effect of that on investment returns and on dividends paid into pension funds. I hope that the hon. Lady will accept that my accounting experience was that we had considerable deficits in pension funds between 1974 and 1979 and that much of British industry was technically insolvent because it could not meet its obligations to the pension funds that it had contracted to meet.

Mr. Wood: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the features of the period between 1974 and 1979 was that borrowers gained while those who relied on pension funds suffered because investments were losing out? Any growth that there might have been in the economy did not benefit pension funds.

Mr. Shaw: My hon. Friend makes a strong point. Any growth during the period of the previous Labour Government—few people have been able to measure growth under the Government—often benefited borrowers rather than savers. Because of the reduction in inflation and the increase in growth in the economy, which has started to filter through to savers, 16·5 million people are confident enough that savers will be rewarded that they are party to either private pension plans or life insurance savings schemes. We have increased people's confidence in saving. By encouraging people to save, we shall have a more responsible country. That is what the new clause is all about. Like the Budget, it provides great incentives for saving. People will not only save in their employers' pension plans but will feel more confident about saving generally in pension plans and about the rewards of saving.

The new clause is dependent upon the growth in the economy, on employers succeeding and having good rates of return and on those good rates of return working through into dividends and pension schemes that can afford to pay the pension increases intended by the Government. It is for those reasons that I welcome the new clause.

8 pm

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockport, South): I, too, welcome the new clause, which requires the payment of annual increases to members guaranteed up to the retail prices index or 5 per cent. It will give greater security to members of private schemes. I listened with interest to what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said about four-fifths of scheme members already obtaining increases.

The new clause is especially welcome because it runs alongside the many other welcome provisions in the Bill that we discussed at great length in Committee. There is encouragement and security for private pension schemes across the board. The Bill already provides for the establishment of an ombudsman to investigate disputes, the establishment of a tracing service to help track down pensions held with previous employers, further protection for members of schemes that are wound up, further protection for members of schemes when they leave early, and a provision to enable the Secretary of State to introduce a new ceiling on self-investment for pension schemes. The Bill does a great deal to look after those who, together with their employers, have invested in private pension schemes.

In Committee I made much of the ITM/Head Wrightson Teesdale scheme, which illustrated the need for greater security for small investors in private pension schemes. I made one or two remarks which, having appeared in the record, might give a slightly incorrect impression. I wish to take a minute or two to place an accurate account on the record. I do not wish anyone to be misled by what I said in Committee.

The Davy Corporation sold the business of Head Wrightson Teesdale to ITM, a company operating in my constituency. Part of the sale agreement was that pension benefits no worse than those enjoyed by employees under the Davy Corporation scheme would be provided by ITM. That obligation was accepted by ITM. The Davy Corporation transferred from its existing pension scheme a sum of money that had been re-negotiated between the actuaries of the two companies to meet the accrued

[Mr. Tim Devlin]

benefits of those employees transferring to ITM. When ITM went into receivership, its employees found that the benefits under their pension scheme did not match the benefits that they had been promised.

The problem was brought to the attention of the Davy Corporation, which contends that it fulfilled all its obligations to its previous employees—first, by ensuring that the new employer committed itself to maintain the benefits of the pension scheme for its new employees, and, secondly, by transferring the correct sum of money to the new scheme. That matter is still under debate.

Since then, partly because I raised the matter in Committee and elsewhere, the Davy Corporation is voluntarily helping the investigation into why the benefits were short, because it recognises that the employees have no means of carrying out that investigation for themselves and because the trustees of the scheme—three individuals —do not have the financial resources necessary to investigate the position properly.

In Committee, we discussed the security for employees in schemes that might collapse, and what could be done to remedy the position. In particular, arguments were advanced about the establishment of a pensions omudsman. I still contend that it is interesting that two individuals who were trustees of the ITM pension scheme were later taken into employment as directors by a subsidiary of the Davy Corporation, subsequent to the ITM receivership. They were employed by ITM at the time of the sale of Head Wrightson Teesdale and became employees of the Davy Corporation subsidiary only after the receivership years later.

There is a major question about whether a proper value for the pension scheme was transferred between the companies. Of course, the Davy Corperation has no legal or contractual obligation towards the pensioners of that pension scheme. It is a difficult and highly complicated case and a good illustration of the reason why the new measures in this Bill are needed to protect the rights of employees. I hope to raise this case again, as it illustrates what can go wrong in the pensions world.

The new clause is a proper compromise between the interests of the employer and those of the employee. It is part of the Bill's much wider approach towards the whole question of private pension schemes. We need to encourage such schemes, but it is not the case that all schemes will always be in surplus. The scheme to which I have just referred and which I raised in Committee was significantly in deficit. I look forward to a report, at an early date, by the Davy Corporation actuaries detailing proposals to help those employees who lost when the company went into liquidation.

Mr. Newton: In my fairly extensive experience as a Social Security Minister at every level it has been rare that such a universally warm welcome should be given to my proposals. I shall bask in that for a moment, in the sure expectation that that mood is unlikely to continue throughout the night. I am grateful for the support that has come from all quarters. I am deeply admiring, even more so than previously, of the assiduous way in which my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) has pursued the interests of a significant number of his constituents——

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): With a reading age of 12.

Mr. Newton: I do not know to whom the hon. Gentleman is referring, but as it sounded offensive I shall not pursue his remark.

I say gently to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) that it is wrong to talk of a Government U-turn in what I have said and done to change the balance of what was already a very significant proposal for schemes that are wound up. I understood him to be claiming credit for the Opposition, but I must disappoint him: what I have proposed is a very long way away from what I can only describe as the half-baked and irresponsible proposal that he made on Second Reading.

According to the hon. Gentleman's proposal, we should make schemes give away every scrap of their surpluses straight away, and if they could not then continue to pay the benefits to which that gave rise, they should be allowed to cut them again. That was his proposal.

Mr. Kirkwood *indicated assent.*

Mr. Meacher *rose*——

Mr. Newton: I was not trying to enrage the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Meacher: The Secretary of State's last comments were not worthy of him. He made a very silly knockabout comment which did not even begin to reflect what I said. However, instead of taking up time with another debate on what I said on Second Reading, I hope that the Secretary of State will read my Second Reading speech closely. If he then wants to talk about it, he will at least reflect accurately what I said.

Mr. Newton: I will not go any further down what is obviously a sensitive path. However, taking the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) as an independent arbiter, as he was nodding, he is obviously on my side in this argument.

It was suggested that we should have gone beyond the 5 per cent. ceiling of the legal requirement, as distinct from what we might like to see schemes do in certain circumstances. In the course of making points about that and asking whether the figure should be higher, the hon. Member for Oldham, West referred to inflation over the past 20 years and to the scale of investment surpluses that we have all seen in schemes over the past few years. The only comments that need to be made about that were eloquently made by my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) in his excellent speech and by my hon. Friends the Members for Stevenage (Mr. Wood) and for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) in their equally eloquent speeches.

By taking the last 20 years, the hon. Member for Oldham, West includes a period in which inflation rose to disastrous levels under the previous Labour Government. Partly as a consequence of that inflation, more and more schemes found themselves in great difficulty because the investment surpluses on which the hon. Member for Oldham, West would rely did not exist. If we were to go beyond the requirements that I am proposing, even if there was the remotest possibility of the hon. Member for Oldham, West being the Secretary of State for Social

Security imposing these requirements, employers are afraid that they would go bankrupt and that they would not be able to pay pensions.

Mr. Meacher: I do not want to prolong the debate. However, we must be absolutely clear that the very high level of inflation in the mid-1970s occurred for two central reasons. The first was the quadrupling of the price of oil that fed through all western economies after 1972-73. The second cause was the enormous and irresponsible credit explosion which Lord Barber, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, unleashed on the economy, the effects of which lasted for the next four years. That is exactly what the former Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), did between 1985 and 1987. Those were the causes of the inflation. Perhaps the Secretary of State should recall that in 1981, when this Government had been in power for two years, inflation reached 22 per cent.

Mr. Newton: That most certainly reflected the legacy of the Labour Government who had presided over the latter part of the 1970s.

The serious point in the debate is that, in this area above all, it is necessary to strike a balance in the requirement that one imposes on schemes. If we overdo it and impose requirements that frighten off employers or which they believe in certain circumstances—some of which I speculated about already—would become unsustainable, some employers who are already running schemes would consider whether they should continue to do that, and others which might be considering setting up schemes might decide that the risk of doing that was too great.

Of course the balance of considerations can be seen as changing from time to time. It is implicit in my proposals that we believe that, in present circumstances, the balance has moved decisively in favour of the additional requirements that I am now imposing. I also believe that, if we were to go much further—one or two in the industry have expressed doubts whether we may not have gone a fraction too far in our proposals—some people would be frightened off from having schemes or continuing the schemes that they have at present. We must strike a balance and I am sure that my hon. Friends believe that we have got it about right.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield stated, a balance must be struck with surpluses. He put his point very well. As happened in the late 1970s, if a deficit emerges, the employer is expected to make it up. I do not believe that it would be reasonable to create a double bind for employers. If they get it wrong one way and their actuaries under-forecast the amount of contribution that is required, the employer is expected to make it up without limit. If the employer and the actuary get it wrong the other way and they over-contribute, there is no way in which they can get any of that back. I believe that we have the balance about right.

8.15 pm

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire queried whether we should vary the 5 per cent. limit from year to year. Inescapably, employers and those who advise them must be able to look ahead at their commitments and plan for the contributions or investment provisions required to meet them. It is not possible suddenly to impose from year to year, according to the rate of inflation in any particular year, a sudden increase in commitment because by definition the employers would not have been able to account for that.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire also referred to 1 January 1992. That is the likely date, although it is not certain. If I can bring it forward, I will. The reason for that date relates back to points made by the hon. Member for Oldham, West. In some cases, because of the new requirements that we are imposing, employers will have to look at the rate of contribution required in the scheme to ensure that they can meet those requirements. It is obviously right to give them some time to consider the scheme before imposing requirements on them. It would be wrong to say that, as from tomorrow, a requirement which employers had heard about only a few weeks ago and for which they had not funded should suddenly have to be met. We must give schemes some time to adjust.

I hope that I have covered most of the points raised in the debate. I am sorry if I inflamed the hon. Member for Oldham, West beyond what I had intended in what has in general been a very good-natured debate. I am very grateful to the hon. Member for Oldham, West for the supportive attitude that he has adopted, which I am sure will be continued throughout our debates this evening.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 21

LIABILITY TO MAINTAIN DEPENDANTS

'(1) After section 24 of the 1986 Act (recovery of expenditure on benefit from person liable for maintenance) there shall be inserted—

"*Recovery of expenditure on income support: additional amounts and transfer of orders.*

24A.—(1) In any case where—

(a) the claim for income support referred to in subsection (1) of section 24 above is made by the parent of one or more children in respect of both himself and those children, and

(b) the other parent is liable to maintain those children but, by virtue of not being the claimant's husband or wife, is not liable to maintain the claimant,

the sum which the court may order that other parent to pay under subsection (4) of that section may include an amount, determined in accordance with regulations, in respect of any income support paid to or for the claimant by virtue of such provisions as may be prescribed.

(2) Where the sum which a court orders a person to pay under section 24(4) above includes by virtue of subsection (1) above an amount (in this section referred to as a "personal allowance element") in respect of income support by virtue of paragraph 1(2) of Schedule 2 to the Income Support (General) Regulations 1987 (personal allowance for lone parent) the order shall separately identify the amount of the personal allowance element.

(3) In any case where—

(a) an order under subsection (4) of section 24 above is made against a person ("the liable parent") who is the parent of one or more children, in respect of the other parent or the children, and

(b) payments under the order fall to be made to the Secretary of State by virtue of subsection (6)(a) of that section, and

(c) that other parent ("the dependent parent") ceases to claim income support,

the Secretary of State may, by giving notice in writing to the court which made the order and to the liable parent and the dependent parent, transfer to the dependent parent the right to receive the payments under the order, exclusive of any personal allowance element, and to exercise the relevant rights in relation to the order, except so far as relating to that element.

(4) Notice under subsection (3) above shall not be given (and if purportedly given, shall be of no effect) at a time when there is in force a maintenance order made against the liable parent—

(a) in favour of the dependent parent or one or more of the children; or

(b) in favour of some other person for the benefit of the dependent parent or one or more of the children;

and if such a maintenance order is made at any time after notice under that subsection has been given, the order under section 24(4) above shall cease to have effect.

(5) Except as provided by subsection (6) below, where the Secretary of State gives notice under subsection (3) above, he shall cease to be entitled—

(a) to receive any payment under the order in respect of any personal allowance element, or

(b) to exercise the relevant rights, so far as relating to any such element,

notwithstanding that the dependent parent does not become entitled to receive any payment in respect of that element or to exercise the relevant rights so far as so relating.

(6) If, in a case where the Secretary of State has given notice under subsection (3) above, the dependent parent makes a further claim for income support, then—

(a) the Secretary of State may, by giving a further notice in writing to the court which made the order and to the liable parent and the dependent parent, transfer back from the dependent parent to himself the right to receive the payments and to exercise the relevant rights; and

(b) that transfer shall revive the Secretary of State's right to receive payment under the order in respect of any personal allowance element and to exercise the relevant rights so far as relating to any such element.

(7) Any notice required to be given to the liable parent under subsection (3) or (6) above shall be taken to have been given if it has been sent to his last known address.

(8) In this section—

"child" means a person under the age of 16, notwithstanding section 26(3)(d) below;

"court" shall be construed in accordance with section 24 above;

"maintenance order"—

(a) in England and Wales, means—

(i) any order for the making of periodical payments or for the payment of a lump sum which is, or has at any time been, a maintenance order within the meaning of the Attachment of Earnings Act 1971;

(ii) any order under Part III of the Matrimonial and Family Proceedings Act 1984 (overseas divorce) for the making of periodical payments or for the payment of a lump sum;

(b) in Scotland, has the meaning given by section 106 of the Debtors (Scotland) Act 1987, but disregarding paragraph (h) (alimentary bond or agreement).

"the relevant rights", in relation to an order under section 24(4) above, means the right to bring any proceedings, take any steps or do any other thing under or in relation to the order which the Secretary of State could have brought, taken or done apart from any transfer under this section.

Reduction of expenditure on income support: certain maintenance orders to be enforceable by the Secretary of State.

24B.—(1) This section applies where—

(a) a person ("the claimant") who is the parent of one or more children is in receipt of income support either in respect of those children or in respect of both himself and those children; and

(b) there is in force a maintenance order made against the other parent ("the liable person")—

(i) in favour of the claimant or one or more of the children, or

(ii) in favour of some other person for the benefit of the claimant or one or more of the children;

and in this section "the primary recipient" means the person in whose favour that maintenance order was made.

(2) If, in a case where this section applies, the liable person fails to comply with any of the terms of the maintenance order—

(a) the Secretary of State may bring any proceedings or take any other steps to enforce the order that could have been brought or taken by or on behalf of the primary recepient; and

(b) any court before which proceedings are brought by the Secretary of State by virtue of paragraph (a) above shall have the same powers in connection with those proceedings as it would have had if they had been brought by the primary recipient.

(3) The Secretary of State's powers under this section are exercisable at his discretion and whether or not the primary recipient or any other person consents to their exercise; but any sums recovered by virtue of this section shall be payable to or for the primary recipient, as if the proceedings or steps in question had been brought or taken by him or on his behalf.

(4) The powers conferred on the Secretary of State by subsection (2)(a) above include power—

(a) to apply for the registration of the maintenance order under—

(i) section 20 of the Maintenance Orders Act 1950;

(ii) section 2 of the Maintenance Orders Act 1958; or

(iii) the Civil Jurisdiction and Judgements Act 1982; and

(b) to make an application under section 2 of the Maintenance Orders (Reciprocal Enforcement) Act 1972 (application for enforcement in reciprocating country).

(5) Where this section applies, the prescribed person shall in prescribed circumstances give the Secretary of State notice of any application—

(a) to alter, vary, suspend, discharge, revoke, revive, or enforce the maintenance order in question; or

(b) to remit arrears under that maintenance order;

and the Secretary of State shall be entitled to appear and be heard on the application.

(6) Where this section applies, the Secretary of State shall be treated for the purposes of any enactment or instrument relating to maintenance orders as if he were a person entitled to payment under the maintenance order in question (but shall not thereby become entitled to any such payment).

(7) In this section "maintenance order" has the same meaning as it has in section 24A above, but does not include any such order for the payment of a lump sum."

(2) Until such time as there comes into force an amendment of Schedule 1 to the Attachment of Earnings Act 1971 (maintenance orders to which the Act applies) which has the effect of including among the orders specified in that Schedule any order for periodical or other payments made or having effect as if made under Schedule 1 to the Children Act 1989, the definition of "maintenance order" in subsection (8) of the section 24A of the 1986 Act inserted by subsection (1) above shall have effect as if, in paragraph (a), after subparagraph (ii) there were inserted—

"(iii) any order under paragraph 1(2)(a), (b) or (c) of Schedule 1 to the Children Act 1989 (financial provision for children against their parents);".

(3) In section 26 of that Act, in subsection (3) definitions for purposes of sections 24, 25 and 26) after the words "section 24" there shall be inserted "24A, 24B".'.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Newton: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Before I launch—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) looks puzzled. I am sure that she will accept that I have done the right thing.

Ms. Short *indicated assent.*

Mr. Newton: I am grateful.

Before I say anything else about the new clause, which concerns lone parents, I simply want to say that I hope that I shall not be accused of being sexist if throughout I assume for practical purposes that lone parents are generally female and absent parents are generally male, simply to ease my sentences. Of course, as the House knows, there is a significant number—although small in proportion—of lone parents who are male and absent parents who are female.

New clause 21 focuses on particular problems relating to maintenance for lone-parent families. As the House knows, the number of families in Britain headed by a lone parent has risen substantially in recent years. The proportion of those families that have to rely on supplementary benefit and now income support has also increased and stands at about two thirds.

It is important to recognise, in view of the concern expressed about that, that those trends are not unique to the United Kingdom. Similar changes have happened in several other countries. Our social security system rightly provides help to lone-parent families who need it, as it does to others, but another valuable source of help for those families is maintenance. Regular payments of maintenance provide a basis of income that can help smooth the path from dependence on benefit to full-time work and independence. That is valuable to the family, but too often it is not paid. Absent parents have a clear legal responsibility to maintain their families as far as they can, but in far too many cases that responsibility has not been fulfilled or properly enforced.

The number of lone-parent families dependent on income support in 1988 is more than double the number on supplementary benefit in 1979, but payment of maintenance has not kept pace. In 1979 maintenance was paid for about half of the lone-parent families on benefit, but in 1988 the equivalent figure was only a quarter.

The Government have already announced that they are reviewing the maintenance system to see what changes need to be made to the way in which maintenance is awarded and operated. A survey of the work in a sample of courts and DSS local offices is under way to provide full, up-to-date information as a basis for deciding on the best way forward. We are examining the system that is in use in other countries to see what lessons can be learned from them. I am planning to visit the United States next month to see the approach that is taken there. We aim to bring forward proposals later this year. Radical changes, should they prove possible, will obviously take a little time to come into effect. That does not mean that we could or should stand still in the meantime. We have also been seeking to improve the effectiveness of the present system. The House will recall that I announced in the uprating debate a month or two ago that we are tightening the way in which we assess an absent parent's ability to pay maintenance for his family on income support.

Mr. Tim Smith: My right hon. Friend spoke about a review. Does he agree that this is a serious and urgent problem, and can he say whether the results will be announced in time for legislation to be introduced in the next Session? We should have as little delay as possible in bringing forward worthwhile changes.

Mr. Newton: At this stage I cannot respond exactly and in detail, not least because, as my hon. Friend will be aware, it is not the practice for Ministers to comment on what may be in the Queen's Speech. We certainly hope to bring forward proposals this year at a time that would enable us to consider the possibilities that my hon. Friend has raised. I entirely accept what he says about the importance of the issue. I hope that he will agree that it is also a complex and difficult issue that needs to be properly considered.

As I said, we are seeking in the meantime to make various changes in the present system. New clause 21 seeks to take us further in three ways. One of them is in relation to the realistic assessment of maintenance and the other two seek to help maintenance work more in the interests of lone parents than is often the case at present.

The first step in the new clause brings social security law more into line with family law. We took a step in that direction last year when we extended liability for children beyond the 16th birthday to cover those children who remain dependent at 16, 17 and 18. Family law could already do that. In the new clause we are proposing to empower courts to consider the cost to the mother in caring for the absent parent's children, which will mean that Department of Social Security staff can do the same in seeking voluntary agreements on maintenance.

The Department can currently seek its own order against an absent parent, which reflects that parent's liability under social security law. In brief, where the parents were divorced or were never married, it applies only to the benefit paid for the children. Under family law, courts can look wider and can consider the mother's costs as child carer in deciding what to award for children. Before we even consider going to court, the Department seeks to come to a voluntary arrangement with the absent parent on the basis of what the courts could award. The new section 24A in the new clause will provide a regulation-making power that will be used to specify that, once having looked at the allowances and premiums that are paid because there are children, the court should also have regard to the income support personal allowance paid for the mother. By increasing the scope of what the courts can award, we are increasing the scope of what voluntary agreements can cover and, therefore, what the Department can seek.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I should like to put to my right hon. Friend two points that he may be about to cover in his speech. What will he do in cases where maintenance has been awarded to a mother and her children and the mother then moves in with another man whom she does not marry but by whom she is supported? Will the court or the legislation insist on the natural parent paying the maintenance? What happens when access to a child has been granted but the mother does not provide it? Will the legislation still insist on the maintenance payments being made?

Mr. Newton: I shall deal first with my hon. Friend's second point. Over the years I have been child care Minister in my various welfare capacities and have dealt with that subject. Access to the children should be

[Mr. Newton]

considered quite separately from whether maintenance should be paid for the children. It is not appropriate to tie the two together.

The other matter which links with that and which focuses specifically on the question asked by my hon. Friend is perhaps not sufficiently appreciated. At the end of the day, the Department of Social Security on its own cannot enforce anything that the courts are not prepared to enforce. We cannot compel a lone parent to agree to something, although we can go to court if we want the court to impose something. Once a court has imposed something, it is open to the person on whom the maintenance order has been made to go back to the court for a variation.

It is not for me to speculate on what someone would do in circumstances such as those referred to by my hon. Friend. However, I expect that in such cases the absent parent might well wish to go back to the court and argue that the circumstances in which a maintenance order was imposed in respect of the former partner as carer and the children should be varied. It would be for the parent to decide whether to pursue the matter and it would be for the court to decide on it.

Mr. Marlow: I shall put my second point again. If access has been granted and is denied by one parent, does my right hon. Friend think that it is right, fair and proper that the other parent should still be required to pay maintenance?

Mr. Newton: They are separate issues. If access has been granted under a court order—I take it that that is what my hon. Friend is postulating—the denial of that access can be pursued in the court under that order. Equally, if maintenance has been granted under a court order, the failure to pay it can be pursued under that order. In considering a maintenance order, it would be for the court to decide whether to have regard to a sense of grievance about access.

Ms. Short: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Newton: I understand that the hon. Lady wishes to take part in the debate.

Even if my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) does not totally agree with what I have said, I hope that he will at least understand the points that I have sought to make.

Mr. Devlin: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Newton: Yes, but I am conscious of the fact that Opposition Members wish to speak.

Mr. Devlin: Will my right hon. Friend confirm an important point that is frequently misunderstood by people when they talk about access? Access is a right that belongs to the child to see its parent. It is not a right that belongs to the parent to see the child. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that?

Mr. Newton: I should need to take advice before saying whether that was the legal position. I rather doubt that it is. It is somewhat outside the scope of the main thrust of the debate and I should like to get on with my speech, if only in the interests of ensuring that the hon. Member for Ladywood can make her speech.

I want to emphasise that when deciding what to award, the courts will continue to look at what the absent parent can afford to pay, as will DSS staff when negotiating voluntary agreements; but in a case in which an absent parent can afford more than the children's benefit, we shall look to obtain some or all of the caring parent's personal allowance. The courts will be able to order that a personal allowance be paid on top of the children's benefit, which means that in those cases the courts will have a flexibility similar to that under family law.

8.30 pm

The second change that we propose as part of new section 24A also concerns an order that the Department can obtain on its own behalf. It seeks to remove the need for a lone parent leaving benefit to go to court to obtain a separate private maintenance order. We propose that when a DSS order has been obtained, it should be possible to transfer it to a lone parent who is leaving benefit. That would apply in so far as the order relates to the costs of the children and when the lone parent does not already have a maintenance order of her own. The aim is that a transferred order should be consistent and fit in as nearly as possible with family law, so that a lone parent who leaves benefit and takes a DSS-obtained order with her is in the same position as someone who obtains her own maintenance order. We believe that that measure will make it easier for a lone parent without her own order to make the transition from benefit to work.

By enabling a lone parent to take with her the maintenance for children obtained under a DSS order, we avoid the need for her to go to court for a new set of proceedings to get her own order, which is often argued to be a significant disincentive to taking the step of going back to work. She will have the same rights to enforce or vary the order afterwards as we in the DSS would have had. Both parents and the court will be informed of the transfer, and of course the absent parent—to pick up a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North—will still be able to go back to the court, as now, if his circumstances have changed or if he feels that other circumstances have.

In our view, it would not be right or necessary to transfer a DSS order if a private maintenance order were already in existence. The private order would have priority, and the same principle would apply if a private maintenance order were obtained later. The existence of a private order would mean that a transferred DSS order would cease to have effect.

Thirdly, new section 24B will enable the DSS to enforce a claimant's own maintenance order for her when payments are not being made in full, if the lone parent is claiming income support for herself and her family. Quite properly, the Department has a strong interest in ensuring that absent parents go on meeting their responsibilities for the family and that payments under any such order to the lone parent are made. The proposed new section gives practical effect to that interest when payments under a court order are not made in full and an absent parent, for whatever reason, is not minded to put that right.

As things stand, the only remedy in such circumstances is for the lone parent herself to ask the court to enforce, and many such parents, for understandable reasons, do not want to do that. We propose to take power to do that on their behalf, with the aim of ensuring that prompt action is taken in all these cases, thus reducing the chance of the absent parent getting into the habit of non-payment. We also think it right that the DSS should be able, if necessary, to be heard on any proposal to reduce the amount to be paid.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Not having served on the Committee, I have not followed all this, but in the event of a delay and of the mother not being able to obtain the maintenance to which she is entitled, while the Department is pursing the father to try to get the money, will it be able to make extra payments to the mother to compensate her until the money is forthcoming from him?

Mr. Newton: One of the reasons for our concern about this matter is that, given that the basic purpose of income support is to make people's income up to a given level, the practical effect is precisely that unpaid maintenance is replaced by income support.

Mr. Frank Field: The right hon. Gentleman is telling the House that he is seeking powers to enable maintenance orders to follow the mother when she starts work. Under the third part of the new clause, will the Department's power to collect money also continue when a mother is in work, or is the measure only to do with saving welfare payments while she is on benefit?

Mr. Newton: No, I have already said that once an order has been transferred, under the second of the proposals, a lone parent will have the same rights to enforce it as the DSS. Under the current arrangements, once a lone parent was not on benefit and an order had been transferred to her, it would then be her responsibility to enforce it. The hon. Gentleman, with his close interest in this subject, will know that the issue that he has raised is one of those that we shall examine in the broader review of maintenance that we are undertaking—which will include experience from Australia, the United States and various other countries.

Mr. Field: I promise my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) that this will be my last intervention. Neither I nor mothers outside the House can understand why the Government have not sought powers in this measure to help women when they move back to work to take over responsibility for the collection of these funds. That would be quite feasible, but the Government have decided not to do it. Why?

Mr. Newton: Because it raises much wider issues. Once a maintenance order has been transferred to someone who is not in receipt of social security benefits of the type that I am discussing—primarily income support—there seems no reason to treat it differently from a maintenance order in favour of someone who has never been on benefit. Many such orders exist. I am not saying that such a move could not be contemplated under any circumstances, but it could be considered only in the context of a much wider reform of the maintenance system.

These three measures form a consistent and sensible package within the constraints of the current system. However, we are doing more than merely making the legal changes that I have announced. I should like to take this opportunity to mention some further steps that we are taking to improve the way in which all these arrangements work at local office level.

First, we shall shortly issue revised guidance covering the need to do more to emphasise to lone parents the responsibility of the absent parent and the advantages of reflecting that responsibility in proper maintenance arrangements established at the outset. Those advantages will clearly be increased by the legal changes proposed in the new clause, not least by easing the way for the lone parent who wants to move back into employment. The guidance will make clearer the fact that the normal expectation should be that a lone parent will co-operate in establishing where responsibility lies and in obtaining maintenance, while continuing to recognise that there may be cases in which, for particular reasons, the lone parent still does not want to name the father.

At the same time, when lone parents are unwilling to help in establishing the responsibility, we shall seek to build up a clearer picture of the reasons to help our further and wider consideration of the whole problem of maintenance.

Secondly, the House will be aware that as a result of action initiated last year the amount of maintenance recovered by the DSS in respect of lone parents on benefit rose from £155 million in 1988-89 to an expected £180 million in 1989-90. That improvement in part reflects the extent to which, over a number of years until recently, that work has been given a lower priority than most would think it deserves. In our objectives for the coming year, we shall underline even more strongly the fact that that work should be given proper priority and resources, and I expect a further increase in maintenance paid in this respect, to about £260 million in 1990-91.

The proposals in the new clause together with the other actions that I have outlined make clear the Government's commitment to ensuring that absent parents do more to meet their responsibilities for their families. We are pressing ahead with work on the more radical options—I have noted the point made by the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field)—but in the meantime we are doing what we can to improve the position because we believe that it is important for everyone involved, especially for lone parents and their children.

What I have proposed will be widely welcomed, and I commend the new clause to the House.

Ms. Short: I am extremely angry. It is 8.40 pm and we have a guillotine at 9 pm. We have another whole group of Government new clauses and amendments to come. This is an enormously important matter. The new clause covers three and a half pages, yet we have so little time to discuss it. This could have been considered in depth in Committee. The Government say that they did not have time, but the previous Secretary of State for Social Security, the right hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Moore), said at the 1988 Tory party conference that there would be measures, and implied that they might be punitive, to get money back from fathers whose children were living on supplementary benefit. That is a long time ago.

In January the Prime Minister made her speech and, according to the Library, the Secretary of State gave an unattributable briefing on the same day about the Government's intentions. The House is brought into disrepute. This is a serious and important matter and it is intolerable that it is being dealt with in this way. The Government should be ashamed of themselves.

The Government's main motivation behind the package is to save the cost of social security benefits, not to assist lone-parent families to come off benefit and enjoy a free, independent life. The narrowness of the

[Ms. Short]

Government's objective is deplorable and sad. Only one of the three measures in the new clause will assist lone parents; when a mother comes off benefit she can take the order which has been obtained by the Department with her. We welcome that. It is entirely good and will help mothers to make the move off benefit and into work.

The Secretary of State misleads the House when he says that the law of his Department is being brought into line with family law. That is disputed by the National Council for One Parent Families. The Library was surprised by his assertion. I know the one case to which he refers and I suspect that he is misleading the House. I do not suppose that he does it deliberately.

If a mother is on income support it will be possible to claim the costs of the income support against the father. That is all that the Government are providing. The minute she comes off income support, if she has never been married to the father, she has no right to claim maintenance for herself, because she is caring for the family. The Government's motivation is entirely to save the costs of benefit. There is no intention to help women both to stop being dependent on benefit and to work, if that is what they want.

The third provision is exactly the same. The Government intend to take action where fathers do not pay, if the mother is on benefit, in order to make him pay and to save benefit costs. Absent parents, who are usually fathers, should pay for their children, but we need to do something for the overwhelming number of lone parents who are living in poverty and caught in the poverty trap. The Government have not attended to that serious issue.

I am deeply disappointed by the package. It is unworthy of the Secretary of State, who I thought had more to him. The figures are shocking. We have in Britain about 1 million lone parents, of whom about 722,000 are living on income support. The proportion who live on income support has increased considerably under the Government because of the erosion in the value of child benefit and other benefits, and the growth in the poverty trap. The Government's benefit changes have trapped increasing numbers of lone parents and their dependants on benefit. They have removed the right of a woman who lives on supplementary benefit and works part time to offset some of the costs of going to work and of child care against benefit. The Government have changed that and trapped more women in complete dependence on benefits. In 1961, one in six lone parents were on supplementary benefit whereas in 1987 two thirds were.

The size of the trap is shocking. A lone parent with two children on benefit gets the enormous sum of £65·80 a week to spend on herself and her children. A lone parent on £150 a week wages, paying £55 a week for child care —that is a reasonable cost for two children as child care can cost more—would get £57·26 a week to live on and would be worse off. A lone parent with two children must get at least £172 a week to be better off than when she is living on benefits. That is the problem and the trap.

The way out is non-means-tested benefits, such as child benefit which the Government have been busy eroding and which they seek to allow to shrivel away, better child care provision, training and access to jobs for women. That is the strategy of the Labour party policy review; our aim is to create pathways out of poverty—stepping stones to assist people who are forced to live in poverty. One such group is lone parents. When they choose and when their children are ready, they should be able to step into part-time work and training, and child care should be available.

The Government are not concerned about that. They are not concerned that many women and children who have been badly treated by the man in their life, not always but often, are living in poverty. Nothing in this package seeks seriously to help. The Government are trying to claw back benefit costs. We cannot discuss the matter properly. The proposal is not good enough to deal with this serious problem. Because one part of the provision is positive, we shall not oppose it, but we are deeply disappointed. The Government have muffed an opportunity to assist lone parents.

8.45 pm

Mr. Frank Field: If it is true that there is great rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents, given the line that the Treasury Bench is taking, paradise must be breaking out in celebration this evening because the Government's stance has changed.

Although the Secretary of State was too modest to mention it, in the past 11 years we have seen a collapse in the idea that wherever possible a male should be responsible for his offspring if the offspring are left to be dependent on welfare. It is to the Government's shame that they allowed that to develop. As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) said, that has resulted in an increasing number of women being forced to be dependent on means-tested assistance. Nevertheless, the Government are turning and I am pleased about it, although I share my hon. Friend's reservations about the measure's limitations.

I am not against the collection of maintenance to offset it against the cost of income support payments. That is proper. I am not against mothers being asked about the whereabouts of the father or who the father is.

Ms. Short: I was briefed that my hon. Friend and others could speak. As a result I neglected to mention that I believe that, under the guidance that the Secretary of State announced, women will be pressurised and harassed to name the absent father when, for good reasons, they do not wish to do so. That will be an ugly side of this package.

Mr. Field: I am not against those questions being asked, but, as my hon. Friend has said, this is a delicate area. Some women will not want to name the father for fear of being beaten up. They will look at the Government's package to see whether it is worth taking that risk. Their lives, like many people's lives, are full of risks and they must make those decisions. They will ask the very questions that my hon. Friend has asked. To what extent are the Government offering a new package?

The Government are showing considerable interest in moving quickly at the Prime Minister's behest to save on the cost of welfare, while providing a limited bridge to the world of work, in that a maintenance order may remain with a woman when she goes back to work. The Secretary of State gave no explanation why at this stage he could not include in the new clause, which we are discussing for the first time and which looks like a new Bill, the idea that the Department would continue to be responsible for collecting the funds and paying them to the mother, whether or not she is on welfare. That would have changed the balance of the package to a mother who is making the crucial decision whether it is worth accepting it.

There is a further stage. It is right to consider mothers who have never been on benefit and who might want the state at some stage to take over the responsibility of collecting. It is extraordinary for Ministers to argue that, because we cannot do everything, we cannot achieve tonight what is realisable.

My brief comments are almost identical to those of my hon. Friend the Member for Ladywood. One part of the new clause is to be welcomed. Despite the Government's change of heart, this is a missed opportunity to strike out and to begin to offer a new deal to show that the Government are on the side of single mothers, of making parents responsible and of encouraging people, wherever possible, to take up work when it is available. The new clause will be viewed for the measure that it is: although the Government have some interest in these issues, their primary purpose is merely to save taxpayers' money. Although that is important, this is, sadly, a missed opportunity.

Mr. Newton: I shall respond only briefly, although with some sadness, compared with my feelings during the previous debate, and with some surprise at the tone adopted by the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). He, of all people, should know that, in essence, we have a system of assessing and collecting maintenance that has proved increasingly unsatisfactory because of the unhappy increases in marriage breakdowns and, for a variety of other reasons, in the number of lone parents.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, other hon. Friends and I have consistently made it clear over some months that we see a need for much wider reform than could possibly be encompassed within the scope of an amendment tabled to the Bill. The matter is complex. In most of the countries that have introduced new systems, considerable preparation time and, because of the number of interests involved, considerable consultations have been required. The system has often had to be introduced by stages—first, by improving the arrangements for enforcement of existing orders and then, to take the Australian example, by coming forward with a new system of assessing maintenance for future cases. Much the same has happened in the United States.

The hon. Member for Birkenhead implied that somehow, in two or three months, we could have reached the stage of tabling to the Bill amendments containing the kind of sweeping, overall reforms that we both agree would be desirable, if we can find the right basis for them.

Mr. Frank Field: I was not trying to cause offence to the Minister. I am pleased that he has a grasp of how strongly I feel about this subject. If the Government had gone on to the next stage requested by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) and me and had introduced a separate measure, we probably would not have opposed it. We would have had a full debate and the provision would have been quickly dispatched to the other place and would have returned. It is a matter not of the constraints of the Bill but of the Government having chosen to link this provision to it. We should have welcomed a more comprehensive measure, separate from the Bill, so that we could have a proper debate. The debate would not have been held up. The matter would have been considered expeditiously. The Secretary of State has not made an adequate defence.

Mr. Newton: There may simply be a misunderstanding between the hon. Gentleman and me. The Government are not at this moment in a position to bring forward a comprehensive proposal for reform. We have done a good deal of work. One of our senior officials has looked closely at the Australian system. We have set in hand a significant survey of courts and DSS offices to give us additional information about the way that the present system works. That is all intended to help us shape wider proposals which we hope to bring forward later this year.

We do not think that it is right, simply because it will take time to bring forward more comprehensive proposals, not to take any steps to make what improvements can be made within the present system. That is what we are trying to do in these proposals. That approach would be widely welcomed outside the House and inside it, if not by those hon. Members who have spoken. It contains useful improvements in the portability of orders obtained by the DSS and in the capacity of the DSS to enforce orders that a lone parent has obtained while she remains on benefit.

Ms. Short: There is nothing in it for her.

Mr. Newton: There is something in it for her. The maintenance will go on being paid in a form that at some stage can improve her position if she returns to work.

Mr. Frank Field: What will happen if the father does not pay up?

Mr. Newton: That is precisely the point. If the DSS is prepared to enforce the maintenance order that has been made in favour of a lone parent, it is more likely that the absent father will continue to pay up.

Mr. Frank Field: It is the exact opposite. If the DSS has problems in getting the money off the father, what chance will the mother have without the sanction of the DSS behind her?

Mr. Newton: We are again talking at cross purposes. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) made a point about the third element in the proposal whereby if a lone parent is on income support but has a maintenance order that she has obtained, the DSS will enforce that order. The hon. Lady said that that did not do anything for the lone parent. I think that we would all agree that the position of a lone parent for whom maintenance is paid, for various reasons, is better in a general sense—not necessarily in the immediate monetary sense—than the position of a lone parent for whom maintenance is not paid. The DSS's capacity to ensure that a private maintenance order continues to be paid is therefore an improvement on the present position.

Mr. Frank Field *indicated assent.*

Mr. Newton: I am glad that the hon. Member for Birkenhead at least agrees with me on that point.

Ms. Short: I wish that the Minister would be straightforward about what he is doing. The fact that the Department will claim for an absent father who does not pay only when the woman is on benefit shows that the Department wants to look after its money, not the woman. The fact that the Department will claim against the man

[Ms. Short]

for the time that the woman spends in maintaining the child only when she is on benefit shows that the Department wants to save its money. The only tiny provision in the package for the woman is that the order obtained by the DSS can go with her when she goes off benefit. The Department's overwhelming concern in this package is to save money for itself, not to assist low-income, lone parents to have a better life, more freedom and higher incomes. I wish that the Secretary of State would be honest about that.

Mr. Newton: It would be thoroughly dishonest of me even to begin to suggest that I accept the hon. Lady's comments, which are ridiculous. Her suggestion that securing the more effective collection of maintenance under maintenance orders does not help the interests of lone parents is a piece of absolute nonsense of which she will be ashamed when she has had the opportunity to think about it.

Clearly, the Opposition are anxious to make further progress, and I understand that. I welcome the fact that the hon. Member for Ladywood, even with her rather less than generous and less than understanding remarks, does not intend to oppose these proposals. I commend the new clause to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 22

RETROSPECTIVE EFFECT OF SECTION 165A OF THE PRINCIPAL ACT

'(1) The following section shall be inserted after section 165A of the principal Act—

"*Retrospective effect of section 165A.*

165AA.—(1) This section applies where a claim for benefit is made or treated as made at any time on or after 2nd September 1985 (the date on which section 165A above, as originally enacted, came into force) in respect of a period the whole or any part of which falls on or after that date.

(2) Where this section applies, any question arising as to—

(a) whether the claimant is or was at any time (whether before, on or after 2nd September 1985) entitled to the benefit in question, or to any other benefit on which his entitlement to that benefit depends, or

(b) in a case where the claimant's entitlement to the benefit depends on the entitlement of another person to a benefit, whether that other person is or was so entitled,

shall be determined as if section 165A above, as in force at the time of the claim referred to in subsection (1) above, and any regulations made under or referred to in that section as so in force, had also been in force, with any necessary modifications, at all times relevant for the purpose of determining the entitlement of the claimant, and, where applicable, of the other person, to the benefit or benefits in question (including the entitlement of any person to any benefit on which that entitlement depends, and so on).

(3) In any case where—

(a) a claim for benefit was made or treated as made (whether before, on or after 2nd September 1985, and whether by the same claimant as the claim referred to in subsection (1) above or not), and benefit was awarded on that claim, in respect of a period falling wholly or partly before that date, but

(b) that award would not have been made had the current requirements applied in relation to claims for benefit, whenever made, in respect of periods before that date, and

(c) entitlement to the benefit claimed as mentioned in subsection (1) above depends on whether the claimant or some other person was previously entitled or treated as entitled to that or some other benefit,

then, in determining whether the conditions of entitlement to the benefit so claimed are satisfied, the person to whom benefit was awarded as mentioned in paragraphs (a) and (b) above shall be taken to have been entitled to the benefit so awarded, notwithstanding anything in subsection (2) above.

(4) In subsection (3) above "the current requirements" means—

(a) the provisions of section 165A above, as in force at the time of the claim referred to in subsection (1) above, and any regulations made under or referred to in that section as so in force, with any necessary modifications; and

(b) subsection (1) (with the omission of the words following "at any time") and subsection (2) above.

(5) Any reference in any enactment to section 165A of this Act (but not a reference to any specific provision of that section) shall be taken to include a reference to this section.

(6) This section shall be taken to have come into force on 2nd September 1985."

(2) In Schedule 20 to the principal Act (glossary of expressions) in the second column of the entry relating to "entitled" and cognate expressions, for the words "section 165A" there shall be substituted the words "sections 165A and 165AA".

(3) Section 32(4) of the Social Security Act 1985 (which made similar provision to that made by subsection (3) of the section inserted by subsection (1) above) shall be deemed never to have been enacted.

(4) In paragraph 48 of Schedule 10 to the 1986 Act (which applies sections 87 and 165A(1) of the principal Act to income-related benefits) in paragraph (b), for the words "section 165A(1)" there shall be substituted the words "sections 165A(1) and 165AA".

(5) The amendments made by subsections (2) and (4) above shall be taken to have come into force on 2nd September 1985.'.—*[Mrs. Gillian Shephard.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): With this it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 24, 25, 84, 67, 85 and 26.

Mrs. Shephard: I shall have to be extremely brief if I am to give even the gist of the Government's intention in the new clause and the amendments.

The new clause amends various provisions of the Social Security Acts 1975 and 1985 to re-establish the accepted policy that, generally speaking, a person shall not be regarded as entitled to benefit for any period unless a claim has been made within the prescribed time limits.

Hon. Members will recall that it had always been our understanding that the law achieved that effect—until a judgment in the House of Lords in November 1984 in the case of a Miss Margaret McCaffrey, when their Lordships held that entitlement to benefit could exist even where no claim had been made.

Although that judgment referred specifically to non-contributory invalidity pension, the decision had much wider implications across the social security front. It was decided that the effects of McCaffrey should be nullified, and section 165A was inserted in the Social Secrity Act 1975 to achieve that, with effect from 2 September 1985, or so we thought.

In June of last year, a social security commissioner held, in the case of a Mr. Cartwright, that the word "entitled" where relating to an event before 2 September 1985 meant "entitled" in the McCaffrey sense—that is, without requiring that a claim must be made for the benefit.

The effect is that, contrary to the policy intention, an understanding that has existed through Administrations of both parties at least back to the start of the national insurance scheme in 1948——

It being Nine o'clock, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded, pursuant to the Order this day, to put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

Question agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 23

AMENDMENTS RELATING TO THE SOCIAL FUND

'(1) In section 32 of the 1986 Act, after subsection (8D) there shall be inserted—

"(8E) The Secretary of State may give general directions to social fund officers or groups of social fund officers, or to any class of social fund officers, with respect to the control and management by social fund officers or groups of social fund officers of the amounts allocated to them under subsections (8A) to (8D) above.".

(2) In subsection (10) of that section (power to nominate a social fund officer to issue guidance to other officers in his area on specified matters) for the words "to issue" there shall be substituted the words "who shall issue".

(3) In section 33 of that Act, after subsection (10) (questions to be determined in accordance with general directions) there shall be inserted—

"(10ZA) Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (10) above, the Secretary of State may issue directions under that subsection for the purpose of securing that a social fund officer or group of social fund officers shall not in any specified period make awards of any specified description which in the aggregate exceed the amount, or a specified portion of the amount, allocated to that officer or group of officers under section 32(8A) to (8D) above for payments under awards of that description in that period."

(4) In subsection (10A) of that section (which specifies certain matters with respect to which directions may be given) after paragraph (e) there shall be inserted—

"(f) that a social fund payment such as is mentioned in section 32(2)(b) above shall only be awarded to a person if either—
- (i) he is in receipt of a benefit under the benefit Acts which is specified in the direction and the circumstances are such as are so specified; or
- (ii) in a case where the conditions specified in sub-paragraph (i) above are not satisfied, the circumstances are such as are specified in the direction;".

(5) At the end of that section there shall be added—

"(13) The Secretary of State may by regulations—

(a) make provision with respect to the time at which an application for a social fund payment such as is mentioned in section 32(2)(b) above is to be treated as made;

(b) prescribe conditions that must be satisfied before any determination in connection with such an application may be made or any award of such a payment may be paid;

(c) prescribe circumstances in which such an award becomes extinguished.".'.—*[Mr. Scott.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Scott: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient also to discuss New clause 3—*Social Fund*——

'In section 33 of the 1986 Act,—

(a) subsection (9)(e) shall cease to have effect;

(b) at the end of subsection (10) there shall be added the words "but shall not refuse by reason of the amount of any allocation made under section 32(8A) above to award a payment which he would otherwise award".'.

Government amendments Nos. 86 and 87.

Mr. Scott: During my statement to the House on 26 March I outlined our response to the judicial review judgments on the social fund. I explained that, although the court found that some of the guidance on budgets was too prescriptive, its judgment explicitly recognised that Parliament clearly intended that the scheme should be subject to strict monetary limits and that the Secretary of State needed to be able to give directions to achieve financial control.

In the light of that, and so that there should be no doubt that it is the Government's intention that the social fund should be operated within a firm budgetary framework, we have introduced this amendment to make explicit the power of my right hon. Friend to give directions relating to the financial control of the fund. The amendment will similarly put beyond doubt my right hon. Friend's power to specify who might be eligible for payments from the fund.

The clause also makes provision for regulations to clarify the date on which an application to the social fund is to be treated as having been made, and operational matters relating to applications and awards.

I will explain in more detail the effect of the amendments that we are making under the clause. The subsection we are inserting after section 32(8) of the Social Security Act will make explicit the power of my right hon. Friend to give directions to social fund officers on control and management of the sums allocated to them for discretionary payments.

The directions made under this power will, we envisage, cover the requirement to plan the expenditure from the local allocation through profiles of anticipated expenditure and recoveries and levels of priorities of needs that can be sustained from the allocation. They will require social fund officers to have regard to such factors in reaching decisions in individual cases.

They will also require the area social fund officer—normally the local office manager, as I said on Monday—to keep the profiles and levels of priorities under review and revise them in the light of changing circumstances. The directions will, therefore, clarify and reinforce the present position. That is, they will ensure that social fund officers manage the funds allocated to them responsibly and sensibly.

At present, the area social fund officer—normally the local office manager—is responsible for controlling the local office budget. Under the existing section 32(10), he may issue guidance on matters which the Secretary of State specifies. This includes guidance on the level of priority that may be sustained from the budget. But the area social fund officer is not under a duty to issue such guidance. The

[Mr. Scott]

amendment we are making to section 32(10) will require the area social fund officer to issue guidance on matters specified by the Secretary of State.

As I said, it has always been our intention that the social fund should operate within a firm, financial framework. We do not believe that that is incompatible with the proper exercise of discretion by social fund officers. Consequently, it is essential to the successful operation of the fund that its resources are managed so as not to exceed the amounts allocated for payments. Under the present legislation, it would be possible to issue directions on matters relating to the control of the budget. I have already mentioned the power that we are taking in respect of directions for the management and control of local budgets. The additional power that we are taking under the new clause will reinforce the effect of those directions by giving the Secretary of State explicit power to issue directions requiring social fund officers to keep within their allocations.

Such directions will, therefore, preclude a social fund officer, or a group of social fund officers, from making any award that would result in the sums allocated to that officer or group of officers being exceeded. This must be right if the scheme is to operate within the strict monetary limits, as Parliament originally intended, and as was recognised by the court. We cannot have a situation in which social fund officers may continue to make awards regardless of whether there is money available to fund such awards.

The purpose is to concentrate help where it is most needed. It is important that the Secretary of State is able to specify who will be eligible for help and where the line is to be drawn. The amendment to section 33(10A) is intended to make explicit his power to do so. The provision is in two parts. The first part restricts eligibility to certain payments from the fund—community care grants and budgeting loans—to persons receiving the benefit or benefits specified in directions. Such payments are available only to persons receiving income support and, in the case of community care grants, to people shortly to leave institutional care who are likely to receive income support upon discharge.

The second part of the amendment provides explicit direction-making powers governing eligibility to the fund, whether or not the applicant is receiving a specified benefit. This is intended to cover the position in respect of crisis loans, which are available to anyone, whether or not on benefit, who faces a crisis as the result of a disaster or an emergency. Given the Secretary of State's power to issue directions, it may be considered that an explicit power to issue directions on eligibility is overegging the pudding. However, as with the rest of the clause, we are concerned that the position on the fundamental principles of the scheme, like the budget and eligibility, should be absolutely clear to all concerned. This amendment achieves that. By making explicit the power to issue directions concerning applicants' eligibility for help from the fund, it confirms both the inherent flexibility of the fund and its ability to target help on those who need it.

I turn to the regulation-making powers under the new clause. The principles by which the fund operates are now well known. Although there may be differences between the Government and the Opposition on what those principles are, I think that, in general, they are well understood. However, some matters may be less clear to hon. Members. We believe that it will be helpful to applicants, their advisers and local office staff if these matters are spelt out in regulations in the same way as they are for the procedures concerning applications to the fund and applications for review. In spelling these things out, we are also making the way in which the scheme operates more accountable to Parliament.

The regulations will cover several procedural matters. The first is the date on which an application for help from the fund is to be treated as made. This will clarify that an application is to be treated as having been made on the day of its receipt in the local office. The second procedural matter that the regulations will cover is the conditions that must be satisfied before any application can be satisfied or any award made—for example, where a community care grant has been made in anticipation of the applicant's discharge from residential care, and where the applicant is not actually discharged. The third procedural matter is the point at which an award becomes extinguished. For example, an applicant might die after an award but before payment could be made, or an applicant might fail to cash a giro within 12 months of its issue.

The new clause will come into effect with the granting of Royal Assent. The amendments that are being made here make it abundantly clear that, as I said to the House on Monday, it is the Government's firm intention that the social fund should continue to operate fairly and flexibly against the framework of a budget and eligibility focused on those who are most in need. On that basis, I commend the clause to the House.

Mr. Meacher: We have just listened to a desultory and depressing speech from the Minister which he read solidly, without an ounce of conviction. He continues to mouth words about flexibility and discretion, but everything the Government do and the new clauses that they bring to the House are a standing denial of everything that the Minister has just said.

I admit at the outset that there is one advantage today over the position that existed two days ago when the Minister made a statement on the social fund. We have now got the Government amendment to the Bill in the light of the High Court judgment. However, we might as well not have had it, since it takes us not one iota further forward. It has taken the Minister five weeks to decide that his response to the High Court decision should be to pretend that it never happened. The court's judgment is being treated in the new clause as a minor distraction to which the proper response is to overturn it as soon as possible through more draconian legislation.

Only one concern guides Government policy on the social fund—how to cut it. Nothing, including the law, will get in the way of that. That is why the social fund has been frozen since its introduction in 1988 and why the supposedly generous increase announced on Monday is actually a further cut in real terms, since the extra £10 million does not even cover inflation.

Today's statement is not only cynical in its attitude to the law but it is dishonest. The Government know that they cannot issue directions to local offices to cash-limit funds until the Bill becomes law without risking legal challenge. So, instead, they issued guidance in such a way as to tell social fund officers with a nod and a wink to hold back the flood until the dam is in place.

I have listened and thought carefully about the matter. I am open to challenge if I am wrong, but I believe that the message from the Government today is that it is business as usual but local offices should not shout about it until the Government have squared the courts. Why else does the Minister refuse to agree to contact claimants who have been illegally refused grants? Those people have to find their own way through bureaucracy to make their own claims. That is a wholly improper response by the Government. It is one thing for the Government, having been found to have been acting outside the law, to decide to change the law, but it is another for them to refuse to seek out and compensate those who have been deprived of their rights because current law has not been adhered to by the Government.

The heart of the matter is that the Government still refuse to face up to the fundamental flaw in the social fund—that there is incompatibility in its two aims of flexibility in meeting needs and rigidity in limiting costs. The Minister referred to it again today. He seems to be able to say that black is white and that he is still preserving flexibility and discretion, when patently he is not.

The new clause will go further in the other direction. The Government are still trying to have it both ways; they are softening the guidance to social fund officers and muddling through until the summer while cocking a snook in the meantime at the High Court decision by refusing any active review of past claims, even though many of them have been shown to have been improperly handled. When the Bill becomes law the Government will enforce new rules which will ensure that the budget is always the paramount consideration in assessing new claims. At that point any idea of flexibility or discretion will fly out of the window and the fundamental principle of the welfare state, which has prevailed under all Governments, including Tory Governments, since the war—that there is an ultimate safety net for meeting unconditionally the basic needs of citizens—will be finally eroded. That is the message of the new clause.

Mr. Scott: I am sorry if I interrupt the hon. Gentleman at a comma in the speech that he is clearly reading to the House of Commons. He said that we were cocking a snook at the court but we are not. We accept the judgment of the court about the way that we were administering the intention of Parliament, which found that in one small regard we were at odds with that intention. We have issued guidance to ensure that in the interim period social fund officers interpret the law in the light of the court judgment, but Parliament has the right to change that and to reassert its original intention. That is what we are doing.

9.15 pm

Mr. Meacher: That is exactly the point that I am making. The Government are determined that the paramountcy of the budget will prevail over all other considerations. They are changing the law in that respect, but, in the meantime, with the law as it stands, the Government have not properly handled claims that have been made on the social fund.

If the Government believe in acting in accordance with the law, it is their duty—indeed, it is incumbent upon the Government—to contact past claimants who have been cheated of their rights and to ensure that under the existing law they get those rights until the law is changed.

Mr. Scott: I thought that the hon. Gentleman was making a wider point about cocking a snook at the court, which we clearly are not because we have issued guidance to social fund officers. We are coming down to practicalities—that is far from cocking a snook at the court—and to the best way to ensure that people who may have been turned down in the past can be made aware of their rights. We are doing that by ensuring that our officers, the citizens advice bureaux and other welfare rights organisations are issued with leaflets which will clearly spell out people's right to ask for a review of their case.

Frankly, I suspect that in the vast majority of cases the circumstances in which the original claim was made and rejected will have changed substantially by now and what the hon. Gentleman suggests would be a waste of time and effort. It would also arouse claimants' expectations and they would certainly be disappointed when they finally came to make their claim. That is not a sensible way to proceed.

We have no wish to hide the fact that claimants have a right to come forward and ask for a review. Leaflets have been widely distributed and publicity has been accorded to the subject, not least by debates in the House and the appearances by the hon. Gentleman and myself on radio and television. I hope that anyone who feels that they may have been turned down unfairly will come forward to ask for a review. Reviews will be carried out promptly in the light of the instructions that we have issued and because of Justice Pill's judgment that the state of the budget when the original claim was made and the present state of the budget should be taken into account.

Mr. Meacher: That was a small speech in itself and I shall reply to a number of the points raised in it—*[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman spoke for several minutes.

The Minister is saying that his reason for not contacting past claimants who have been deprived of their rights is that their circumstances may have changed in the meantime. Yet he is encouraging them to claim. He is sending out leaflets explaining how they can do so. If they had rights at the time that they made the original claim, those should be met now. They should be adhered to, because that is the law.

Merely putting leaflets into citizens advice bureau offices and social security offices means—let us be perfectly straight about this—that the Government are washing their hands of the business. The Minister knows perfectly well that the kind of people who are normally claimants of the social fund are not avid readers of the Government's leaflets. They need to be contacted, if the Government are seriously concerned that they should get their rights.

I believe that the Government are cocking a snook at the High Court judgment. That is exactly what they are doing. All that they have done is to send out guidance to social fund officers. That guidance is less prescriptive than it was before.

The High Court judgment said that consideration of budget was not the only essential factor. There should also be a test of reasonableness and a test of commonsense application in the assessment of those needs. Those were the other two considerations in the High Court judgment and the Government have totally ignored them.

The Government have acted in a high-handed manner over the High Court decision. They take the view that the

[Mr. Meacher]

claims can no longer be afforded and that is fundamental to the whole argument. The Minister looks puzzled, but he constantly talks about the need for strict cash limiting of the budget—presumably because he believes that the open-ended and unconditional meeting of need that has always existed in the past—even under Conservative Governments—can now no longer be afforded. The Government can afford open-ended mortgage interest tax relief, which has increased sevenfold in the past decade, to about £7 billion. They can afford open-ended subsidies to private residential and nursing homes, which have increased hundredfold over the past decade, from about £10 million in the early 1980s to more than £1 billion now. The Government can afford open-ended subsidies for personal pensions, now costing some £2 billion, to bribe people into ideologically approved but highly speculative pension arrangements. The only thing that the Government cannot afford is to provide open-ended support—at a fraction of those other costs—for those at the very bottom of society whose needs are manifest and intractable.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Do I take it from the hon. Gentleman's remarks that the Labour party is against mortgage interest relief and against giving help with the costs of residential care?

Mr. Meacher: If the hon. Lady cannot follow my line of argument, she will have to listen a great deal more carefully.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I have been listening.

Mr. Meacher: If the hon. Lady had been listening, she would have heard me say to the Government that if they can afford £7 billion in mortgage interest tax relief and £1 billion to subsidise residential and private nursing homes, one might have thought that they could afford a little more than £200 million—a penn'orth in terms of the overall social security budget—to meet the needs of people at the very bottom of society. If there is anyone deeply in need in our society it is those whom we are discussing now.

The new clause would intensify the two most odious and objectionable features of the social fund. One is the cash limiting of the relief of poverty—something that even Conservative Governments have never done in the past—so that thousands of destitute families, however searing their need, will be denied help because the money has not been made available. That has never happened before.

The other consideration is the fixing of that budget cap at an aggressively low level, which is only slightly over half of the budget that existed before. That is bound to multiply the numbers who are forced to do without. That is why refusal rates today are soaring at 60 to 70 per cent. Of the other 30 or 40 per cent. who manage to get loans, more than 400,000—nearly 10 per cent. of all claimants—are having to repay social fund loans out of their basic income support, which is meant to provide their basic daily subsistence costs.

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): Is not it a matter of public record that the Government are paying out £1 billion a week, which I work out at roughly £145 million per day, on benefits to help the very people to whom the hon. Gentleman referred? We all meet such people in our everyday work; I certainly do in my part of the world. But there is more help than there has ever been, and that is a matter of fact.

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Lady is not quite right. For the reasons that I have given, the £1 billion a week of the social security budget is not being directed at social fund claimants. It is being directed at the increasing number of people who are dependent on social security. Their numbers are growing. There are about 500,000 more pensioners than there were at the start of the decade. That is not the responsibility of the Government; the need has to be met. But the increase has come about not because benefits are more generous or because the Government have focused more closely on the need; it is simply that there are more people in the categories that have a right to those benefits. The number of unemployed is still about 60 to 70 per cent. higher than it was at the start of the decade, and the number on income support has almost doubled since then. Those are the reasons for the high figure—not that assistance is being given to the people who really need it.

The Government's new clause does not even begin to address the ocean of hardship, poverty and debt that is undoubtedly washing over the social fund. I cannot believe that the Minister is unaware of that. The Government's hard line in the new clause, in changing the rules to make budget capping even more pronounced, as a reason for rejecting claims will intensify hardship. We take the opposite view, expressed in new clause 3, that social fund officers should be prevented from refusing payments on the ground that there is not enough money in the local office budget and revert to the system that always operated since 1945. Because we totally repudiate the Government's social fund's strategy, we seek to vote down their new clause.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—
The House divided: Ayes 288, Noes 197.

Division No. 144] **[9.25 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina

Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine

Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion

Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*

Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Alastair Goodlad and
Mr. Tony Durant.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buckley, George J.
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim

Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Harman, Ms Harriet

Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Illsley, Eric
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilfedder, James
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Martyn Jones and
Mr. Ray Powell.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 26

INCOME SUPPORT IN RESPECT OF ACCOMMODATION CHARGES FOR CERTAIN PERSONS IN RESIDENTIAL CARE AND NURSING HOMES

'In section 22 of the 1986 Act (calculation of income-related benefits) after subsection (2) there shall be inserted—

"(2A) In prescribing, for the purposes of income support, amounts under subsection (1) above in respect of accommodation in any area for qualifying persons in cases where prescribed conditions are fulfilled, the Secretary of State shall take into account information provided by local authorities or other prescribed bodies or persons with respect to the amounts which they have agreed to pay for the provision of accommodation in relevant premises in that area.

(2B) In subsection (2A) above—

"accommodation" includes any board or care;

"local authority" has the same meaning as it has in Part III of the National Assistance Act 1948;

"qualifying person" means any person such as is mentioned in subsection (1) of section 26A of that Act (which is inserted by the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990 and relates to persons ordinarily resident in residential care or nursing homes immediately before the commencement of that section);

"relevant premises" has the meaning given by subsection (2) of that section.".'

Brought up, and read the First time.—[Mr. Newton.]

Mr. Newton: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to consider new clause 14—*Persons in residential care and nursing homes*—

'(1) The Secretary of State shall review the amounts specified in paragraphs 6 and 7 of Part I of Schedule 4 to the Income Support (General) Regulations as soon as practicable, in order to determine whether they are adequate, having regard to the reasonable cost of providing suitable accommodation, board and suitable personal care for the persons concerned, and shall lay before Parliament a report on his conclusions and the evidence on which they are based.

(2) If it appears to the Secretary of State that any of those amounts are not adequate, he shall lay before Parliament the draft of an up-rating order substituting such amounts as he considers adequate, which may include different amounts for different areas, and, if the draft order is approved by a resolution of each House, he shall make the order in the form of the draft.

(3) The provisions of an order under this section shall come into force on the day on which the order is made.

(4) Subject to subsection (5) below, if a claimant to whom regulation 19(1) of the Income Support (General) Regulations 1987 applies or, on his behalf, the proprietor of the home in which he lives applies to an adjudication officer for a review of the appropriate amount determined in his case for the purposes of paragraph 5 of Part I of Schedule 4 to those regulations on the grounds that that amount is not sufficient to enable him to pay a reasonable charge for suitable accommodation, board and suitable personal care provided in that home, the adjudication officer shall refer the questions whether that amount is sufficient for that purpose and, if not, what higher amount would be sufficient to a social security appeal tribunal for determination.

(5) If an adjudication officer to whom an application has been made under subsection (4) above is of the opinion that he can determine the questions mentioned in that subsection by reference to—

(a) a determination made by a tribunal under that subsection in the case of another claimant living in the same home, or

(b) the advice of a local authority with knowledge of the home in question,

he may determine those questions instead of referring them to a tribunal.

(6) If a tribunal to which a question has been referred under subsection (4) above determines that the amount determined by the adjudication officer is not sufficient, or an adjudication officer so determines under subsection (5) above, the adjudication officer shall review his determination of the appropriate amount, substituting the higher amount determined by the tribunal or by him.'.

Mr. Newton: During my speech I shall comment on the three strands of the Government's response to some of the concerns expressed during the debate on the National Health Service and Community Care Bill two weeks ago, and also on a particular point made in the report of the

Select Committee on Social Services on the need for greater information about the costs and charges of residential care homes.

As the House is aware, under the National Health Service and Community Care Bill, the Government's intention is that, from 1 April 1991, local authorities will negotiate prices with voluntary organisations and home owners before making a contract for places in residential care and nursing homes for new cases arising after that time. Obviously, to make a contract, both parties to the agreement—the local authorities and the voluntary organisations or home owners—will have to be satisfied that the prices are fair.

During an extensive debate on the anxieties about the position that might arise between those whose care would be organised under the new arrangements and those whose support would continue to be made under the preserved income support entitlement under the existing regime, a number of hon. Members—including, not least, my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young)—suggested that those prices resulting from a contractual arrangement should be used by the Department in setting the appropriate income support limits for those with preserved rights to income support.

I shall not attempt to repeat everything that I said during that debate, other than that I could envisage some difficulties in simply taking any price that any local authority negotiated for any person in any home and making that the automatic setting of the level for income support in that home. I think that I carried many of my hon. Friends with me on that and also in my criticisms of the Opposition's new clause that we were then debating.

As I promised when replying to that debate, since then I have carefully considered the suggestions made. In particular, I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Acton an assurance that if, on examination, it appeared that an amendment to social security law was required to ensure that I could respond properly in taking account of what emerged from local authority negotiations, I would table an amendment to this Bill, as it is the last practicable opportunity to introduce such a power before the community care charges take effect in April 1991. That is why I have tabled the new clause, which ensures that I can act along the lines urged in taking account of what emerges from local authority negotiations with voluntary organisations and home owners in setting the income support rates.

The power that I am taking in the new clause is designed to help me to set up a system of local limits, if need be. In setting such limits, I want to have regard to both the charges being met by local authorities in homes and also, perhaps, the charges being met by other bodies such as the voluntary sector. In fairness to my hon. Friends, whose concern I understand and respect, I am not saying that it would necessarily be possible to make use of those powers at the absolute starting point in April 1991.

It is clear that we shall need to gain experience of what local authorities are negotiating. For a long time, there may be many homes in which local authorities have not negotiated and have not placed people. It would be foolish of me to suggest that we can suddenly produce a wholesale change in the system at the point of changeover. However, once we have adequate information on the scale required, the new clause will give me the power to respond in the way suggested by many of my hon. Friends. We shall be talking to local authority associations, as soon as possible, about how local authorities can help us in that respect.

I will be brief in relation to my next point, because our time for debate is limited and many hon. Members want to speak. I want now to consider a need that goes beyond the need for information about what local authorities actually do. I want to consider the need, which I accept, for more and better information about the true costs of running residential care and nursing homes. In particular, the Select Committee on Social Services has recommended that we should commission an early study into that. As I said in our debate on 13 March, I fully accept the force of that request; I hope to approve the commissioning of the necessary research in the near future, and I will let the Select Committee and the House have further details as soon as I can.

9.45 pm

My comments so far have responded to the overt purpose of the new clause in the National Health Service and Community Care Bill that was debated two weeks ago. I have responded to suggestions made then about the social security regime in the wake of the community care changes being introduced in April 1991 and also to the request made by the Select Committee on Social Services.

One of the striking things about the debate on that new clause two weeks ago was that much of what was said, especially—but not only—by my hon. Friends, was not directed to the overt purpose of that new clause, which was concerned with the post-1991 regime. Comments then reflected a wide measure of concern about the income support limits in the present year, quite apart from what the position might be after April 1991.

As the House knows, the income support limits are due to be increased in virtually all cases by £10 a week in a fortnight's time. For example, that will take the basic residential care home limit to £173 a week in Greater London and £150 a week elsewhere. It will take the basic nursing home limit to £223 in Greater London and £200 a week elsewhere.

In all, this year's increases will be the biggest since November 1985, at a cost of £100 million. They take the expected total of income support in such cases in 1990-91 to well over £1,100 million. That is a substantial rise, which will undoubtedly help to ease some of the pressures reflected in our debates. However, I have carefully considered whether there is more that I can appropriately do when, as I said to the House in the earlier debate, the information currently available does not provide a sufficiently secure base for more detailed geographical or local variation or for further fine tuning between different categories of case or home.

It is clear from all the information available, whether anecdotal or from representations that we have received, that the pressure on nursing homes is greater than that on residential care homes. That is understandable, in view of the scale of the increases in nursing pay which have taken place as a result of the Government's actions over the past two years.

Following on from the uprating that is about to take place, I propose to make a further increase in the limits in mid-August—the earliest time consistent with sensible handling of the case load in the Department of Social Security offices. At that time, all residential care home limits will be increased by a further £5 a week, making a

[Mr. Newton]

total of £15 a week more than at present and taking the figure to £178 a week in Greater London and £155 a week elsewhere.

All nursing home limits, with one exception, will be increased by a further £10 a week, making a total of £20 a week more than at present. That will take the figure to £233 a week in Greater London and £210 a week elsewhere. The one exception is that, for hospices and other cases covered by the limit relating to people who are terminally ill, the increase will be a further £15 a week, making a total of £25 a week more than now. That will take that very important limit to £283 in Greater London and £260 a week elsewhere.

That will mean that the cost of increased limits next year will be £45 million more than the £100 million announced in my October uprating statement, giving a total increase of about £150 million compared with 1989-90. In a full year, the total cost of the impending uprating, the one due in a fortnight's time, together with the further increase that I have announced, will be about £170 million.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Newton: No, not at this stage.

The additions that I have announced can be accommodated in the existing DSS programme of over £50 billion, apart from an addition of just over £20 million from the reserve which my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury has agreed for 1990-91. What I have been able to say on this clause properly responds to concerns that have been legitimately and responsibly expressed in the House. I commend the new clause to the House.

Mr. Speaker: Before we continue the debate, I must tell the House that I have selected a manuscript amendment in the name of the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). It has been available for some time, and for the convenience of the House I shall read it out. It is: to leave out "take into account" and insert

"determine the amounts required to meet the costs of providing such accommodation of a suitable standard by reference to".

Mr. Meacher: This new clause was tabled at the last possible moment, late last night, a full fortnight after the matter was debated in the House. Clearly, there has been agonising over exactly what should go into it. With the exception of the extra money, which is certainly welcome and with which I will deal in more detail later, the new clause takes us very little further than the last time the issue was debated.

What safeguards does the new clause offer? That is the key point. Of course, the Government will consider the information that is provided by local authorities on the charges that they consider acceptable, but they do not need a new clause to do that. The measure does not do anything for those who are facing shortfalls and possible eviction in the immediate future. The Secretary of State, who is always a fair man on such issues, was good enough to make that clear.

The new clause will not come into effect until April 1991 and that will be too late to help people either this April or next April. The question that was asked on Second Reading continues to be relevant and it is about who will meet the shortfall in the meantime. Above all, the new clause does not give any guarantees that it will meet the level of payment agreed between local authorities and homes. It says that the Secretary of State will take the information into account. We certainly wish him to do that, but above all the House wishes him to act on it and there is no specific commitment in the new clause that makes it clear that he will.

For those reasons the new clause does not give security to the 176,000 sick and elderly people who could face eviction because the Secretary of State is not guaranteeing that they will not be evicted. That is the crucial criterion. It was the criterion on Second Reading and it remains the criterion on which each hon. Member should base his judgment. It does nothing to stop homes charging more for residents not covered by agreements with local authorities, which is another point.

As I have said, we welcome the extra money. That is certainly important. The Secretary of State has said that the residential care limits rise by £5 over and above what he stated before and the amount for nursing homes will rise by £10 and for hospices by £15. While that is welcome, he must be aware that the gap that has to be filled is often about £30, £40 or even £60.

What matters is not whether assistance is given to make up the shortfall but whether it is enough to prevent the eviction of the elderly person. Although the money is welcome, I suspect that it will not serve that purpose in many cases.

New clause 14 requires the Secretary of State to review the income support limits for residential and nursing homes and to enable adjudicating officers and appeal tribunals to decide that the limits should be exceeded, when necessary, to meet reasonable charges for suitable accommodation. To some extent, the Government are following our lead, but the crucial difference is that they are holding back from a commitment to solving the problem.

There are two elements in our new clause: first, the Secretary of State's review of the limits could and should be done straight away. Both sides of the House agree that there is no need to wait until 1991. We also believe that the Government have a duty to review the limits, for two reasons. The explosion in the number of people in those homes is the result of Government policy. In the early 1980s the Government did not provide the cash for local authorities that was needed for community care, and they encouraged people to go into private care on the understanding that the costs would be covered by social security. Moreover, since 1985 the income support limits have been uprated by less than is required to cover increasing costs. This April's £10 increase, now raised to £15, is still less than inflation requires.

During the community care debate the Secretary of State said that we need more and better information, and he undertook to present proposals to the Select Committee. We welcome that; it is obviously needed. But we do not believe that the collection of information should be used to stall. There is enough information already to show that some safeguards should be provided. The Government have admitted to the Social Services Select Committee that no fewer than 42 per cent. of people in care and in receipt of income support live in homes that charge more than the income support limits. So tonight we are discussing the fact that two in five of these people face a shortfall. I shall not repeat this at length, because we have already discussed it, but that is not a matter of unreasonable charges. The National Federation of Housing Associations found that most of the homes that it surveyed, which were not profit-making, had shortfalls of £30 or more, and one in five had a shortfall of £60. Those figures should be taken carefully into account alongside those that the Minister gave earlier.

The second part of our new clause ensures that an adjudicating officer or tribunal will have the power to exceed income support limits. The Government say that adjudication officers do not have the capacity to determine reasonable charges, on the ground that when they had that job in 1985 they came up with wildly differing levels in various parts of the country. Surely, however, the answer lies in guidelines and assistance from local authorities. The problem will apply only for this year, because as from April 1991—we are agreed on this—officers and tribunals will have the local authority-agreed charges as a guideline. The Government new clause says that the Secretary of State will take those levels into account, but what is wrong with adjudicating officers and tribunals doing the same?

While we welcome the Secretary of State's statement, having reviewed the matter with extreme care, we do not believe that it goes far enough—a view that may be widely shared. For all those reasons we intend to press new clause 14 to a Division when the time comes, because it alone guarantees protection against eviction for 176,000 elderly people in residential and nursing homes. We should prefer to press our manuscript amendment to a Division. I sought to achieve the same purpose by tabling it, because it advances protection for elderly residents in a way that I believe commands majority support in the House. Our preference is to vote on that. If for any reason we cannot do so, we shall press Government new clause 26 to a Division because it does not go far enough. It is far too late to say that the Secretary of State shall take into account relevant information. That ignores the spirit and intention of the Division in the House a fortnight ago. Above all, it does not provide security against eviction, which it is unforgivable for any civilised Government to withhold from frail and needy elderly people.

10 pm

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Two weeks ago, it was with great regret that I found myself in the unusual position of being unable to support the Government. I was deeply distressed that, in my constituency, nursing home proprietors were subsidising unfortunate elderly people. I was even more appalled that, if nothing was done, those old people could be evicted. That was the reason for my speech and vote.

I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has come to the House with a solution. We should recognise the struggle that he has had. We all know that, at the end of the day, one must do battle with the Treasury. I give complete credit to my right hon. Friend for responding to the views expressed on both sides, doing battle with the Treasury and winning that battle. For that reason, we should respond appropriately.

Unlike the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher), I am not worried that the Minister

"shall take into account information provided by local authorities".

That is precisely what I wanted him to do in the previous debate. Those words fulfil my wishes. I understand that there is to be a gap until April 1991, but we now know that more money will be available and that it is a sensible amount, so appropriate arrangements can be made. I hope and believe that nursing homes and residential homes in my constituency can tide over the gap if necessary, as I hope, with some assistance from the county council. In any event, they can inform the Minister of that.

Costs are high in London, but let us not disregard the fact that in some parts of East Anglia, as my right hon. Friend will know, particularly Cambridgeshire, costs are high and obtaining nursing staff is difficult. Therefore, I ask him to consider the geographical position carefully.

The problem has been going on for some time. I have a file of correspondence going back a long time. It is not a new problem. It is only right that we should recognise the Secretary of State's efforts. This is the House at its best. The will of the House has been expressed, and the Minister has responded to it. In those circumstances, I can best respond by saying that I shall support the Government tonight. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will do likewise.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): We are interested to know precisely how the Secretary of State reached the present figure, other than by emergency pressure. I wish to put to him some details which may seem to be a side issue, but which are crucial for working out the figure.

On 24 January, during a debate on residential homes instigated by the hon. Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin), the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security pointed out:

> "The national limits are not rates, but maximum allowances towards fees. In addition, we provide an allowance for personal expenses or pocket money . . . I must emphasise that it has never been the policy of this Government—nor could it be the policy of any Government—to undertake to meet all fees charged by homes, however high they may be. We set the limits with due regard not only to the interests of the residents and the homes concerned, but also to the interests of the taxpayer."—[*Official Report*, 24 January 1990; Vol. 165, c. 1028-9.]

I remind the Secretary of State that he may like to have a conversation with the Secretary of State for the Environment. In precisely that context, the housing benefit legislation means that there is no limit on the rents that private landlords can charge people on income support and housing benefit and the amounts that must be repaid to those private landlords.

Mr. Newton: This is about the third time that the hon. Gentleman has made that point. He is wrong. There are powers to restrict the payment of housing benefit where the rent officer judges that it is an excessive rent—I do not wish to be held to the exact words, but no doubt I can get further advice—and they are often used.

Mr. Battle: The Secretary of State identifies the exact problem, because the words are crucial. If he checks the legislation, he will see that the words are not "excessive rents" but "market rents". I accept that this point is somewhat to the side of this debate, but we put this question during the housing debate. The amount depends on what the capital values are, because that may blow the budget of the Department of Social Security sky high. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman accepts that fact.

Mr. Newton: I shall try to avoid intervening again, because I do not wish to interrupt the hon. Gentleman. Frankly, this is a slight side-step to the debate. I am told

[Mr. Newton]

by that process of curious osmosis by which information reaches Ministers in these circumstances that the words used are rents "which are unreasonably high".

Mr. Battle: We shall watch with interest what happens in the private rented sector and how much housing benefit is paid out by the DSS for rents that are excessive in the terms that the Government have laid out in their legislation to remove controls on rents. Without the controls, obviously the Government are in some difficulty.

I tabled a question to the Secretary of State asking

> "what regulations govern the administration and use of the pocket money element in the board-and-lodging allowance".

The reply stated:

> "Applicable amounts payable for persons in independent residential care and nursing homes are prescribed by Income Support (General) Regulations 1987, as amended. They include an amount in respect of personal expenses which is at present £10·05 each week. The regulations do not prescribe how that allowance is to be used, as this is a matter for the claimant."—[*Official Report*, 30 January 1990; Vol. 166, c. *123*.]

The difficulty is that the money never gets to the claimants because the allowance is deducted by the costs of the place at which they reside.

I received a letter from a Leeds constituent, who said that she wanted to write about

> "the case of my Mother-in-law, who will be ninety-seven in May, and is living in a Residential Home in . . . Leeds.
>
> It was the only Home available, at the time she needed to be taken care of, and there are only three ladies residing there as the person in charge cannot accommodate any more, but it is registered.
>
> The two other ladies residing there do get a little pocket money, as they share a room, but when Mother went there, there was only a single room, and was more expensive, so therefore she was not entitled to any pocket money. The fee then was £140-00 per week. Last year at the pension rise, we thought she would be entitled to a bit of money then—but no—the fee went up to £150-00—therefore Mother was entitled to no pocket money again. This year I expect will be the same . . .
>
> We have to provide Mother with Pocket Money and clothing, which has to include hairdressing and chiropody."

Page 19 of chapter 14 of "The Government's Expenditure Plans" for the Department of Social Security, under the heading "Proposals for changes to benefits to long-term sick and disabled people", states:

> "the hospital personal expenses allowance for single people receiving income-related benefits will increase from £8·70 to £11·75. This will benefit pensioners and other single people as well as sick and disabled people."

Why has the pocket allowance for those in residential homes not been increased? More seriously, what guarantee do we have that the pocket money will not become part of the cost of board and lodging, so that in practice the money is never recieved?

It is for the Secretary of State to say clearly that the money that his Department has earmarked for pocket money will not be absorbed in fees. If that were to happen, it would mask hidden costs. I accept that the Department says in good faith that the money is for the use of clients, to be used as they wish. That is why it should not be salted away to cover the cost of fees. May we have an assurance that the money allocated for personal pocket expenses will be used for that purpose and not for board and lodging costs, thereby appearing to reduce those costs?

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I thank the Secretary of State for listening to the clearly expressed view of the House two weeks ago. It could not be right to cover the costs of people who will in future enter residential care and nursing homes and not cover the costs of those already in such homes. I am glad that my right hon. Friend recognised the anomaly and corrected it. I agree with what my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) said and I say to my right hon. Friend: well done, you fought a good battle and you won.

Mr. Kirkwood: Welcome though the provisions in the new clause are, they do not go far enough, for the reasons that have been stated. The people operating residential homes, certainly in my area, face a difficult problem in trying to bridge the gap between a shortage of funds now and the time when tonight's announcement will bear fruit.

The Secretary of State was candid enough to say that it will take time before the assessments are studied and the results work through to local authorities. In terms of the solution that the right hon. Gentleman has introduced, that is bound to be so, but he should be more forthcoming by saying how long it will take him to act, should he find that the evidence reaching him is not to his liking. Should the evidence show that a need exists, will it take weeks, months or years before he will be able to remedy the situation?

It could be a year or 18 months before the Government get round to taking action. Should that be the case, many residential homes in my area might go out of business. It would not be a question of evicting some elderly residents already in homes. That would be bad enough. Some residential homes are unable to make ends meet now.

I am thinking of homes in my constituency which look after the needs of the demented elderly, a difficult group for whom to care. Some nursing homes do an excellent job in looking after their needs, and considering that they are already finding it difficult to make ends meet, one wonders how long it will take for the extra assistance to work its way through. They already say that it will take time before the community care provisions, through local authorities, come on stream. The help to come from the Government's new proposals, if there is any, may take 18 months or two years to appear, and that gap is worrying nursing homes.

I would be more sanguine about the new clause and the prospects of the help that we are told it will bring if the Secretary of State could be more reassuring in that respect. I accept that it is a move forward. If the new clause is to mean anything, the Government will find themselves being forced to use it heftily if we are to meet the difficulties that are being faced by many residents and home operators.

10.15 pm

Sir David Price (Eastleigh): I did not speak on the new clause last week, for the very simple reason that the Select Committee on Social Services, of which I am a member, had produced a short report, which I hope assisted the House in coming to the conclusion that it came to. As to the gap between what people receive in income support and the costs that they have to meet, we know that there are quite substantial regional variations. This was identified by the Committee, and in this regard we are completely at one with my right hon. Friend. There can be variations even within a region, depending on whether a home is owned outright or is being paid for through a mortgage.

We welcome my right hon. Friend's response. However as has been said by several hon. Members, there will still be a shortfall. In this regard, I am particularly concerned about nursing homes. As one or two hon. Members have pointed out, nursing home costs have gone up rather more substantially because of the improved pay for nurses. It seems to me that there is a very simple solution. This suggestion was not in the Committee's report—I simply offer it personally. Where this difficulty arises, especially in the intervening months—before implementation of my right hon. Friend's proposals—the district health authority should be allowed to top up. Often we are talking about £30 or £40 a week. My understanding is that, under Treasury rules, the district health authority could take over total responsibility and pay the lot, but is not allowed to top up. In the past, I had correspondence with the Department of Health and Social Security about this matter. As the DHSS has now been split into two Departments, what I am suggesting should not give rise to any ill feeling. The difference between the amount of the top-up and what it would cost the district health authority to take a person into a geriatric ward is very substantial indeed. I shall not detain the House by giving figures to demonstrate cost variations, as I can see that my right hon. Friend and my right hon. and learned Friend are both very aware of them.

Mr. Newton: Perhaps I should observe wryly that, whereas two weeks ago, as the Social Security Secretary, I got drawn somewhat unexpectedly into the debate on a health Bill, my hon. Friend is now seeking to draw my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health into a social security Bill. I am happy to leave my right hon. and learned Friend to consider my hon. Friend's proposal.

Sir David Price: My right hon. Friend will know that, whatever happens in Whitehall, health care in the real world is a continuum. I defended the Government's decision to deal with care in the community and the National Health Service in the same Bill. So we are on the same side. Of course, the common enemy is Treasury rules. I refer not to the best use of public resources, but simply to the fact that the Treasury operates on the basis of its own liturgical rules, rather than on the basis of cost-effectiveness. In terms of cost-effectiveness, we could avoid difficulties over individual cases where the district health authority is willing to take up the difference. Under the existing nursing homes legislation, the district health authority is responsible for inspecting homes, so it knows them. Therefore, the fears of some of us about excessive charges and about care being inadequate are dealt with already because homes are registered and inspected by the DHA.

I leave that thought with my right hon. Friend. I am delighted that he accepted the Select Committee's proposal that there should be detailed studies of the variations in costs, with a view to producing a more coherent formula. The Committee identified the problem, and I thank my right hon. Friend for his response. But the problem will not go away; it is with us for keeps. The higher the rate of inflation, the more urgent is the problem. While I am thankful for my right hon. Friend's immediate response, I have to say—though I do not want to sound depressing—that this is not the end of the story.

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): I want to ask the Minister two specific questions about the announcement that he made on the new clause. He may remember that I raised with him on Second Reading the plight of war widows in nursing homes and residential homes. Although a constituent of mine had received the extra £40 from the Government, and although a promise had been made in the Chamber that it would be untouched by any decisions about income support, she lost all the £40 increase in her war widows' pension because of the regulations on income support. I am pleased to tell the Minister that the Department agreed to disregard the £40 and to increase her income support to match her nursing home fee. I do not know how that happened, but is it now a general rule? From now on, will the £40 given to war widows be disregarded in calculations for income support?

Mr. Newton: The point is so specific that it is probably sensible for me to respond to it immediately. I am a little puzzled by what the hon. Lady has said. The increase of £40 is not to be paid to pre-1973 war widows until next month. Certainly her constituent could not have it in January. I can assure the hon. Lady that, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence said at the time, and as I have subsequently carried into regulations, the whole of the £40 is to be disregarded for the purposes of all income-related benefits. It will not apply to housing benefit, income support or family credit, although probably that will not apply to war widows.

Ms. Primarolo: I am grateful to the Minister for his intervention. I am sure that he appreciates that many nursing homes notify in advance increases in charges and that the increases normally take effect in April to coincide with increases in benefit. I agree that war widows' pensions should be protected. I want to know how the shortfall in fees will be made up to ensure that the increase in pension will not be incorporated in the fee.

My second point relates to the fact that people are on income support because they have no other income. I see the Minister shaking his head. Income support is paid to top up income to make payments to nursing homes. In many instances the top-up of income support does not equal the cost of the nursing home fees. That point has been made frequently in the House.

Even taking into account the Minister's announcement, in Avon there will still be a shortfall of £15, £20, £25, or £30, depending on the location of the home. Will the Minister explain the position to the House so that we may tell our constituents who still have a shortfall what they should do about it? If the welfare state cannot act as a safety net for the most vulnerable and needy in society, what does it exist for? Perhaps the Minister will tell us how his Department intends the shortfall to be made up in the interim, because many people will still not have enough money to pay their nursing home fees.

Mrs. Peacock: I listened carefully to what my right hon. Friend the Minister said. Two weeks ago, like many of my colleagues, I went into the Opposition Lobby on an amendment. I greatly appreciate what my right hon. Friend said. Obviously, he listened carefully to many of his Back-Bench colleagues on that occasion.

I have one or two worries. Some hon. Members may have never seen anyone suffering from Alzheimer's disease. I think that it is the most frightening thing that could happen to an individual. Sufferers need special care and their families cannot cope. It is not a matter of them putting Grannie or Grandpa away. It is impossible to cope with someone in that state.

[Mrs. Peacock]

In Yorkshire there are some specialised homes that can care for such people. Nursing homes send people out and say, "We can't cope," and we know that there have been examples of that. The specialised homes are residential care homes, not nursing homes. Because they provide 24-hour specialised care, their costs are high. A young family living in my constituency have such a problem. The husband, who is a bus driver, is working all the hours God sends to raise an extra £35 per week to pay for his mother-in-law, who needs to be cared for, and they have three young children. We spend so much money on benefits that it cannot be right that such a family should be excluded and have to find the amount somehow or another. Will the Minister consider that carefully? I fear that that old lady will end up out on the street when her family cannot provide £35 or that they will have to make their children do without shoes to provide it. Residential care and nursing homes do not incur such huge costs.

There is also a problem when pensioners, who are often in their early 60s, and on their own, have to try to provide for one or two parents who are in their 90s and live in residential care homes. Those pensioners do not have the money to pay. One lady brought her bank statement to me, and she had 22p left in the bank. She needs to find £45 to pay for her father, who is 92.

There must be provision in the system to help such people this week and next week, but we have not found it yet. I appreciate that the increases in August were a tremendous help, and that the rules that come into effect next April will help, but the families that I have described are at their wits' end. That may result in nervous breakdowns caused by worry about their parents.

Given the amount of money that we spend, we should be able to help such people in the interim period. I plead with the Minister to consider specific cases or to give an idea of what hon. Members could do to help those who are waiting to see what he says tonight.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): I appreciate the announcement tonight, and I think that it is a major step forward. I cannot imagine why Conservative Members, who came into the Opposition Lobby to vote a couple of weeks ago and who find that they have something to be thankful for tonight, do not come into our Lobby more often. It seems to have been a worthwhile exercise.

Like other hon. Members who represent coastal constituencies, I became aware a few years ago of the extraordinary proliferation of nursing homes. Out of curiosity, I tabled a written question 18 months ago asking how levels of income support had increased. As far as I know, that was the first time that it emerged that residential care had become a billion-pound industry—it had gone from £82 million in 1979 to £1 billion 10 years later. That spiral cannot simply go on indefinitely. We must bear in mind that it was public policy to create that new industry—private residential homes—and to concentrate so many resources in that kind of accommodation, and into income support payments for people in them.

The tragedy was that, having created that huge expenditure, the Government took fright. The pace of increase in income support has not been sufficient to keep up with the costs of the homes which were created during the great boom period. The Minister has to live with that reality now, as future Ministers will have to.

The Minister would do well to listen to his hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price), who seemed to speak a lot of sense on the subject. The new clause still has a blanket approach, although it is now within local authority areas. The problem is that we are talking not about problems arising out of what is charged in a town or a district health board area, but about individuals and specific homes. I am sure that Conservative Members will find out as they go along that the wonder of the poll tax is that one discovers that one is not dealing with categories of 1 million people or 100,000 people; every case throws up different circumstances and different individual problems to be dealt with.

10.30 pm

Let me describe the kind of problems that I have come across in my constituency. An elderly person is living quite happily in a home until it is taken over by another company, which decides that it does not want to operate a run-of-the-mill home on basic charges but, rather, an up-market de luxe nursing home. The prices go shooting up. The elderly person, who has previously been able to meet the cost of his care, suddenly finds that there has been a large increase in the amount for which he is being asked. Would the new clause meet that happenstance? The new cost of the home might be out of the normal order of things in that particular area and the general rate that the local authority applied in the area might not cover the case of a person caught by such a change of ownership.

Similarly, as the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock) said, there are exceptional cases in which costs are higher because the level of nursing care is higher. Within one area—whether it is a local authority area or a district health authority area—a great range of circumstances may pertain.

That takes us back to what my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) said. The owners of the homes identify an average shortfall of about £40 per person per week. At the most generous estimate, what the Minister proposes will go perhaps halfway towards meeting that shortfall. But everything is relative. For a poor person—a person who does not have extraneous income—it does not really matter whether the figure is £20 or £40 a week. It is a substantial shortfall, and if the person has no means to fill the gap, the problem remains the same.

I welcome the proposals that the Minister has announced—I am not being churlish about them—but the problem remains that people will set a level of charge and many of the clients will not be able to meet it. On the other hand, a blanket approach does not meet the problem either. It takes us back to the initial dilemma to which I referred—that the global sum just goes on increasing and in some cases all that one is doing is encouraging homes to increase charges, for a quality of service that is not necessarily provided.

Putting those two arguments together, it seems to me that there is a case for the flexibility for which the hon. Member for Eastleigh argued. That may be a big task; such a system may be difficult to administer. But it will mean that there will be an officer in each area looking at specific cases and the genuine human problems and trying to solve them case by case.

I am grateful for the money that has been awarded, which will come as a relief to many people. The new clause is a step in the right direction and a response to what the whole House voted for a fortnight ago. But the Minister will have to go further—and future Ministers will have to go further—to meet the specific cases to which the problem gives rise.

Sir George Young (Ealing, Acton): I shall be brief, because there are other Conservative Members who deserve to be heard—not least my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), who spoke with such emotion on the subject only two weeks ago. Like other Conservative Members, two weeks ago I voted against the Government and for the all-party amendment. I did so reluctantly, although I make no apology for it, because unless we used the most powerful means available to Back Benchers—voting—there could be no guarantee that we should get a response.

Having said that, I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has listened to the arguments and responded to the debate. In two weeks, which is a very short time scale for Whitehall, he has responded with the new clause before us today. He had to do that against a very difficult economic background. We have had a restrictive Budget, with the downward pressure on expenditure to which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor referred. Against such an economic background, to negotiate this sum of money from the Treasury in such a short time was a genuine achievement, for which my right hon. Friend deserves full credit.

I am delighted with new clause 26, because it embraces the principle for which many of us spoke two weeks ago—using local authority contracts as the basis for income support. The new clause gives the Department the power to validate the price negotiated between the local authority and the home as the basis for income support, which is the right long-term solution.

There is no advantage in Opposition new clause 14, which is wholly bureaucratic—involving tribunals and adjudicating officers—by comparison with the Government's solution. My right hon. Friend mentioned

[Sir George Young]

the time scale. If a local authority makes good progress this year and negotiates a series of contracts to come into effect in 1991, will my right hon. Friend's Department be able to use those contracts in setting the income support level in that local authority's area—or does he propose waiting until the system is nationally tested before allowing progress at a local level?

In the debate of two weeks ago, it was no part of the proposed new clause to insist on extra help being provided this year. Certainly I did not make that demand in my own speech. I regard as a bonus the additional assistance that my right hon. Friend announced tonight for nursing and residential care homes from August, which will help in cases where the shoe is pinching.

New clause 26 is an honourable response from an honourable man, and I hope that the House will support it.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I ask the Secretary of State a straight question, and I hope that he will give a straight answer. Who pays? Although we are grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's announcement tonight, it must be seen as an exercise in damage limitation, being the minimum action required to satisfy the Secretary of State's right hon. and hon. Friends.

The problem remains this year, as it will next year, that there is a gap between the amount charged and what can be claimed. Who will pay the difference? In some cases, it will be the relatives of the individual concerned—but often they themselves will be pensioners. Increasing life expectancy means that many residents of nursing and residential homes are aged 85 or 90, and have relatives who are themselves pensioners and unable to meet any additional costs. In other cases, relatives have moved from the area—which may be the reason why an individual was placed in a home in the first place.

In both the Local Government and Housing Bill and the National Health Service and Community Care Bill, responsibility is ultimately placed in the hands of the local authority, which will have to undertake a case study and determine, through the officer concerned, what form of care is to be provided—care in the community or care in the home. So in many cases the local authority will have to pay the difference if the Department refuses to do so. I hope that Conservative Members will think about that when they vote tonight.

There is little use taking a local authority to task or placing limitations on its level of poll tax if at the same time the Government deliberately load it with the responsibility for meeting the gap between charges and the money available from central Government. Will the Secretary of State or the Minister for Social Security undertake to hold consultations with local authorities, and confirm that funding will be available for them to make up any difference?

The Government have brought the problem upon themselves. When they came to power, they decided to encourage private nursing and residential care homes, which was fair enough. But the bill has to be paid, and instead of ducking, weaving, dodging and bobbing we should be honest and above board. Let us ensure that payment stops finally with the Government of the day.

We must care for those who find themselves in homes, so let us eradicate the problems, worries and concerns that face those who are in homes and their relatives. So many families are bending over backwards to try to find the charges. I believe that we can pull together within a proper system. It is right and proper that responsibility should rest with local government, but central Government should ensure that adequate funding is available.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone): The new clause comes as a great reassurance and considerable relief to those who have been campaigning for such a provision for the past year. The question asked by hon. Members on both sides of the House is, "What happens to the existing shortfall?" I was concerned that strong pressure to evict would be the prospect if action were not taken. If those who run the homes had been faced with a long-term problem and had felt that no endeavour was being made to match the level of benefits to the level of reasonable charges, they would have had every incentive to evict quickly. Immediate relief means that they are receiving more money than hitherto, and that should help.

The homes that face the difficult problem of servicing a large capital investment will be assisted if, in addition to the generous interim measures, there is a fall in interest rates. I feel that there is some hope for home owners. I feel also that proprietors will be much less pushed to evict than they would have been if the measures in the new clause had not been brought forward. The shortfall is of less significance than it was. A perpetual bleakness has been removed.

Does the new clause provide a sufficient guarantee? I am reassured, first, because account is taken of both nursing and residential homes. There was much speculation that we would be confronted with action only in the nursing home sector. Secondly, the new clause provides that the Secretary of State shall, not may, take into account reasonable levels of charges. There is now, or will be, a clear obligation on the Secretary of State.

Two questions remain, however, for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Does he accept that the new clause will be a cause for future action and that it is not merely an adornment of the statute book? Secondly, does he accept that future action must commence as quickly as possible after April 1991 if we are not to find, once more, that there is pressure to evict?

I find new clause 14 unacceptable because it places emphasis on adjudication officers. My right hon. Friend has persuaded me that that is not the right approach. As for the manuscript amendment, of which I have had sound if not sight, it provides the blank cheque that we have tried to aviod. If my right hon. Friend will give the assurance that he regards the new clause as a programme for action and not merely a reassuring sop, I think that we may trust him. I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to go with him tonight.

10.45 pm

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): I welcome what the Government have done. My concern about shortfall and future action was expressed clearly by the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe).

I do not believe that the new clause is sufficient to deal with the problems that have been brought to my notice. Half the constituency of the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Mrs. Peacock) was joined with half of my constituency for a long time—Batley and Morley—and, therefore, we share the problems with former mill towns in the west riding. I should like to express the concern of my constituents.

The new clause refers to "prescribed" bodies. I declare an interest because I am on the governing board of a Salvation Army home not far from the House. My mother was there for a long time. She was a war widow and received war widows' pension and attendance allowance but not income support.

Over the years, I have learned about the expertise of the Salvation Army. It does marvellous work for down and outs—it will do such work tonight in London—and it has built homes and altered old buildings. Before being on the governing board, I was not aware of the expertise and professionalism of its staff.

Whatever information the Department of Social Security receives from local authorities, the Salvation Army could provide, within weeks, a detailed report on the problems experienced in its homes. Such a report would cover a good cross-section, because the people in its homes come from a variety of backgrounds.

The letters that I have received and the people who have come to see me cause me to worry that the sums being offered by the Government are not sufficient. I have received letters from people on low incomes whose aged parents are in homes. They are concerned that their parents will be evicted because they cannot afford to make the payments. I want to check in the next few weeks what difference the money the Government have offered will make to them. Will there still be a problem of eviction because my constituents cannot afford to pay?

I have a constituent—a former nurse—who runs an old people's home with her husband. They are devoted to their patients and make only enough money to cover their incomes. I want to check that next year they will not lose money.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo) said, we are debating not structures or statistics but the dignity of people living in old people's homes. If in the next few weeks the Minister is told by hon. Members or the Salvation Army that his figures are wrong, will he be able to act on that information in advance of 1991?

I suspect that we are all in for a surprise. Hon. Members will receive letters and their constituents will say to them, "Thank you for what you have done. We are not looking a gift horse in the mouth, but frankly it is not enough."

Mr. Peter Griffiths (Portsmouth, North): I shall be extremely brief.

I welcome new clause 26 and the comments made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, but I suggest that the success of the arrangements between now and April 1991 will depend not only on the generosity of the Department but on the restraint and tolerance of the owners of residential care homes. It would be helpful if my right hon. Friend said that we can look forward to such success.

The advantage of new clause 26 is that after April 1991 it will not leave the cost of residential care open ended. Although two weeks ago and tonight our attention has been directed to residents who depend on income support, those who manage to pay their own fees must meet the increased costs that inevitably follow when income support is raised.

New clause 26 meets the objections that I raised two weeks ago. We should be grateful for the tolerance of home owners who will now have a better opportunity to care for our constituents.

Mr. Newton: I wish to make two crisp points. First, I am grateful to hon. Members for their response to my proposals. Secondly, such is my mellow frame of mind that I shall even co-operate with the Opposition, who wish me to sit down a little early so that they may vote on their amendment rather than on the new clause. I shall respond as best I can to some of the points raised during the debate.

I say to all hon. Members, but especially to the hon. Members for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) and for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo), that I do not think that the complexities of the position have been fully recognised in the debate. I want to explain the difficulty that I or any other Minister would face in coming forward with what would be regarded as a complete solution. As I said in our previous debate on this matter, there are two categories of shortfall with these homes. One is involuntary—where people cannot meet the charge being levied. That is the case that concerns my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) and others. The other category—there was a case in my constituency only last week—is where relatives use their freedom to top up what income support will buy because they wish to pay for more than the state can be expected to provide.

Indeed, many of the charitable bodies have said that they do not expect the full difference between income support and their costs to be met. It is important that that is understood. I am not suggesting that they have expressed satisfaction with the present limits, but they do not demand that the full gap should be met because it is specifically part of their policy to provide a standard of amenity and the like higher than they think it reasonable for the state to be expected to pay for. They view that as a legitimate use of their charitable funds.

I make that point only to illustrate the difficulties of pitching the figures at the right level. I am not in any way discounting the anxiety felt about the present level, to which I have sought to respond. Indeed, the increases are substantial. The debate has focused on what I shall do in August, but that should be linked with what I have already done, which will take effect next month—that is, £20 on nursing homes, £15 on residential care homes and, at the extreme, £25 for terminal illness limits.

The right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) mentioned the Salvation Army. I am prepared to take into account evidence from that body or any other reputable source, as I sought to do in making my judgments today. I shall be looking for more and better evidence when I have to make a judgment next October about the uprating from next April.

I can tell my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) that, even when not on the scale envisaged by the new clause, when information is available in advance of April 1991, I shall use it in making my judgments at that time.

The only point that I need to make in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone is that it will be some time—I cannot give an exact time—after April 1991 before we have comprehensive information covering a range of local authorities and a range of homes and circumstances that would make it possible to activate the new clause. I assure her that I tabled it not as a cosmetic

[Mr. Newton]

adornment, but as a sign of the way in which I hope to move in the future when the information is available to enable me to act in that way.

Mr. Meacher: The Secretary of State says that his new clause is not intended to be cosmetic. What guarantee can he give us that as a result of his new clause there will be no evictions after April 1991? What action does he propose to take to prevent evictions before April 1991? He has not answered either of those questions.

Mr. Newton: The answer was given in the sensible remarks by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone when she referred to the background to some of the anxieties about the future and about the present limits. As my hon. Friend acknowledged very fairly, on both those fronts my actions respond to the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Oldham, West.

I owe it to the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) to respond to his comment about pocket money. I have undertaken to eschew the phrase "pocket money". It is really personal expenses allowance.

The point about pocket money is not widely understood. The Department of Social Security cannot dictate how people use their pocket money. There is no question of the DSS allocating the personal expenses allowance to pay for residential home or nursing home charges. Some home owners set their charges at the expenses level above the income support rate. If I raised the income support rate, some owners—perhaps not many—would raise their charges to the same amount above the new income support rate. If I set it at £200 and the personal expenses element was £10, some owners would set the charge at £210. I cannot prevent that without controlling charges for homes or taking away an individual's right to spend personal expenses money as he or she wishes.

My colleagues who organise the business of the House have told me that, in order to fulfil my undertaking about voting that I gave at the outset of my speech, I should curtail my remarks now. I shall do that after expressing my gratitude for the support that my hon. Friends and some Opposition Members have expressed in a very reasonable and constructive way and for the outcome that we have achieved.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time.

Amendment proposed to the new clause: to leave out "take into account" and insert

"determine the amounts required to meet the costs of providing such accommodation of a suitable standard by reference to".—*[Mr. Meacher.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 221, Noes 326.

Division No. 145] **[10.57 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Illsley, Eric
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex

Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*

Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Ray Powell.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda

Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian

Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David

Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*

Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Alastair Goodlad and
Mr. Tony Durant.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause added to the Bill.

New Clause 1

COMMUNITY CHARGE BENEFIT

'In section 22A of the 1986 Act,

(a) at the beginning of subsection (1) there shall be inserted the words "Subject to the provisions of subsection (1A) below,";

(b) after subsection (1) there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(1A) For the purpose of determining such entitlement or such amount in any such case, the amounts of capital prescribed under section 22(6) and (7) above shall be doubled.".'.—*[Mr. Meacher.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Meacher: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following amendments: (b), at the beginning insert—

'(1) In section 22 of the 1986 Act, after subsection (6) there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(6A) Regulations shall make provision for entitling any person to housing benefit in the form of a community charge rebate for any period in respect of which he would have been so entitled if the amount prescribed under subsection (6) above during that period had been £16,000.

(2)'.

(a), in new subsection (1A), leave out '22(6) and (7)' and insert '22(7)'.

Mr. Meacher: It speaks for itself that, since 3.30 pm, we have had seven and a half hours under a Government guillotine, yet only now do we reach the first Opposition new clause. The full absurdity of the Government's guillotine is shown by the fact that we have been allocated the next 47 minutes to debate seven Opposition new clauses and amendments.

The first concerns the poll tax, and I have little doubt that it will take the full time until 12 o'clock—indeed, the debate could have gone considerably beyond that time. Everyone realises that the Chancellor's proposed concession in the Budget to alleviate poll tax bills has turned out rather less of a sweetener and more of a confidence trick, for two main reasons. The first is that the proposed formula will mean that most pensioners and others will get little or nothing extra in relief. The other is that the Chancellor simply forgot about Scotland and its right to equivalent relief over the past year. The first objection is fully redressed by new clause 1 and I invite support for it from hon. Members on both sides of the House who agree with the statement yesterday by the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen):

"It"—

referring to the poll tax—

"needs to be reconsidered in respect of the abatements made and the effectiveness of the transitional arrangements".—[*Official Report*, 27 March 1990; Vol. 170, c. 243.]

On the first point, I submit that we propose precisely the kind of reconsideration for which the right hon. Gentleman asked.

11.15 pm

Under the Government's proposal, most people will find when they come to claim that they will get little or nothing extra. The reason is the rule on tariff income: for every £250 in savings over £3,000, they are deemed, however unrealistically, to receive an income of £1 a week, and that reduces their poll tax rebate by 15p a week. Let me give an example of a pensioner who has just less than £16,000 in savings—presumably, the type of person that this "concession" was designed to assist. The net effect of all the deductions is that his or her poll tax rebate is reduced by £7·65 a week. I am sure that hon. Members will not closely follow these figures, but I assure them that they have been carefully checked and I am certain that they are correct. As benefit is calculated on a maximum 80 per cent. of the poll tax, this equates with a poll tax bill of £497 a year. In other words, that pensioner, who is clearly intended to be a main beneficiary of the great poll tax concession, will not get a penny unless he or she lives in one of four local authority areas in England and Wales—those with a poll tax above £497 a year. So much for the Budget special offer!

Hon. Members will agree that many pensioners will be bitterly disappointed when they realise that the increase in the capital cut-off allows them merely to fill in a form and then have a zero rebate calculated. It is disgraceful for the Government to raise hopes as they did in the Budget and then dash them when people discover that they will get only tiny amounts of aid to offset their massive poll tax bills.

The Government's error has been in raising the upper capital limit but not the lower limit. If the lower threshold at which deductions start had been doubled to £6,000—which is what one might expect—the value of the concession would have been greatly increased. That is precisely why my right hon. and hon. Friends and I have tabled the new clause. It effects exactly that purpose.

Only a few days ago, in Committee, the Minister declared that a limit of £16,000 for couples was on the high side. I am glad that, after a presumably deafening outcry from the Tory heartlands, he has decided to recant. For the Government to raise the upper limit but not the lower one can only reflect one of two things—either it shows incompetence in that they intended pensioners to get a much bigger gain from this concession, but they bungled the operation, or it shows cynicism, in that they knew well that most of the concession would be diminished or even extinguished in practice, but they wanted the political credit of at least the appearance of making a generous offer.

I leave it to the Minister to say which of the two motivations applied. I do not know, but whichever it was, it is now in the interest of equity and reasonableness to change the formula, and on those grounds I seek support for the new clause.

Mr. Christopher Hawkins (High Peak): The hon. Gentleman is aware that I, too, am keen to sort out the anomalies on this issue. I am not sure why he wants to raise the amount of capital that is disregarded, because that would create further anomalies by making people with those amounts of capital have their benefit assessed on the basis of too low an income for them.

At present, the problem is that people with high amounts of capital up to £16,000 have a notional income for DSS purposes which is way above their actual income because of attributing 20·8 per cent. interest to every extra £1,000 of savings above £3,000. That is the £1 per week per £250—being £52 a year per £250—which is £208 a year per £1,000, and that is 20·8 per cent. interest on every extra £1,000. The problem is—[HON. MEMBERS: "Too long."] I hope I may be allowed to complete this, and I promise not to intervene later.

The problem is that if one raises the lower limit, one is creating as big an anomaly at the bottom by assessing those people's benefit on an income which is lower than their real income. It would be better if the DSS scrapped the 20·8 per cent. interest on extra savings and stuck in annually, at uplift time, the actual interest available based on the best practice in the high street and by building societies, currently about 11 per cent. Putting it simply, if instead of the level being £1 per week per £250 it was 50p per week per £250, that would be available in every high street in Britain.

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Gentleman makes an extremely valid point. I have always thought that the tariff rate of income which suggests that one has a 20 per cent. yield on one's investments must mean that one is getting some extremely good stockbroker advice, and I doubt whether such advice is available to those on income support.

The rate of 20 per cent. is absurd. I would not care to say what the rate should be, but I would have thought that it should be something less than half that rate, and then there would be the offsetting effect, and the damage in extinguishing the right to benefit would be that much less.

That is a separate point and, while I do not dispute the validity of the hon. Gentleman's argument, I hope he will agree that until the DSS makes that change, it is important to raise the lower threshold. We cannot tonight change the tariff rate of income, but the way to ameliorate the effect would be to raise the lower threshold.

Because of the shortness of time, I will not dwell on amendment (b) in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar). I understand, from what was said at Scottish Question Time today, that there is shortly to be a full statement on the matter from the Secretary of State for Scotland. My hon. Friends and I will be looking at that statement on three clear and explicit criteria: the adequacy or otherwise of the extra funds that are made available; the ex gratia nature of the scheme; and how it will be ensured that those entitled receive payments retrospectively on a strictly comparable basis to those now made available in England and Wales.

The view that rebates to alleviate the full horrific force of the poll tax should be maximised is shared on both sides of the House. We do not know whether the formula enunciated by the Chancellor in his Budget was by accident or design, but we know that raising the upper capital limit and not the lower one has the counter-productive effect of extinguishing a large proportion of the relief that presumably was intended. On that basis, I hope that new clause 1, which corrects that error, will command approval in all parts of the House.

Mr. Hawkins: I said a moment ago that I would not speak again, because I was conscious of the guillotine, but I had not realised that no one else wanted to speak.

I greatly welcome the fact that the Chancellor responded to representations by raising the capital limit to almost £16,000. It is now important to get the DSS rule on the interest implied in the capital changed. Sympathetic as I am to what the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) is trying to achieve, I do not want to support the creation of another anomaly at the bottom end by assuming no interest on the first £3,000 or £6,000. That would be to underrate the income that those people with savings genuinely have. What I should like to see is a system that is neutral as between saving and not saving. The way to make the system neutral is to impute to savings the best-practice interest rate that a normal human being anywhere in Britain can earn on the high street.

By doing that, one would, for benefit purposes, be using a person's actual income from savings, added to his actual income from other sources, and comparing the resulting figure with the benefit tables to see whether he qualified for a rebate. I have drawn to the attention of Ministers the situation of a person with savings who, before the Budget, may have had an income one third lower than that of someone who did not save. A couple could have an income of just £100 a week, made up of retirement pension and interest on savings, and fail to qualify for a rebate. Yet a couple in my area, where the poll tax is £400, could have an income of £150 a week and qualify for the rebate, so long as their income was not derived from savings. A couple with savings living on £100 a week fail to qualify, yet a couple who have not saved but whose income is 50 per cent. higher do qualify. That is a ridiculous anomaly. It is a massive penalty on savings—much too great to put right.

While I support the Opposition's intentions, I have to point out that raising the lower limit would create anomalies similar to those that would arise from playing with the upper limit without changing the interest rate. I should like the Minister to consider a move to a neutral system—a system that would not impose a penalty on savers.

Of course, I do not expect a considered response tonight. The way to achieve what I have in mind is to impute to capital the interest rate that can actually be achieved on the high street. Magically, at the moment, there is the lovely convenience in that, instead of being £1 a week per £250 of savings, which is the current rule, it

[Mr. Hawkins]

should be 50p a week per £250 of savings. There is an over-estimate of precisely 100 per cent. What I am suggesting would put the whole matter to rights.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I shall be very brief. It was strange that the Minister should indicate from a sedentary position his intention to speak at the end of the debate. Many hon. Members, including myself, would have liked to hear an immediate response to the case made by my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) in his opening speech. This is an important debate, and I am surprised at the course that the Minister is adopting.

The case that the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Hawkins) has made has considerable merit, and is worthy of consideration. Of course, it is not relevant to this new clause. Many constituents have written to ask me where they might get the rate of interest that is used as the notional figure when the DSS is calculating benefit. The hon. Member's case should be pursued and hopefully it will be supported by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Having listened to the Chancellor's Budget statement last week, I think it would have benefited more people if he had increased the £3,000 limit to £6,000 rather than doubled the £8,000 to £16,000. There is considerable merit in the new clause. I hope that the Minister will respond positively and say that the Government are prepared to accept the new clause.

11.30 pm

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): I listened carefully to the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hawkins) and by the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike). On examining the matter, I think that we should proceed on the basis of real figures in the market place.

Shortly after the Chancellor's excellent concession in the Budget of the increase in the savings limit, I tabled a question to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security, asking what action he was taking to vary the tapers in calculating housing benefit and community charge concessions. The reply was that no change would be made in the tapers. That may be all right in regard to the community charge because the tapers are extremely low and one loses benefit slowly in relation to increases in income. But I believe that the tapers for housing benefit are much more fierce.

Obviously the Government cannot deal with the matter in the debate, but in due course we should be given exemplification of the rebates that might be available in relation to various levels of income and capital so that we can pass the information to our constituents. I pay tribute to the Under-Secretary for the written answer last autumn, which set out the income levels on which rebates were available. I found the information extremely useful when replying to queries from constituents. All hon. Members want to help their constituents as much as possible to maximise the rebates that they may get in relation to the community charge, housing benefit and other benefits.

Mr. Timothy Raison (Aylesbury): I hope my right hon. Friend the Minister will pay serious attention to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hawkins). It would be a strange irony if, after a Budget which not only contained the concession of increasing the permitted amount of capital but which introduced specific savings schemes, we should persist with the notion that for every £250 of capital a person has he should lose £1 a week. We have seen the strengthening of the PEP scheme and the proposed introduction of the TESSA scheme. Those schemes are directed entirely towards the type of people whom we are talking about. We are trying to encourage those people to save. It is a cruel irony if people who have saved over the years find themselves taxed at a penal rate on their capital. I hope that my right hon. Friend will think seriously about the point.

Mr. Jim Sillars (Glasgow, Govan): Those of us from Scotland are labouring under a great difficulty because we have not had any statement from the Secretary of State for Scotland on how he intends to disburse the £4 million ex gratia payment that was announced last week. It was not announced in the House. As I understand it, it was announced at a hastily called press conference. We are not sure whether it was a Lobby meeting or a formal press conference.

In Scotland there has been a great deal of consternation ever since about the method of handling that announcement. But here we are tonight and the Secretary of State for Scotland is "semi-detached" from the rest of us. He is not sitting on the Front Bench, where he could respond to invitations to intervene and to put the record straight. He is developing a rather shy attitude.

The chairman of the Tory party in Scotland, the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), paid a fleeting visit to the Chamber and then beat it as fast as he could. That is not characteristic of him. He is normally up front, arguing vociferously for Government policy. I am now told that he is up the back somewhere, rather than on the Front Bench where he should be.

Our other difficulty is that we do not really know what the Government's attitude is, because each time they touch the poll tax some sort of change or a semi-U turn takes place. They would be well-advised to take on board the message contained in new clause 1, moved by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). The Government are only just beginning to understand many of the problems that are developing with the poll tax south of the border that people north of the border have understood for a considerable time. When the Chancellor made his statement about poll tax rebates in the Budget I thought that it was a very strange thing to do. That statement on the upper limit of savings for rebates had absolutely nothing to do with the Budget. It was not a Finance Bill measure, and it is interesting that the legislation will come as secondary legislation from the Department of Social Security. Therefore, one can only assume that he included the measure in the Budget speech to gain political benefit at a time that looked pretty bad for the Conservative party. The great problem, if one engages in a con trick without thinking it through, is that one has to live with the consequences. I shall tell the Minister for Social Security of some of the consequences.

An old lady constituent of mine visited me at my office in Ibrox in Glasgow. She does not have any money in the bank, but with her pension and the pension that she obtains from her husband's work she is above the limit for any rebate on the poll tax and therefore pays the full amount. After a discussion with her family and her neighbours she came to me and said, "If they are going to give folk with £16,000 in the bank a rebate on the poll tax, then why don't I get a rebate, as I've got no money in the bank?" The logic was that she thought she must get a rebate. She was going to pay another instalment of the poll tax, but did not do so until she had had a chat with me because she was convinced that justice had to be done. She said, "I do not have £16,000. Why should I be paying the full tax? Surely I'm entitled to a rebate." She was astonished, scandalised and angry when I explained to her that it did not matter whether she had money in the bank; her income carried her above the line and there would be no rebate.

Then I met someone else who assumed that because he has more than £8,000 in the bank—but not as much as £16,000—he was automatically guaranteed the full rebate. When I explained the situation, there was even greater anger. Such folk read the Chancellor as they were meant to read him on that particular day. They understood that a massive concession was coming from the Government and that they should be applauding their television screens. Then the cold light of reality struck some days later and they found that there was not a penny piece of help in it for them.

I am addressing my remarks to Conservative Back Benchers and not to the Government because, from the experience of recent weeks, it seems that the Government will respond only to pressure from them. Conservative Members might think that their crisis on the poll tax is over. I noticed in one Scottish newspaper that the Secretary of State for Scotland is alleged to have told his Cabinet colleagues that the main pressure will be put on them when people learn the level of the poll tax, and that once the bills start dropping through the letter box the anger will start dropping off. That is not true. If he told his Cabinet colleagues that, he has misled them once again. Our experience in Scotland is that it is when the bills rattle through the letter box and people are forced to decide whether to pay and how much to pay that the anger starts.

The major problems for the Conservative party in England are yet to come. The sensible thing would be for Conservative Members to take a small step backwards, to listen carefully to what has been said on new clause 1 and to accept it as the first step towards a major reconstruction of local government finance in England and Scotland. No matter how much we tinker with the poll tax, it remains fundamentally flawed because it does not take account of people's ability to pay. I am sorry that the Prime Minister is not here. The message which was sent from Mid-Staffordshire, and which will be sent from Glasgow on Saturday——

Ms. Short: The alternative is Labour.

Mr. Sillars: If the hon. Lady is telling me that the roof tax is a sensible alternative to the poll tax, she and I will have to differ.

Ms. Short: Surely the lesson of Mid-Staffordshire is that the only alternative to the present Government is a Labour Government.

Mr. Sillars: Believe it or not, if we cannot win independence at the next election, I look forward to the day when we shall have a Labour Government instead of a Tory Government in this place because I shall then have the pleasure of watching the Labour party trying to reconcile the contradictions in its policy——

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): The hon. Gentleman will not be here to watch it.

Mr. Sillars: Whether I am here or watching it on television is immaterial. I recall a period when we had a Labour Government who were cutting the National Health Service, housing and education. How do Labour Members reconcile the policy of the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, who goes around the City of London telling all those in the boardrooms that fundamentally nothing will change under a Labour Government, with Back-Bench Labour Members simultaneously telling people in housing, education and the Health Service that they will be able to allocate the additional resources? I reckon that 12 to 18 months of a Labour Government in power here will advance the cause of Scottish independence by a fair number of years.

I return to the message of Mid-Staffordshire. Of course, I accept that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) interprets it as she has. But I think that there is another important message for the Prime Minister from Mid-Staffordshire and from the great demonstration of non-payers of the poll tax in Glasgow this Saturday. It is quite simple: if the poll tax does not go, she will have to.

Mr. Scott: Perhaps I should explain that it seemed unnecessary for me to intervene twice in the debate. I felt that it was better to listen to the bulk of the arguments and then to respond, perhaps leaving the Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen the last word in the debate. That seemed to be the most effective way in which to deal with the matter.

I think that we can all agree on one thing—we welcome the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget statement that he intended to raise the upper capital limit for income support and family credit from £6,000 to £8,000 and the upper limits for community charge and housing benefit from £8,000 to £16,000 from April. It is worth reminding the House that the change means that 250,000 people will be helped at a cost, in all benefits, of £120 million. That cannot be regarded by anyone who takes a fair view of matters as anything other than a significant change.

In essence, the change was introduced to ensure that many people who save conscientiously throughout their lives should not be prevented from claiming help with community charge or with their rents, particularly in retirement. In fact, about two thirds of those who will be helped by this very welcome change announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will be pensioners.

It was suggested that people having capital in excess of £10,000 will not benefit from those changes, but nothing could be further from the truth. We estimate that 70,000 extra benefit cases, affecting 100,000 individuals, will involve capital in excess of £10,000 and that the vast majority of them will concern pensioners. There are still gainers even among those having capital of between £14,000 and £16,000. We estimate that 15,000 people in that bracket, again mainly pensioners, will also gain. That should be the starting point for our consideration of new clause 1.

11.45 pm

The Opposition's new clause, which doubles upper and lower limits for couples only, should be rejected. We extended the upper capital limit for all claimants, and right hon. and hon. Members should be aware that the Opposition's new clause contains a serious anomaly. I take the example of a couple having capital greater than £8,000 and being entitled to community charge benefit. Under the Opposition's proposals, if one of them were to die, the surviving partner would not be entitled to benefit because the upper capital limit of £8,000 would be relevant when her benefit was reassessed. It follows that new clause 1 might deprive people of community charge benefit at a very vulnerable moment in their lives.

The Opposition make general points, but they should think through the practical effects of their proposals. In this case, a serious anomaly would result, with widows, for example, losing entitlement to community charge benefit in the circumstances I described.

Mr. Wilson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Scott: No, because I want to allow time for the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) to respond.

My hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Hawkins) suggested that imputed interest should be taken into account rather than tariff income. That proposal would cause problems, and it would be difficult to administer. However, I am happy to discuss the implications of my hon. Friend's proposal with him to see whether those practical difficulties can be tackled. Obviously we want to monitor the results of different——

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will my hon. Friend allow me to intervene?

Mr. Scott: No, because I must——

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Then we shall vote against the Government.

Mr. Scott: I understand that, but the debate must end in 12 minutes. I said that I am perfectly prepared to discuss with my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak his proposals, but I assure him that they would present serious practical difficulties. If we can overcome them, I shall take his suggestions into account when we reconsider these matters in due course.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West suggested that pensioners having capital of £16,000 will not benefit unless the community charge is greater than £9·75 per week.

Mr. Meacher *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Scott: The effect of tariff income depends on other income of which the claimant is in receipt.

Mr. Meacher: The Minister could not have been listening. I did not cite a figure of £9·75 but one of £7·65.

Mr. Scott: I am sorry if I misheard the hon. Gentleman. The fact remains that a pensioner aged over 75 with capital of £16,000 or other income of less than about £20 per week will still receive the maximum rebate. I repeat that about 15,000 pensioners having capital of between £14,000 and £16,000 will still gain from the announcement made by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

My hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) asked for examples of benefit entitlement. I am only too willing to provide that information. If my hon. Friend will table a suitable question, I shall ensure that he receives examples of exemptions at different levels.

There is still widespread misunderstanding about the precise way in which tariff income operates. It is not true that the tariff income rule reduces benefit entitlement by the same, equal amount. Where a person's income is greater than the set applicable amount, only 15p per week is deducted from maximum benefit for every £1 of weekly excess income over the applicable amount.

Hon. Members have expressed concern about the interest applied by the tariff income. As I have said, the benefit system has to be considered in totality. I shall give an example to the House. A person with tariff income of £25 a week would not see benefit reduced by £25 a week. The benefit would be reduced by 15 per cent. of £25, which would be only £3·75 a week. That should be understood. It is being spread around the system that once a certain amount is exceeded there is a pound for pound reduction in benefit. That is not true. Only 15 per cent. is taken into account. I leave it to those on the Opposition Front Bench or Back Benches to speak.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I am appalled by the Minister of State's approach. The debate is limited to 47 minutes and it is clear that as many Conservative Members as Opposition Members wish to question him. It would have been suitable and appropriate for him to respond immediately after my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) resumed his place. The Minister would then have had the time to allow his hon. Friends to intervene. I do not understand why he is so shy about being accountable to the House. He chose to intervene shortly before midnight to promise secret discussions—it seems that they are to take place behind closed doors—in an endeavour to shut up his right hon. and hon. Friends.

Conservative Members have cottoned on to the con of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Whether the percentages are 20·8, 20 or 15, those outside this place know that last week's Budget statement contained a con. Who are the 15,000 with £16,000 in the bank who will benefit? These people will have an ordinary income of less than £20 a week. Who is sitting on £16,000 with an income of less than £20 a week? We are talking of a total income of about £20 a week, not extra income.

I shall follow with interest the questions that are tabled over the next few months to ascertain what the DSS knows about these people. Did those in the DSS know what the Chancellor of the Exchequer was to say, or the consequences of it? Did they understand the effect of not raising the lower limit, and especially the effect of his statement in Scotland? If they did know, did they tell the Chancellor before he made his speech? The Minister of State must know that his Department is the repository of expertise on these matters. His officials know what is happening. The problem is—this became clear during a sitting of the Public Accounts Committee last year—that they do not tell Ministers unless Ministers ask.

We discovered that the effect of the housing benefit changes was known to all the officials. They said, "We never said anything about this, because the Ministers never asked us." The PAC took a dim view of the official who said that. The problem was that Ministers were not asking, "What are the effects and the consequences of this change of policy?"

In this instance—let us concentrate on the doubling for poll tax for the moment—did Ministers ask the departmental officials what would be the effects, pitfalls and anomalies that would result from the change in policy? If Ministers do not put that question to their officials, they are not fit to be Ministers. The House knows that officials will not provide information freely unless they are asked to do so. That is a great worry to all hon. Members, and especially to members of Select Committees. I shall give way if the Minister wants to answer those questions. The House should be aware of the views of Ministers.

Mr. Scott: Before my right hon. Friend the Chancellor made his announcement, he discussed it with Ministers at the Department of Social Security. We welcome, as I believe does the whole House, his announcement on the increasing of the limits.

I respond to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) by asking some other questions. Does the Labour party welcome the announcement made by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor to increase the limits? Does it accept that new clause 1 is incompetent and ineffective and contains anomalies? Does it accept that I am prepared to listen to my hon. Friends and to others who want to discuss this, to answer parliamentary questions and to give examples of exemptions? Does it accept that the rather superficial acceptance that 20·8 per cent. is assumed as income on capital is a misapprehension of the true position? When income from £3,000 to nought is averaged out, one gets nowhere near 20·8 per cent. When one takes account of the taper of 15 per cent. instead of 20 per cent., which operated under the rating system, it is even more beneficial. Does the Labour party, particularly the hon. Member for Perry Barr, accept those points?

Mr. Rooker: Before the Government took office, we had a much fairer system of taking account of people's savings than capital cut-off. The Government have sought to squeeze people who have few savings and a bit of extra pension to cut benefits, and that has led to this anomaly. The anomaly will continue with benefit after benefit unless there are major changes to the policy.

The Minister knows that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition welcomed the doubling of the limit by the Chancellor, but we are entitled to attack the consequences of making that change but not changing the lower limit. The message that that gave to the British people was not the one that the Government intended to give. As the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars) said, the message was intended to make people think: "I am now entitled to a rebate, whereas previously I was turned down for being over the £8,000 limit. What will my rebate be?" I have had to give the same answer to my constituents as other hon. Members have had to give theirs—"The chances are that you will not get a penny piece. If you do, it will be a few bob rather than a few pounds."

Mr. Hawkins: I know that the hon. Member would not want to mislead the House. He knows that I share his concern, but a couple under 75 with savings of £16,000 —a tariff income of £52 a week—can receive the state pension and still qualify for community charge rebate in any area where the community charge, or poll tax, is more than £300.

Mr. Rooker: The capital limit is exactly the same for a single person as for a couple.

Mr. Hawkins: Not a single person—a couple.

Mr. Rooker: I am talking about an individual. I was asking how people with savings of £16,000 survive on such meagre incomes. The Secretary of State said that 15,000 people with savings of £16,000 would benefit. I want to know where they are, what their incomes are and how they survive on such low incomes.

It is easy for Ministers to say, "We do not like new clause 1; it has a technical defect." What a defence for a Minister who has an army of civil servants and who will have a chance to correct any defect in the new clause in the other place. If he had the good grace of some other Ministers, he would have said, "We shall consider the new clause" and would not have nit-picked. I shall happily vote for new clause 1, because any technical defects can be corrected at a later stage.

Mr. Wilson: When we support the new clause, we shall do so soberly and with good sense. However, when the Chancellor made his announcement—which we have since discovered is worthless—during the Budget statement, Conservative Members waved their Order Papers as though it was Christmas and as though the Chancellor was dispensing millions of pounds to tens of thousands of pensioners. Conservative Members should have been a little more circumspect and found out what it was worth. Will not their embarrassment on the poll tax. as in so many other areas, be heightened when, once again, they return to their constituents and have to tell them that this so-called concession is a con?

Mr. Rooker: Conservative Members thought that they were waving goodbye to us, when what they did not know was that the Government were waving goodbye to the rebate——

It being Twelve o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded, pursuant to the Order this day, to put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

The House divided: Ayes 204, Noes 307.

Division No. 143] **[12 midnight**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*

Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Illsley, Eric
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Mrs Alice

Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Ray Powell.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*

Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael

Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Alastair Goodlad and
Mr. Tony Durant.

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 8

RADIATION EXPOSED CROWN EMPLOYEES

'(1) In the principal Act, after section 78, there shall be inserted the following Chapter:—

"CHAPTER VA: RADIATION EXPOSED CROWN EMPLOYEES

78A.—(1) Subject to the provisions of this Act, a person shall be entitled to a benefit or benefits, to be known as radiation exposure payments, payable at a prescribed rate or rates, if he is—

(a) a radiation exposed Crown employee who suffers from a relevant disease;
(b) the widow or widower of a radiation exposed Crown employee who suffered from a relevant disease; or
(c) a person entitled to child benefit in respect of a child of a deceased radiation exposed Crown employee who suffered from a relevant disease.

(2) Subsection (1) above shall come into force six months after the passing of the Social Security Act 1990.

(3) In this Chapter—

'a radiation exposed Crown employee' means a person who, while serving as a member of Her Majesty's forces or in any other prescribed employment under the Crown, was, or is deemed in accordance with regulations to have been, exposed to ionizing radiation as a result of his participation in activities connected with a prescribed test or series of tests of a nuclear device or devices;

'a relevant disease' means a disease presumed to have been caused by service as a radiation exposed Crown employee.

(4) For the purposes of this section, any disease specified in column 1 of Schedule 9A to this Act, which a radiation exposed Crown employee develops or has developed at any time after the last day on which he was, or is deemed in accordance with regulations to have been, exposed to ionizing radiation as a result of his participation in activities connected with a prescibed test or series of tests of a nuclear device or devices, but not longer after that day than the maximum period specified for that disease in column 2 of that Schedule, shall be presumed to have been caused by service as a radiation exposed Crown employee, and no other disease shall be presumed to have been so caused.

(5) The Secretary of State may at any time make an Order amending Schedule 9A to this Act in such manner as he considers appropriate in the light of medical evidence.

(6) Where, on the day before such an Order comes into force, a person is treated as suffering or having suffered from a relevant disease for the purposes of this section, or would have been so treated if his claim for benefit under this section had been determined, the provisions of Schedule 9A shall apply in his case as if the Order had not been made.

(7) Regulations may prescribe circumstances in which a claim for benefit under this section is to be determined as if an Order under subsection (5) above which came into force after the date of the claim had been in force on that date.

(8) Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection (2) above, the first regulations under subsections (1) and (3) above shall be made before subsection (1) comes into force.

(9) Before making the first regulations under subsection (1) above, it shall be the duty of the Secretary of State to satisfy himself that the benefit or benefits payable under that subsection by virtue of those regulations will be on the whole as favourable as the benefits that would be payable under section 76 above to persons in similar circumstances if the relevant disease were prescribed for the purposes of that section and the other conditions of entitlement to benefit under that section were satisfied.

(10) A claim for benefit under subsection (1) above made within 12 months after the day on which the Social Security Act 1990 was passed shall be treated as if the provisions of

that subsection and of the first regulations under subsections (1) and (3) above had come into force on that day and as if the claim had been made on that day or on the first day on which the claimant satisfied or would have been satisfied the requirements for entitlement to the benefit, whichever is later."

(2) In section 93(1) of the principal act, there shall be added at the end—

"(f) a question whether a person is or was on any day a radiation exposed Crown employee for the purposes of Part II, Chapter VA."

(3) In section 113(1) of the principal Act, for the words "Chapter V" there shall be substituted the words "Chapters V and VA".

(4) In section 115(3) of the principal Act, for the words "those relating to industrial injuries benefit" there shall be substituted the words "Chapters IV to VA".

(5) After Schedule 9 to the principal Act there shall be inserted the following Schedule—

"SCHEDULE 9A

DISEASES PRESUMED TO HAVE BEEN CAUSED BY SERVICE AS A RADIATION EXPOSED CROWN EMPLOYEE

Disease	Maximum period
Leukaemia (other than chronic lymphocytic leukaemia)	40 years
Cancer of the thyroid	40 years
Cancer of the breast	40 years
Cancer of the pharynx	40 years
Cancer of the oesophagus	40 years
Cancer of the stomach	40 years
Cancer of the small intestine	40 years
Cancer of the pancreas	40 years
Multiple myeloma	40 years
Lymphomas (except Hodgkin's disease)	40 years
Cancer of the bile ducts	40 years
Cancer of the gall bladder	40 years
Primary liver cancer (except if caused by cirrhosis or hepatitis B)	40 years"

(6) In section 63 of the Social Security Act 1986 (annual up-rating of benefits)—

(a) the following paragraph shall be inserted after subsection (1)(i)—

"(j) specified in regulations under section 78A(1) of the Social Security Act 1975,"; and

(b) in subsection (3)(b), for the words "or (ee)" there shall be substituted the words "(ee) or (j)".'.—*[Mr. Clay.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

12.15 am

Mr. Bob Clay (Sunderland, North): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The new clause stands in my name and in the names of hon. Members from both sides of the House. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) and other hon. Friends for not moving new clause 7, thus enabling this debate to take place. New clause 8 is about the 22,000 British service men and approximately 3,000 Crown employees who participated in the British nuclear weapons test programme between 1952 and 1958. Tragically, it is more about the dependants of those men, since the men are dying disproportionately from leukaemia, myeloma and many other cancers.

For years, successive Governments have argued that those involved in the British nuclear testing programme were not exposed to danger from radiation and that there was no connection between the incidence of cancer that they have suffered and their participation in the tests. For years, too, increasing scientific, medical and statistical evidence has contradicted Governments' assertions.

Many hon. Members on both sides of the House have interviewed many constituents who took part in these exercises at Christmas island, Maralinga or other test sites and have been told stories of how the men wore no protective clothing or dosimeter film badges to measure radiation. It is possible to believe that one or two of them were cranks, or that their memories had faded, or that one or two did not know what they were talking about. But when so many serious, sober people with clear recollections tell us that that was their experience, we cannot go on believing the claims of successive Governments that everyone was protected and wore radiation-measuring badges, and that there was no evidence that anything went wrong.

Leaving aside anecdotal evidence of this kind, however, we can turn to a newly declassified document written before the test programme started, on 20 September 1951. It was sent by Rear Admiral Torlisse to Rear Admiral Brooking. The former was the military commander of the first British nuclear test. I do not have time to read the whole letter, but I want to quote two key passages from it:

> "Radiological safety must be one of the chief concerns of the naval commander, but equally evidently, some degree of risk must be run by some people if we are to achieve the full purpose of the trial. As naval commander I must expect to have to order or approve the acceptance of some degree of risk. This is a customary service obligation, but it is performed in the knowledge that the Admiralty accept liability for those killed or injured in duty . . . I believe that all Government servants are in fact entitled to compensation for injury on duty, but the particular points to be covered in Hurricane arise from the fact that
>
> (a) the ill effects may be long delayed
>
> (b) illness unconnected with the operation might have caused the same symptoms."

So before the test programme had even started the military commander recognised that, uniquely, the detrimental effects on men's health might be long delayed —precisely what has happened.

The scientific and medical debate has dragged on for years. Eventually the National Radiological Protection Board was asked to commission a study, which was duly carried out, and the board reported to the Government. No doubt the Minister will tell us tonight that that report found that, with the exceptions of leukaemia and myeloma, there was no evidence that other cancers could have been linked with participation in the test programme.

But that is not what the NRPB report says. It came up with two hypotheses: first, that leukaemia and myeloma probably were caused by participation in the programme; secondly, that other cancers probably were not. The report said that neither hypothesis was proven and that more research and study were required.

Tonight the House must face up to the issue of how much longer we shall go on studying and debating while men continue to die. I hope that the Government will finally accept this point: only a limited number of these service men are now receiving pensions; mostly, we are talking about widows receiving pensions because their husbands died from leukaemia or myeloma. They are receiving those pensions because the NRPB study finally decided, in 1988, that there probably was a connection.

For any service man who died of leukaemia or myeloma before 1988, that decision was too late. For any widows of the service men who died before 1988, that decision was too late. If, at the end of 1991, when the next NRPB report comes out—nearly two years from now—it finally concludes that, for example, cancer of the larynx was possibly caused by participation in the test programme, it will be too late for many more who will have died of that disease and for their widows.

We cannot go on and on neglecting this closed universe of people. This is not happening any more. It happened in the 1950s. Time has moved on. The fact that it is a closed universe should make the Government say that on a no-fault, benefit-of-the-doubt basis they will compensate those who were affected by particular diseases.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): I do not say that this country should always follow everything that the United States does, but does the hon. Gentleman agree that if the Americans can pay compensation to their nuclear test veterans, surely we can too?

Mr. Clay: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point. He anticipates the next but one part of my speech.

Many believe that the NRPB study is fundamentally flawed in several ways. There is not time to cite all the examples, so I shall give the most stunning point. It was discovered that the records of service supplied by the Ministry of Defence to the NRPB did not include all those who participated in the test. An important category was missing. All the files of those who had claims outstanding for pensions as a result of their participation in the test were not included. By definition, those who were most likely to weight the statistics to show a high incidence of cancer were not included. It is claimed that the study was to some extent weighted to take account of that, but, again, without going into the most laborious statistical detail, it is difficult to deal with that in a brief speech. Many people have concluded that the study was flawed in many other ways and that the Government should not rely on it.

The new clause is modelled, as nearly as possible in the terms of our legislative procedure, on existing legislation in the United States. It simply says that if one participated in the test and one of a list of cancers has manifested itself within 40 years of participation, it will be presumed that there is a service connection and one will benefit accordingly.

There was some debate in the United States before the legislation was passed. In January when I went to Washington to research this and met the Bush Administration, I said, "We know that President Reagan faltered before signing the legislation passed by the House and Senate. How do you feel about it now?" They said that they were glad it happened and tha if it happened again President Bush could sign legislation happily. It has taken away the hassle of going to court, stopped an enormous sense of injustice and offence felt by veterans and is not costing large sums. The United States has 250,000 men involved whereas we have oly 25,000. Moreover, their men went into Nagasaki and Hiroshima. I asked whether I could convey their view to the British Government and they said that their advice to the British Government, in so far as it was their place to give such advice, would be to do the same. The message has already been conveyed to the Government, but I convey it again tonight.

Progress is so far ahead in the United States because the research that has been conducted there is far ahead of any such research in this country. The existing American legislation is almost certainly due to be improved this year, with manifestation caps being lengthened and more diseases that are compensatable being added to the list. Report No. 5 of the National Research Council, "Biological Effects of Ionising Radiation", concluded that all the previous understandings about which low levels of radiation cause various diseases have been wrong. The Americans have exhaustively studied what happened in their nuclear test programme and have taken much evidence from many parts of the world. The report—which the Ministry of Defence had not bothered to obtain or study until a week or so ago—concluded that further legislation was needed in the United States. It is believed that it will pass through the House of Representatives and the Senate without much difficulty.

In a sense, we do not need another report from the NRPB if we assume two things—first, that the radiation yields from American nuclear explosions must have been much the same as British ones and, secondly, that American service men must be much the same physiologically as British service men. The Government must either say that the Americans have got it totally wrong and are compensating people for no reason or acknowledge that they have got it wrong themselves and face up to that.

The new clause is a modest measure. It is carefully drafted to ensure that considerable scope is left to the Secretary of State to fix the compensation levels, to add to or to subtract from the list of prescribed diseases and to change the manifestation levels. I hope that the Minister will not say that some technical problem exists. The new clause has been carefully drafted with, I acknowledge, technical assistance from her Department. If the Government have any problem with the detail of the clause and how it is set out, they can easily amend it in another place.

It may be argued that if we legislate for a service connection presumption, we will automatically compensate some people who are suffering, but not because of their participation in a test programme. There is nothing to be done about that. Those people will, after all, suffer and will be compensated only if they have one of these diseases. Better to have the generosity to compensate those who have leukaemia or cancer for some other reason than not to compensate those who have it because of service. For the sake of argument, take 10 people with cancer of the stomach who we know were all at Christmas island. I

[Mr. Clay]

have been told that, whatever the records and even if there could be an action replay, any physician would say, "We may know that statistically of the 10, five had cancer from radiation at Christmas island and five had it for some other reason." No physician will ever establish which five were which. Better to compensate the five who did not get it because of being on Christmas island than deny justice to the five who got it because they were there. We are trying to establish that fundamental principle.

It is disingenuous for the Government to argue that some of the evidence, anecdotal as it might be, could and should have been tested in the courts and that, if service men believed that they could prove that they got these terrible diseases as a result of the test programme, they should prove that in the courts and claim compensation in that way. That is a disingenuous argument, because, until recently, they could not get into the courts because of section 10 of the Crown Proceedings Act 1947. Even the abolition of that section was not retrospective. The Government having appealed all the way, Mr. Melvyn Pearce from Bristol won in the House of Lords the right to sue retrospectively. The first case will soon go into the courts, but by the time the Government have appealed that case all the way to the House of Lords, many more people will have died. We cannot have a situation in which this issue is eventually settled through the courts. It is a difficult issue to take to the courts and, in any event, by the time the courts have eventually settled the matter, it will be too late for far too many people.

12.30 am

These people believed that they were serving their country. This issue has nothing to do with one's view on nuclear weapons. If, like me, one is totally opposed to their possession, one obviously takes the view that it is horrific that people should have contracted these terrible diseases while participating in the testing of them. If, like many Conservative Members, one believes that nuclear weapons have kept the peace for many years, one should be all the more grateful to those service men who participated in the programme to test them. This is not a pro or anti-nuclear weapon issue. It is an issue of basic justice.

Radiation kills just as a bullet kills. It is less obvious, it happens later and it is more difficult to prove. I urge the Minister to reflect on the words of President Reagan, who had great difficulty before deciding to sign the legislation that was passed in the United States. He said:

> "Enactment of this legislation does not represent a judgment that service-related exposure of veterans covered by the Act in fact caused any disease. Nor does it represent endorsement of a principle of permitting veterans to receive benefits funded through veterans' programmes which bear no relationship to their former military service. Instead, the Act gives due recognition to the unusual service rendered by Americans who participated in military activities involving exposure to radiation generated by the detonation of atomic explosives. The nation is grateful for their special service, and enactment of H.R. 1811 makes clear the nation's continuing concern for their welfare."

If the British Government have any concern for the continuing welfare of those who are suffering and for the widows who have lost husbands as a result of those men participating in the test programme, they will end the statistical nit-picking tonight, say enough is enough and accept the new clause.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): I cannot match the eloquence of the hon. Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay) on this subject. Nor can I match the depth of his knowledge. The consistent commitment that he has shown to the cause of justice for those who have exposed themselves in the service of the Crown to ionising radiation deserves the praise of the House and a favourable response from the Government.

I was always aware, in a background sense, if that is the right analogy, that perhaps we were not doing justice to those who were exposed to such radiation in our test programmes in the 1950s and 1960s. It was brought home to me just how great the concern was when we had a particularly unedifying occasion here on the afternoon of Friday 2 March, when the hon. Gentleman sought a Second Reading for his admirable Radiation Exposed Crown Employees (Benefit) Bill. It is sad to recall that there was a filibuster, and the many members of the Royal British Legion and veterans who came to witness what they thought would be an important debate went home disappointed. This debate may be taking place late at night and we may not have much time to discuss the new clause, but it is all the more important in view of the fact that the matter did not get the attention that it deserved on 2 March.

It can be clearly established that there is a pathological connection between exposure to ionising radiation and the list of diseases, mostly cancers of various types, in the schedule, which is taken from the United States legislation. Indeed, one could draw up an actuarial connection between the level of ionising radiation received and the likelihood of contracting a number of illnesses subsequently. That is well understood.

Thus—I say in unparliamentary language—we need not nit-pick about the causes or consequences of exposure to ionising radiation. What we have to do is ensure that ex-service men who served the Crown well, and their dependants, receive the appropriate compensation. That would be achieved by acceptance of the proposed new clause. Under the present war pensions provisions, compensation can be achieved, but there is an element of doubt. The order says that, in deciding whether disablement or death is attributable to service, benefit will be given if there is reasonable doubt. But it is extremely difficult to establish what constitutes reasonable doubt.

On 15 May 1989, my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Mr. Lloyd), the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, answering a question on this point, said:

> "One war disablement pension and six war widows' pensions have been awarded because servicemen who took part in nuclear tests contracted or died of leukaemia . . . or multiple myeloma."—[*Official Report*, 15 May 1989; Vol. 153, c. *73*.]

In other words, the precedent has been set. It has been established that the state has a duty to look after the welfare of those unfortunate people. We now have to put the appropriate legislative framework in place to guarantee that compensation is received as of right, and not by peradventure.

I most earnestly beg right hon. and hon. Members to do the honourable thing—to vote on the new clause as their consciences dictate, to make sure that we do our duty by those who have done their duty by us.

Mrs. Shephard: As there is a great deal of interest in this matter among hon. Members on both sides of the House, I shall be brief.

I want to begin by paying tribute to the hon. Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay), who has been so assiduous in his pursuit of this cause and in his research. I understand perfectly the concerns that have been expressed in the House and elsewhere about the nuclear weapons test programme conducted in the south Pacific in the 1950s, and the suggestion that that programme has bequeathed a legacy of illness to those who participated. The Government's view is that there is no evidence, either medical or scientific, to link participation in the nuclear weapons test programme with the ill health that some of the participants have suffered subsequently. *[Interruption.]* If hon. Members listen, I shall attempt to develop my argument.

Most of those who took part in the tests were young. Indeed, many were doing their two years' national service. The scientists, too, were mostly young, and because the physical conditions were tough, those who took part had to be fit. Those young men of the 1950s are now, inevitably, middle-aged or elderly. Some of them have developed ill health, and, sadly, others have died. The new clause that we are debating is based on the presumption that exposure to radiation during participation in the nuclear weapons trials was responsible for these illnesses and these deaths. The Government believe that this presumption is not well founded.

It is a sad fact, but a fact nevertheless, that in the western world, where we enjoy a relatively high standard of living, more than 20 per cent. of deaths are due to cancer.

Mr. Wilkinson: Can my hon. Friend explain why, in the legislation enacted by the United States Congress, compensation is extended to American service men who took part in the occupation of Nagasaki and Hiroshima even if there was doubt about the adverse consequences of doing duty in those cities?

Mrs. Shephard: Obviously arrangements in the United States are a matter for that country, but I am coming to the provisions in war pensions which may go some way to give comfort to my hon. Friend.

I was saying that, tragically, there are well over 100,000 cancer-related deaths a year in this country. Sadly, many of those who participated in the nuclear weapons test programme would by now be suffering from cancer or might have died, even if they had spent their national service in this country and had never gone anywhere near the south Pacific. Of course, it is understandable that some of them, knowing that radiation can cause cancer——

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): Is the Minister aware that, despite the fact that documentary evidence exists on MOD files that there is no such thing as a harmless increase in radiation, some service men and women were given protective clothing but some were barred from having it and were asked to roll in the dust on the ground at ground zero? Is the Minister aware of that when she tells us that their health could have been the same if they had spent their national service in this country? It was a deliberate test. Does not the Minister accept that? Their health was deliberately put at risk to find out the results.

Mrs. Shephard: I shall deal in a moment with the way in which the tests were conducted.

It is generally impossible, medically speaking, to distinguish between cancers caused by one factor and those caused by others.

Mention has been made of the test programme. The tests were implemented with professional thoroughness and bear favourable comparison with the standards in force today. There is much evidence of the importance attached at the time to the safety of those who took part. Individuals who might be exposed to radiation were issued with dosimeters, usually of the film-badge variety, to record the actual exposure experienced. Readings were taken after each possible radiation exposure, and they provided objective and reliable evidence that the exposure limits set before the tests were respected and complied with. The regulations in force were consistent with recommendations of the International Commission on Radiological Protection and advice from the Medical Research Council.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): I received a letter last week from the Ministry of Defence stating that workers at the Clyde submarine base in my constituency were exposed to nuclear radiation because the dosimeters were faulty. That was in 1990. Can the Minister be sure that everything was working to perfection in the early 1950s when the equipment is not working properly in 1990? I have that on record.

Mrs. Shephard: I point out to the hon. Gentleman that the Government have confirmed on more than one occasion that they are satisfied that a positive effort was made to monitor the observance of the safety procedures and that, if there has been significant non-compliance, that fact would have been observed by those responsible for implementing the safety regulations.

Mr. Clay: Is the Minister aware that literally hundreds of those directly involved have stated categorically that they were not issued with badges, defective or otherwise? In the Minister's view, are they daft, or are they liars?

Mrs. Shephard: I can only repeat what I have just said. Had non-compliance been observed by those responsible for the safety of the tests, criticisms would have been made at the time.

Despite the fact that the Government have remained confident that the safety precautions were adequate and that the personnel who took part were protected by safety checks, we were anxious to alleviate the concern expressed, understandably, by participants that their involvement in the nuclear weapons test programme might well have been the cause of their subsequent ill health in later life.

As a result, the National Radiological Protection Board study was commissioned in 1983. It has already been mentioned by the hon. Member for Sunderland, North. The purpose of the study was to examine statistically the health of men who participated in the tests and experimental programmes carried out in Australia and the Pacific between 1952 and 1967.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Shephard: I shall, but I am beginning to be a bit nervous about the time.

Mr. Thompson: Can she tell me the number of badges issued against the number of personnel involved in the explosion?

Mrs. Shephard: I am sorry, but I did not hear the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Thompson: I am sorry. Please will the hon. Lady give the number of badges issued at the time compared to the number of personnel who were on the island and who were exposed to radiation?

12.45 am

Mrs. Shephard: Dosimeters were issued to people at the beginning of the tests. After the tests had proceeded and the appropriate authorities were satisfied that the arrangements were satisfactory, dosimeters were no longer issued.

The National Radiological Protection Board has been somewhat rubbished by comments in the Chamber this evening. I must point out that the report was conducted by eminent scientists from the NRPB, from the cancer epidemiology and clinical trials unit of the Imperial Cancer Research Fund and with the participation of people eminent in the field such as Sir Richard Doll.

The results were published in the *British Medical Journal*, and the conclusion was that participation in the nuclear weapons test programme has not had a detectable effect on the participants' expectation of life or on their total risk of developing cancer, apart from a possible effect on the risks of developing multiple myeloma and leukaemia, other than chronic lymphatic leukaemia. The authors of the study acknowledged that the evidence relating to these two diseases was confusing, but on balance they concluded that there may well have been small hazards of both diseases associated with participation in the programme, although this had not been proved.

Mr. Stan Crowther (Rotherham): Has the hon. Lady read the Cabinet papers released under the 30-year rule last year, which make it quite clear that the Government were well aware that people were being exposed to risks which were not made public at the time? Has she read those papers?

Mrs. Shephard: I have not read those papers, but they do not alter the position as far as the NRPB report is concerned. When the authors of that study produced their report in January 1988, they recommended, as the hon. Member for Sunderland, North said, that observations on the two defined groups of participants and controls should be continued for the first 10 years. The Government welcomed that proposal and they confirmed their willingness to co-operate with the NRPB to implement the recommendations to continue to observe the——

Mr. Wilkinson: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Shephard: May I finish my sentence?

—to continue to observe the mortality and cancer incidents for participants over a further 10 years as a means of testing the hypotheses formulated by the NRPB.

Mr. Wilkinson: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend but is she aware that she is, I am afraid, quoting selectively from the NRPB report? It says in an earlier section:

> "Some aspects of the results, however, suggest that a real hazard was associated with the programme. The most striking is the very low probability of finding by chance such large differences as those observed specifically for two diseases"—

like the ones she quoted.

Mrs. Shephard: I do not accept that I am in any way quoting selectively. The simple fact is that the conclusions of the report were that small hazards of leukaemia and multiple myeloma may well have been associated with participation in the nuclear weapons programme.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): I am the patron of the Nuclear Tests Veterans Association and I can tell the Minister that that association will be shocked by her statement tonight. I suggest that she is guilty of misinterpreting the NRPB report, and of selectively quoting from that report. I offer the Minister one phrase from the report which should burn in her mind:

> "Some aspects of the results suggest that a real hazard was associated with the programme."

That is what the NRPB report said. What is the Minister's answer to that?

Mrs. Shephard: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention, but I should like to move on to what is being done under the war pensions scheme, which is administered by the Department of Social Security.

There only needs to be reliable evidence which raises a reasonable doubt about whether a condition is caused or aggravated by service. The Department's doctors are satisfied that the report's evidence raises sufficient doubt in the case of participants suffering from multiple myeloma or leukaemia and any claim to a war pension by such service men or their widows is likely to succeed. Seven awards have already been made, and there are more in the pipeline. The appropriate machinery is in place to provide for war pensions when there is reliable evidence that raises reasonable doubt as to whether a condition is caused or aggravated by service.

I must emphasise that the Government would be willing to pay compensation——

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): Will the Minister give way?

Mrs. Shephard: I really think that I cannot.

I must emphasise that the Government would be willing to pay compensation wherever the Crown's legal liability is established and when there is firm evidence to show, on a balance of probabilities, that those who took part in the United Kingdom's nuclear weapons programme did, indeed, suffer ill health as a result of exposure to radiation in the course of their duties.

Perhaps I may conclude by repeating that the Government cannot just ignore——

Sir Rhodes Boyson (Brent, North): I know that the Royal British Legion and many others are deeply concerned about this matter. What amount of money is involved? And is the Minister saying that what happened in America is wrong and that there was no basis for the different decisions reached there following American research?

Mrs. Shephard: To answer the second question first, I have already said that arrangements in the United States are a matter for that country. The amount of money involved as a result of the Bill, which is not flawed, is £4 million to £5 million. I reiterate that my Department already accepts reasonable doubt in the case of awarding war pensions to people who may be suffering from multiple myeloma of the other condition to which I referred.

The Government cannot just ignore the evidence from the expert advisers in this field that not only is there no such evidence available but there is the conclusion that those who took part in the nuclear weapons test programme did not suffer harm. But we shall await the NRPB's further report with interest and we will take full account of the findings to the extent that they provide any additional information that might affect participants' entitlement to war pensions.

Mr. Boyes: It is disgraceful that the Government should guillotine a Bill and then take up a disproportionate amount of time in a debate, thus excluding Opposition Members who would have liked to speak on this matter. The Minister has given us a most disappointing reply. Some of her remarks have been disgraceful and most hurtful to those involved.

We are discussing the future of a number of men who have suffered over a long period, either because they were too near to the test of a nuclear device or because they had inadequate protective gear or even a combination of the two. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay) said, plenty of research has been carried out already, at a cost that could possibly have compensated the victims. Some of the research has cost more than £200,000. It is unacceptable to suggest that there should be even more research.

Surely after 40 years it is time for the Government to take action rather than trying to find further means of delaying payment. There is more than enough evidence already to justify payment to the nuclear test veterans. The Government should treat claims for compensation much more sympathetically. That is what other countries have done. President Reagan signed legislation in May 1988 granting compensation to United States test veterans who participated in the nuclear programme—for those who were in Hiroshima or Nagasaki between August 1945 and July 1946.

A survey of 1,000 American nuclear test veterans revealed twice as many cases of cancer as were expected, and an incidence of sterility 12 times higher than usual. Consequently, the United States are compensating those with 10 per cent. or more disablement within 30 years of exposure to radiation. In Australia, a Mr. Rick Johnstone could receive as much as £300,000 compensation. If compensation can be paid to Americans and Australians, surely British nuclear test veterans should also be compensated.

The conditions that test veterans suffered are well documented, but I shall cite a couple of examples. I have a copy of a MOD memo dated 20 may 1953, classified top secret, which states:

> "Tests were vital to discover detailed effects of various types of explosion on equipment, stores and men, without various types of protection."

The 1983 Australian Ionising Radiation Advisory Council found that service personnel were used as guinea pigs in testing the effects of radiation. In 1956, 200 British and 62 Australian service men experienced the effects of an atomic blast

> "at a closer range than normally allowed."

Recently, the Government changed the rules concerning post-1973 war widows' pensions, which was welcomed by right hon. and hon. Ministers in all parts of the House. The Secretary of State should make a statement to the House at an early opportuniy, which I am sure all right hon. Members will welcome, confirming that proper and adequate compensation wil be paid to those who participated in British nuclear tests and who now suffer illness as a consequence.

I have in my possession the names of many nuclear test veterans who have already died as a result of their presence at test sites. The House is debating the future of some very brave men who served their country loyally, and who, as they grow older, continue to suffer both physically and financially. There is no excuse for not dealing speedily with the financial predicament.

Among the many organisations that I have consulted was the Royal British Legion, which holds the view that ex-service men with a clearly defined condition that can be related to their involvement in nuclear tests should be given the benefit of the doubt. I believe, as does the Nuclear Tests Veterans Association, that public opinion is clearly on the side of the test veterans.

I hope that the Government will prove their flexibility tonight, acknowledge public opinion, and welcome the support given to nuclear test veterans by right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House. I believe also that the House is broadly with me when I ask that nuclear test veterans be given the benefit of the doubt and adequate compensation. I assure the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary that this matter will not go away. It will surely come before the Government again.

Mr. Clay: The Under-Secretary's admission that seven veterans are already receiving compensation after contracting leukaemia and multiple myeloma emphasises that many others died before they had an opportunity to receive any compensation. The Minister said that studies will continue and that another report will be published in two years, so she must recognise that those studies may discover further cases that the Government might finally acknowledge were caused by radiation during the test programme.

By then, it will be too late for other veterans. The House has a simple choice to make. I hope that it will make the right choice, and that we shall not have to return to this matter again. If right hon. and hon. Members choose only for research to continue, week by week more veterans will die and their dependants will suffer. The importance of the new clause is not so much the financial compensation it will provide but the feeling of justice it will engender among the victims and their families.

The debate will continue for as long as it is necessary to maintain it, but in the meantime people die. The House should have resolved the matter by now. In 100 years' time we may know for certain who is right and who is wrong, but it will then be known for certain that everyone who was concerned is dead and that the finding is too late. Let us end the issue tonight. I implore Conservative Members to take that approach. I ask for support for the new clause from hon. Members on both sides of the House.

The Government have hardly produced an argument. They have merely repeated what they have been saying for years. Let us put ourselves in line with what the Americans

[Mr. Clay]

have already done, in the knowledge that they will be even further ahead of us by the end of the year. We must end this nonsense.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 218, Noes 276.

Division No. 147] **[1 am**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Boyes, Roland
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Bradley, Keith
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colvin, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cran, James
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*

Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Fookes, Dame Janet
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Forman, Nigel
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hannam, John
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Holt, Richard
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Irving, Sir Charles
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max

Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mans, Keith
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Rhodes James, Robert
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry

Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Ray Powell.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*

Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh

Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom,*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael

Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony

Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard

Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Alastair Goodlad and
Mr. Nicholas Baker.

Question accordingly negatived.

It being after One o'clock, further consideration of the Bill, as amended, stood adjourned.

Bill, as amended (in the Standing Committee), to be further considered this day.

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): With the leave of the House, I shall put together the Questions on statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

RATING AND VALUATION (SCOTLAND)

That the draft Water Undertakings (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1990, which was laid before this House on 6th March, be approved.

That the draft Mines and Quarries (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1990, which was laid before this House on 6th March, be approved.

That the draft Mercury Communications Limited (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1990, which was laid before this House on 6th March be approved.

That the draft Lochaber Power Company (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1990, which was laid before this House on 6th March, be approved.

That the draft Industrial and Freight Transport (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1990, which was laid before this House on 6th March, be approved.

That the draft Glasgow Underground (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1990, which was laid before this House on 6th March, be approved.

That the draft Forth Ports Authority (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1990, which was laid before this House on 6th March, be approved.

That the draft Docks and Harbours (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1990, which was laid before this House on 6th March, be approved.

That the draft Caledonian MacBrayne Limited (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1990, which was laid before this House on 6th March, be approved.

That the draft British Waterways Board (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1990, which was laid before this House on 6th March, be approved.

That the draft British Telecommunications plc (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1990, which was laid before this House on 6th March, be approved.

That the draft British Railways Board (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1990, which was laid before this House on 6th March, be approved.

That the draft British Gas plc (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1990, which was laid before this House on 6th March, be approved.

That the draft British Alcan Primary and Recycling Ltd. (Rateable Values) (Scotland) Order 1990, which was laid before this House on 6th March, be approved.—*[Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.]*

Question agreed to.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE (INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION BILL [Lords]

Ordered.

That, notwithstanding that such provisions could not have been proposed in Committee without an Instruction from the House, amendments may be proposed on consideration of the Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Bill [*Lords*] to provide for the seizure, detention and forfeiture of drug trafficking money imported or exported in cash.—*[Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.]*

WAYS AND MEANS

CRIMINAL JUSTICE (INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION) BILL *[Lords]*

Resolved,

That any Act resulting from the Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Bill *[Lords]* may provide for the payment into the Consolidated Fund of money representing cash, and accrued interest on cash, forfeited under provisions of that Act conferring powers in respect of drug trafficking money imported or exported in cash.—*[Mr. Kenneth Carlisle.]*

PETITIONS

Human Embryos

1.13 am

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): I wish to present a petition on behalf of Mr. G. J. Welsh of Hawthorns, Hammersley Lane, Tylers Green, Buckinghamshire, and another on behalf of Mrs. T. Coppin of 55 Robinson Road, Loudwater, High Wycombe. The second petition is signed by 67 other constituents—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. Will hon. Members leaving the Chamber do so quietly so that we can hear the petition?

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The second petition is signed by 67 of my constituents who are all concerned that the human embryo should be protected. The petitions states:

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure that involves:—

(a) the purchase or sale of human embryos;
(b) the discarding or freezing of human embryos;
(c) the use of human embryos as sources of transplant tissue;
(d) the use of human embryos as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned);
(e) the cross-fertilisation of humans with other species.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc.

To lie upon the Table.

A46–A47 Link Road

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I have two petitions to present. I present the first on behalf of Councillor Mike Preston of 60 Barry road, Leicester and Mr. Frank Kerr of 131 Humberstone boulevard, Leicester and 36 other residents of Humberstone who are protesting against the proposed extension of the A46–A47 link road and the fact that the local authority has made no provision for pedestrian safety as outlined in the plans for the link road.

Your petitioners pray that your Honourable House encourage the Secretary of State for the Environment to consider the views of the residents of Humberstone during his consideration of the appeals against compulsory purchase orders by Leicestershire County Council submitted for this planned road,

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Vaz: I present my second petition, which is against the poll tax, on behalf of David Roy Winder of 4 Rawsthorne walk, St. Marks, Leicester and 1,020 other residents of Leicester. A demonstration was held in Leicester last Saturday in which more than 1,000 people protested against the introduction of the poll tax which in Leicester will be more than £400 per person. The petitioners are concerned that the tax is unfair, unjust and will cause misery and hardship to thousands of people in Leicester and to millions of people throughout Britain.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your Honourable House demands that the Secretary of State for the Environment withdraw this tax and listens to the views of the people of Leicester.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

National Insurance

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

1.17 am

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): This Adjournment debate arose from the fact that some time last year I received one of those brown envelopes from a whistleblower. That letter asked me to raise the matter of the mighty scandal of employers across the country not paying into the Inland Revenue the amount of money that they have taken from employees.

As a result of that letter, I raised the issue on the Floor of the House with the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. He was able to reveal that that was the case and that the Comptroller and Auditor General thought that the position was so bad that he was inclined to look at it as well.

As a result of my questions, the matter was reported in the press and a great deal of publicity arose in many parts of Great Britain. I am indebted to the northern regional low pay unit, the west midlands regional low pay unit and many others who wrote to me saying that I had raised an issue of scandalous proportions in which employers in large and small firms are breaking the law, but the Government are doing nothing about it.

The whistleblower wrote:

> "Dear Mr. Skinner,
>
> I am the legal adviser to a large . . . organisation which is why, to my shame, I am remaining anonymous.
>
> Over the past eight years the publications emanating from the Government's Departments"—

that is, *Employment News*—

> "have gradually ceased to give (as they used) basic facts and statistics and become a mere vehicle for Government propaganda. There is no other word for it. The enclosed publication used to give facts . . . The centre pages mark the lowest it has yet reached."

The centre pages referred to fraud squad snoopers who turned into a potato field in Lincoln and managed to find a few people who were getting unemployment benefit. It got the proper tabloid treatment, as we expect. The writer went on to say:

> "The unholy glee exhibited by whoever wrote the article is unpleasant. £1 million a day 365 days a year is the estimate of monies deducted by employers from the wages of employees in Tax and Social Security contributions which are never paid over. That is a hell of a lot more than the £62·55 million the article boasts of."

That was about the potato pickers, the social security claimants. The letter goes on:

> "It says nothing of the alleged 'frauds' which were successfully fought by the beneficiaries.
>
> Last year 157 people died on building sites. Over the past 8 years there has been a 20 per cent. cut in the numbers of safety inspectors—there are 12 for London and 90 for the rest of the country. Employment News never mentions that."

That is the scale of the fraud. As people have said, it is a licence to steal from the lowest-paid in Britain. That is usually the case because of the way in which people have to scramble for jobs.

According to the northern regional low pay unit, it all arose from the change in the law instituted by the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), who has now left to look after his family. He was the Secretary of State for Social Services, and in 1984 he changed the rules to allow employers off the hook. He said:

> "I have examined carefully the special power contained in section 152(4) of the Social Security Act 1975, under which directors can become personally liable for the national insurance contribution debts of their company if they knew or should have known that the contributions were not being paid.
>
> From the date of this announcement, I propose to take no further action in any case in which my Department is currently involved."—[*Official Report,* 12 November 1984; Vol. 67, c. *139.*]

That prompted a person called Mr. Justice Harman no less to say that contributions that were being held by employers in a quasi-trust fund had been stolen from the employees when employers did not pass them on. He said:

> "But the thieves are not prosecuted, as they are no longer held personally liable for payment of the contributions, and all too frequently remain in business, or set up new companies should the first go into liquidation. Meanwhile, the taxpayers meet the cost of the fraudulent practices, and the individual ex-employees suffer weeks of anxiety and trouble until benefit is restored."

Of course, some of them have to suffer even more than that.

In 1980 the amount not collected by the Inland Revenue was estimated at £40 million. By 1987, after the Act had been changed and employers were let off the hook, the amount of fraud had risen to £264 million. The estimate now is that it is approaching £400 million. In the same time those who commit social security fraud—we are talking about people on low pay, one-parent families and such people—have been prosecuted 400 times more than employers who are defrauding their employees and the tax system.

The Government talk to us about the rule of law and the poll tax and the millions of people who refuse to pay it, yet they allow employers to get off the hook. Employers cheat in an incredible number of ways. First, there is creative accounting, which is very handy. Employers deduct contributions from the wages of employees and keep the money in the company account. The second fiddle is not to provide pay slips, and where there is high unemployment people are frightened to ask for a pay slip. By and large there are no unions in the small places and people are frightened to say anything. The employers say, "Everything is okay. You don't need a pay slip and here is money in the hand." They are not paying over the insurance and tax.

The third fiddle is to list full-time workers as part-time workers. If they earn less than £46 a week, as from April of this year, they do not have to pay insurance. If the workers earn more than that, the employers pocket the money and make a fine killing. No stamps are needed, and many of these people are paid as little as £2 an hour.

Another gimmick is to cut the hours of employees who earn more than £46 a week. Two and a half million women fall into the category of people I am talking about; they are affected more than men. As I have said, this information comes from the northern regional low pay unit.

Not only small companies are involved; multinationals are, too. They use an old gimmick: they falsify the numbers of people working for them in the Common Market. Also, they sometimes pay enhanced wages in the Common Market and tell the Inland Revenue here in Britain that those people are on lower wages. They make small fortunes in that way; they declare phantom wages to the Inland Revenue.

Another fiddle is used when a firm is in trouble. Let us say that a company realises that it faces bankruptcy. If it is not already pocketing the money, that is the moment when it begins to do so. Insolvency stares a firm in the face,

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

so for six, nine or even 12 months such a firm can pocket all its employees' national insurance and tax contributions. Then, when it is declared insolvent, the money is not claimed back from the firm. Throughout the Thatcher years there have been 20,000 bankruptcies or insolvencies a year, so we can imagine how many casualties there must be.

Then there are what I call the phoenix companies which rise from the ashes. A company is set up in one area and seems to flourish for a while. It then goes into liquidation, only to emerge somewhere else with the same machines and sometimes with the same work force. Then the pattern is repeated. Each time, many people are thrown out of work. Debts are left unpaid and company directors pick up the profits and go on to set up somewhere else.

A certain northern firm was set up originally by a couple and an accountant with a Department of Trade and Industry grant. It went bust in 1983, with £310,000 debts, and £195,000 of unpaid VAT, pay-as-you-earn and national insurance contributions, including those deducted from workers' pay. The directors were not prosecuted. The Inland Revenue said that it would "bear with the company". Due to the change effected by the Secretary of State in 1984, the directors were saved from paying £90,000 in PAYE and national insurance.

The name of the company was changed, but it crashed again in January 1985, with £20,000 taken from workers' pay in income tax and national insurance contributions. Again, the Revenue said that it would bear with the directors. The company changed its name again, and went bust again in August 1985, owing £26,679 in income tax and national insurance that had not been passed on, and £16,000 in unpaid workers' wages.

By August 1988, the court had disqualified the first director from holding company directorships. The law finally caught up with him after all those years, and he was not allowed to be a director for three years. He had to pay the small sum of £500 costs. But the bent accountant got off scot free. The other director started another company with another DTI grant—that is what happens in the Government's entrepreneurial society.

This second director set up two more clothing firms, which went bust owing thousands to the Inland Revenue. Altogether, this man, his co-director wife and the bent accountant had started up four companies with debts totalling £500,000. They have not paid back a single penny, or been fined, or been imprisoned for a single day. Those phoenix companies are being set up on a large scale.

That case and others were so outrageous that the official receiver in the north-east said:

> "It is common place to find that firms run for 2 years with no intention to pay their debts to the Crown. It is licensed theft."

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, North-East): It is dreadful.

Mr. Skinner: Yes, my hon. Friend is right.

The Government talk about the rule of law and how we have a law in Britian that is equal for everybody, yet these employers are running rings round the Inland Revenue. They are not the casualties. The real casualties are the people who go for their unemployment benefit and the DSS says, "Sorry, you haven't got enough stamps. We can't pay you." People go for sick pay. Women go for maternity benefit. All my hon. Friends present know of constituents who have found that they have insufficient contributions. Then there is the person who wants his old-age pension. Thousands of people go through life working for these companies and end up finding out that they have lost three, four and, sometimes, 10 years of contributions, and their retirement benefit is reduced as a result.

Why does that happen? It is partly because of the changes in the law in 1984, but also because the Inland Revenue does not have enough inspectors to do the job. It is different for social security fraud inspectors checking on people on £40 a week. In 1979 when the Government came to office, there were 2,311 full-time equivalent posts for detecting fraudulent social security claims. By 1989 there were 413 more. Those people deal with one-parent families, those who are supposedly co-habiting and potato pickers in East Anglia. In the same period the Inland Revenue lost 18,000 posts. That is how the Government allow their friends, the bosses, to get away with breaking the law.

What needs doing? We want an increase in the number of Inland Revenue inspectors to follow up employers who are breaking the law. We want the 1984 legislation changed back so that employers can be prosecuted for these debts. We want the Labour Government, because this one will not do it, to ensure that local authorities, regional development agencies and the Department of Trade and Industry fully investigate all companies that apply for grants. [HON. MEMBERS: "The Minister for Social Security is sleeping."] He will drop to sleep because he has just voted against the veterans.

We want local authorities to be able to use their purchasing power so that the companies from which they buy materials have to conform to proper employment regulations. We want all employees, whatever their hours, to have a proper documented pay slip. We want stronger employment laws and a return to the right to a tribunal. Instead of having to wait two years, we want to return to the pre-1979 position. We want protection against unfair dismissal.

We say to employees: demand and keep pay slips. Ask employers to see the records. Is national insurance being paid? Is tax being paid? If unsure, contact the DSS and have the records checked regularly. Contact the Inland Revenue to make sure that it is receiving the tax. Join a trade union. Every union has a legal department that can help with cases. Too many people think that trade unionism is just about conditions and getting extra money each year. Although they are important, it is also about having a protective armoury so that that legal protection can be used in cases against employers.

The Government should introduce this legislation and stop this business. The Minister should tell the Prime Minister and every other Minister that we are fed up to the back teeth with trade unionists being slagged off because they fight for their rights, such as the ambulance workers and workers who have been described as the enemy within. We do not want that when we know that employers are getting away with blue murder and making money hand over fist. It is time that the bosses were brought into line and got off the workers' backs.

1.35 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): I am delighted to have the opportunity to respond to the important points made by the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and to reassure him that the Government share his concern. I should also like to take the opportunity to trail a little advance publicity for a launch of the new contributions unit and agency which is to be made on Monday. The hon. Gentleman's timing could hardly be more impeccable. I am deeply grateful to him, as will be the whole Government.

I should like to explain the current arrangements. Of course we know that fraud exists, but I shall reassure the hon. Gentleman about the checks that are made. As he knows, it is the employer's responsibility to ensure that the appropriate employee contributions are deducted when earnings are paid, that full and proper records are maintained and that contributions are paid over regularly, together with the appropriate secondary or employer's contributions.

Most class 1 contributions are collected by the Inland Revenue. To emphasise the scale of the operation, at the moment, there are some 1·5 million annual returns from employers, covering well over 20 million contributors and nearly £30 billion of contributions. Although the hon. Gentleman was right to express concern, in the huge majority of cases these arrangements work smoothly with the correct contributions being deducted and paid over to the national insurance fund.

It is not correct to say that checks are not done. When, at the end of every tax year, an employer submits his PAYE return for each of his employees, it is subject to a series of detailed checks within the department. They ensure that the money paid over by the employer corresponds with the amounts recorded on the individual employees' returns. Further checks ensure that individual national insurance records are accurately maintained and that benefit entitlement is properly recorded. That is done by checking the feasibility of every individual contribution received. The checks can also help to identify failures by employers to deduct and pay the correct contributions. Those errors are generally referred to our teams of specialist contributions staff and inspectors for investigation and correction. Many thousands of queries are investigated each year and, as a result, contribution records are amended and arrears of contributions are collected or refunds made.

Although some contribution errors arise from deliberate fraud, it is fair to say that they do not typically arise from it but are the result of genuine mistakes, misunderstandings or even—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] I have accepted that some are the result of fraud, but others result from simple errors in the computer software used to control payrolls. Most employers are more than happy to correct errors that my Department finds, but where arrears cannot be collected legal proceedings have to be, and are, taken. In the past five years, an average of about 1,300 cases annually have been brought by the Department against employers in respect of arrears amounting to over £20 million. That is in addition to the action taken by the Inland Revenue, which also takes enforcement action against employers who default in their periodic payments of NICs and PAYE income tax.

Complaints from employees about failure by employers properly to pay NICs are not widespread and the majority of my Department's investigations arise from our chasing mechanism. If the hon. Gentleman has information about failures by employers, I should be glad to have details. I shall ensure that those instances are vigorously investigated.

In addition to the regular and routine checking procedures that I have described, national insurance inspectors also co-operate with the Inland Revenue to conduct surveys of employers' premises—a series of co-ordinated visits to employers aimed at uncovering tax and/or contribution irregularities.

The hon. Gentleman referred to people working in fields in East Anglia. I represent a constituency in East Anglia that is full of fields and the people who work in them are subject to visits of that kind, as are employers. The present system of survey has been in operation since the beginning of the 1986-87 tax year and in its first three years DSS inspectors conducted 270,000 survey visits and, as a result, an additional £37 million of contributions were recovered. The surveys also corrected many thousands of minor errors by employers.

As one would expect with any system as large and complex as the national insurance scheme, we take stock regularly of how well our procedures are operating and whether there are any improvements to be made. In the last two years there have been two internal departmental studies into contributions work which have examined every aspect of the work that is done.

Those studies have concluded that there is undercollection of national insurance contributions. That is not surprising, given the large number of employers and employees who are required to make contributions and the large sums of money involved. No collection system can be 100 per cent. effective or perfect. There will always be a small proportion of employers who try to avoid their responsibilities, and mistakes are bound to happen. We have taken the reports very seriously indeed. We have reviewed our existing arrangements for collection and compliance and we have concluded that improvements can and should be made.

I must thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this matter, because the results of that work will be seen shortly. With effect from Monday 2 April, a new contributions unit will be established to take responsibility for all operational aspects of the national insurance scheme. The unit's HQ will be at Newcastle and the network of locally based staff responsible for collection and compliance work will no longer be under the general control of local social security office managers but will come instead under a central management structure which will be dedicated exclusively to this important part of the Department's work of contributions and compliance.

The unit will place a high priority on compliance. There will be better training for national insurance inspectors and in the first instance there will be 100 more of them to perform that task, with rising numbers year on year. They will be trained better so that they can keep up to date with changing business practice. Their existing jobs will be reorganised so that they can spend more time visiting employers and investigating national insurance irregularities.

Mr. Skinner: Will the unit be more successful than the last special unit that was set up, which managed to find

[Mr. Skinner]

only £6·8 million? How many additional inspectors will be employed to hound employers who are fiddling? How much additional money does she expect to rope in as a result of these efforts?

Mrs. Shephard: I did not think the hon. Gentleman was listening. I said that 100 more inspectors would be employed instantly and that the numbers would increase year on year in the unit, rising to more than 2,000 inspectors in all.

Our reorganisation will not stop there. From April of next year, the unit will be given agency status and there will be increased management accountability and flexibility to allow the development of a more professional approach to contributions work—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. The Minister must be heard.

Mrs. Shephard: I fear that, from a sedentary position, the hon. Gentleman displays his misunderstanding of the meaning of agency status, but I ask him to watch the press after the launch of the contributions unit and agency, which I am sure will be reported fully on Tuesday. That will extend his understanding.

We have taken careful note of the promise made by the Comptroller and Auditor General on the national insurance fund account, in which he drew attention to departmental studies that cited deliberate evasion by a minority of employers. Of course we recognise and share his concern. We shall continue to do all that we can to prevent this form of abuse and to ensure that the correct amounts of contribution are recovered. We also share his concern about the level of resources mentioned in the internal studies, and, as I have said already, we plan to increase the number of inspectors during the coming year.

However, it is obvious that additional resources are not the only answer. It is quite clear that the work of the inspectors must be prioritised—and it will be. The inspectors will be working in a unit dedicated to compliance and contribution work. It is clear also that their training needs to be improved. That, too, will be achieved by the existence of the unit. It is the job of the Department to provide more resources for this very important work, but it is extremely important that staff —an existing resource—be well trained and experienced in the sort of work that modern business practice will oblige them to do.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman is reassured by all of that.

Mr. Skinner: No.

Mrs. Shephard: Perhaps not, if he is not listening.

The Government are taking very careful note not only of internal studies of the problem, which I have described, but of the NAO report, which the hon. Gentleman has prayed in aid. It is unfortunate that in his contribution, which, as usual, was colourful, he displayed such animosity towards employers. Employers do, after all, provide employment. Our experience in the Department is that it is a minority of employers who cheat the system in this way, and we are absolutely determined that they will be pursued.

The problem of undercollection came to light as a result of investigations initiated by the Department and aimed at improving the service that we provide. Since receiving these reports, we certainly have not allowed the grass to grow under our feet. Instead, we have urgently examined the findings and have decided to embark on a major reorganisation of our contributions work. That is the proper response of a Government determined to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public administration.

Once again I thank the hon. Gentleman most sincerely for giving me the opportunity to point this out.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at thirteen minutes to Two o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 29 March 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

NOTTINGHAM PARK ESTATE BILL *[Lords]*

Read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

GREAT YARMOUTH PORT AUTHORITY BILL *[Lords]*

RIVER TEES BARRAGE AND CROSSING BILL *[Lords]*

Orders for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Monday 2 April.

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL (No. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question proposed [26 February],

That the Bill be now considered.

Debate further adjourned till Thursday 19 April.

Mr. Speaker: As the 10 remaining Bills set down for Second Reading have blocking motions, with the leave of the House I shall put them as a single group.

ADELPHI ESTATE BILL *(By Order)*

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question proposed [27 February],

That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Debate further adjourned till Thursday 19 April.

CATTEWATER RECLAMATION BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON LOCAL AUTHORITIES (No. 2) BILL *[Lords]* *(By Order)*

CLYDE PORT AUTHORITY BILL *(By Order)*

SHARD BRIDGE BILL *(By Order)*

VALE OF GLAMORGAN (BARRY HARBOUR) BILL *[Lords]* *(By Order)*

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON UNDERGROUND (VICTORIA) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON REGIONAL TRANSPORT (PENALTY FARES) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON UNDERGROUND BILL *(By Order)*

Orders for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday 19 April.

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

Small Businesses

1. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many small businesses were set up in Northern Ireland in 1989; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Richard Needham): That information is not yet available for 1989. The Government continue to assist the development of small businesses through the Local Enterprise Development Unit and have increased its funding by £4·7 million, or 17 per cent., to more than £33 million for 1991.

Dr. Clark: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Local Enterprise Development Unit, unique to Northern Ireland, is doing a most satisfactory job in promoting small businesses and employment in the Province? How many small businesses have been assisted by LEDU and how many jobs have been created since LEDU was founded in 1971?

Mr. Needham: Many thousands of small companies have been assisted and 43,000 jobs have been promoted by LEDU since 1971. Last year 5,004 jobs were promoted at a cost of £4,400 per job. LEDU is upping its target for new jobs to 10,000 per year in 1994. As my hon. Friend said, there is no doubt that the creation of small businesses and the work created is crucial to the economic success of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: What advice would the Minister give to small businesses that feel that they are being forced to use LEDU-nominated professional advisers when preparing business plans for grant applications? Will he take steps to reduce the time taken to process such applications?

Mr. Needham: I shall answer the hon. Gentleman's last point first. It is crucial that we get as much of the work through as fast as we can. I give the hon. Gentleman an undertaking on that. It is up to the company concerned to determine which professional adviser it uses. Clearly, there will be those who have greater expertise on this subject, and LEDU's advice should be listened to carefully. In the final instance, it must be up to the companies.

Hospices

2. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on Government funding to hospices in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: A total of £530,000, a 100 per cent. increase in the present level of funding, will be made available in 1990-91 to provide, for the first time, a firm public sector financial base for the support of hospices in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Bruce: I thank my hon. Friend for that wonderful reply. Hospices have been funded through charitable donations in the United Kingdom—in my constituency, in

Weymouth, people have been excellent in putting money into that sector. Does my hon. Friend agree that such community involvement is similar to the Government's opting-out proposals? Does he think that that will happen even more in the Province of Northern Ireland? Where will the additional funding be spent in the Province?

Mr. Needham: There is, of course, a need for a partnership with those involved with the terminally ill. There is a wonderful record of voluntary service and help to the terminally ill in Northern Ireland. The Government feel that they must do whatever they can to help and are increasing their spending this year by £530,000—£530,000 more than last year—and in 1991-92 they plan to spend a further £200,000. The objective is to obtain a 50:50 partnership with the voluntary organisations. I agree with my hon. Friend that it is crucial to keep the partnership going and to attract as many private donations and as much support as we can, particularly from the business side. I think that he will agree that the Budget measures announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will help in that.

Mr. Hume: As the Minister will be aware from correspondence from me, a vast amount of voluntary effort in the Derry area has gone into setting up the Foyle hospice, demonstrating the need for that service there. Is he now telling us that at last the Government will fund that hospice?

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman knows that hospices in Northern Ireland are a regional service, but the Foyle hospice is not regional in that sense. However, he also knows that the Department has suggested to the boards that they negotiate the funding of the revenue element with the hospices, and that applies to the Foyle hospice. I hope that the discussions that I believe are about to take place between the Western board and the Foyle hospice will lead to a satisfactory conclusion.

Mr. Dickens: When my hon. Friend next considers the funding of hospices in Northern Ireland, will he also consider funding for hospices in the north-west, such as those at Oldham and Rochdale?

Mr. Needham: Up to now I have not considered that, but I shall bring it to the notice of my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State who has responsibility for health matters in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Ashdown: The Minister said that he hoped that the discussions to which he referred would lead to a satisfactory conclusion, but will he confirm that the Government's view of a satisfactory conclusion includes funding the Foyle hospice, which not only serves the people of the Foyle area in a way that no hospice in Belfast can, but serves the region across the border and so builds the type of cross-border relationships that must be necessary? Will he confirm that the Government's view is that the hospice should be funded?

Mr. Needham: Of course, the hospice has to be funded. Up to now it has not been considered to be a regional hospice, and I do not see why it should be. But, as I said, it is an important movement, which has been supported at all levels in the Derry area, and the Government and the Department have been saying through their policy that we look to the Western board to come to a satisfactory conclusion with the hospice.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I welcome the additional funds, having pressed for them in the past, and I should like to share in the tribute that has been paid to the hospice movement, but am I right to infer that it is looked upon as a regional service? If so, does that mean that there will be Government limitations on developments in Foyle, Newry or anywhere else where voluntary bodies come together?

Mr. Needham: I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman, who has been a great supporter of the hospice movement and has done much to enable it to develop throughout Northern Ireland. As I said, the funds are earmarked for the boards and it is up to them to negotiate how those funds will be distributed in each area. The aim of the Government and the Department is to move to a 50 per cent. funding arrangement with the hospices.

Anglo-Irish Conference

3. **Sir Michael McNair-Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will propose that the secretariat for the Anglo-Irish Conference be transferred to Dublin.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Peter Brooke): No, Sir. I have no current plans to make such a proposal.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: Was the location of the secretariat in Northern Ireland part of the Anglo-Irish Agreement? If not, does the Secretary of State agree that if it were to spend half the year in Dublin, the considerable security costs, which currently fall on the British taxpayer and none of which are borne by the Republic would be halved? Does he further agree that if it were in Dublin, it would enable the Irish Government to show that no matter what perverse judgments come from the Supreme Court, they stand by the good faith of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and, in particular, article 1 of that agreement?

Mr. Brooke: Article 3 of the agreement says:

"A Secretariat shall be established by the two Governments to service the Conference on a continuing basis in the discharge of its functions as set out in this agreement."

It does not specifically state any geographical location. The Secretariat is in Belfast because that is the most efficient place for it to do business. I have no evidence that the Irish Government do not stand by article 1 of the agreement.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Having confirmed that there is no reference whatever to Maryfield in the Anglo-Irish Agreement—news which will be welcomed throughout Northern Ireland—does the Secretary of State agree that that gives him the option to consider a different location for the Anglo-Irish secretariat, if there is any necessity for the secretariat? Will he confirm that our concept of the secretariat must have changed since the ruling by the Supreme Court of Dublin that the Dublin representatives have a constitutional imperative to pursue a united Ireland through their agencies, including the Anglo-Irish secretariat?

Mr. Brooke: The right hon. Gentleman is quite correct in stating that I have that freedom, as exemplified in the article of the agreement that I read out, but, as I said in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Sir M. McNair-Wilson), I do not currently have such a proposal. The right hon. Gentleman knows that I do not accept the premise that was contained in the second part of his question.

Mr. Peter Robinson: Does the Secretary of State recall that when the Government's salesmen were attempting to sell the advantages of the Anglo-Irish Agreement to the Unionist community, they put forward two premises—that there would be recognition of Northern Ireland's status as part of the United Kingdom by the Government of the Irish Republic, and that there would be better co-operation on security, including extradition? Now that those two claims have been blown out of the water by the Supreme Court of the Irish Republic, will the Secretary of State list for the House the remaining advantages of the Anglo-Irish Agreement that could not be obtained from other sources?

Mr. Brooke: That is the hon. Gentleman's interpretation of the events, but he made a specific reference to the judgment of the Supreme Court. We do not accept the claim to Northern Ireland in article 2 of the Irish constitution. Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom in our law and our international law. It is important that we look to the future. Successive Irish Governments have accepted the factual status of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom. Article 1 of the agreement provides that any change to the status of Northern Ireland would come about only with the consent of the people of Northern Ireland. The hon. Gentleman draws attention to extradition matters that we have raised with the Irish Government through the secretariat.

Sir William Clark: Irrespective of the location of the secretariat, does my right hon. Friend agree that it would be much fairer if both Governments shared the costs?

Mr. Brooke: I am delighted to welcome my hon. Friend's steady fiscal attitude, but I am also concerned with the efficiency of the secretariat, and that is most efficiently conducted in Belfast.

Inward Investment

4. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about inward investment into Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: We have achieved a number of notable inward investment successes during the past two years, and I am confident that we shall be able to build on those successes.

Mr. Smith: Does my hon. Friend agree that those successes demonstrate the confidence of overseas investors in the economy of Northern Ireland? Can he say from which countries the investment is principally coming?

Mr. Needham: It is not always appreciated how great the change in the fortunes of the Northern Ireland economy has been over the past few years and how it is growing. In the past year we have had Fruit of the Loom from the United States—the single largest American investment in Northern Ireland for 10 years—Daewoo from Korea, Montupet from France and Holian from Hong Kong. We are about to announce a German company coming soon to the constituency of the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) and another company coming from Japan. We have Harris Laboratories from the United States. We are creating thousands of new jobs from inward investment in Northern Ireland because the people who come there realise what a wonderful place it is and what wonderful people we are.

Mr. Beggs: Does the Minister agree that, within a reasonable time after interview, officials of the Industrial Development Board should be capable of providing a new business promoter with a letter of offer indicative of the support that might be forthcoming from the IDB? Does he further agree that every inquiry must be treated seriously and with sensitivity, to ensure that we do not lose anyone who might ultimately locate in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Needham: Of course, I agree with the sentiments expressed by the hon. Gentleman. It is crucial that the scope and scale of inward investment is fully understoood before the IDB—a body which spends taxpayers' money—makes an indicative offer. Subject to that, an indicative offer can and should be made.

Rev. William McCrea: Does the Minister accept that the bombings in Castlederg and Ballymena have hampered his efforts to attract inward investment to the Province? What encouragement have the Government given to investment in the Mid-Ulster constituency which has suffered so much from unemployment? Is it not true that it is better to have a stable environment, with the defeat of terrorism, and to allow the jobs that have been set up to remain, rather than, after years of hard work by the Department, to allow the IRA to demolish that in a few seconds with a bomb?

Mr. Needham: I am pleased to be able to agree with the hon. Gentleman for once. The recent damage at Castlederg was another dreadful, exasperating and pointless blow to that little town. The hon. Gentleman is well aware that we are establishing a project in Castlederg, which will involve all its people, to find a way forward, to attract investment and to bring the community together to rebuild its soul. For maniacs to blow apart the wishes of the ordinary people of Northern Ireland is utterly despicable.

Mr. Skinner: Does the Minister agree that if the poll tax were introduced in Northern Ireland, it would greatly affect inward investment? Does he know—and will he condemn it—that East Antrim Conservative association has called for the implementation of the poll tax in Northern Ireland? Is he aware that the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) is a member of that association? I am rapidly coming to the conclusion that all of them are infected with mad cow disease.

Mr. Needham: The community charge is unlikely to have any effect on inward investment in Northern Ireland. One of the incentives that we offer is that people do not have to pay rates. That is one of the main reasons for people wishing to invest in Northern Ireland.

Tourism

5. **Mr. Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to develop the tourism potential of Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

14 **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to promote tourism in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: Encouraging progress is being made in implementing our published strategy for improving the economic return from tourism in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Taylor: Does the Minister agree that, with the obvious exception of Southend-on-Sea, Northern Ireland is probably one of the most delightful places to enjoy a holiday? Will he use the powers of British embassies to destroy Northern Ireland's unfair reputation abroad and to explain that one can enjoy a holiday and delightful scenery and expect much hospitality at a low cost in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Needham: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. I spent a holiday with my family in Northern Ireland two years ago, and it was one of the best holidays that I have ever had. I am sure that it will not be too long before you, Mr. Speaker, spend a holiday in Northern Ireland golfing, walking, sailing, eating, drinking, or pony trekking. We must increase the number of people employed in tourism, which at present is only 9,000 compared with 90,000 in the Republic. Once people have spent a holiday in Northern Ireland, they come back time and again.

Mr. Boswell: Further to the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor), does my hon. Friend agree that agriculture can be supplemented by tourism as a major revenue earner in all parts of the United Kingdom, particularly in Northern Ireland? Will he confirm that those who visit the countryside of Northern Ireland are as much at risk from terrorism as from a case of snakebite?

Mr. Needham: Yes, or mad cow disease for that matter. Some 1 million people visited Northern Ireland last year —the first time that that figure had been achieved since 1969. We have set ourselves the objective of raising that figure to 1·6 million by 1994. Next year is Ulster-Canada year, when we expect to double the number of Canadians visiting Ulster. We shall have a tremendous festival in Belfast so that the city can have a year of fun and enjoyment, and everyone here is welcome.

Mr. A. Cecil Walker: Will the Minister join me in congratulating Belfast city airport on achieving such an impressive record in passenger throughput in the limited time that it has been in operation? Will he assure the House that in the event of Bombardier geting rid of that valuable asset, a monopoly will not then be created whereby the Northern Ireland international airports might be interested in taking over Belfast city airport? Will he further ensure that Belfast city airport will be encouraged to develop as a single entity?

Mr. Needham: Airports are not my responsibility, but I am sure that the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), who is responsible, has listened carefully to the question.

Mr. Stott: I am sure that the Minister is aware that a recent article by Mr. Bert O'Hara, who is the executive director of the Northern Ireland tourist board, in the *The House Magazine* sets out clearly how well tourism is doing in Northern Ireland. The Minister referred to the figure of 1·12 million people who have visited Northern Ireland in the past 12 months to take a holiday. We welcome the increase in that figure and hope that it will continue. Will the Minister comment on a rather interesting suggestion from Dr. William Hastings, the president of the Northern Ireland chamber of commerce and industry? He addressed a meeting recently and called for

"a chamber of tourism for all Ireland."

Will the Minister comment on what I believe is a good suggestion?

Mr. Needham: Certainly for tourism to succeed in the north, it must be carried out in co-operation with the south and with Bord Failte. I have no doubt that we shall build on those links because we have an awful lot to offer to anyone who comes from the south and who would like to spend a few extra days in the north with us. I always listen carefully to the views of Dr. Hastings and we shall see what further links we can build between north and south to attract more people to come.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that single questions at Question Time mean that we can get further down the Order Paper, which is for the benefit of the whole House.

Downpatrick (Anaesthetist Post)

6. **Mr. McGrady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the hon. Member for South Down may expect an answer to his written question of 5 March about the appointment of the permanent third anaesthetist post to the Down group of hospitals in Downpatrick.

Mr. Needham: The answer was given on 15 March 1990.

Mr. McGrady: Does the Minister agree that for the anaesthetist's post not to be filled at Down hospital for two years is a public health hazard? Is he aware that the anaesthetists at Down hospital have a work load two and a half times that at Belfast City hospital? Will he intervene with the board, as his noble Friend the Under-Secretary did last September, when he insisted on compulsory competitive tendering to save a few pounds? Will the hon. Gentleman intervene now and direct the board to appoint a permanent anaesthetist to save a few lives?

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman and I have been corresponding on the third anaesthetist consultant post at Down hospital for almost as long as I can remember. I wrote to him in February 1989 saying that a third consultant post was to be advertised. I also wrote to him in July 1989 saying that it would be a locum post while anaesthetist cover was examined not only for Down hospital, but for Lagan hospital and the others in the area. I realise the difficulties there, which must be sorted out. The hon. Gentleman is in discussion with the chairman of the board and I shall pass on his points to my noble Friend. The hon. Gentleman has been told exactly what the position is.

Mr. Molyneaux: Is not there a real need for improvement in communications between the Department of Health and Social Services and the various health boards in the light of the experience of the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady) and in the light of my own experience? It took the Department three solid months to reply to me saying that it had passed a constituent's problem to the relevant health board.

Mr. Needham: If there has been an error between the Department and the health board, I am sure that the Department will apologise for it. Generally speaking, I have found that relationships between the boards, the Department, Ministers and the chairman are very good and work extremely well.

De Lorean

7. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the progress of recovery of money from the De Lorean car company and associated ventures.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. John Cope): So far, £12·6 million has been recovered. A number of claims are still being pursued in this country and abroad.

Mr. Cryer: Does the Minister accept that I warned Labour and Conservative Governments, who poured £84 million into the venture, that it was fraudulent from the very beginning? I suggest that the Minister should ask some of the social services inspectors, who are busy hounding single-parent families, to turn their attention to the outstanding sums of money. In particular, will he assure the House that he will pursue the recovery of the £20 million that was spirited away by Lotus Cars through GPD Investments?

Mr. Cope: I am aware of the hon. Gentleman's long connection with and involvement in that matter. I am also aware of what went wrong. We shall continue to pursue all the money that we can in every available court here, the United States and Switzerland.

Mr. Latham: Is my right hon. Friend aware that those of us who sat on the Public Accounts Committee inquiry into that disgraceful affair want to know how my right hon. Friend is getting on with his legal action against Arthur Andersen and also why no one has been brought to trial for the criminal swindling which was clearly revealed in the report?

Mr. Cope: I am not prepared to discuss in detail the current litigation against Arthur Andersen except to say that it is continuing. The Serious Fraud Office is continuing its inquiries into the matter and one person is currently on remand to Belfast magistrates court in connection with that.

Northern Ireland Electricity

8. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the privatisation of Northern Ireland Electricity.

Mr. Brooke: A White Paper on privatisation proposals will be published later this year.

Mr. Davies: I thank the Secretary of State for that unusually helpful answer. Will he give us a likely estimate of the increase in electricity prices that will flow from privatisation on the one hand and from decoupling from the Great Britain link on the other? Can he also give us an idea of the number of jobs that are likely to be lost as a consequence of privatisation?

Mr. Brooke: Earlier this month I announced the increase in the tariff as from 1 April. That statement was made in the context of present circumstances. The Government have nothing further to say on tariffs at present and will certainly not speculate about tariff levels beyond the coming year. The principle underlying tariffs in the future will be that of charging the economic price for producing and delivering electricity efficiently in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Kilfedder: May I make it clear that I am totally opposed to the privatisation of the Northern Ireland electricity supply because once that monopoly is placed in private hands, the price of electricity, which is already far higher than in Scotland, will increase to the detriment of industrial and domestic consumers in Northern Ireland who already suffer the highest cost of living in the United Kingdom? I say to the Government, "Hands off our electricity."

Mr. Brooke: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making clear beyond peradventure his attitude towards privatisation. However, as he knows, appropriate measures of regulation will accompany the introduction of privatisation.

Mr. Jim Marshall: The Secretary of State will recall that some months ago the Minister of State promised that we would have a White Paper on privatisation in the near future. That statement was made at the back end of last year, but there is still no sign of the White Paper. Will the Secretary of State tell us when, or if, that White Paper will see the light of day?

Mr. Brooke: I have already said that it will be published later this year. The "near future" is an elastic term in Northern Ireland.

Shoppers (Free Movement)

9. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the progress of the European Court case brought by the Government following restrictions made by the Irish Government on the free movement of shoppers from that country.

Mr. Cope: The case against the Government of the Republic of Ireland was brought by the European Commission, and was heard by the European Court of Justice on 21 February when the United Kingdom Government was represented by Treasury counsel, who advanced our view that the restrictions were contrary to European law and damaging to the economy of Northern Ireland. The Advocate-General of the court delivered his opinion on 21 March, but a date has not yet been fixed for the court's judgment.

Mr. Thurnham: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is disgraceful that the Irish Government are persisting with this absurd restriction, which will have to go? Will not that be much to the benefit not only of traders, but of Irish consumers?

Mr. Cope: Yes. We have made it clear, not only through the courts, which I have just mentioned, but to Irish Ministers, through the Anglo-Irish Conference and in other ways, that we completely oppose the 48-hour rule. It has been in force for too long; the sooner it goes, the better.

Mr. Foulkes: Is the Minister aware that the Sealink and rail services from Northern Ireland to south-west Scotland are used by many shoppers who travel between those two parts of the United Kingdom? Is he further aware that British Rail is planning to axe the sleeper service from Stranraer to Euston? What representations has the right hon. Gentleman or his right hon. and hon. Friends made to British Rail about this? If they have not made any such representations, will the right hon. Gentleman assure me that he will make representations to British Rail to stop the axing of that vital service?

Mr. Cope: It must be a matter for British Rail. Not many people use that service. In any case, it does not arise out of this question, which is about travellers from the Republic of Ireland.

Terrorists (Extradition)

10. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had recently with Ministers of the Republic of Ireland about the extradition of convicted or suspected terrorists from the Republic.

Mr. Brooke: Extradition matters were discussed at the latest meeting of the Anglo-Irish Conference on 2 March. I have not had the opportunity to speak to Ministers of the Republic of Ireland since the disappointing outcome of the Finucane and Clarke hearings, but I hope to do so shortly.

Mr. Hunter: In the light of the recent case of Dermot Finucane and James Clarke, does my right hon. Friend now agree that the Republic of Ireland is a safe haven for terrorists and that that seriously undermines the validity of the Anglo-Irish Agreement? Would not it be better to negotiate and to come to an agreement with Ulster Unionists rather than with a Government who appear to support terrorists?

Mr. Brooke: At the time of the extradition judgments, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made it clear in the House that the judgments might give some people the impression that terrorists would have a safe haven in the Republic. The Anglo-Irish Agreement continues to be a serviceable instrument for the discussion of such matters, and in that respect we shall continue to support it.

Mr. Maginnis: Will the Secretary of State protest in the most strenuous manner at the judgment by a majority of Supreme Court judges in the Irish Republic who ruled that political exemption from extradition should

> "apply to persons charged with politically motivated offences when the objective of such offences was to secure the ultimate unity of the country"?

Does the right hon. Gentleman concede that that amounts to a mandate for terrorist warfare conducted against the Unionist community in Northern Ireland being enshrined within the legal interpretation of the Extradition Act 1965 of the Irish Republic?

Mr. Brooke: The Irish Government have been left in no doubt, through the secretariat, of the strength of our feelings about the judgment to which the hon. Gentleman referred and which he will recall elicited astonishment in the Republic. I agree that the implications for future extradition cases from the Republic, especially those relating to the political offence exception, are extremely serious. However, I do not go as far as the hon. Getleman's final interpretation.

Mr. Gow: Will my right hon. Friend make representations to the Government of the Irish Republic that it is most desirable to remove articles 2 and 3 from the constitution of the Irish Republic? Will he assure the House that he has made such representations, either directly or through the framework of the secretariat?

Mr. Brooke: My hon. Friend is correct to refer to articles 2 and 3, as they relate to the Supreme Court's judgment. In answer to an earlier question, I made quite clear the Government's attitude towards articles 2 and 3.

Mr. William Ross: The Secretary of State says that the Government of the Irish Republic have been left in no doubt as to his strength of feeling. Am I to understand that he now understands the full meaning of the judgment to which my hon. Friend the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) referred?

Mr. Brooke: I did not entirely catch the hon. Gentleman's question, but I point out that the court's judgment has obviously been subjected to considerable scrutiny with a view to the conversations that we shall be having in the future.

Mr. Hayes: Has my right hon. Friend made it absolutely clear.

Hon. Members: Ah!

Mr. Speaker: Order. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to ask his question sitting down?

Mr. Hayes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is nice to get a little sympathy.

Has my right hon. Friend made it absolutely clear to the Irish Government that Conservative Members are utterly appalled at the decision of the Irish Supreme Court? Has he warned them that if this sort of behaviour continues, it will provide more ammunition for those people who are against the Anglo-Irish Agreement and who want to undermine relations between this country and the south of Ireland? Does he agree that that would be regrettable?

Mr. Brooke: I know that I speak on behalf of the whole House in expressing sympathy with my hon. Friend for his injuries.

In answer to my hon. Friend's question, I remind the House that this was a decision of the Irish Supreme Court. The Irish Government were acting on our behalf and were as anxious as we were to secure a satisfactory solution. In that light, we shall be having further discussions with the Irish Government.

Mr. McNamara: Does the Secretary of State accept that our overriding concern must be to ensure that offenders are brought to justice—not where they are brought to justice? Given that the use of the Criminal Law Jurisdiction Act does not excite the same controversy as extradition, should not the right hon. Gentleman and his Irish counterpart consider means of increasing the number of cases that are tried under that legislation?

Mr. Brooke: The hon. Gentleman is correct to raise that issue, but it is really one for my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General.

Enterprise Agencies

11. **Dr. Woodcock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many enterprise agencies are currently operating; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: Twenty six, and a further six agencies are at an advanced stage of negotiation.

Dr. Woodcock: Does my hon. Friend agree that enterprise is the key to success in Northern Ireland? How many jobs and how many industrial units are currently being provided by enterprise agency networks in Northern Ireland? Does he agree that it is Conservative Governments who constantly support enterprise?

Mr. Needham: Of course, I agree with my hon. Friend. In Northern Ireland we have 800 units, in which 26,000 people are employed. The key to the success of Northern Ireland's economy is the private sector and the creation of small businesses. In that regard, we have a very good record, which will improve.

Mr. Molyneaux: Does the Minister agree that if this agency is to achieve its aims, it must have a skilled work force at its disposal? Can he explain the remark of the Secretary of State for Employment on 27 March? Referring to training credits, the Secretary of State said:

> "There are no present plans to extend the scheme to Northern Ireland.—[*Official Report*, 27 March 1990; Vol. 170, c. 215.]

Mr. Needham: We are just about to launch the Training and Employment Agency, which we believe is the first step in substantially improving the skills of our work force. We have a very good education system and many skills, but we believe that we can do much better. The best way of achieving this is through the Training and Employment Agency. Of course, at some stage in the future we shall consider what further steps need to be taken, and whether we should come closer to the system in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Kincora Boys' Home

12. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to the *Official Report*, 1 March, column 370, what consideration he has given to allegations that the Army informed the Royal Ulster Constabulary of what was going on at the Kincora boys' home before 24 January 1980.

Mr. Cope: Various statements have been made by individuals, but all these allegations were available and were investigated as fully as possible by the RUC and by Sir George Terry six years and more ago. If anyone has new evidence, will he please put it to the police?

Mr. Dalyell: Have Ministers changed their minds about the authenticity of the two Army documents to which Michael Taylor, the former Army information officer at the time, referred on "Channel 4 News" last night? The Minister asks for new information. It came from Broderick and from others involved in the programme. Who was right—Ministers or the people who bore witness last night on "Channel 4 News"?

Mr. Cope: I saw the news programme to which the hon. Gentleman referred, but I am in no position to confirm or deny the authenticity of the documents. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the RUC forensic report was inconclusive. That has been known for a long time. As to the individuals who made statements on the programme, all the allegations that were repeated yesterday have been investigated, but we stand ready to look at new evidence if it comes forward. I did not detect any in the programme last night, but I am having the transcript of it carefully examined to see whether there is any new evidence there.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 29 March.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I shall be speaking at the Anglo-German Koenigswinter conference dinner to be held in Cambridge.

Mr. Hoyle: Will the Prime Minister take time off from her engagements to investigate why the out-patient vehicle service in Cheshire has not been raised from the skeleton level to which it was reduced during the ambulance dispute? Is not it wrong that her Government are cost-cutting at the expense of the sick, the infirm and the disabled? Instead of the Prime Minister giving her usual outmoded and outdated statistics on the Health Service, will she take steps immediately to bring that inhuman treatment of patients to an end?

The Prime Minister: I shall refer the detailed matter to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health. I do not give the House outdated statistics. This year, according to contemporary statistics, the taxpayer has contributed an extra £2·4 billion to the National Health Service and next year the taxpayer will be contributing a further £3 billion to the NHS. The total figure was £7·5 billion a year when I came into No. 10 Downing street: now the taxpayer will contribute £29 billion a year to the National Health Service.

Q2. **Mr. Kirkhope:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 29 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Kirkhope: When my right hon. Friend sees Chancellor Kohl tomorrow, will she explain to him that the British people understand Germany's desire for unification, but that they want to be sure that it will strengthen Europe's security and stability and that it will mean the united Germany being a member of NATO, and the presence of British and American forces, with nuclear weapons, on German soil?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right. I am sure that he will be listened to carefully because I understand that he was one of the parliamentary observers at the recent East German elections. I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. Chancellor Kohl has been very firm in his support of NATO and of a united Germany being in NATO. He has also been very firm in his support for American troops and nuclear weapons being stationed on German soil. Those are vital for the future defence of freedom.

Mr. Kinnock: If the Prime Minister had her time again, would she still introduce the poll tax?

The Prime Minister: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Kinnock: I am very grateful for that reply—*[Interruption.]* Does the Prime Minister think that if they had their time again, her hon. Friends would vote for the poll tax?

The Prime Minister: Yes. It is infinitely—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

The Prime Minister: It is infinitely preferable to a rating revaluation, which would put a colossal burden on half the people who reside in local authority areas, and it is infinitely preferable to Labour's roof tax and local income tax.

Mr. Kinnock: The Prime Minister must be just about the last person in the country who believes all that claptrap. The people of Britain know that from Sunday they will have imposed on them a tax of monstrous injustice and cost, and it will have been imposed by her Government. It is incompatible with democracy.

The Prime Minister: I notice that the right hon. Gentleman wisely keeps silent about his own policy of a roof tax plus a local income tax—*[Interruption.]* Of course he does, because the moment he enunciates a policy it is blown sky-high.

Mr. Ashby: My right hon. Friend will know that the whole House is deeply concerned about the discovery of nuclear triggers destined for Iraq, about which there will be a statement later. There has been a steady flow of defensive weapons and technology to Iraq over the years. Will my right hon. Friend get together with our European friends as a matter of urgency and institute a meeting to try to stop the flow of this technology and equipment to Iraq and to preserve peace in the middle east?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right. The attempted spread of nuclear weapons is very serious and Customs are to be congratulated on having foiled an effort to spread them further. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will be answering a private notice question, during which he will make a full statement. In the meantime, we shall urgently be contacting the signatories to the non-proliferation treaty and the missile technology control regime to see what we can do to prevent a repeat of this serious incident.

Q3. **Mr. Barron:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 29 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Barron: Does the Prime Minister think it right that over 42,000 student nurses in Britain on low incomes should have to pay the full rate of poll tax?

The Prime Minister: Before long, most student nurses—those who are not yet registered as full nurses—will be on Project 2000. That means that they will be paid a bursary and treated fully as ordinary students; therefore, they will pay only 20 per cent. of the community charge. Before long, most of them will be on that system. *[Interruption.]* In the meantime, some student nurses who are in receipt of a salary will be treated like all other trainees who are in receipt of a salary. If the salary were very low, they would be eligible for rebate, but most of them will be paying the community charge in full. That was taken into account in the recent pay award and the speed at which it was implemented.

Q4. **Sir John Stokes:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 29 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Sir John Stokes: Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is considerable anxiety about the teaching of English history in our schools? Instead of teaching only what are called themes, why cannot we go back to the good old days when we learnt by heart the names of the kings and queens of England, the names of our warriors and battles and the glorious deeds of our past? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sure that the whole House wants to hear the reply.

The Prime Minister: As usual, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. What children should be taught in history is the subject of vigorous debate. I agree with him. Most of us are expected to learn from experience of history and we cannot do that unless we know it. Children should know the great landmarks of British history and should be taught them at school.

Mr. Hume: Will the Prime Minister recall with me that 16 years ago, 21 working-class people were having a quite drink in public houses in Birmingham when they were blown to pieces by the IRA? Does she agree that there is no greater injustice than an atrocity of that nature because it cannot be changed and those people cannot come out of their graves? Does she further agree that the wave of anger and emotion that swept Britain following that atrocity was both natural and understandable?

Does the Prime Minister agree that it is not understandable that that wave of anger and emotion should distort the course of justice and lead to the conviction of the wrong people? Given the overwhelming evidence that is emerging and the deep anxiety that has been expressed by respected national figures in Britain and abroad, will she now personally order an independent inquiry into the whole affair?

The Prime Minister: Most of us recall the scenes of that terrorist act, and the great tragedy will live with some families for ever. But we do not conduct trial by television. The place to put any new evidence is with the police. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary said that if there is any fresh evidence in the meantime, of course, it will be looked at carefully. The hon. Gentleman will be aware of investigations that are under way with the chief constables of the West Midlands and of Devon and Cornwall to inquire into the latest evidence. Then it will be for the prosecuting authorities and my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary to decide whether any further action should be taken, bearing in mind that there has already been one rehearing by the Court of Appeal, which gave a very detailed judgment.

The hon. Gentleman referred to emotions. We must not let our emotions run away with us either. It is a matter of evidence before the courts, not of feelings.

Q5. **Mrs. Maureen Hicks:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 29 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mrs. Hicks: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the need for her trade union electoral reforms was never more obvious than in recent weeks with the dubious electoral practices of the Transport and General Workers Union —the union which sponsors the Leader of the Opposition?

The Prime Minister: All our measures on trade union reform were well judged and have been of great benefit to ordinary members of trade unions. I hope that one day the Transport and General Workers Union will take a move to the right. It will be very welcome.

Mr. Mullin: Is the Prime Minister aware that this morning her press secretary quietly briefed the press that no new developments have occurred in the past few days in the Birmingham pub bombing case? Would not the appropriate course of action be for the Home Secretary to come to the House and say that out loud so that hon. Members can ask the many questions that arise?

The Prime Minister: No. A television programme alters nothing. We do not have trial by television, and the day we do, the rule of law will have left this country for good. The only thing that matters in a court of law is evidence and the only thing that matters in reopening a case is whether there is any fresh evidence. I am not yet aware that there is, but if there is, that matter will be fully taken into account by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

Q6. **Mr. Beaumont-Dark:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 29 March.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: Does my right hon. Friend accept that she has many friends and admirers in this House? *[Interruption.]* Does she also accept that there was a need to change our system of local government finance? But the poll tax has become friendless even among those who gain most because they do not recognise it as fair or as based upon people's ability to pay. Can we set ourselves upon a path on which ability to pay plays a bigger part than where one happens to live, fortunately or unfortunately?

The Prime Minister: First, ability to pay is taken care of by the most generous community charge rebates this country has ever known. Every penny of those rebates is taken care of by the taxpayer. Secondly, the majority of expenditure of local authorities is met not by the community charge payer, but by the taxpayer. The taxpayer is part of a progressive system of tax under which, of course, the rich pay far more than the poor. Those are two facts. I can think of nothing more unfair than a system of rating that ensured that half the people who voted for local authorities did not pay a penny piece.

Nuclear Trigger Devices (Iraq)

3.31 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) *(by private notice)*: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs about Government action with regard to Iraq following the seizure of nuclear detonators at Heathrow airport.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): The House will wish to congratulate the Customs and Excise on its successful operation yesterday to stop the illegal export of nuclear material to Iraq. This was an effective demonstration of our commitment to carrying out our responsibilities to stop proliferation and of co-operation between the British and United States authorities.

Three people have been charged with offences under the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 and the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1989. The House will understand that I am not able to speculate on the details of the matter which are now sub judice. The question goes wider than law enforcement here and no doubt that is why the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) tabled it.

There are two international instruments which are relevant. Under the non-proliferation treaty, nuclear suppliers undertake not to transfer nuclear devices or technology and the other parties undertake not to receive them. All exports of nuclear material by suppliers who are states parties to the NPT including Iraq, are subject to safeguards administered by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The second instrument is the missile technology control regime which was established in 1987 by the summit 7 countries. The MTCR is intended to prevent the spread of technology that could be used to develop nuclear-capable missiles. Both instruments are important.

In Geneva, we are urgently consulting other parties in the western group to the NPT in order to find ways in which to minimise the risk of evasion of the treaty. We are in the forefront of those working to expand the membership of the MTCR. We shall urge our European Community partners and other Governments to join the MTCR without delay. The Soviet Union has similar controls that apply to the export of missile technology and we hope that it too will adhere to the MTCR guidelines.

Iraq is not the only power in the middle east with nuclear ambitions. This episode underlines starkly the dangers for the whole world from the proliferation of nuclear weapons. It shows that vigilance pays off. It also points to the vital need to solve by negotiation the wider conflicts in the middle east that undoubtedly acts as a spur to the proliferation of weapons in that region.

Mr. Kaufman: May I, on behalf of the Labour party, congratulate Her Majesty's Customs and Excise and the United States authorities on the brilliant success of their operation? The whole world owes them a debt, for what we have seen is the prevention of a crime that would have menaced world security. However, I must say to the right hon. Gentleman, in the light of his response to my question, that the action that he has announced does not bear comparison with the efficiency and determination of the authorities that detected and defeated the nuclear smuggling ring.

There are a number of questions to which the House requires an answer. Why did the right hon. Gentleman's Foreign Office spokesman last night describe the seizure of the detonators as only a

> "criminal matter which need have no bearing on our relationship with Iraq"?

Is not that a culpably complacent reaction? If our relationship with Iraq is not affected, why did the Foreign Office call in the Iraqi ambassador? Is it a matter of no concern to us that a regime such as that of Iraq has got so far along the road to building a nuclear weapon? If the seizure has no bearing on our relationship with Iraq, why was an Iraqi national arrested on the point of boarding a plane for Baghdad?

If, as the right hon. Gentleman's spokesman said, this is only a criminal matter, why was the decision made by his right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary to deport a man on grounds which were:

> "reasons of national security and . . . other reasons of a political nature connected with attempted breaches of legislation governing the export of strategic goods from the United Kingdom"?

Why was a decision made to deport the man at all, especially at a time when two British subjects are being held in wrongful imprisonment in Iraq? Why has the man not been held, why is he not to be charged and why has he been sent home to safety and no doubt applause? Given that the whole Iraqi operation was clearly inspired at the highest level in Baghdad, can the Minister say whether the Iraqi embassy in London has been involved? Should the Iraqi ambassador be allowed to remain in London? After the murder of Mr. Bazoft, Opposition Members called for the expulsion of the Iraqi ambassador. Is not such action more appropriate than ever now?

If there is concern about possible Iraqi reprisals against British nationals in Iraq, will the Government now advise British nationals to leave that country in the interests of their own safety? Will the Government now place a ban on all technological exports to Iraq that could have any connection with nuclear or any other armaments? Will the Government reconsider their attitude towards export credits for Iraq? As Iraq is now clearly in breach of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, to which it is an adherent and to which the United Kingdom is one of the principal signatory parties, will the Government now call for the International Atomic Energy Agency to use its powers under article 3 of the non-proliferation treaty to go to Iraq and carry out an inspection, as it has the right to do under the treaty?

Will the Government urgently consult our European partners and the United States on concerted action? As the Iraqi action is clearly a threat to world peace, will the Government raise the issue without delay at the United Nations Security Council? The Government must take action with the utmost urgency, because the maintenance of international stability and the threat to peace make this an issue of paramount importance.

Mr. Hurd: This is a deeply important matter; I do not dissent from that. It is a criminal matter, and the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) was right not to press me on that aspect of it.

The Iraqi ambassador was called in so that we could explain our concern, the steps that were being taken and the reasons for them. Which charges were brought is not a matter for me. My right hon. and learned Friend decided to deport Mr. Latif because his continued presence here was considered to be against the public interest. That is a perfectly normal procedure with which the House is familiar.

The right hon. Member for Gorton mentioned the stance of his hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) after Mr. Bazoft's death, but he did not do so wholly accurately. I believe that he was in Sweden at the time. As we did then, we have considered the presence of the Iraqi ambassador and our diplomatic relations with Iraq. There is a considerable risk of damage in breaking off diplomatic relations, with no actual advantage. I do not want to get into the position that we not only leave our citizens, including our two prisoners which the right hon. Gentleman mentioned, without protection, but do not have an embassy in the middle east between the Khyber pass and the Mediterranean. We have two empty embassies in two important middle eastern countries, and I do not want to add to that number unless there is a clear advantage in doing so. The right hon. Gentleman has not urged that advantage.

The right hon. Gentleman knows that we do not supply arms to Iraq, and I am glad of the opportunity to make that clear. We covered the issue of exports during our previous exchanges. Exports of nuclear technology and arms are covered by the restrictions I mentioned. It is clear from yesterday's events that those are effectively policed, and will continue to be.

The right hon. Gentleman urged me to consult our partners and allies, which is absolutely right. I have told the House that we are doing so. I do not exclude action in the Security Council, but I am not, at present, clear whether it would be profitable or lead anywhere. What are important are the two instruments I mentioned—the two international regimes—which are not perfect but offer the best hope of preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons and the missiles which could carry them. We are right to concentrate our international effort in following up this serious event by trying to sharpen and improve the effectiveness of those two regimes, which are designed for that purpose.

Mr. Kenneth Warren (Hastings and Rye): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the coup effected by the Customs and Excise in London, which the whole world will applaud. However, there are many participants in this unsavoury act who should be brought to account. It is worrying that West Germany, China, France and the United States are involved. Will he consider extending the COCOM net, which already exists for some of those countries, to control the exports of such vital equipment to unfriendly territories, and the need to ensure that the world co-ordinates its efforts to stop the proliferation, rather than rely on existing treaties which simply do not work.

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend is on exactly the right tack. Appended to the NPT is the Zangger list of products. That is one instrument, the other is the missile control arrangement, which I described. We are anxious not only that the original summit seven members should belong to that, but that all our EC partners, and other countries, should join it so that that control becomes more effective. I entirely agree with that, and we shall continue down exactly that path.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): I welcome the Secretary of State's commitment to the missile control technology regime and the non-proliferation treaty. Does he agree that the effectiveness of both those regimes will always depend not only on the good faith of their signatories, but on the policing available to ensure that they are followed? Having regard to the position in the middle east, and the continuing unrest there, does he accept that it is time for the launching of a substantial political initiative, of which the Government should form part?

Mr. Hurd: There are different middle east disputes. There is the Iran-Iraq war, on which I am in close touch with the secretary-general, who carries the peace-making banner, and there is the Arab-Israeli dispute, which we have often discussed, and the hon. and learned Gentleman knows our stance on that. To answer the hon. and learned Gentleman, and to pick up a point made by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) which I did not answer, I can tell him that the Iraqis have a nuclear research establishment based on a French-supplied reactor which was inspected under the IAEA procedures in April 1989.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the most worrying aspect of the affair is that security arrangements have been so sloppy that people such as the Iraqis could get their hands on such bits of equipment? Surely the most urgent thing of all is to ensure that it cannot happen again.

Mr. Hurd: My right hon. Friend has been in the business long enough to know that such questions arise when one has a success. If the Customs had not been sucessful, the question would not have arisen. The episode shows that there is vigilance and effective co-operation. The shipment was prevented, but that is not a reason for complacency, rather for doing what we have proposed to do, which is to draw more and more people into more and more effective arrangements.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): As the Foreign Secretary said, this is a disturbing incident. What does the attempted export of the nuclear triggers tell us about the advance of the Iraqis towards producing a nuclear device of their own? Can he assure the House that he will give a full report of our findings and exploration into the matter to the IAEA in Vienna so that it can seriously consider taking much more effective action than seemed to be forthcoming having listened to the complacent interview on the BBC at 1 o'clock with the representative of the Vienna authority?

Mr. Hurd: I had better obtain a transcript of that interview. I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. The specification of the material confiscated yesterday suggests that the capacitors were intended for use in the trigger mechanism for a nuclear warhead, but, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, it does not follow that all the other pieces are in place. No such deduction can be drawn, but that is not a reason for complacency.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): Is my right hon. Friend concerned about the fact that, if any group of terrorists seeks illegally to export such nuclear devices, they can apparently be brought to justice only under a somewhat obscure statutory instrument, the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1989, which carries the maximum

[Mr. Jonathan Aitken]

penalty of a £1,000 fine or a two-year sentence of imprisonment? Is that an adequate deterrent to those seeking to blow up the entire middle east?

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend will not expect me to trespass by commenting on the case or what may follow, but I note his point.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): Does the Foreign Secretary accept that if Iraq, with its dangerous regime, were to obtain nuclear potential, it would present a menace to peace? Does he recall that on a previous occasion others who were concerned about that took practical and effective action which was condemned in the House, I believe wrongly? Is he prepared to say what Her Majesty's Government and their allies will do to prevent the need for such action again?

Mr. Hurd: We shall continue to take the action that was taken yesterday. That is the most effective way of ensuring that proliferation does not take place. I would be disturbed if any state proliferated in that way, particularly if it was in an area of a good deal of tension and long-standing disputes. The first thing to do—I am not just talking about the middle east—is to persuade as many countries as possible to join the NPT so that they are subjected to inspection. But that in itself is not enough, as this incident shows, and that is why we need to strengthen the regime and make it more effective.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Is not the excellent operation yesterday evidence that the best way of controlling international terrorism is by international co-operation? Will my right hon. Friend now ask the Foreign Office to update its previously held view that there is no evidence that Iraq is developing a nuclear capability?

Mr. Hurd: I am not sure about that previously expressed view. We keep a pretty wary eye on threats of proliferation in the middle east and elsewhere. It may prove to be a rather healthy reminder that, as one threat to our security diminishes—the Soviet threat with which we have lived most familiarly—there are other perhaps more sinister threats. We have to be equally vigilant and prepared to deal with them.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that we have business questions today and an important debate that has to end at 7 o'clock, so I shall allow two more questions from either side and then I am afraid we must move on.

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Hillhead): While no one in their right mind wants any new countries to acquire nuclear weapons, is the Secretary of State aware of the offence that is felt in the Arab and Islamic world at the assumptions which seem to lie behind such a hue and cry —that it is all right for some countries such as South Africa, Israel and ourselves to have nuclear weapons, but it is somehow fundamentally wrong for Arab countries and other Muslim countries such as Pakistan to have them? Will the Secretary of State amplify the point that he correctly made in his earlier remarks—that Iraq is not the only country in the middle east seeking a nuclear capacity and, thanks to Mr. Vanunu—we should not forget his incarceration—we now know that Israel has a battery of nuclear weapons pointed at countries such as Iraq?

Mr. Hurd: The non-proliferation treaty distinguishes between those who were nuclear powers at the time and the remainder. That is the basis on which 139 countries have adhered to the treaty. It is not a distinction between Arabs and other non-nuclear powers; it is a distinction between the original nuclear powers and the remainder. I draw that distinction. The hon. Gentleman mentioned South Africa. I hope that all the countries of southern Africa will sign and adhere to the NPT.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend (Bexleyheath): May I commend my right hon. Friend for resisting the calls to break diplomatic relations? Are not our troublesome relations with Iraq just where we need diplomatic expertise? Is not the main point to be learned from yesterday's episode that in recent years the arms race has been on the increase in the middle east while the peace process has been on the decrease there?

Mr. Hurd: The peace processes—my hon. Friend knows that we are talking about more than one dispute —are extremely important. There is no doubt that the existence of the Iran-Iraq war—there is a truce and there is no fighting, but there is no formal end to the war—acts as a spur to some of those activities. I agree that we all have a responsibility for urging forward the peace processes. At the same time, we also have a responsibility in that case for preventing the flow of arms and, in all cases, for preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Mr. David Young (Bolton, South-East): Is not it true that Israel and Iraq either have or are about to have nuclear weapons and that the history of both those countries has shown that they will not hesitate to use a pre-emptive strike if it suits their purposes? Is the Foreign Secretary content with that situation, which may mean war, and does he anticipate its prevention?

Mr. Hurd: That is the oldest and I think the emptiest argument in the world. Because one country may have thought of that argument, it takes actions which produce exactly the same feelings among its neighbours. The hon. Gentleman will agree that the only sane answer is that we have treaties in place which may not be perfect and we should work with our friends and allies who see the dangers to make them more effective. The success yesterday showed that they are effective, but we cannot be satisfied, because the incident also showed the continuing need and the continuing danger.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is equally unacceptable for Israel to have nuclear weapons as it would be for Iraq to have them? Will he confirm that the Government have been as assiduous in preventing the flow of nuclear munitions, or parts for them, to Israel as they would be to other countries?

Mr. Hurd: I have tried not to get drawn into the preferences of right hon. and hon. Members for different states. There is an occasion for doing that, but today is not it. We are talking about a number of non-nuclear states in an area continuously full of tension and bitterness. In my answers, I think that I have covered what we think is the right remedy.

Business of the House

3.54 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): May I ask the Leader of the House to give us the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Sir Geoffrey Howe): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 2 APRIL—Second Reading of the Human Fertilisation and Embrylogy Bill *[Lords]*.

TUESDAY 3 APRIL—Conclusion of remaining stages of the Social Security Bill (2nd Allotted day).

Motion relating to the National Health Services (Charges for Drugs and Appliances) (Amendment) Regulations.

WEDNESDAY 4 APRIL—Consideration of any Lords amendments that may be received to the Education (Student Loans) Bill.

THURSDAY 5 APRIL—Adjournment debates.

It may be for the convenience of the House if I indicate that the business for the first week after the Easter Adjournment will be as follows:

WEDNESDAY 18 APRIL—Second Reading of the Courts and Legal Services Bill *[Lords]*.

THURSDAY 19 APRIL—Second Reading of the British Nationality (Hong Kong) Bill.

FRIDAY 20 APRIL—Private Members' Bills.

It may be for the convenience of hon. Members to know how I propose that the House should handle the debates on the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill. I should make it plain that I put forward these proposals only after having consulted widely in all parts of the House.

I should like to express my thanks to those hon. Members who have been willing to help me, in particular to the shadow Leader of the House, the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham).

The Bill is an important part of the legislative programme that the Government have brought before the House. In bringing the Bill forward, the Government are responding to developments in human fertilisation and embryology, and their practical consequences.

The key issue at the heart of the Bill's provision is whether certain infertility treatments and research on human embryos should be permitted and brought within a new regulatory regime. In addition, I am advised that amendments on the medical termination of pregnancy would be within the scope of the Bill.

These are matters on which there is strong personal feeling, on both sides of the argument, and on which there has been wide public debate. They are matters on which the public have a right to expect the House to reach a clear view, but, equally clearly, there are issues on which the House should reach its conclusions on a free vote, on both sides of the House, as Government and Opposition speakers have made clear on previous occasions.

Against that background, the Government believe it right to do all we can to facilitate the House's consideration of those complex issues. I therefore propose to take certain procedural steps to provide for a structured and orderly debate of the whole of the Bill. Later today, I shall table a motion under Standing Order No. 61(3) to provide for the major issues of conscience on embryology research and on abortion, if and in so far as any amendments are tabled on that subject, to be debated in a Committee of the whole House before the remainder of the Bill is debated in Standing Committee, and a timetable motion covering the Committee and subsequent stages of the Bill. The House will be given an opportunity to consider the motions immediately after Second Reading on 2 April.

I hope that the House will welcome those arrangements, which are entirely intended to enable it to reach clear and orderly conclusions on the important issues within the scope of the Bill.

Dr. Cunningham: I first thank the Leader of the House for his careful and important statement on how we should deal with the controversial issues in the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill. I personally thank him for the care and time he has taken to consult the Opposition about those matters and I hope that whatever the views of individual Members on the particular issues, his proposals will receive a wide welcome, which they deserve. I confirm what he and the House already know: speaking for the Labour party, there will be a free vote on these matters.

I also thank the Leader of the House for giving us the business for the week after the Easter recess as well as for next week. Can he tell us when the Government will be publishing the British Nationality (Hong Kong) Bill?

Has the right hon. and learned Gentleman seen the survey published today by the BBC of the financial circumstances of the 214 district health authorities? Is he aware that the survey shows that 42 per cent. of all district health authorities are facing debts; that 24 per cent. of them say that, as a consequence of their indebtedness, they are having to reduce patient care; and that 57 per cent. say that their financial circumstances are worse now than when the Government introduced their new proposals for financing the Health Service?

As Government legislation now in the House of Lords makes it clear that, after 31 March next year, no district health authority can lawfully operate with a financial deficit, is not this matter now urgent and should not the House hear as soon as possible, preferably in an oral statement next week from the Secretary of State for Health, exactly what the Government intend to do for the finances of the Health Service between now and 31 March next year to avoid an impending catastrophe in reductions in patient care across the country? I urge the Leader of the House to provide time for us to discuss that most critical of matters.

There are about 10 outstanding orders on the poll tax to come before the House for debate. This week we have again seen one of the most callous anomalies of all in the poll tax—the position of student nurses, who qualify for no rebate compared with that of apprentices in the armed services earning similar amounts who do qualify for rebates. I draw the right hon. and learned Gentleman's attention to the editorial in *The Times* today, which is a damning indictment of the whole barmy idea of introducing a poll tax in Britain——

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): It does not say much about the roof tax, does it?

Dr. Cunningham: If I may reply to the hon. Gentleman's sedentary intervention, *The Times* said that property taxes should be reintroduced. The hon. Gentleman got it absolutely and comprehensively wrong.

[Dr. Cunningham]

Given the damning comments from all quarters about the poll tax, will the Leader of the House arrange for a debate after the Easter recess, and preferably, introduce measures to get rid of the whole ludicrous idea?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Let me deal with the last point first. There have been a number of opportunities lately to discuss orders in connection with the community charge. There will be an opportunity to do so again later today. The question of another debate on the subject is best left for handling through the usual channels.

The hon. Gentleman did not, of course, disclose that the majority of health authorities are proving able to manage their budgets within the resources available; that must, in the end, be an essential feature of National Health Service management. Even if the resources were to be doubled, and whatever the resources available to health authorities for a given period, a system of management needs to be put into place for managing them within those resources.

One of the purposes of the Health Service reforms is to enhance the quality of management so that the resources that are available, which will and must be finite under any Government under the sun, are managed so as to avoid end of the year problems of that kind. That is the object of the reforms and the hon. Gentleman's analysis was wholly ill founded and astonishing.

Dr. Cunningham: It was the analysis of the BBC.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The fact that it was the BBC's analysis does not make it any more commendable.

The British Nationality (Hong Kong) Bill will be published next week and will therefore be available some time ahead of the debate that will take place in the week following the Easter recess. Finally, I was grateful for the hon. Gentleman's comments about the arrangements that I propose for discussing the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): When will the House have an opportunity to debate the proposals for the change in the regulations relating to housing allowance for police officers so that it can deliver its verdict on what most people would consider to be a breach of faith with the police?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am of course aware of the interest on both sides of the House in those matters. However, the timing of a debate on the police regulations must be left to discussions between the usual channels.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): When the Leader of the House has dinner here in the House of Commons in the evening and he is sitting at his table being served by staff in the Refreshment Department, does he ever stop to wonder how they manage to live on little more than £100 a week? What does he think about that?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I have one thought in that context: I am reminded of the tenacity with which the hon. Gentleman pursues that matter on every occasion——

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Make us pay more for our meals.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: If the hon. Gentleman will contain himself for a second, I will answer him. Of course the matter can be considered by the House of Commons Commission, as it will be in so far as the points that the hon. Gentleman has advanced should be considered.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): Does my right hon. and learned Friend share the growing anxiety in this country about the state of the British press? Is he aware that hardly a day goes by without the announcement of a settlement for some unfounded libel and never a day passes without the invasion of the privacy of people who in no sense are in public life? Does he agree that the balance to be struck between the freedom of the press and the rights of the individual is a vital constitutional issue? If he does agree, will he provide time for a debate on the matter?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am aware that that is a topic of interest to hon. Members on both sides of the House, and it has been the subject of debate before, although perhaps not this year. My hon. Friend will have the opportunity to raise it in a debate on the Adjournment. I have no plans for arranging a debate on the subject.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Has the Leader of the House had a chance to study early-day motion 736, signed by hon. Members from all parties, about the entitlement of fishermen to unemployment benefit?

[That this House views with concern the effects on share fishermen and fishing crews of new regulations, introduced on 10th December 1989, covering benefit payments, which establishes a £43 earnings limit in a seven day benefit week; regrets that the new rules were introduced without consultation with the industry, and despite the existence of a 42-year-old agreement that higher national insurance contributions would be paid by share fishermen on the understanding that they would be able to claim unemployment benefit for the days they cannot go to sea; and calls upon the Government, who have now imposed a compulsory lay-up scheme with the intention of reducing catching effort, to amend the Department of Social Security regulations to allow fishermen to claim benefit payments when they are prevented from going to sea.]

Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept that it is disgraceful for the Government to breach a 42-year-old agreement at precisely the time when they are preventing fishermen from going to sea? Is not it time for an early debate in Government time to discuss that and the other injustices being visited upon the Scottish fishing industry?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend the Prime Minister answered a question bearing on the more general issues on that topic on Tuesday. On this matter, the Government are aware of the concerns of the fishing industry, and we are monitoring the effects of the changes to which the hon. Gentleman has referred.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Although I appreciate that there was a short debate in the early hours of the morning a few days ago about the exchange rate mechanism, would it be possible to have a proper debate on that subject in the not-too-distant future so that we may consider how far the Madrid conditions have been satisifed and how far they are still relevant?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I certainly understand the interest that my hon. Friend expresses in that matter. There will be opportunities to discuss it in the course of our regular debates on Community affairs, but I will bear his points in mind.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Is the Leader of the House aware that, at 1 o'clock this morning, many hon. Members on both sides of the House were deeply concerned that Ministers were still trotting out the same excuses that they have been trotting out for the past decade for not paying compensation to nuclear test veterans, and that they did after only a 45-minute debate? So that we can put the case properly and give justice to those ex-service men, such as is being given in the United States and in other countries, please may we have a full debate next week?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I cannot respond to the right hon. Gentleman by acceding to his request. As he has said, that matter was debated last night and was the subject of a long answer from my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security a day or two before. The arguments that were advanced on behalf of the Government still deserve to prevail.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone): Through the arrangements that he has announced for the Human Fertilsation and Embryology Bill, my right hon. and learned Friend must be aware that he has brought to an end years of wrangling and uncertainty on a difficult subject. Is he aware that that will have earned the gratitude not only of those of us in this place with strong feelings on the matter, but of many people in the country who have wanted to see that wrangling and uncertainty brought to an end, and, indeed, of many other hon. Members who do not have strong feelings on it, but who have been vexed for many years by the wrangling and pressures that have been involved?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for the generosity of what she has just said.

Ms. Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): Will the Leader of the House be good enough to ask the Minister for Health to investigate the functioning of the Tower Hamlets social services and housing committee, especially in relation to its arrangements for the care and financing in the community of severely disabled people, with special reference to the case of——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am not certain that that is the direct responsibility of the Leader of the House. Is it a question about a debate, a statement or a question?

Ms. Gordon: Yes, I want a statement. I refer especially to the case of Corporal William Blackburn, who has been in the Queen Elizabeth military hospital in Woolwhich ready for discharge for the past 19 months. Will the Leader of the House please make a statement to the House next week?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I cannot promise to make a statement about that, but I can undertake to bring the matter to the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister for Health.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland Melton): Is the Government's statement about whether or not to charge-cap any local authority coming next week; and if not, why not?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I cannot give a precise answer to my hon. Friend's question, but I expect that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will be in a positon to make an announcement next week.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The right hon. and learned Gentleman will recall that last week I asked for a Minister from the Northern Ireland Office to be brought to the Dispatch Box this week to give a statement about the uprating of the ceiling for rate benefits in Northern Ireland in line with the uprating for the community charge here. Do I take it that silence gives consent and that we shall be able to read about it in the newspapers in the next few weeks?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman should draw any particular conclusions from that. He knows that Ministers from the Northern Ireland Office were at the Dispatch Box earlier this afternoon.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Will my right hon. and learned Friend find time after the recess for a full debate on tourism? There has not been one for some considerable time, and the tourist industry, which is this country's largest earner of foreign currency, is in a state of crisis, partly because of the introduction of the uniform business rate and because of the elimination of any transitional arrangements for people who purchase new hotels.

I also refer my right hon. and learned Friend to the 100-day limit that has been introduced on bed-and-breakfast accommodation, which exempts such accommodation from the uniform business rate. Finally, may I refer my right hon. and learned Friend to the fact that the standard spending assessments do not give any recognition to the expenditure on tourism that my local authority in Torbay spends every year, which amounts to about £1 million? Will my right hon. and learned Friend please find the time for a debate after the recess?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend has understandably drawn attention to certain matters affecting the tourist industry, which is of importance in his constituency. I shall bring those matters to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, but I cannot promise to offer a debate.

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I understand that, in the light of the programme on the Birmingham Six last night, the Home Secretary issued a press statement. Many of us thought that, before he did that, he should have come to the House to answer questions about what happened. In view of that and of many of the allegations made in that programme—especially the allegation that the police have had the names of those involved for no less than 15 years—does the right hon. and learned Gentleman think that his right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary should come to the House as soon as possible—certainly during next week—to say what he thinks and to allow us to question him about that whole business, which is now part and parcel of the thinking of all our people?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The fact that one of the relevant documents referred to in that programme has been in the

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possession of the police and other authorities for some time tends to support the view that the programme did not contain a great deal of new material. However, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has said today that, as always, he is willing to look at fresh evidence. That is the appropriate course in respect of this matter.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that, apparently, there are at present about 25,000 empty council properties in London—10,000 of them in just five Labour-controlled authority areas? Does he know that uncollected rents in five Labour-controlled authority areas amount to £58 million? Does he agree that there is a need for an urgent debate on local authority housing in London, so that the slur about "the plight of the homeless" may be fully exposed?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend, as so often, has drawn attention to two important facts that underline the extent to which Labour-controlled authorities in London are failing to meet the needs of their populations in respect of housing.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Will the Leader of the House accept that his announcement about the guillotine on the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill is about the only guillotine announcement that will be widely welcomed on both sides of the House? Will he give the House credit? The public are fed up with our failure to come to a decision and with our appearing to mess around with an important issue.

Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman at the same time confirm that no guillotine will be imposed on the Education (Student Loans) Bill when it comes back from the House of Lords next week? Following the question from the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham), can he remove any doubt that there will be an early statement next week on any capping of councils? The system will come into operation next week, and councils need to know whether an upper limit will be fixed by the Government.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: On the hon. Gentleman's last point, I have said clearly that I expect that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will make a statement next week. We shall have to consider, as the days unfold, the most appropriate arrangements for dealing with student loans. I wish to express my gratitude for the hon. Gentleman's appreciation of the arrangements that I announced concerning the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill.

I qualify my gratitude in one respect: I should have expected someone of the hon. Gentleman's enlightenment to recognise that the timetable motion that I propose is not in any sense a guillotine. It is being put in place as a result of very wide consultation, to enable the House to consider the matter sensibly. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will withdraw the word "guillotine" and accept the word "timetable", which is much more elegant and gentle.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Will the Leader of the House give an undertaking that his decision to give special time for matters that are normally considered matters of conscience is due entirely to the fact that those debates will stem from amendments to Government legislation—amendments that are in order—and that there is no change whatever in long-standing Government policy never, ever, to allow extra time for private Members' Bills?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Our position starts and finishes with the premise of which I am reminded by my right hon. Friend. In this context, the Government thought it right—certainly I thought it right—to make arrangements for issues that arise within the scope of this Bill to be considered in an orderly fashion.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the Leader of the House please make arrangements as soon as possible for a statement and debate on miscarriages of justice in this country? I refer in particular to the case of the Birmingham Six, whose innocence has been known for the past 15 years. These people have lost 15 years of their lives. They have been in prison for 15 years for a crime that they did not commit and could not have committed. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman make sure that this debate takes place soon? Will he ensure that the Government do not delay on the inquiry by the Devon and Cornwall constabulary but, instead, refer the case rapidly to the Court of Appeal as the most speedy mechanism by which these men may be released, and the sense of injustice removed?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: As I have said already, it does not appear that any significant new matters were raised in the course of the recent programme. However, the position remains the same: my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary is always willing to consider fresh evidence and, in the light of it, to decide whether any further procedural steps should be taken.

Mr. Cecil Franks (Barrow and Furness): Bearing in mind an earlier question about the media, and also the widespread concern expressed in the House about the violence which has followed media-inspired and orchestrated demonstrations, will my right hon. and learned Friend consider an early debate on the issue? To help him to determine what to do, may I draw to his attention to two events in my constituency? First, last weekend a media-orchestrated and inspired demonstration broke into my constituency office during my advice bureau: it resulted in the police being called and a Labour councillor and the Labour party press secretary being arrested. Secondly, following an article on Monday calling for a demonstration outside the hotel where my constituency was to hold its annual general meeting tomorrow, the hotel has refused to give facilities for the meeting. There is a climate of fear in the constituency, deliberately orchestrated and inspired by the local media.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: While I cannot undertake to offer a debate on the particular matters raised by my hon. Friend, he is certainly right to draw attention to the need to avoid violence in the expression of opinion on any issue at any time, and to draw attention to the need for the media, like anybody else, not to provoke or incite violence on such occasions.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Can we have a debate on Wednesday on the illegal export of nuclear bomb triggers, instead of dealing with Lords amendments to the Education (Student Loans) Bill? Today we had only a private notice question on the nuclear bomb triggers; a

Government statement should have been volunteered. As the Leader of the House knows, the United Nations nuclear non-proliferation treaty is very important and has suddenly leapt into prominence. We should be given time to debate it and to support the 137 non-nuclear nations who support the treaty. We want to strengthen it. We could discuss how the Government are sabotaging the treaty by being in breach of article 6 because of the development and purchase of £10 billion worth of Trident nuclear weapons. We could examine and expose the double standards of a nation and Government who want an increase in the capability to cause mass extermination but condemn other nations that want to follow suit.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The quality of the hon. Gentleman's argument in support of his case is such that it convinces me that his case does not deserve to prevail. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has dealt clearly today with the instant matters. It is also manifest from the success of the authorities in intercepting the equipment that Her Majesty's Government take their obligations in this respect very seriously.

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): Grave and valid concern has been felt in all parts of Northern Ireland by the callous call of Northern Ireland Conservatives for the imposition of the poll tax on the people of Northern Ireland. Can we have an urgent debate on the matter so that the representatives of all the constitutional political parties in Northern Ireland may have an opportunity to put forward the reasons why the tax should not be imposed on the hard-pressed people of Northern Ireland?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman is in a position to advance in the House the case that he has just put forward. It would surely be sensible for Conservatives in Northern Ireland to have a comparable and expanding opportunity to do the same.

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): Further to the point raised by the Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook), does the Leader of the House recognise that the Police (Amendment) Regulations 1990 are causing a considerable drop in morale in the police forces of the United Kingdom? Can he be more specific about when he will find time for a debate on them? I hope that the right hon. and learned Gentleman and the Government are not avoiding a debate, for which there is considerable support on both sides of the House, just because the Government are trying to avoid the discussion of thorny and embarrassing matters.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: While I cannot accept the hon. Gentleman's judgment on the merits of the regulations, I have said that there is widespread interest in the matter among hon. Members on both sides of the House. The usual channels will be considering when a debate can conveniently be arranged.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Further to the questions posed by the hon. Members for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) and for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), would my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the innocence of the Birmingham Six was not demonstrated by an emotional and misleading television programme in which one of the most absurd propositions was that a conspiracy was conducted by police officers, solicitors, barristers, judges and Ministers to ensure that a disgraceful miscarriage of justice was perpetrated against six innocent men?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. and learned Friend makes some important points in response to the programme, but he will agree that we do not have to accept trial by television as a means of reaching justice in this country. I assure him and the House that the Home Secretary will continue to consider fresh evidence that is presented on this matter in the proper way, as he has done heretofore.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): The whole House will appreciate my right hon. and learned Friend's care in consulting widely on the Human Fertilisation and Embrology Bill. So that the House can come to a clear view, may we have votes on the subject at a reasonable hour, when the House is well attended, as it will be unwhipped business?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his general welcome for my proposals. We shall be seeking so to arrange matters that they are conducted in a reasonable way at not unreasonable times.

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): Will the Leader of the House arrange an urgent debate so that we may discuss the leaked memorandum from the chief solicitor of Barnet council admitting that, over a period of years, Barnet council has illegally discriminated in the rehousing of immigrants and is liable to prosecution under the Race Relations Act 1976?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: That is a relatively unorthodox foundation for suggesting a debate. I do not immediately respond to it with enthusiasm.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): Will my right hon. and learned Friend find time for a debate on the situation in Hungary? It would seem that the Hungarian Communist party changed its name to the Socialist party to fight the recent elections. But only 10 per cent. of the population voted for that party, and presumably the other 90 per cent. could not tell the difference between socialism and communism. Does he agree that that would be an interesting subject for a debate?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend makes a penetrating observation about an interesting subject. I am not sure that it carries the matter far enough for me to arrange an early debate.

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): When will the Leader of the House announce a debate about Harrods? Such a debate has been made more urgent by the disastrous and disgusting performance of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry yesterday before the Select Committee on Trade and Industry when he refused to answer any questions about why he did not recommend the disqualification of the two villains who are running one of the leading corner shops in Britain. Will he note that there is a demand for an urgent debate on both sides of the House?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Again, the way in which the hon. Gentleman advances that case is not very effective in persuading me to shift from my position. A debate on the matter would not be appropriate while the Select Committee is considering the subject.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): Will my right hon. and learned Friend find time for a debate on the valuable work undertaken by the Audit Commission? Many hon. Members have campaigned, and welcome the decision by the Government, to deploy the Audit Commission in the National Health Service, as outlined in the National Health Service and Community Care Bill. Many of us are also extremely impressed by some of the important reports produced by the Audit Commission.

I think particularly of the report "Care in the Community", which has been widely welcomed on both sides of the House, and the valuable work that it did in respect of the homeless and homelessness. Many other areas might benefit from the attentions of the Audit Commission. Could time be found to discuss the matter on the Floor of the House?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the tribute he paid to the work of the Audit Commission and to the way in which its area of operations has been effectively enlarged. That adds force to the case for its being considered on the Floor of the House, but I cannot give him any promise in that respect.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman consider the answer that he gave to his hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) about a debate on people in council houses who cannot pay their rent? Will he extend such a debate to a full debate on the issue of poverty, so that some of us on this side can explain to Conservative Members what causes poverty, why people cannot pay their rents, why some people—not all—are suffering more than they have ever suffered in their lives, especially those in a state of poverty who are about to face poll tax demands which they cannot possibly pay? Is it not time that we had a full-scale debate on poverty so that there can be some glimmer of understanding among Conservative Members of why people are in poverty?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My recollection is that, on a Supply day not many months ago, there was a debate on a subject similar to that identified by the hon. Gentleman. He may have the opportunity to play his part in selecting other Supply days for that purpose. I hope that my hon. Friends will make use of the occasion to identify the extent to which poverty has diminished as a result of the successful operation of the Government's economic policies in raising average living standards throughout the country.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): May we have an early debate on the policies of Barnet council, in view of the interest in them of the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone), so that I can point out that our community charge is two thirds that of Brent, that every day 2,000 children come from Brent to be educated in Barnet and that Barnet does not have the rent arrears of Brent or the stock of empty houses of many London Labour councils?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: In the absence of a debate, my hon. Friend has made good use of the opportunity just afforded to him.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): It would be helpful if the Leader of the House could tell us when the Secretary of State for Scotland will respond to the situation that confronts us on the capital offset for the poll tax. May I crave your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, and raise with the Leader of the House a matter that I have raised with you connected with the Select Committee on Defence and the interest of the Chairman of the Committee in SGL? Next week the Committee will spend about £15,000 of taxpayers' money.

The Leader of the House should be aware that yesterday the Select Committee passed a motion to the Select Committee on Members' Interests expressing anxiety that there might be a conflict of interests created by the information received by members of the Committee in connection with their work and which they gain from trips abroad.

Mr. Speaker *rose*——

Mr. Douglas: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, but it is a matter for the whole House. Witnesses coming before a Select Committee of the House should have the absolute assurance that the information that they give will be used for the purposes of the Committee and of the House and for no other purpose. There is a conflict of interest between the offices that the Chairman of the Committee holds—*[Interruption.]* I have given him notice that I intended to raise the matter—and the position that he holds.

With great respect, Mr. Speaker, I would welcome the guidance of the House. I am withholding my attendance from that Committee. If I am wrong that witnesses should have that assurance, the House should put down a motion saying, "Dick Douglas is wrong." I believe that I am not wrong, and I await the decision of the House on the matter.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I think that the precision of the request with which the hon. Gentleman closed his observations represents a proposition that I could not be expected to table in the present or any other circumstances. On the underlying substance of the matter, it is the subject of representations between the two relevant Select Committees—the Defence Committee and the Select Committee on Members' Interests. It is best that it is handled in that way, by the two Committees considering it.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall call the hon. Members who are on their feet but I ask them not to repeat questions that have been asked before, in view of the heavy business before us.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Leader of the House make a statement next week and give us a detailed list of the number of Bills that have been passed, but which have not been put fully into practice? I raise that matter in particular because he will recall that he was one of the Ministers who piloted through the Industrial Relations Bill. It became an Act of Parliament, but then the Government put it on the back boiler and never used it. I suggest that it would not be a bad idea if they repeated that practice with the poll tax.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman's insight is uncharacteristically inaccurate in several respects. The Industrial Relations Bill would have had a flourishing and effective life had it not been for the temporary misfortune of the country in electing a Labour Government in March 1974. That Government made the mistake of repealing it.

but the present Government have put in place provisions designed to achieve similar purposes, and they have done so to good effect.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Will the Leader of the House consider early-day motion 539, which has been signed by 49 Members and which asks him specifically to separate the issues of human fertilisation and embryology from the emotive issue of abortion?

[That this House believes the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill has crucial implications for the future of in vitro fertilisation techniques, diagnosis and treatment of serious congenital disease, advance in knowledge of the causes and treatment of serious congenital disease, advance in knowledge of the causes and treatments for infertility, miscarriage and contraception; further believes that this important Bill deserves serious and detailed consideration on its own merits; therefore declares its intention to resist efforts of anti-abortion hon. Members to introduce the separate and controversial issue of abortion into this Bill, in particular by the moving of amendments to lower the abortion time limit below 20 weeks as the medical and ethical arguments about late term abortions are quite different from those surrounding the treatment of embryos in the 14 days after fertilisation, and believes that this essential debate on embryo research must not be allowed to be distorted and overshadowed by the inevitably heightened emotion which would follow from the introduction of abortion amendments.]

Surely it would have been more appropriate to accept that amendment when my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo) introduced her ten-minute Bill, Medical Services for Women, which specifically mentioned abortion. Is not it a shame that the House has allowed a Bill that will give great happiness to many infertile couples to be hijacked by people for the wrong reasons?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am disappointed that the hon. Lady does not share the general view that the arrangements we have in mind are best calculated to handle those complicated issues. It is not for the Government alone to determine the scope of the debate on embryo research, which cannot be separated from the moral issues that underline the abortion question. It will be for Parliament to decide the right approach to those questions on the basis of careful arrangements that commend themselves to people in most parts of the House.

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): The Leader of the House is a good Welshman and he will be aware that the Severn crossing is our main access point. Does he appreciate that there is speculation now that the contract for the second crossing will be awarded to a consortium with major French interests, which will take over the existing bridge and all that that entails? May we have an early debate on this vital matter? Meanwhile will he use his good offices to ensure that a solution is found that will at least maintain the tolls on both crossings at their current prices in real terms?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I would be very imprudent were I to respond affirmatively to the last question posed by the hon. Gentleman.

No decision has yet been taken about the second crossing provisions, but when that decision is reached, the House will be informed about it. That decision will be reached after a proper assessment of the value and merits of the alternatives.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): May I again ask the Leader of the House whether he is aware of the growing public concern about Members and financial interests, including the Chairmen of Select Committees? I echo the concern expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) and urge the Leader of the House to do everything possible to enable the Select Committee on Members' Interests thoroughly to investigate the complaints that have been referred to it.

That can be done only if the backlog of inquiries facing that Committee are dealt with. I suggest that that Select Committee establishes a number of Sub-Committees so that thorough and prompt inquiries are made into the complaints facing it. As long as the matter drags on, no recommendations are made and the House takes no decision on such matters, public concern will continue and is bound to escalate.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I understand that there is significant interest in the question of Members' interests, but there must be a limit to my capacity or anyone else's to mobilise parliamentary resources out of thin air. The Select Committee on Members' Interests is seized of all the questions. A few weeks ago, in the light of the debate on the affairs of my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Browne), some extra items were added to the agenda of that Select Committee. The Chairman of the Committee and his colleagues are addressing themselves to the issues as expeditiously as they can. The House has proper procedures for such matters, and they are being followed.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept that the important debate on Hong Kong will not cover the conditions under which Vietnamese boat people are still living there? Is he aware that, in response to my complaint about the filthy, insanitary conditions in the place, I received a reply from the Hong Kong authorities saying that the reason was not that the drains were open, but that people put excrement into them? Can we please have a debate on that, as those conditions are unworthy of us? Will the Leader of the House be kind enough to refer the matter to the Home Secretary, or to someone who can ensure that the people at least have reasonable conditions rather than conditions of which this country should be ashamed?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. and learned Gentleman offers us a glimpse into the obvious when he says that those matters will be outside the scope of the debate on the Hong Kong legislation. He will appreciate that everyone who has addressed the question is bound to be deeply concerned about the conditions in the Hong Kong camps: that is the very reason why the Government are following a policy designed to diminish the numbers forced to face those conditions, and to improve them as far as possible. The real improvement is to be found through reducing the numbers that are obliged to stay there.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): The Leader of the House will be aware that on 11 October last year the Secretary of State for Scotland announced a transitional relief scheme for householders in Scotland who would be

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penalised by having to pay £3 per week extra during the transition between domestic rates and the poll tax. To date, no regulations have been made on that.

We are all aware of the speed with which the Secretary of State for Scotland arrived at the door of No. 10 after the foul-up in the Budget. Will the Leader of the House show the same speed? Will he grab his right hon. and learned Friend by the scruff of the neck to make him come here and lay the regulations before the House, so that the people of Scotland receive the just entitlement for which they have waited too long?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am not aware of the particular deficiency to which the hon. Gentleman refers. He himself provided an eloquent tribute to the speed with which my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland does his work, and I am sure that he will continue to do so.

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): The Leader of the House is probably aware that, on Tuesday this week, I presented a ten-minute Bill containing the proposition that the Abortion Act 1967 should be amended to make the law of England and Wales the same as that in Scotland, where there is no upper time limit. The House gave its unanimous consent to a further debate of that proposition.

May I ask the Leader of the House for a procedural ruling on how the House, which already has a proposition before it on abortion, can make separate arrangements to proceed against another Bill? Is it not the case that the proposition that was passed unanimously on Tuesday is now the relevant Bill before Parliament?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I listened to the eloquent observations by the hon. Lady in support of her Bill, which covered a wide range of matters, including that one. The House was kind enough not to oppose its introduction; however, I do not think that she should assume that it will have as optimistic a prospect of making headway as the Bill that we will be debating on Monday.

Ms. Primarolo: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No. Mr. Cohen.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Is the Leader of the House aware that, according to Greenpeace, the United States has today set——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Greenpeace does not organise debates here.

Mr. Cohen: I am asking for a debate on an important matter. According to Greenpeace, the United States has today set a 1,000 yd exclusion zone around its King's Bay submarine base, and the USS Tennessee, armed with Trident D5 missiles, is about to go on operational patrol —the first operational patrol with Trident missiles. Can we have an urgent debate on that huge and dangerous expansion in the world's nuclear arsenal?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am not immediately persuaded by the hon. Gentleman's case.

Points of Order

4.45 pm

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I ask you to defend the interests of hon. Members—I hasten to add that I was not one of them—who are lucky enough on either Tuesdays or Thursdays to draw a question for Question Time between eight and 15 minutes past 3 o'clock? In the past 12 months, it has been increasingly difficult to hear anything that is said at that time. That is a relatively new feature. The only other time that I can remember its happening was during the Falklands war, when there was a good reason for the House to concentrate on one issue. It is not fair to the hon. Members concerned. If the House does not want to have questions beyond 3.8 pm, we should start Prime Minister's questions then.

Several Hon. Members: Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let me deal with one thing at a time. I agree with the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham) if he is saying that, in the few minutes before the Prime Minister gets up, there is a growing tendency for private discussions on both sides of the House. I frequently draw attention to that fact.

While I am on the subject of Prime Minister's questions, I should like to say that the quality of the questions asked of the Prime Minister makes a difference to the reaction of the House. We saw an example of that this afternoon when the hon. Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) asked a question that was heard in complete silence.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can we do something about the amplification system? It was not possible to hear anything today. It may have something to do with the cameras and the BBC, but we really must be able to hear what is said.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is it on the same matter—the microphones?

Mr. Madden: Yes, Mr. Speaker. You have been asked on a number of occasions to try to do something to help hon. Members to hear the proceedings. May I ask why, over the past week, the microphone nearest to me has been installed? It is smaller than all the others. I wonder if a bit has dropped off it, whether it is an experiment or whether it is a direct line to MI5.

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that it is the latter. *[Interruption.]* Order. This is a serious matter. We are in an experimental period for television. The answer to the hon. Members for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) and for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) is that we are also experimenting with microphones that were not originally designed for television. They need a certain amount of adjustment, and that is being carried out.

Whether hon. Members can be heard in the Chamber is entirely up to the House. Let me repeat that the quality of questions that are asked determines the reaction that they receive.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Sir Geoffrey Howe): Further to that point of order on microphones, Mr. Speaker. The impact of television on the microphonic equipment has been insignificant. The microphones are the same as those that have served the House for a long time, although modest changes have been made to take account of the positioning of people in relation to the Dispatch Box.

The real problem may be thought to be that they are rather ancient, but, even if they were to be replaced by a modern system, it would be difficult to design a microphone that can at one and the same time pick up the voice of the hon. Member who has the Floor of the House, speaking at a modest level, and exclude hubbub from the rest of the House. That balance is extremely difficult to achieve, but it is under continuous consideration by the Select Committee on Televising the Proceedings of the House.

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Skinner, if it is helpful.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Yes, it is, Mr. Speaker. We had the same problem a few years ago, before television came in. You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that the last leader of the Liberal party, as it was then called, said that he could not be heard. A separate microphone was installed for him alone because he had such a wee small voice. To put the balance right, another microphone was placed on the Tory side of the Chamber for the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen)—for when he crossed the Floor.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that we can have a debate on microphones this afternoon. We have important——

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am on my feet. We have a very important debate on the community charge in the form of two prayers. *[Interruption.]* Order. I am sure that all the points of order are serious, but hon. Members who are not interested in taking part in the debate on the community charge should bear in mind the fact that many of their colleagues are.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Further to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham), Mr. Speaker. Will you tell the House what you think of the quality of the questions put by the Leader of the Opposition? Conservative Members feel that he never has an opportunity——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Fortunately, the Chair is never required to give an opinion about such matters.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am interested not in arguments about the quality of questions, but in the lights, which are having a bad effect on my eyes and probably on other hon. Members' eyes. When will something be done about the glare? I have to put my hand above my eyes like this to get a view of the House. It is a serious matter, and sooner or later something must be done about controlling those lights.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I suggest that other hon. Members who want to ask questions on this matter should refer them to the Select Committee on Televising the Proceedings of the House, because I cannot answer them. They are properly matters for the Committee and should be drawn to its attention.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): I have to pursue this matter, Mr. Speaker, because, unfortunately, the comments by the Leader of the House were technically incorrect. The reason we cannot hear in the House of Commons has nothing to do with the quality of the microphones. The reason is that, in order not to spoil the sound track going out with the television transmission, the speakers in the back of the Benches have been turned down. That is why we cannot hear the proceedings when there is a hubbub. Can we have a frank admission of that fact?

Mr. Speaker: Again, those matters should be raised with the Select Committee. When the microphones were turned up, there was so much noise from about 50 amplifiers that those speaking could not be heard.

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Well, I am beginning to get involved in a debate. I cannot take any more questions about televising.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): You, Mr. Speaker, may have noted that the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) has moved himself closer to the microphone which he said had some sinister purpose. I believe that he thinks that good things come wrapped up in large parcels, and I have sympathy with him.

Mr. Speaker: I know. It might be helpful if this were the last word on the matter.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: No. I am constantly seeking to help the House on this matter, which is serious. It would help those concerned about noise if, when hon. Members spoke, they stood close to a microphone. They would not then need to speak so loudly.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Ms. Primarolo—on a separate point of order.

Ms. Dawn Primarolo (Bristol, South): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a separate point of order.

In reply to my question during business questions, the Leader of the House commented on the intentions of hon. Members in not opposing the Medical Services for Women Bill which I introduced. The Leader of the House could not have known all the intentions of every hon. Member, and his comment undermined the rights of Back Benchers to move ten-minute Bills and impugns motives which he cannot know exist. Therefore, I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to

[Ms. Dawn Primarolo]

rule that the Leader of the House could not have known that and that the ten-minute Bill, unopposed, stands in its own right.

Mr. Speaker: The House gave the hon. Lady permission to bring in her Bill, which has yet to have a Second Reading.

Mr. Cryer: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No. I am taking no more points of order. Other hon. Members want to speak in the debate and I cannot answer any more questions about microphones.

Mr. Cryer: It is not about microphones.

Mr. Speaker: If it is not about microphones but a different matter I will hear it.

Mr. Cryer: Yes, a different matter. When information is sent out about the operations of the House, such as the guide to the Chamber, could the information be included that when we stand up we are not being deferential to the Prime Minister or anybody else? Many people outside believe that we are. However, we are trying to be called. The past few minutes, during which I have been trying to be called, and jumping up and down, illustrate the case very well.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): Is it consistent that the Opposition parties should take part in last night's debate about allocation of time and then take time from today's debate with a vast number of questions to my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House and bogus points of order?

Mr. Speaker: That is not very helpful, either.

Adjournment Motions

Mr. Speaker: I remind hon. Members that on the motion for the Adjournment of the House on Thursday 5 April, up to 10 hon. Members may raise with Ministers subjects of their own choice. Applications should reach my office by 10 pm on Monday next. A ballot will be held on Tuesday morning, and the result made known as soon as possible thereafter.

Community Charge

4.56 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Community Charges (Deductions from Income Support) (No. 2) Regulations 1990 (S.I., 1990, No. 545), dated 8th March 1990, a copy of which was laid before this House on 9th March, be annulled.

May I say how glad I am to be speaking from a microphone which is unlikely to be either decreased in size or moved.

The Opposition wish to pray against some of the poll tax benefit regulations. Those regulations implement what is fast proving the most detested tax introduced in this country for 600 years. In addition, the way in which the regulations have been handled shows that the Government are not only breaking down, but are hell-bent on a campaign of self-destruction.

I shall start with the Government's strongest card: the sweetener they threw into the Budget to spice up what would otherwise have been described as a wimpish Budget. The Chancellor of the Exchequer clearly believes that doubling the upper capital limit for poll tax benefit will elicit instant gratitude and, no doubt, long-term political dividends. However, it has blown up in his face, not only because, as he had the grace to admit, he clean forgot about the existence of Scotland, but because he, as Chancellor—or was it the Secretary of State for Social Security—got his sums wrong. Far from being the great concession it was cracked up to be, it has turned out to be a huge political con.

In his Budget speech, the Chancellor claimed that 250,000 people would benefit. We now know that the true figure is about half that—only 130,000. He said that two thirds of those benefiting would be pensioners. But that is still less than 1 per cent. of all the pensioners who will have to pay the poll tax. He did not say that this much-touted concession still does not compensate for the tightening of the capital rules which the Government imposed two years ago. If the Government claim credit for having eased the capital rules, they must also accept censure for having introduced the initial capital rule two years ago which deprived 700,000 pensioner households from any entitlement to housing benefit or rate rebate.

It was only when my right hon. and learned Friends raised a huge political outcry about this matter that the former Secretary of State was forced to backtrack a few months later in May 1988. A total of 100,000 pensioners were then brought back into the benefit net. With this further concession the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Social Security will bring back another 100,000 pensioners into the entitlement net, but that still leaves 500,000 pensioners who were entitled to benefit before 1988 but are still left outside the benefit net. It is as though someone had robbed a bank, but then, under pressure, given back some of the swag. That is hardly an occasion for unqualified gratitude, more perhaps a case where humility, and perhaps an apology, from the Government are overdue.

It is not only that the numbers of the newly entitled will be distinctly modest, but much more: that most of them will find out when they claim that they will get little. Many will get nothing. As I said last night, that is because of the rule on tariff income. For every £250 in savings of more than £3,000, people are deemed, however totally unrealistic it may be, to receive an income of £1 a week. That reduces their poll tax rebate by 15p a week.

Let me take as an example—not an extravagant example—the case of a single pensioner with a small occupational pension, which takes her £10 a week over her applicable amount, and who also has £15,500 in capital —just the sort of person whom the Government are trying to help. Because of her extra £10, £1·50 will be deducted from her poll tax benefit. The tariff income from her capital would come to £50, so another £7·50 would be deducted on top of the £1·50. Unless her poll tax was more than £611 a year—I think that I am right in saying that not a single local authority has that notorious distinction—the pretend income that is attributed to her would completely extinguish her entitlement to poll tax benefit.

I stress again that that is not, as the House can see, a far-fetched or exceptional case. The sheer modesty of what is being proposed is illustrated by the Government's estimate that it is worth only about £35 million a year, which works out at less than half of 1 per cent. of the total revenue that they will receive from the poll tax. After all the excitement and ballyhoo, with Conservative Members waving their Order Papers in delight at the Chancellor's announcement, the cold reality of minimal relief will disappoint and anger many pensioners whose much-aroused expectations are about to be dashed to the ground. It is surely irresponsible for the Government to boost hopes in that way and to encourage pensioners to fill out complex forms only to find that a zero or negligible rebate is calculated to offset their massive tax bills.

There are two ways out of the dilemma into which the Government have put themselves, but they have consciously refused to take either of them. The first is to raise the lower capital limit as well as the upper one. If the lower threshold at which deductions start were doubled to £6,000, the value of the concession would be greatly increased. That is precisely why my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and I tabled a new clause to that effect during yesterday's Report stage of the Social Security Bill. As hon. Members know perfectly well, the new clause was voted down by Tory Members by 307 votes to 204. That shows that Tory Back-Benchers are a great deal more concerned to prop up a Government who are on the ropes than to protect pensioners.

The other way out of the Government's self-inflicted dilemma would be to revert to the pre-1988 system so that the actual rate of interest was counted rather than the artificial tariff rate. It is absurd for the tariff income to assume a rate of return on savings of 20 per cent. There is a bitter irony in all this. The Tory Government introduced the system two years ago to cut expenditure on housing benefits and rate rebates and they are now impaled on a device of their own making which grossly undermines the value of the poll tax concession that they now claim they wish to make. Not only the people of Scotland, but all thrifty pensioners have been insulted by the Government's incompetent handling of the poll tax rebates.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): My hon. Friend mentioned two ways to get rid of the problem, but there is a third way—to adopt the Labour party's policy and drop the tax altogether. I pray in aid a remarkable editorial in *The Times* today—a paper which supports the Tory party and the Prime Minister through and through—which canvasses the idea that the poll tax should be dropped and a tax based on property and the ability to pay introduced in its place. When we have support from such strange quarters it means that the poll tax is almost friendless.

Mr. Meacher: That is the obvious solution, and it is the solution which the British people overwhelmingly want. However, we know that it will not happen because the iron lady, who cannot turn, has been committed for the past 15 years to the abolition of the rates and their replacement by something like the poll tax. It is her tax and as long as she is Prime Minister it will remain.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that if there had been a secret vote in the Cabinet on the poll tax, the majority would probably have been against any such proposal and, perhaps even now, a motion to repeal the poll tax would be carried? There can be no doubt that on a free vote in the House of Commons the poll tax would have been decisively rejected, as was urged by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) and the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), who is putting forward his own case for the leadership.

Mr. Meacher: None of us knows with certainty the truth of the matter, but I have always assumed that only one member of the Cabinet is in favour of the poll tax. I doubt whether it has a single other taker. Conservative Members would like nothing more than to get rid of the poll tax, but the truth is that the poll tax will get rid of them.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): We all accept reasonable protest, but will the hon. Gentleman repudiate those of his colleagues who are refusing to pay the community charge and so are breaking the law?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. The regulations have nothing to do with that intervention.

Mr. Meacher: That is the sort of remark that we would expect from a former Minister for Sport.

I come now to what might accurately be called the Scottish embarrassment bonus or the "Rifkind" face-saver. It is increasingly clear that "we in Scotland" are becoming rather forgetful. It appears that on a recent visit "we in Scotland" failed to remember that the Scottish Labour party conference was taking place at the same time. One memory loss might constitute a significant offence, but two is decidedly careless.

The Chancellor has now admitted that he completely forgot about Scotland in the Budget and he will not be surprised if Scotland forgets about the Government when it comes to the next election. We shall be looking extremely carefully at the Secretary of State for Scotland's ex gratia scheme to see whether it guarantees full retrospection. A discretionary scheme of ex gratia payments is one thing, but a system of assured rights for all those entitled is another. We welcome the £4 million proposed in a humiliating Government climb-down, but we wish to be sure that Scotland receives a fair deal in exactly the same way as England and Wales.

Our central objection to the poll tax benefit regulations, on which we shall be calling for a vote tonight, relates to the Government's proposal to deduct income support from those on the poverty line if they fail to pay the poll

[Mr. Meacher]

tax. The first and the fundamental point that I make is that those who are poor enough to be on income support should not have to pay the poll tax at all.

Until the Fowler reviews of 1986, it was accepted by all Governments that the supplementary benefit or income support line was so low that rent and rates had to be separately provided for in full. In 1986, for the first time, the former Secretary of State for Health and Social Security decreed that even the poorest on income support would in future be forced to pay 20 per cent. of the poll tax and 100 per cent. of water rates.

The poll tax bills have been fixed at such a high level that the Goverment have been forced to backtrack, but they have done so in a way that still exposes millions of people on income support to paying a hefty chunk of poll tax. That is precisely why such draconian legislation is being introduced today.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Is my hon. Friend aware that in Bradford and a number of other places a problem has arisen for couples who are in receipt of income support and housing benefit because the automatic poll tax rebates which people on income support and housing benefit were told would be paid are not being paid to partners who did not apply or sign for the housing benefit? The poll tax rebate is going only to partners who applied for housing benefit. That is resulting in tens of thousands of people who are in receipt of housing benefit and income support not getting full poll tax rebates and it is causing great hardship. What action do the Government plan to take to alert those people who will lose their poll tax rebate so that they can apply immediately for the poll tax rebate that the Government have been telling them for months they will receive automatically?

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend raises one of a wide range of anomalies about entitlement to that benefit. We are all interested to hear the Minister's answer to that.

The problem with the poll tax is that it is extremely complex and the entitlement to rebate is hedged round with several conditions that are not exactly common sense. My hon. Friend has illustrated the point that, although the Government claim that a large number of people will be entitled to rebate, because of the complexity and difficulty of the regulations and people's lack of awareness, only a small number of people will gain significantly, but we look forward to the Government's answer on that.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): My hon. Friend may be interested to hear about a case in my constituency involving a single pensioner who has no savings whatsoever and has been entitled to rebate, but because his retirement pension is £46·73 a week any entitlement he has to income support has been cancelled, so he receives none. He has to pay a poll tax bill of more than £81 this year out of that small income. Because he has chronic bronchitis and circulatory troubles and needs to spend a great deal on heating his house, he has less than £30 a week to pay for his food, clothing and poll tax and he is in desperate straits.

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend illustrates one of the many thousands of cases which no doubt will be drawn to the attention of the Minister and his officers in the next few months. We look forward to his detailed reply on these matters.

The Government have not succeeded in compensating people on income support. They have claimed to protect them from the pressures of having to pay 20 per cent. of the poll tax by providing a 20 per cent. personal allowance for income support claimants based on the Government's average poll tax figure of £278. But that is flawed in three ways. First, as everyone knows, the figure of £278 is a Government fiction and the average figure is about £363, or £85 higher. Income support claimants will not be compensated for that shortfall. Secondly, there will be no compensation for people on income support living in areas charging above the average poll tax. The Opposition have always argued that people on the poverty line should not be treated as pawns in the Government's political battles with local government of any party, and we stick to that principle. Thirdly, the amount added to income support to compensate for the 20 per cent. of poll tax that everyone has to pay was arbitrarily reduced by the Government by about half.

The effect of those three factors is that average poll tax payers on income support in England and Wales will have to find more than £36 from their basic benefit. A couple will have to find almost £76, and in 34 local authorities couples on income support will be more than £2 a week worse off, and at income support level that really matters. In Haringey for example, a couple on income support will be £163 a year worse off. In case anyone thinks that I have particularly chosen a Labour-controlled council, in leafy south Oxfordshire they will be £116 worse off.

There are 4·6 million poll tax payers on income support in England and Wales and nearly all will lose money—with the exception of people living in only two local authorities throughout the country. The steady extortion of money from the poorest in society to subsidise the cost of the poll tax is the most repulsive aspect of a most repulsive tax. Hundreds of thousands of poll tax payers on income support will simply be unable to pay.

The Under-Secretary of State, to whom I am grateful for such a full parliamentary answer, admitted on 19 February:

> "The Department expects that in any year in England, Wales and Scotland some 850,000 applications for deductions from income support may be made in respect of the community charge, though the number will depend on the extent to which authorities choose to recover unpaid charges using this particular method. We expect about 700,000 of the applications to be enforced."

That is an extremely high figure. One of the poll tax regulations that we are debating today implements that enforcement procedure to which we most strongly object. If Conservative Members believe that those consequences spelt out by the Under-Secretary of State are onerous, not to say draconian, they have the opportunity today to reject the regulations.

Where a liability order is made against the single debtor, the deduction can be 5 per cent. of the rate for a single claimant over 25, or £1·85 a week. For a couple who are both in arrears it is double that—£2·90 a week. The severity of the regulation can be judged by the fact that that amount can be deducted from benefit, provided only that a person is left with at least 10p in income support.

The Government are going further still. They propose that deductions for poll tax arrears sit on top of the deductions for other debts—for example, social fund loan repayments. In other words, under this regulation to which we so strongly object, the Government propose that provided that a person will be left with 10p in benefit, he could be forced to pay up to 25 per cent. of his income on housing, fuel, water, and deductions for arrears and still have to pay a further £1·85 a week in poll tax deductions.

The great debt-collecting apparatus will cost a lot of money. I return to the answer given by the Under-Secretary on 19 February which stated:

> "The average annual cost to the Department of servicing each application is estimated to be £26. The total staffing requirement in Great Britain is now estimated to be approximately 470 posts."—*[Official Report*, 19 February 1990; Vol. 167, *c. 554.*]

But even that underestimates the costs. One has to add in the costs to local authorities for registration, billing and interviews, so the total cost is likely to be considerably more than the amount collected. I do not see how one could reach any other conclusion.

There is also the question whether the poll tax deductions take precedence over other deductions for debt. If so, the Department is likely to stop making social fund loans for essential items on the ground that they will not be repaid, or claimants will increasingly have their fuel cut off as payments to the fuel boards are stopped. Of course, councils will not be able to claim arrears through benefit deductions. Local authorities will either have to write off poll tax arrears or use distraint or other measures to recover ridiculously small amounts from the poorest in our community. In the process, councils will simply be adding to the poverty of those on income support because the cost of going to court is invariably added to the original debt. At £100 a time, it could easily amount to more than the original debt.

Why are the Government so gung-ho in pursuing the 1 million low-income families who are already known to be in serious debt when they refuse to take action against landlords who are ripping off the taxpayer by about £420 million a year by continuing to charge the same rent when they no longer have to pay rates to the local authority, when they failed to collect almost £4,000 million of assessed tax revenue in 1988 and wrote off £500 million of so-called uncollectable tax revenue, and when they have failed to collect £250 million of national insurance from the self-employed each year because they will not spend one tenth of that amount on staff to collect it?

If the poll tax is a curse, the regulations to extract tiny amounts of poll tax, at huge cost, from the poorest and most debt-ridden section of the community are an abomination, and tonight the House should reject them.

5.20 pm

The Minister for Social Security (Mr. Nicholas Scott): Although the Opposition have spoken to just one motion, I understand that we are also discussing the next three motions on the Order Paper:

> That the draft Community Charge Benefits (General) Amendment Regulations 1990, which were laid before this House on 13th March, be approved.
>
> That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Community Charge Benefits (Permitted Total) Order 1990 (S.I., 1990, No. 533), dated 7th March 1990, a copy of which was laid before this House on 9th March, be annulled.
>
> That the draft Community Charge Benefits (General) Amendment No. 2 Regulations 1990, which were laid before this House on 20th March, be approved.

The motions must be set against the background of the announcement made by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in the Budget, that he and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had decided to raise capital limits for income-related benefits. I shall deal with the Opposition's criticism of those arrangements, but most hon. Members warmly welcomed that announcement.

Mr. Jim Sillars (Glasgow, Govan): The Minister admitted last night, and he did so again today, that the Treasury and the Chancellor of the Exchequer consulted the Department of Social Security. Did the Department consult the Secretary of State for Scotland or the Scottish Office before the Chancellor made his Budget statement?

Mr. Scott: I can only give the assurance that I gave last night: the Chancellor consulted the Department of Social Security, and we warmly welcomed the opportunity to raise the capital limits, as would any sensible hon. Member.

Mr. Madden: So the answer is no.

Mr. Scott: The matter has been raised elsewhere. My concern was to ensure that the Department was consulted. We welcomed the announcement that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor made to the House.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): The Minister said, as a man of reason, and as any sensible or rational person would, that he agreed to the change for the coming year. Was such an approach made last year? Was there any rational person in the Treasury, the Department of Social Security or the Scottish Office? How was the system allowed to run for a year without anyone noticing that this terribly sensible measure had not been taken?

Mr. Scott: I am sorry, but I shall not spend the afternoon jogging backwards with hon. Members from north of the border. We welcome the new arrangements. They will be to the overwhelming benefit of many people.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) misquoted my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on the number of people who will benefit as a result of his announcement. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor was clearly talking about the number of people on income-related benefits, not just community charge benefit. If the hon. Gentleman doubts that, I can give him the exact quotation, but I imagine that he will not want me to do so as it would further his embarrassment. It is clear that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor was referring to those on income support, housing benefit, family credit and community charge benefit. I shall deal later with the precise number who will benefit from community charge benefit.

I am sure that the House will agree that, with income-related benefits being designed to help people in greatest need, there should be a capital limit above which benefit entitlement ceases. We may argue about the level of the capital limit, but we must all agree that if we are to help those most in need there must be a cut-off point. Under all income-related benefits, the first £3,000 of a claimant's capital resources are ignored, and the lower limit—I know that this is to the regret of the hon. Member for Oldham, West—will not be affected by the announcement made by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. Capital of less than £3,000 and the income that it generates is disregarded in the calculation of a person's or couple's benefit

[Mr. Scott]

entitlement. For all income-related benefits, a standard tariff income of £1 a week is assumed for each £250 above the capital limit.

Apparently, the hon. Member for Oldham, West thinks that that provision is ungenerous. I looked back to discover the state of play in 1979 under the previous Labour Government. The hon. Member for Oldham, West giggles in embarrassment; he probably knows what is coming because, as he does his homework so carefully, no doubt he looked back to that period. Under the supplementary benefit rules in 1979, the first £1,200 was ignored—roughly £2,400 according to today's prices, compared with the £3,000 that operates today. The tariff, on which so much weight has been placed, was 25p a week for each £50 of capital—equivalent to £1 for every £200, compared with the £250 that we operate today.

Much play has been made of the 20·8 per cent. assumed income above the lower capital limit. I do not agree with that system of measurement, but if we accept it for one moment, the system operated by the previous Labour Government was not 20·8 per cent. but 26 per cent.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr) *rose*——

Mr. Scott: Will the hon. Gentleman let me finish the point?

Mr. Meacher: Be fair; allow my hon. Friend to intervene.

Mr. Scott: The hon. Member for Oldham, West normally responds by saying, "In a moment", when an hon. Member wishes to intervene in his speeches. I hope that he will not mind if I do not give way immediately.

The Labour party, which has been so critical of us, operated a capital rule that came in at a lower level and imposed a steeper tariff above it.

Mr. Rooker: What was the upper capital limit cut-off point under Labour?

Mr. Scott: Under Labour, there were differing systems——

Mr. Rooker: What was the upper capital limit cut-off point under Labour? Tell the whole truth, please.

Mr. Scott: Two differing systems operated under Labour until reforms were introduced, mainly by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, in 1986. One set of rules applied to supplementary benefit, but a totally different set applied to housing benefit.

Mr. Madden: So there was not one.

Mr. Scott: Precisely; there was not one. The system for housing benefit was ridiculous because only income was taken into account, regardless of the amount of capital held. That was a completely unsustainable system. The benefits of an aligned system for income-related benefits are obvious to everyone. I think that I have made the point about the Labour party——

Mr. Madden: Get on with it.

Mr. Scott: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is keen to get on with it, because I have proved categorically that we operate a more generous system than the Labour party did.

Mr. Madden: Rather than spending the last five minutes going down memory lane, the Minister should have addressed himself to the question that I put to my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). Is he aware that in Bradford, and in other parts of west Yorkshire, only one person in two-person households will receive poll tax rebate, which for months the Government said would be paid automatically to households receiving income support and housing benefit? Tens of thousands of people are receiving full poll tax demands who should be receiving a rebate. What will the Minister do about that?

Mr. Scott: Local authorities are empowered to treat any claim for housing benefit as a claim for community charge benefit. If the hon. Gentleman believes that things are going wrong in Bradford, his proper course is to contact his local authority to ensure that it is operating the system effectively and that it is treating those claims as claims for community charge benefit. If it is doing that properly, there should not be a problem in Bradford. I recommend——

Mr. Madden: There is a problem.

Mr. Scott: I recommend the hon. Gentleman to take that step with the local authority.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Why do the Government still assume that every £250 of savings generates an income of £1 a week? We have just had a Budget and the Chancellor tells us about all the benefits of thrift, but for my sake and that of everyone else, will the Minister tell us where on the high street one can obtain a 20 per cent. rate of interest on one's savings? The tariff rate of £1 a week for every £250 of savings is twice the real rate that people can obtain, from Girobank or anywhere else.

Mr. Scott: I have just been making the point that when Labour was in office and interest rates were rather lower, the Government assumed a 26 per cent. rate of interest. We debated all this yesterday, although it seems longer ago than that. We are really talking not about the principle of an assumed income, but about a rational way in which we can ensure that as people's capital assets increase they can be less dependent on benefit. The rate at which such support through the benefit system is reduced as capital increases is a matter of judgment. It is wrong to consider it in terms of an assumed return on the capital itself. We should consider what is the proper rate at which we reduce the burden on the taxpayer as people's capital increases.

Mr. Lewis Stevens (Nuneaton): We have been discussing the 20 per cent. tariff. Surely the real position is that up to £8,000, the first £3,000 incurs no penalty at all. At £8,000, the real tariff is approximately 13 per cent., which is a far more realistic rate and gives us a simple way of calculating benefit without the complication of people making returns.

Mr. Scott: My hon. Friend is right. Two factors ameliorate the 20·8 per cent. most frequently quoted. The first £3,000 is disregarded and once benefit begins to be withdrawn above the level the 15 per cent. taper operates for community charge benefit, which further reduces, well into single figures, the rate that is assumed.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): This is a matter of importance. When I live down here, I live in Westminster, which has kept its level down to £195. One of the actions that it has taken to achieve that has been to discontinue the redecoration of the council houses of elderly people. As a consequence, not only will those people have to meet the cost of redecoration themselves, but they will still have to pay the 20 per cent., and 36 painters, most of whom are in my union, the Union of Construction and Allied Trades Technicians, will be thrown out of work. That is just one of the small steps taken by Westminster council to reach the level of £195. Will the Minister explain how those elderly people will be able to raise money to save, to benefit further under the Government's policies? Does the Minister believe that ordinary working people will stand for this in view of the suffering that this policy will cause them?

Mr. Scott: If I were to stand at the Dispatch Box this afternoon and explain exactly how each local authority is operating and how it has managed to fix its poll tax or community charge limits I should spend a great deal of time here. I have done my best to be generous in giving way to hon. Members of all parties. [HON. MEMBERS: "Too generous."] My hon. Friends say that I have been too generous, but I am a generous fellow. It is about time that I got on with the remarks that I want to make.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West described our actions yesterday in defeating the new clause that he had tabled. He must have taken note of the particular anomaly to which I drew his attention and I do not want to go over all that today. However, the hon. Gentleman had every opportunity to draft the new clause properly and sensibly. He did not do so, so we were right to reject it. We are not discussing the level, but whether there is a different rate for single people and couples. The hon. Gentleman seemed to accept my point yesterday, although he said that it was a quibble. It is up to him to get a new clause right.

Mr. Meacher: I do not want to take further time on the issue, but I must say that the Minister is scraping the dregs of the barrel if that is his only point. He is acknowledging a weakness in his proposals. The poll tax is concerned with individuals, yet single persons and married couples receive the same. That is hardly logical. The Minister said that if one of an elderly married couple died, the amount received would be halved under our proposal. However, the whole point about the poll tax is that it is directed at individuals and it would be wrong for such people to receive double. The Minister's objection is worthless.

Mr. Scott: I am interested to hear that the Labour party is prepared to say that, when an elderly partner dies, the community charge rebate is reduced. That would be the consequence of accepting the new clause.

Mr. Meacher: No.

Mr. Scott: With the greatest respect, I must say that the hon. Gentleman is wrong. By increasing the limit for everybody, we have made it possible for almost 200,000 individuals to benefit from community charge benefit. Of those, 150,000 are pensioners. I am not prepared to accept an anomalous new clause which would lead to people having benefit reduced.

It is about time that I continued, otherwise I shall talk out the whole debate and I should not want to do that. Doubling the capital limit for community charge benefit will help almost 200,000 individuals, of whom 150,000 are pensioners. Sixty-five thousand couples will be helped—half of all new cases. The benefit cost in 1990-91 is expected to be about £35 million. The extra cost will be charged to the reserve and will not increase the public expenditure planning total. On average, gainers will gain a £5 a week, or £260 a year, reduction in the community charge bill.

There have been groundless allegations that there is an automatic cut-off at £10,000 of capital resources or savings. As I implied in shorthand terms in the debate yesterday, I can assure the House that 70,000 benefit cases with capital over £10,000 will be able to receive benefit and about 50,000 benefit cases involving pensioners will be affected. They too will gain an average of £5 a week, or £260 a year. It is wholly incorrect to assert that only those whose savings are just above the current £8,000 limit will benefit as a result of our proposals.

It may be helpful if I now explain the way in which the rules regarding the treatment of capital work in practice. The House is familiar with the broad details about the £3,000 and the £1 for every £250. In our exchanges across the Floor of the House, we have cleared all that out of the way.

Mr. Nellist: No.

Mr. Scott: We have. We may not agree, but at least we understand the basis of both arguments. We have acknowledged in the course of our discussions yesterday and today that the community charge benefit scheme, incorporating a taper that is more generous than the old rate rebate scheme under housing benefit—15 per cent. compared with 20 per cent.—is another step in the right direction.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West picked out a few examples and, of course, he chose those least helpful to the Government. I want to give some more average examples about the outcome of our proposals for the community charge benefit scheme. Let us consider a pensioner couple, one of whom is over 80 years old. They pay £30 a week rent and their community charge is £350 each. If they have savings of £15,000 and a weekly income of £75·35—and that does not include income from capital—they would gain £4·51 a week community charge benefit. Therefore, it is clear that many pensioners will gain.

We may also consider the example of an unemployed couple with two children aged 10 and 14. They pay rent of £30 a week and a community charge of £325 each. They have savings of £15,000 and a total weekly income of £74·90. They would get £5·70 community charge benefit. It is clear that considerable benefits will flow to a wide range of people as a result of the changes.

I believe that the overwhelming majority of hon. Members welcome the changes. Of course, it is the Opposition's job to nit-pick and criticise, but most people accept that we are taking an important step in the right direction. Hon. Members accept that the conscientious efforts of people with low incomes who have built up savings for retirement should be recognised in the system of community charge benefit.

Mr. Meacher: The Minister has quoted examples that he believes confirm the Government's case. As he always talks about the spread of occupational pension schemes and the amount that people receive in occupational pensions, does he accept that if the people in the cases that he has quoted had an occupational pension of as little as £30 or £40 a week the benefit accruing would be nil?

Mr. Scott: With regard to occupational pensions, that may well be so. However, I was referring to people in the precise circumstances that I outlined. Just as one's capital affects the calculation of benefit in any income-related benefit scheme, so too does income from any other source. We cannot get away from that fundamental principle.

I want to refer now to claims for benefits, and the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) might be interested in this.

Mr. Nellist: Does the Minister have any information about the number of people in receipt of occupational pensions, in relation to the number of people who have between £15,000 and £16,000 in savings? There must be a few million people with works pensions, who have worked 30 or 40 years, who will be hammered while the rebates, which the Minister described as generous, will be extended to people with savings.

Mr. Scott: My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will have listened to that point with great care and we shall see whether we can be helpful to the House—if I ever get to the end of this speech.

The House will be aware that the changes come into effect on 1 April this year. The regulations provide for backdating claims from people who will become entitled to benefit as a result of the new benefit rules. That will mean —and this is important—that so long as people make claims by 27 May, they will be able to receive any benefit for which they were eligible during the period after the increase takes effect on 1 April. As the hon. Member for Oldham, West will understand, it is unusual in social security matters to allow backdating.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): As the Minister will be aware, many people receive cash in lieu of concessionary fuel, which affects housing benefit. Such a case is at a tribunal; the tribunal chairman found that the Department was wrong in taking that into consideration. If the Department does not take the case any further on appeal or if it is lost on appeal, will there be retrospective payments for people whose benefits have been affected?

Mr. Scott: I would have to see the final outcome of that case before I commited myself to replying to that question. I gave way to the hon. Gentleman because I respect him highly. However, he would not expect me now, in advance of the tribunal's decision or in advance of an appeal by either side, to give a commitment about backdating.

We shall ensure that so long as people claim by 27 May, they will be able to have benefit backdated to 1 April. I hope that that will be helpful because I am aware that a new benefit such as this can confuse people. We want to ensure that people are aware of their rights and are given the maximum opportunity to claim. We have discussed those matters with the local authority associations and they gave general support to the changes. Local authorities are making every effort to get benefits to the new claimants as soon as possible.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend for his great patience. Will he take the opportunity in this debate to give the lie to an allegation made in another part of the Palace today, by the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), that young people living at home with their parents face eviction because of the rebate scheme? Will he confirm that parents are not legally responsible for meeting the community charges of their children who are over 18? Will he also confirm that any young person who is genuinely unemployed will receive maximum help, irrespective of the income of his parents?

Mr. Scott: That is absolutely right, as one would expect.

Mr. Wilson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Scott: No. The hon. Gentleman will have other opportunities to make his points and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will reply. However, I believe that it is the mood of the House that I should conclude my remarks as soon as possible. That is certainly my view and I believe that it is widely shared.

I want to consider briefly the amending regulations that were laid before Parliament earlier this month. I do not believe that the House would welcome a line-by-line explanation of them and I do not intend to embark on that. However, the regulations make a number of important changes that affect several groups of people. For example, they provide for an increased disregard of £10 a week for war widows' pensions and war disablement pensions, which was announced last July. They also provide that the special payment to war widows whose husbands served before 1973, which was announced before Christmas, shall be disregarded totally when assessing claims for community charge benefit. Those payments are also tax free. The regulations provide that such payments are to be disregarded completely for community charge benefit. That means that the additonal help being provided for war widows whose husbands served before 1973 will not affect the help to which they are entitled under the scheme.

I want now to consider the Community Charges (Deductions from Income Support) (No. 2) Regulations 1990, which were laid before Parliament on 9 March 1990 and which come into effect on 1 April. The House will be aware that the main principle behind these deduction regulations is that there should be some measure of equality of treatment between those in employment and those receiving benefit. Deductions from income support for those receiving benefit represents a parallel measure to attachment of earnings for those in work where people fail to pay their community charge.

To achieve a liability order, the charging authority must first obtain a liability order from a magistrates court to prove that it is owed the money by the claimant. The liability order triggers the operation of the regulations, which provide that when a local authority has obtained a liability order for a community charge debt it may then apply for deductions from income support to meet that debt. In applying for deductions, the local authority must provide sufficient information to enable the local social security office to identify the debtor. If the adjudication officer decides that there is sufficient income support in payment, the standard rate of deduction will be £1·85 a week, and £2·90 a week for a couple if an order is made against both of them and income support is payable for both of them.

The regulations fix those weekly rates of deductions; there is no provision for them to be varied. The lower rate of deduction is the same as for any other third-party debt. We have taken great care to ensure that the regulations are in harmony with the rules governing payment to any other third party, which are contained in schedule 9 of the Social

Security (Claims and Payments) Regulations 1987.

To sum up, the Government believe that it is right that deductions from income support should be made where the claimant fails to pay his community charge and the charging authority has a liability order to prove the debt. Those regulations are an extension of the Department's existing procedures. Accordingly, I invite the House to reject the prayer against them since they strike a fair balance between the needs of the local community which has to pay the community charge and those who fail to do so. I also invite the House to reject the prayer against the permitted total order.

The Community Charge Benefits (Permitted Total) Order 1990 allows local authorities to make additional payments of community charge benefits to claimants where they consider the circumstances to be exceptional. Those discretionary powers restrict the payment to no more than the maximum community charge benefit. Therefore, however exceptional the circumstances, the charge payer still has to pay 20 per cent. of the charge set by the authority. Primary legislation requires the Department to set a ceiling on the amount of discretionary payments that an authority may make. Similar arrangements apply to housing benefit. We therefore decided that the prescribed ceiling for those discretionary payments should be set at 0·1 per cent. of the total amount of community charge benefit that an authority pays out in a year. We have no evidence that the limit causes difficulties for local authorities and I believe that it offers welcome flexibility for dealing with exceptional circumstances.

I commend the order to the House.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Unless hon. Members are brief from now on, many hon. Members who wish to speak will be extremely disappointed.

5.50 pm

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I shall take those words to heart, Madam Deputy Speaker, and be extremely brief.

People on income support are not being treated equally regarding deductions from benefit when compared with people on earnings. Some people in receipt of income support would like their poll tax payments to be deducted from their benefit automatically—similar to what happens with a direct debit for people with earnings. But they will not be allowed that facility, so they are not being treated equally. They will be treated in that way only if a debt builds up. That unequal treatment is grossly unfair.

If my memory serves me right, the Minister said that the provisions will relate to the court costs as well as to the debt. Without checking the Minister's figures, I do not think that, once the costs are added to the 20 per cent. debt, people will be able to pay off those sums during the first 12 months. As they approach the next year and the next poll tax, their debt will go up and up and up.

When the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security replies to the debate, I should like a commitment that the House of Commons will be given the information that it requires. Hon. Members need to know how many people at each local office are having a liability order slapped against them for deductions from benefit. On 14 November last year, I asked the Secretary of State to list how many claimants on income support at each local office in Birmingham had had their names and addresses sent to the community charge registration officer by the local office. The Minister gave the standard answer that the information was not readily available and that it could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Not to be put off, the next day I wrote to the managers of the two local offices that serve my constituency. Both managers replied by return of post stating that they had contacted their headquarters about it and could not give me the information. Although eventually they were advised by their headquarters that they could tell me, initially Ministers tried to stop the information coming out. When I went to my local office, the staff there were instructed, "Do not answer him; we will think about it."

A lot of trouble would be saved all round—for local managers and local staff—if we could be given such information at the Dispatch Box when hon. Members ask questions about their local offices and the number of income support claimants who are affected. We should be given that information without the rigmarole of having to write to the local managers or even the Minister. We simply want answers to parliamentary questions about a matter for which the Minister is directly accountable to the House. I should like that point to be clarified when the Minister replies.

Before mentioning some of the anomalies with rebates, I wish to make a point about the independent living fund. Although I do not have it with me, I received a written answer on this from the Minister some weeks ago, and some clarification would be desirable. I have only one constituency case that relates to the independent living fund, and although I do not have to declare an interest, I freely admit that it involves a member of my own family. But the person concerned is a constituent and is entitled to her Member of Parliament's services, just like anybody else.

In effect, the lady concerned has all her income above income support levels subvented to the independent living fund as her contribution to its contribution. Therefore, all her graduated pension and all her occupational pension have to be paid to help meet the independent living fund's contribution to the care and other arrangements made by the local authority. In effect, she has been told, "You do not have anything above income support levels because we need it to help with the contributions." That lady cannot apply for a poll tax rebate because she could not fill in the form and state honestly that she is in receipt of income support, because she is not. She has an occupational pension and a graduated pension.

One of two things must happen. Either people who are involved in independent living fund arrangements have to have their poll tax discounted above income support levels —in other words, they can keep the poll tax amount so that they can pay the tax—or they should be able to apply for a rebate like anybody else who has a net disposable income at only income support level. The position must be clarified. Like me, the social services department in Birmingham has attempted to clarify this anomaly, but without success. Although the Minister's answer was clear, what we were told should happen is not happening. Despite its problems, the independent living fund is of enormous benefit to many people in helping to keep them in their own homes. It is crucial, but the penalty that will be imposed if changes are not made is unacceptable.

[Mr. Jeff Rooker]

I shall not rehearse all the arguments about student nurses, but I must refer to some of the anomalies. The Minister said earlier, "We have set it all out now. Everybody understands it. It is simple. Everybody knows where they stand on poll tax rebates." I must advise him that most people do not and that even those who understand do not think that the system is fair. I have received a parliamentary answer about the position of Royal Air Force officers. The Ministry of Defence has said that it is aware of the 411 trainees at RAF Halton and that it is telling all the other service stations to ensure that their trainees and students are similarly classified. That is fine for them, but some of them have incomes of as much as £9,000 per year. It is wrong that they should get the rebate when student nurses do not.

One of my constituents wrote to me only last week. She was a health visitor with earnings of £12,000 per year and was due to go on a course at Birmingham polytechnic. It had been agreed that she would be classified as a student and that she would be entitled to an 80 per cent. rebate on her poll tax. Circumstances that I need not go into have meant not only that she is unable to go on the course, but that she has had to leave her job. She is now a housewife with no income and she will receive no rebate because of joint and several liability. She asked me how, when she was earning £12,000 per year, going on a course and married to a husband who was working, she would get an 80 per cent. rebate on her poll tax, whereas now, when she is not working, has no income and is not going on that course, she has to pay her full poll tax. It does not make sense. If the system is shot full of anomalies like that, the Minister has not heard the end of the difficulties about poll tax rebates.

Poor people will be in real trouble. I should like to share with the House a couple of sentences that were uttered when these issues were debated on 23 February 1988, which seems a long time ago now. I refer to the 17th sitting of the Committee that considered the Local Government Finance Bill:

> "Above all, I am worried because in recent years we have seen the development of two societies . . ..
>
> I am not over-dramatising the position, but I have noticed the haunted look in the eyes of people who shuffle into my surgery. They have been caught in the poverty trap which has come about by a combination of our benefits and tax system and low income . . ..
>
> We have a get-rich-quick, materialistic environment. It scorns people who cannot keep up with it. That is also distressing for parliamentarians. People need our help; they must not be kicked in the teeth by a system that is becoming increasingly hard on them."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E,* 23 February 1988; c. 884.]

I am not quoting a Labour Member of Parliament; I am quoting a Conservative Member of Parliament. I shall not embarrass him by identifying him. The hon. Gentleman is no longer in his place, as he was a few minutes ago—*[Interruption.]* Very well—it is public knowledge—it was the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes)——

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Surprise, surprise.

Mr. Rooker: Conservative Members are trying to dismiss that statement. A Conservative Member of Parliament has seen the "haunted look". Two years ago, when we were discussing the poll tax rebate system and how it would work, the Secretary of State said, in effect, "Why should what the duke has to pay be different from what the dustman has to pay?" That is the kind of attitude that we are facing.

The system is unfair. It is shot through with anomalies. With the best will in the world and, at the Department of Social Security, with the finest of dedicated civil servants —I am making up for last night—who do their best to serve Ministers, and who, of course, do not ask questions about the effects of the policies in the first place, the system will not work. The poll tax does not deserve to work. In fact, the rebate system will be the final nail in its coffin.

6 pm

Mr. Timothy Raison (Aylesbury): Hon. Members may recall that I did not support the introduction of the community charge when the legislation was passed two years ago. I am bound to say that many of the gloomy predictions made at that time have been fulfilled. However, in this debate we are concerned not with fundamental principles but with the very important question of how to implement the charge, and whether that can be done in as reasonable, perhaps even humane, a manner as possible. Elements of the instruments before us today show that Government are trying to ensure that implementation is eased. They have taken certain important steps to ease the impact of the charge.

My right hon. Friend the Minister referred to the generous rebate taper level. It is exceptionally generous compared with almost anything else. Then there is the transitional relief, designed to limit increases where charges are more than £156 above what the Government deem to be a sensible level. In addition, the Chancellor, in the Budget, raised the capital limit to £16,000. That is the subject of the fourth of the instruments that we are considering.

All those things are welcome in principle; they are genuine attempts to ease the introduction of the community charge. However, we still have not done nearly enough to ease the burden on many people who are hit hard by the community charge. Some of the concessions, which were certainly intended to be helpful, have not had the effect that, at first sight, it appeared they would have. In the process of easing the transition into the new system, the Government must go further.

How can that be done? I shall briefly offer one or two thoughts. First, I return to a point that has been raised already. I refer to the capital limits—in particular, to the effect of the assumption that each £250 of capital above £3,000 should add £1 a week to the level of income on which rebates are assessed. As my right hon. Friend the Minister reminded us, this matter was debated here only a few hours ago, but I do not think that the debate has been put to rest. We cannot say that we have got the system right. We really are assuming the equivalent of a 20·8 per cent. yield on capital. That cannot be justified.

I accept that, so long as someone remains within the rebate range, he will have to pay only 15 per cent. of the increase, and I have referred already to the fact that there is a generous rate of taper. However, the real problem is that this level of deemed income will take certain people right out of the income range within which they can get help. Under the provisions that we are debating, they might qualify in terms of capital, but because of their income they will fail to qualify. The Government really must face up to that fact.

The answer must be provided by doing something like dropping the assumption that £250 of capital will yield an income of £1 a week and assuming that the yield will be about 50p a week. One could try to tie the level more precisely to prevailing interest and yield levels, but, for administrative simplicity, a rough and ready yardstick such as that would probably make more sense. I hope that my right hon. Friend will see the force of this point and will take it very seriously.

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): My hon. Friend has referred to the generous rate of taper. In historical terms, this is correct, but I should like to draw my hon. Friend's attention to a written answer that I received from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security on 23 March 1990. That answer, which is recorded in column *788* of Vol. 169 of the *Official Report*, reveals that a pensioner couple aged between 60 and 74 on an income of £75·55 would get the maximum rate of community charge benefit, but that if that income rose to £106·23, even on the assumption of a £600 community charge between them, they would lose 50 per cent. of their entitlement to community charge benefit.

Mr. Raison: My right hon. Friend has made a significant point, which the House will have clearly heard.

I want to turn to the next element in the package that the Government have offered in an attempt to ease this process—the transitional relief, the help for single people and couples where charges are more than £156 above current rates. This too is welcome, but it assumes sensible spending by the local authority. The judgment as to what is a sensible level of spending is rather hard to justify. In the debate earlier this week, we heard that it was based on an assessment of what the local authority received in the current year, plus 4·64 per cent. Clearly 4·64 per cent. is below the rate of inflation. As a result, the £156, especially in so far as the scheme touches on the assumed level of spending, has its weakenesses.

This too is a matter that could be tackled. If I were to pick out the most useful single short-term action that could be taken to relieve the pressure of the community charge, it would be a reduction of the £156 to £104, or perhaps even £52. That could be done without enormous administrative complication, and it would have immediate effect. Every penny of the money being provided by way of benefit would, by definition, go to the people who needed it most. I realise that this is not the direct responsibility of my right hon. Friends, but I urge on them the need to think very carefully about my proposition. It could very rapidly do enormous good.

I hope to goodness that the Government will not get sucked into the business of extensive rate capping. That would only prolong the agony, month after month. It would also confirm the belief that the community charge is not achieving its objective. It would undoubtedly lead to endless court actions and to local authorities making cuts in those services in which they felt that cuts would have the greatest and most dramatic effect. I ask my right hon. Friends to pass those points on to their colleagues.

I want to return to a point that has cropped up in this debate—whether those who are on income support should pay any community charge at all. One has an instinctive initial sympathy with the argument that anyone on income support should not have to pay the community charge. On reflection, however, one must accept that, since we have the community charge system anyway, interfering with the objective of achieving greater accountability in local government would make total nonsense of the whole thing. I have therefore come reluctantly to the view that those on income support should have to pay the notional sum—or the 20 per cent.-plus, which I accept is more than notional. But that makes it all the more important that they should be helped in other ways to maintain their standard of living.

As other right hon. and hon. Members want to take part in the debate, I shall not go further, save to say that the Government must immediately take further steps to make the system operate more fairly and to win more acceptance for it among the public at large. Over the coming year, it will be crucial to think again about the fundamental problem of whether there is some way of relating the community charge much more closely to ability to pay.

6.9 pm

Mr. Matthew Taylor (Truro): The debate is reactive to the outcry against this unfair and regressive tax. That is the background to the comments of every hon. Member. The regulations, particularly those which came through the Budget, are an attempt to make some adjustment in view of the unprecedented response, across the generations, to the tax. I am still surprised at how many Conservative Members did not see the gathering storm clouds. There are a number of hon. Members in the Chamber who served, as I did, in Committee on the Local Government Finance Act 1988, which introduced the tax. Hon. Members on this side warned the Government what would happen; some of their own Back Benchers warned them, and so did almost every outside body. Yet a succession of hon. Members who voted the legislation through seem to be surprised by what has happened.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): The people who could best have warned the Government were the Scottish Conservative Members who served on the Standing Committee on the legislation which imposed the poll tax on Scotland, but most of them lost their seats at the last election.

Mr. Taylor: I was about the say that they would have found it harder to warn the Government because they are no longer here.

In regard to the regulations about deduction from income support, all the other deductions associated with loans and all the rest come first and the poll tax deduction comes on top, so we see how penal and draconian the measure is. A person might have 25 per cent. of his income support deducted even before the poll tax is considered. Many people whose income is on or just above the exemption limit do not know how they will pay the tax.

On Monday night, I addressed a meeting in my constituency about the poll tax. The people there do not normally come to political meetings. They were angry and were reacting in an extreme way. I tried to explain the penalties and difficulties. The reason for their reaction was that they cannot afford to pay the tax. When some of them spoke to me privately after the meeting, they were more

[Mr. Taylor]

friendly but they were frightened because they do not know how they will pay. That is what we find about the people who are coming to our surgeries.

The explanatory memorandum on the Community Charge Benefits (General) Amendment Regulations says:

> "Regulation 78 is amended so that collective community charge contributions may in specified cases be paid direct to the collective community charge payer without the consent of the person entitled to the benefit."

Perhaps the Minister would explain that. It seems that the people who are entitled to the benefit will not actually be the people who are expected to have paid it. I am not sure why the benefit should go to the landlord.

I should like Ministers to take up with their colleagues the case of a mature student in my constituency. She has two children and is studying in Plymouth, where she has to live for part of the week. She is expected to pay the 20 per cent. contribution there. Otherwise, because she is on income support, she would have been paying 20 per cent. in my constituency. Because she has a property in my constituency, where her children live during the week, she will have to pay a standard community charge, a double poll tax. The problem has not been properly resolved by the Government. I cannot believe that it is intended. If it cannot be dealt with here, I hope that Ministers will see that something is done about it, because it is clearly nonsense.

The Chancellor's announcement about capital limits, intentionally or otherwise, misled many people. When they heard that the limit was to be increased from £8,000 to £16,000 they believed that they would be entitled to considerable extra help. Certainly they believed that they would be entitled to some extra help. When councils dealt with the flood of problems, more often than not people found that they will not get any help or that the help will be minimal.

We have to explain that the concession is based on the idea that they are getting a return of 20 per cent. on their savings investment. Although they might not be pleased about it, people might understand it if the deduction was based on actual income. The problem is that they are not getting a 20 per cent. return on their savings, apart from the fact that they have already paid tax on the money before putting it aside. Instead of increasing the capital limit to £16,000, the Chancellor should have tackled the limit of £3,000 or the rate of reduction which, more than anything, is divorced from reality.

If the concession is to be based on people's income, why is there a cut-off limit? If we could find someone with savings of £16,000 who is still entitled to help—I think we would be hard-pressed to do it—it is not logical to say that that person will not get help. By definition, the person needs help.

Not only did the Chancellor not think about Scotland: he did not think through his policy as a whole. It does not add up. He has admitted that it was rushed through at the last minute, with insufficient consultation. I think it was rushed through without any thought. The Government had read in the newspapers that it would be a good idea to increase the capital limit to £16,000, so they bunged it through, and ever since they have been wondering what they got up to. We know that they forgot about Scotland. That is not surprising. They forgot about Scotland all the way through. It was not just Ministers who forgot about it; but all the Conservative Members in England who pushed through for Scotland what they now find unacceptable.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Not true.

Mr. Taylor: I beg the hon. Gentleman's pardon. A few Conservative Members—three, I think—paid attention to what was being done north of the border.

The Government are attempting to ameliorate the problems associated with the poll tax. They are trying to deal with the reality of people's inability to pay. Every time Ministers try to come up with a solution, they throw up more problems for themselves. The tax is not based on ability to pay. However much the Government try to adjust it, they cannot do it. It will not work.

Throughout all the debates it has been pointed out that one other country, Papua New Guinea, was foolish enough to precede the Government down this path. However, that is not true. Papua New Guinea did not bring in a poll tax. It was debated there in 1906 but was rejected as too unfair and difficult to introduce. Instead, a local income tax was introduced. Ministers would be wise to follow that example.

6.20 pm

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): I particularly welcome the uprating of the rule on savings because the old system was a disincentive to savers. We must increase saving levels in Britain—*[Interruption.]*—and rather than sniggering, the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) should reflect that the previous Labour Government, instead of giving incentives to savers, had negative interest rates and taxation at 98 per cent., at the highest rate, on savings.

We had a ludicrous state of affairs. That reflects Labour's commitment to savings. We must increase saving levels because the higher they are, the larger the pool of investment for industry—*[Interruption.]*—and the more——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. There is clearly nothing wrong with the microphones in the Chamber. The problem is the barracking that is going on underneath them.

Mr. Oppenheim: Opposition Members do not like hearing pertinent facts about the policies of Labour in power.

A high level of savings provides a larger pool of capital for industry to invest, which puts downward pressure on interest rates. That is why countries such as Japan, which have been economically successful, have concentrated their efforts on persuading people to save. We in Britain have learnt that lesson late, but I am glad that action is being taken to redress the balance.

The new regulations do not help many people who do not qualify for rebate, but who are suffering as the result of high levels of community charge. Media cover to date has concentrated on Conservative areas that have problems of their own, problems which are largely irrelevant to my county of Derbyshire.

Some Conservative county councils receive little by way of Government grant. Surrey, for example, gets only £60 a head. In addition, some of those areas are paying substantial sums—as much as £75 a head—into the safety net. They may complain that they are subsidising Labour areas such as Derbyshire.

We in Derbyshire do not have that excuse because not only are we getting a massive amount by way of Government grant—three or four times Surrey's level—but in my constituency we are also benefiting from the safety net at levels ranging from £51 to £58 a head. Unfortunately, the media have concentrated on Conservative areas, which have one set of problems, and ignored the fundamental problems in Labour-controlled counties such as Derbyshire.

Derbyshire has no excuse for having a high community charge because it is generously treated by the safety net and has a huge grant, much higher than almost every other shire county.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): Is my hon. Friend aware that the situation to which he refers in Derbyshire is reflected precisely in Lancashire, where Government grant of £533 a head is not sufficient to dissuade the county council from increasing its expenditure by 17 per cent., equivalent to a 30 per cent. increase in the old rates? The result is a community charge £60 to £70 higher than it should be.

Mr. Oppenheim: My hon. Friend makes the point well. It is a shame that the media have not paid more attention to areas such as Lancashire and Derbyshire, where the real problem comes from very high county council spending.

Mrs. Fyfe *rose*——

Mr. Oppenheim: I hope that the hon. Lady will forgive me if I do not give way because time is short. Opposition Members have intervened on many occasions during the debate and the hon. Lady has already intervened, and I see the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East, (Mr. Nellist) bursting at the seams to take part in the debate.

Many people have told me that they would consider a community charge in the county of £250 or even £300 to be fair, but not £400. Many who will not qualify for rebate cannot afford £400. The community charge is at that level in Derbyshire because of the policies of the Labour-controlled county council.

Mr. Skinner *rose*——

Mr. Oppenheim: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman, who has just come into the Chamber, while many of his hon. Friends have sat patiently through the whole debate. No doubt he will have a word with me outside in the Lobby after the Division.

Hon. Members: Oh.

Mr. Skinner: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Oppenheim: Had the hon. Gentleman been here for the whole debate, I should have happily given way to him. But he wanders into the Chamber from the Tea Room or wherever else he has been and expects to make an intervention.

Mr. Skinner: Will mammy's boy give way?

Mr. Oppenheim: No.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member who has the floor has made it clear that he does not intend to give way.

Mr. Oppenheim: We have a ludicrously high community charge in Derbyshire because of the irresponsible and profligate spending policies of Derbyshire county council. My constituents are expected to pay a community charge close to £400 a head, despite benefiting from the safety net and from one of the most generous Government grants available to any shire council, because the county council has decided to have a £34 million contingency fund, equal to almost £50 per charge payer. Having done its best to keep rate rises low last year—election year—it is setting the community charge as high as possible this year so that it can blame the Government.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East) *rose*——

Mr. Oppenheim: In addition, the county council has spent £1 million a year on a public relations department that produces nothing short of socialist propaganda. Just after the community charge level of nearly £400 was announced, the county council threw an expensive party, at the charge payers' expense, to celebrate the release of Nelson Mandela. Many people are happy that he has been released, but they do not want to contribute to a beano at which councillors can celebrate it.

In addition, those councillors have spent £600,000 on an equal opportunities and race relations department; £140,000 on twinning arrangements mainly with towns in China and Russia; and nearly £15 million on a dubious so-called community education programme that most people believe is of little educational benefit.

Derbyshire county councillors have no interest in efficiency and in keeping costs down. That is why—*[Interruption.]*—since 1981, the number of staff employed by the county council has increased by 8,000, a 20 per cent. increase, and the largest increase of any shire county. The county council leadership seems to believe not that it is running a council to provide services for the people of Derbyshire——

Mr. Barnes *rose*——

Mr. Oppenheim: —but that it is running a huge, bloated job agency for its friends in NUPE and COHSE.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Although there are specific motions before the House, the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) seems to be spending much of his speech on items that are not relevant to those motions.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is the most genuine point of order that has been put to me in my three years in the Chair. The hon. Gentleman is quite correct, and perhaps the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) will now address his remarks to the regulations and the question of their annulment.

Mr. Oppenheim: The purpose of the regulations is to reduce the burden of the community charge on poorer people. I am suggesting other ways of reducing that burden. The massive, wasteful and profligate spending policies of counties such as Derbyshire are a significant factor in increasing the burden. Were those councils more sensible in pursuing proper policies, the burden on community charge payers would be substantially reduced. I shall give an example. When district council leaders in Derbyshire got together and produced——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have given a ruling. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will wish to follow it and return to the subject under discussion.

Mr. Oppenheim: I always abide by your rulings, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The regulations will prove to be important in making the community charge fairer. On the other hand, we must retain the principle of accountability in relation to the charge, with everyone making a contribution towards the costs of local government.

We must go further and do our utmost to make the community charge fairer. Most people now realise that not everyone pays the same amount because, after all, there is the rebate system. On top of that, throughout England and Wales, 70 per cent. of local government spending is funded by business or directly by the Government. The funding that comes directly from the Government is financed primarily by income tax, which is disproportionately paid by better-off people. We must do as much as possible to make sure that the community charge is fairer.

Local government also has an important responsibility to ensure that it reduces wasteful spending and does not put unnecessary burdens on poor people who cannot afford to pay them. We do not yet have the accountability that we should, because many people voted for county councils last year under the old system without realising what the new system would mean. As the system develops and is fine tuned, it will introduce a great deal of accountability. Until we have greater accountability—which we may not have for two or three years—it is important to defend less well-off people who do not benefit from rebate or benefit only partially. In a county as irresponsible and wasteful as Derbyshire, the only way to defend people is to cap the council.

6.31 pm

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): The poll tax and the rebate regulations that we are discussing become law in three days—on April fool's day. I am almost tempted to rest my case there, but as I have a few minutes, I shall push on.

During the past two or three weeks we have watched Tory Members of Parliament race around in panic. They were compared to headless chickens. I think that that is unfair. Headless chickens are a model of sobriety compared to the way Conservative Members have panicked in the past few weeks both inside and outside the Chamber. However, their concern was synthetic.

Conservative Members were not worried about low-paid workers presently in low-rated property who will be pauperised by the poll tax. They were not worried about women throughout the country and in every industry who earn on average two thirds to three quarters of the wage of a man but have to pay the same poll tax as a man. They were not worried about young people, 80 per cent. of whom, when they leave school, find jobs that earn less than the Council of Europe decency threshold of £150 a week but who pay the same poll tax as higher paid workers. They were not worried for the 11 per cent. of West Indian families and 29 per cent. of Asian families who have six or more adults in their household and will face bills in three days' time of £2,000, £2,500 or £3,000.

They were worried about Conservative seats. The *Daily Express* predicted that 81 Conservative Members would lose their seats because of the poll tax alone. I do not know about the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), but if the Prime Minister were run over by a bus tomorrow morning, half that lot on the other side would vote for the bus driver to be the next Prime Minister in grateful thanks.

The regulations before us are supposed to make a fundamental difference to the mass opposition to the poll tax throughout the country. We should remember that only 19 per cent. of the population support the poll tax; 81 per cent. are against it. The regulations will do nothing of the sort. Many families, particularly the 3 million families who are already in serious debt, and arrears for mortgage, rent, gas, water and electricity, must find tonight's debate a joke. What the hell does it matter if the rebate threshold is increased from £8,000 to £16,000 if one is already deep in debt? If one had that level of savings, one would not be in debt in the first place. For millions of families, tonight's debate is irrelevant.

Everyone in the country should apply—I shall use the same date as the Minister used—before May 27 for the rebates to which they might be entitled from every local authority in England and Wales. The reason why they should do so is that those who will pay should not pay any more than they have to. Those who will not pay should not owe any more than they have to. What is more, anything that gives the councils a bit more work to do in the next few weeks so that they cannot get round to court orders suits me down to the ground.

The rebates are paltry. To take my own borough of Coventry——

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): What about Wandsworth?

Mr. Nellist: I shall come to Wandsworth in a minute. The hon. Gentleman has just walked in from the bar, obviously after a good lunch, as they say. He should pipe down and let us get on with the serious debate.

In Coventry, the poll tax is £394. That is £7·56 a week. Therefore, the maximum rebate is £6·04. Everyone has to pay a minimum of £1·52 or 20 per cent. For those under 25, that is a net loss of 88p a week. For those over 25 there is a net loss of 85p a week. For couples, there is a net loss each of 88p.

What about those in work? Someone under 25 in Coventry who takes home more than £70·85 a week receives no rebate whatever. Someone over 25 who takes home more than £78·75 a week receives no rebate whatever. A pensioner between the ages of 60 and 74 with an income of more than £85·55 a week receives no rebate whatever. A couple with two children under the age of 11 with a net income of more than £177, including all income from family credit, child benefit or anywhere else, even out of two low-paid jobs of, say, £88 or £89 a week, receives no rebate whatever. That is notwithstanding the regulations that we are discussing.

Young people in Coventry and throughout the country on such levels of low wages will owe from next Monday 2 April a month or a month and a half of their total annual income just to pay Maggie's tax. A hell of a lot ain't going to do it.

The regulations cover two main areas. First, we have the concession of raising the savings allowed from £8,000 to £16,000. My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) dealt with the perfect example of those who thought—probably until tonight—that they would gain. Someone with £15,500 in the bank thought until the

Budget that they would get no rebate. When they heard that the figure had been increased to £16,000 they thought they were okay. He dealt with the example of a pensioner with a small occupational pension which took her £10 over the applicable amount, and with £15,500 savings. Even if she lived in an area where the poll tax was £611, there would be no rebate. That is bad enough, but most hon. Members, particularly the Tory headless chickens, do not realise that, if the poll tax was £350—let us remember that three quarters of all councils in England and Wales have set a poll tax higher than that—that pensioner is limited to a maximum of £4·51 a week in rebate. When the Tories next do their surgeries, they will not have a lot of grateful pensioners coming along to say, "Thanks for doubling the amount." We have gone into all the reasons for that.

I should have still voted against the poll tax, as the Minister knows, but it would have been a bit better if he had done what several of his hon. Friends suggested and lifted the £3,000 at which people start to lose rebate to about £8,000. Parallel to that—no one else has argued for this tonight—he should have increased by £20 or £25 a week the applicable amount of other items such as works pensions which are disregarded before the loss of rebate. We heard from the Chancellor about thrift. But pensions are only deferred wages. It is a way to set aside wages for the future. That is thrift. But people are being penalised by that lower limit of weekly income.

As the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison) said in response to a question that I put to the Minister, the idea that for every £250 above the savings limit of £3,000 one receives £1 a week in interest is wrong. No Tory Member could point me to any bank, savings institution or other high street institution to which ordinary people have access—I am not talking about Lloyd's—that gives 20 per cent. interest and would give £1 a week for every £250. Millions of people have been conned by that.

The second area covered by the regulations is income support. From Monday, one of the three penalties, other than gaol, which the Government and local authorities can use to force people to pay is benefit arrestment. It is worth noticing—it does not seem that any Scottish Member will get into the debate—that Scotland has had 12 months of the poll tax but not one person has had his or her benefit arrested in Scotland by exactly the same powers as are available here. That is because of the huge number of people affected.

In Scotland, people do not worry about debates such as this, because they have their own rebate system—more than 1 million people have not paid the tax. The Scottish are successfully implementing their own rebate system.

Mr. Wilson: It is true that no hon. Member representing Scotland will have the opportunity to participate in the debate. That is unfortunate, but I know it is not the fault of the Chair. However, that does not give my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) the right to misrepresent the situation in Scotland. An enormous amount of suffering has been caused in Scotland by the poll tax. The vast majority of people included in my hon. Friend's fanciful figure are not involved in non-payment campaigns. The greatest recruiting sergeant for non-payment or underpayment in Scotland is poverty. Inability to pay and poverty is what it is all about. I will not allow anyone, on either side of the House, to claim as trophies people in my constituency who are unable to pay the poll tax and who are not involved in any campaign. The poll tax is an evil imposition, but one must get the politics of it right. The way to defeat the poll tax is to defeat the people who have imposed it on us.

Mr. Nellist: I do not necessarily disagree with my hon. Friend. The vast majority of people in England who will not be paying will be unable to pay the tax. My hon. Friend says that the figure I gave is fanciful, but it is based on the returns of Strathclyde, Lothian and other regional councils of those who have not paid since last April, who are now more than five months in arrears and who have stopped paying the tax. I maintain that more than 1 million people in Scotland are unable to pay that poll tax.

The regulations raise the amount that can be deducted from income support to £1·85 for a single person and £2·90 for a couple. It is deplorable that people already on the poverty line and in receipt of income support should have anything deducted from that benefit. One third of claimants in this country are already deeply in debt. On average, those in debt owe £84 for fuel, £135 for housing, £132 on purchases, £210 on loans and £119 in other debts. They owe a total of £680, and for them to be driven further into debt by deductions from their income support is absolutely disgraceful.

There is a small silver lining in the cloud. If the poll tax is £500, as it is in Tory Maidenhead and Basildon, those on income support must pay 20 per cent. towards it—£100. That means that, even with the increases announced today, it costs less to have the poll tax taken out of one's benefit than to try to pay it. I am sure that quite a few people will follow that line.

In recent weeks, I have received an enormous number of letters and they have made me proud of the things I have said inside and outside the Chamber. I have received, for example, a letter from a former beach commando who was strafed and bombed for five and a half years during the second world war. In the past two days, I have received letters from pensioners living in Cheshire, Exeter, Wallsend, Birmingham and Tamworth who tell me that they cannot afford to pay. They say that they are pleased that someone is standing shoulder to shoulder with them in their battle.

I make no apology to those Tory Ministers who were egged on and organised by Dr. Julian Lewis in their attempts to smear those who will not pay the poll tax. It will not work.

A couple of years ago, the Prime Minister said that the poll tax was the flagship of her third term of office. From Monday, millions of people will show that it ain't no flagship, it is her Titanic. She is going down with the ship.

6.43 pm

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): Tonight we are discussing one set of regulations that try to modify a deeply unjust tax. It is no good, however, fiddling around at the margins—that will not help. The fundamentals behind the tax are unjust and cannot be put right. The country has begun to realise that such is the Government's problem. The other regulations relate to taking away money from those on benefits who get into debt.

The hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) —I am sorry that he has left the Chamber—failed to give way to anyone and made a disreputable attack on Derbyshire county council. I do not know about that county council in detail, but we all know that Tory authorities have set their poll tax 31 per cent. above the

[Ms. Clare Short]

Government-set figure, and that Labour authorities have set it 34 per cent. above that figure. We know that the Government figures are wrong, and statements from associations representing Labour and Tory local authorities back our claim. To say that the debate centres on Labour councils is equivalent to lies and fibs.

The hon. Member for Amber Valley also attacked the equal opportunities policy of Derbyshire. Clearly the hon. Gentleman is not in favour of black people and women having equality in the county. He also attacked the party given to celebrate that lion of a man, Nelson Mandela, on his release from imprisonment, and community education. His attack on the county council was disreputable in all respects.

The first set of regulations relates to deductions from those on income support to meet their arrears on poll tax. We know that those on income support are already being ripped off because the 20 per cent. contributions that they must pay towards the poll tax in their local area is based on the Government's figures, but the real rates of poll tax are much higher. Everyone on income support will be poorer because of the poll tax and the Government's implementation of it.

The principle of deduction from income support is a worry, because we are taking money from people who are given the minimum on which it is calculated they need to live. The people who are unlikely to be able to pay the poll tax are those who are already in debt for other things. The level of debt in Britain is higher than it has ever been; our level of indebtness is higher than that of any other European country.

People on low incomes, low-paid workers and people on benefits are being squeezed by the Government so that they can give more in tax handouts to their rich friends. Loan sharks and creditmongers have pushed their credit at those on low income and many people are now suffering deeply as a result of indebtedness. Many people are already paying money out of their income support to pay off debts that they have collected.

The regulations mean that a deducation of £1·85 a week can be made from a single person—nearly £100 a year—and £2·90 a week from a couple—nearly £150 a year. Given that those deductions will not cover the debt, it will carry on in subsequent years, as my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) has made clear. The deductions can be made, providing a person is left with at least 10p per week in income support. Deductions might already be made from that support to pay for housing, rent, fuel and water debts as well as the overpayment of benefit, whether it was the fault of the recipient or not. A person's income support might also face a deduction for the social fund.

Under our system, a maximum of 25 per cent. of a person's income support can be deducted without his or her consent. That deduction is made from the minimum which it is judged people need to live on. Today the Government are suggesting that, on top of that 25 per cent., £1·85 or £2·90 can be taken from that benefit, provided that 10p a week is left in income support.

Tonight the House is being asked to approve regulations penalising those on little, who are already in debt. Those people are facing a deeply unjust tax and they are now to have money compulsorily deducted from their income support. Will Conservative Members vote for that? What will they say to their constituents? When they vote this through and find out how unpopular it is, they will try to distance themselves and pretend that, for some reason or other, they do not really support the change.

The other regulations implement the Chancellor's misleading concession in the Budget. There is no doubt that he misled elderly people with savings into believing that they would receive a rebate on the poll tax. I do not believe that the Chancellor knew what he was doing, as the figures he quoted do not make sense. He said that 250,000 people would benefit, at a cost of £120 million. From my desk in the Cloisters, I heard a Tory Member with a marginal seat who rang his agent to say that 500 people in a certain area would get £400 each. Suddenly, different figures were given by the Department of Social Security. We are now told that 195,000 people will benefit at a cost of £35 million. Where did all the other money go?

I think that the arrangements were cobbled together in panic. I do not believe that the Department of Social Security was properly consulted. Opposition Members tabled an amendment to the Social Security Bill on this very point, and were told by the Minister that there was no possibility of a concession. Shortly afterwards, the Chancellor made such a concession and messed it up—probably because he did not properly consult the DSS, any more than he thought about Scotland or the needs of its people.

The concession on capital limits has been a mess from beginning to end. It has misled Tory Members into waving their Order Papers because they thought that they had obtained some relief; more seriously, it has misled many elderly people who have more than £8,000 in savings and who thought that they would be given significant help with their poll tax. That is wrong: the poll tax is wrong. It is wrong to mislead people in that way.

I believe that even the Government's so-called concession will blow up in their face. The anger of those elderly people when they find out what really went on will cost the Government politically even more dearly than the poll tax is costing them now.

6.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): I should dearly like to answer all the detailed questions that have been asked during this short debate, but time does not permit it. Some, in any event, would be dealt with more appropriately by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), however, asked one question that needs to be passed on to the trustees of the independent living fund. The hon. Gentleman also asked about information from local officers. I assure him that local office managers have approached the divulging of information with proper care, although of course they were able to answer his inquiry in a proper way as well. We have nothing to hide in that regard.

Today's debate has centred on two issues—tariff income and capital, and deductions. Hon. Members' concern about tariff income and capital limits is understandable, because community charge benefit is not the simplest benefit in the world to explain. Nevertheless, there has been some misunderstanding about the £1 of weekly benefit per £250 of capital, and of the fact that the deduction represents a very generous taper of 15p a week.

Let me give some examples, as a good deal of misleading information has been given. Let us take a married couple in their 50s. The husband is disabled, and is cared for by his wife. Their rent is £23 a week, their community charge is £400 each and their savings stand at £13,000. Their total weekly income is £138·90, not including income from the capital. That couple will receive £6·96 a week in community charge benefit.

Now let us take a single pensioner in her 80s, paying a rent of £25 a week and a community charge of £400. She has £12,000 in savings and a total weekly income of £47·15, not including income from her capital. She will gain £5·89 a week in housing benefit, and £1·73 a week in community charge benefit.

As the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) pointed out, however, the prayer is against the provisions for deductions. The enforcement of community charge arrears is, as she will appreciate, a matter for local authorities, and my right hon. Friend the Minister of State has already explained how that will work. I feel, however, that I must clarify the misrepresentation that has been repeated today by the hon. Members for Ladywood and for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) about the 10p a week. It is entirely misleading to say that the Department intends to take large amounts of benefit away from people in order to leave them with only 10p a week on which to live.

Ms. Short: We did not say that.

Mrs. Shephard: That was the implication, and neither hon. Member corrected it.

Mr. Meacher: What we said was that large sums could be deducted in poll tax arrears, as long as people were left with 10p in income support. We did not use the words "in order to leave". Does the Minister not consider that disgraceful?

Mrs. Shephard: I should like to continue my explanation, because I still think that the hon. Gentleman is giving a misleading impression. He is giving the impression that the 10p is all that people will have to live on. The fact is that benefit can be reduced to 10p a week only if the income support was very low in the first place because the claimant had other income—for example, from other contributory benefits. The 10p minimum level of income support is retained precisely to retain for the claimant automatic eligibility for free NHS dental treatment, prescriptions and vouchers for glasses. It is important to clear that up.

As an amount is included in income support for the payment of 20 per cent. of community charge, we think it only right that a separate deduction should be made to pay any community charge arrears, as would happen if the claimant were in work. Deductions can be made from income support to meet debts relating to housing costs and fuel or water charges: clearly that is necessary for the claimant to retain tenure of the property and the supply of essential services.

From April, those deductions for arrears will be limited to a maximum of £5·55 a week. If the income support being paid is not enough to meet the debts and the community charge arrears, the regulations provide that the other deductions shall take precedence over community charge. Obviously, deductions from income support for housing, fuel and water costs must be given a higher priority, to protect claimants and their families.

Mr. Rooker: The debt deduction from income support will be possible only if a liability order has been obtained from the courts, and that will involve court costs. The local authority will add them to the debt, which will mean a minimum of £60 on top of the 20 per cent. payment. How will that money be collected?

Mrs. Shephard: As I have said, the enforcement of orders will be a matter for local authorities.

Mr. Rooker: Who will pay the court costs?

Mrs. Shephard: I really cannot answer the hon. Gentleman in any better way; that is the position.

It is extraordinary that Opposition Members should choose to ignore the positive aspects of the regulations. Perhaps, on the other hand, they prefer not to know about them. According to an advertisement about the community charge that was issued recently by the Labour-run Association of Local Authorities,

> "a few might find themselves entitled to a rebate".

That is misleading, as one might expect; but it is misleading on two counts. It will be not a few, but a large number, and it is not "might" but "will". The increase in the limit of the savings that people can have while still receiving help with the community charge has been widely welcomed.

Let me repeat that the increase will help 195,000 individual charge payers, of whom 150,000 will be pensioners. The backdating arrangements and the publicity will ensure that people will be able to benefit, provided that they apply before 27 May. The regulations also provide special arrangements for specific and vulnerable groups—although Opposition Members, of course, did not mention that.

The £40-a-week payments announced in December for war widows whose husbands served before 1973 will be entirely disregarded, and the disregard for war disablement pensions will be doubled to £10 next month. All lump sums from the Macfarlane Trust for haemophiliacs with an HIV infection will be totally disregarded, and the disregard for regular and charitable payments will also be doubled. That move has been widely welcomed by charitable and voluntary organisations throughout the country.

The sums allocated for the benefit are very generous indeed. The planned expenditure on community charge benefit for next year is £2·5 billion. The more generous taper of 15 per cent. instead of 20 per cent. will bring a further 650,000 people on to the benefit, and half of all benefit claimants will be helped. Help is to be given to 10 million people in all—one in four of the population.

The regulations are sensible, fair and generous. I commend them to the House and invite the House to reject the prayers.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 190, Noes 298.

Division No. 148] **[7 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack

Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Margaret

Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eastham, Ken
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Heffer, Eric S.
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Janner, Greville
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Maginnis, Ken
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wall, Pat
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. John Battle.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hat'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*

Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Alistair Goodlad and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.

It being after Seven o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *proceeded, pursuant to Order [23 March], to put successively the Questions on motions made by a member of the Government.*

Motion made, and Question put,

That the draft Community Charge Benefits (General) Amendment Regulations 1990, which were laid before this House on 13th March, be approved.—*[Mr. Scott.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put,

That the draft Community Charge Benefits (General) Amendment No. 2 Regulations 1990, which were laid before this House on 20th March, be approved.—*[Mr. Scott.]*

Question agreed to.

Exmouth Docks Bill *(By Order)*

Order for Second Reading read.

7.13 pm

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will those hon. Members who do not wish to remain please leave quietly?

Sir Peter Emery: Because of some suggestions in the national press, I make it clear that I have no shares or interest in Exmouth Docks company, the Exmouth Docks Steamship company, the land surrounding the docks or any land in Exmouth, or anything to do with the companies which suggest a development at Exmouth docks.

It is interesting to note that, according to the journals, a previous Bill relating to Exmouth docks received a Second Reading in July 1868—*[Interruption.]* I have been a Member of the House for a considerable time, but not that long. The Bill received an unopposed Second Reading, but later on, mainly before it reached Committee, it ran into one or two difficulties and Standing Orders had to be repealed to let it go through. Two of the nominated directors in the Bill were removed from it, after which the Bill proceeded without difficulty. The most interesting aspect was that the total capitalisation necessary to make the docks and create the railway sidings ran to only £60,000, an amazing figure when one looks at today's costs.

One need not go back any further than the 1960s, when the docks fell into considerable disuse and remained so, with small tonnages going through, until the docks company was purchased in 1982 by new owners who attempted to revitalise the commercial life of the docks by encouraging the importation of animal feedstocks to serve the needs of the farming community in Devon and Somerset.

It soon became apparent that, if the docks were to be financially successful and a viable proposition, it was necessary to construct new deep-water berths for vessels larger than 2,500 tonnes dead weight. Such larger ships are essential for coastal traffic as the older generation of cargo vessels disappears. But because of the narrow docks entrance at Exmouth, vessels of that size could not enter the docks basin.

It is necessary for me to show that the company has tried to keep the docks going. At that time the company applied to East Devon district council, the local planning authority, for planning permission to construct new berths. But the council said in no uncertain terms that it was strongly opposed to the proposed modernisation of the docks and the company withdrew its application.

In the 1980s the greatest increase in business that the docks company could obtain arose from the docks strike and the coal strike. At that time, the docks tonnages increased from below 400,000 tonnes gross weight a year to 523,00 tonnes in 1985, at which level it remained, give or take 10,000 tonnes, until the docks closed in 1989. For anybody to say that the docks were expanding or becoming increasingly successful would not be correct.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): It is important to know whether traffic through the dock was growing. It has been suggested that the miners' strike brought more vessels and coal through the docks and led to their growth. According to the figures that I have for the numbers of vessels and the tonnage, before the miners' strike the tonnage through the port more than doubled from 158,000 in 1978 to nearly 400,000 in 1982. The number of ships increased from 279 to 551. After the strike about 500 ships a year continued going through the port. It would be fair to say that, contrary to what the hon. Gentleman is implying, traffic through the port has grown not simply because of the coal strike.

Sir Peter Emery: I am sorry if my figures were misunderstood. Let us have the facts, as people should make a judgment on the exact facts. I was suggesting that the growth from 400 to 500 ships occurred during the two strikes. In 1985 the tonnage through the docks was 523,478; in 1986 it was 511,350: in 1987 it was 536,580; in 1988 it was 516,462; and in 1989 it was 523,223. Therefore, my original statement that growth has been at an average level since 1985 is fair.

The objections to the docks made up the largest single file that I had as a constituency Member about any factor in east Devon. The dust, the size of the lorries and the environmental disturbance that the docks were causing to local residents provided me with more complaints than I have received on any other issue. The complaints led to the dock company being taken to court and asked to meet restrictions on and requirements to deal with dust and nuisance. Although the company spent considerable sums of money trying to comply, it is almost impossible to stop dust when handling open feedstuff cargo and the company was prosecuted under the Public Health Acts, leading to the issue of prohibition notices under the Public Health (Recurring Nuisances) Act 1969.

Mr. Prescott: It is important to get some of the facts established at the outset as we shall want to discuss them. I could be wrong, but I understood that the prosecution by the Health and Safety Executive concerned the continued complaints from many people in the area which the hon. Gentleman has drawn to the attention of the House. I confirm that that is so, as I have visited the docks. They were concerned about the dust and dirt and complained that no action of any substance was taken by the docks authority to correct that. That is why the company was prosecuted under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974. As he said that considerable sums of money were spent by the authority for dealing with the problem of dust and dirt, can he give us some idea of the sums involved?

Sir Peter Emery: I cannot give the exact figures, but a new hopper complex with covering for the cranes that were unloading and air ducts to stop the dust blowing around was constructed. I know that the company visited docks throughout Europe to try to find modern equipment to meet the requirement to stop the nuisance. The company was very conscious of that, and I repeat that it went to considerable trouble.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Paragraph 6 of the statement on behalf of the promoters of the Bill talks about

"prosecutions being brought under the Public Health Acts.".

However, the hon. Gentleman has mentioned only the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 and a prohibition notice. The Health and Safety at Work, etc Act applies to people affected by a process, but substantially it is not the same as the Public Health Acts.

Was action taken under the Public Health Acts? The Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 is not a public health Act.

Sir Peter Emery: I must look in *Hansard* as I had no intention of mentioning the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act. I was referring to action under the Public Health Acts leading to the issue in December 1987 of a prohibition notice under the Public Health (Recurring Nuisances) Act 1969.

Mr. Prescott: I mentioned the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act.

Sir Peter Emery: It was the hon. Gentleman who did that, not me.

The company complied with that requirement and applied for outline planning permission for the development of most of the land, including the docks. The company had earlier tried to obtain planning permission for residential development of the land containing holiday chalets round the docks, but the district council refused permission because of the proximity of the area to the working docks. Under the June proposals the dock basin would accommodate only pleasure craft, although facilities would continue, because there was originally an objection from the fishermen in the area, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows. They have now withdrawn their objection because arrangements have been made to facilitate the local fishing fleets; I can supply the details if necessary.

The dock basin has been closed since the beginning of the year.

Mr. Prescott: The hon. Gentleman is generous in giving way and I do not intend to tire him, but a number of people and groups made objections and several of those objections have been withdrawn. It would be helpful to the House if the hon. Gentleman could tell us why the fishermen and others who registered objections are now in the process of withdrawing them or intend to withdraw them. The House should understand the extent of the objections, whether they have been withdrawn and the reasons for withdrawing them.

Sir Peter Emery: I am delighted that I gave way to the hon. Gentleman. If I had passed the outline of my speech to the hon. Gentleman he would have seen that an entire section deals with the five objections to the Bill.

The Bill is promoted by the Exmouth Docks company, which was established under the Exmouth Docks Act 1864. The purpose of the Bill is to authorise the company to discontinue the operation of the docks and close them to commercial traffic.

It was originally suggested to the company that a harbour revision order might be the way to proceed. The company was happy to do that. It would have allowed the public inquiry, but the company had no reason to stop that. My hon. Friend the Minister decided that, legally, he was not authorised to grant a harbour revision order. I see that he is nodding in agreement. He might have considered granting such an order if that were possible, but he had to inform the company and East Devon district council that that was not within his legal rights. So the company considered the matter and that is why the Bill is now before the House.

I understand hon. Members on both sides of the House objecting to the private Bill procedure being used to circumvent planning law and planning applications. The Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure has made recommendations on that, but they have not been carried through.

Mr. Prescott: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way again; it is inevitable that I shall ask him to do so to secure information. I know that he will reply to the debate at the end, but it may be better for him to answer my inquiry now.

The hon. Gentleman made an important point and I should like to hear his views because I have seen documents asking whether the Bill is necessary for the conversion from commercial docks to a marina. I have been led to believe, and I have read statements from either representatives of the development company or the organisations involved, that the company has received legal advice that it is not necessary to proceed with the Bill for the conversion from commercial docks to a marina. If so, why are we considering the Bill?

Sir Peter Emery: As with many legal matters, there is no simple answer to that question. If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall try to deal with the matter in detail.

Sensibly, the company considers all the options because it is not gaining any income from the docks at present——

Mr. Prescott: Because it has shut them.

Sir Peter Emery: Of course. It has been advised that it would be unsafe to continue. I shall deal later with the cost to the company of proceeding.

Mr. Cryer: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Peter Emery: I am trying to answer the question asked by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott). Will the hon. Gentleman allow me to answer one question at a time?

The company took advice, and it was suggested that it might be possible—not that it was possible—to proceed without the Bill as long as the development was not challenged in the courts. If it was challenged in the courts, the development would be uncertain.

The planning committee of East Devon district council wants an assurance before granting planning permission that the structure that it suggested in the plans will remain. Later, I shall read a letter from it urging that the Bill should be allowed to proceed. One option is sure but the other is open to some doubt.

Mr. Cryer: The somewhat spartan statement from the promoters says that some consulting engineers have reported. It says that

> "certain of the dock walls are unsafe, and could collapse if heavy machinery or vehicles are used at the dockside."

Has a copy of that report been deposited for hon. Members?

Sir Peter Emery: I cannot answer that question. I would judge that it has not been deposited because it has not been asked for, but I shall try to deal with it in my speech because it is an important matter. A Committee can deal with such matters better than hon. Members on Second Reading.

The company decided to bring a Bill before the House. I said earlier that hon. Members object to private Bills being used to circumvent planning procedures. This Bill has been through all the required planning procedures and has the approval of Exmouth town committee, which was

[Sir Peter Emery]

set up by East Devon district council and comprises councillors from the Exmouth area. East Devon district council wrote to me saying:

> "I understand that the Second Reading of the Bill is likely to take place next week and it may be useful for you to know this council's position on the matter. I can confirm that the Council's Planning Committee has given planning permission for the redevelopment of the Exmouth docks for a marina together with the associated residential development, subject to formal closure of the docks by the necessary legal process, ie the Bill currently before Parliament."

That reinforces the point that I made to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East. The letter continues:

> "The council has accepted the reality of the situation and that the days of Exmouth as a commercial port are over and that the docks should close. I understand that there are fears in some quarters that private Bills such as this may be used to circumvent normal planning procedures, but I can confirm that this is definitely not the case with this Bill. I would reiterate that the proper planning process has been followed and permission given."

That is of considerable importance and I hope that it assures hon. Members who have been concerned about the private Bill procedure.

I now turn to the report of Hydraulics Research Ltd, about which the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) asked. I am sure that details of the report can be provided to hon. Members if it has not already been deposited in the House. It makes it quite clear that expenditure of over £1 million will be necessary to make the docks safe, and that equipment to modernise and to meet restrictions under the health Acts is likely to cost about the same. It is impossible for the company to meet such expenditure, even if the company does not wish the development of the docks as a marina. The company has considered seeking financial assistance, but section 12 of the Harbours Act 1964, which allowed for grants to docks, was repealed in 1981. That grant facility is no longer available.

Originally, there were five objectors—two major objectors and three individuals. Initially, the major objectors were fishermen, who were concerned about their right to enter the harbour. They wanted to be assured that there would be a harbourmaster. They wished to have areas to unload fish, which traditionally they had done, and one or two other facilities. The company has given legally binding assurances that the number and size of vessels that the fishermen stipulated will be able to enter the port and that it will be open in emergencies or in bad weather. To meet the wishes of fishermen, the company has provided land for a refrigeration process which hitherto they did not have. The fishermen therefore withdrew their objection.

The next objection came from a strange source—one might say that it was somewhat impertinent. It came from Exeter city council.

Mr. Prescott: Impertinent?

Sir Peter Emery: Yes, I said impertinent, but perhaps I should put that in inverted commas. The council objected because it would lose income. Its real objection was that the dues of £168,000 a year which it obtained from the operation would be lost if the docks did not operate. However, as the docks are closed, the council is receiving no income, so it seems strange to me—I do not represent Exeter—that Exeter city council is trying to interfere in what Exmouth and East Devon district council saw as the best development.

Mr. Prescott: The hon. Gentleman has come to a more controversial point. He refers to the impertinence of the authority. Exeter city council is, as I understand it, the navigation and conservation authority for the river. It is entitled to impose charges on all vessels on the river to pay for the lights and navigational aids required under merchant shipping legislation. The money does not go into the coffers of Exeter city council for playing fields, for example, but goes to maintain navigational aids on the river and to make it safe. The problem now for the council and the citizens of Exeter is that if the charges are not secured from other vessels or in other forms, the navigational aids will be a charge on the authority itself. Exeter will find not only that it is losing income, but that it still has costs for which it can no longer levy charges. The council is not simply picking up money; its position is a dead loss. It will have to finance navigational aids, which is no loss to the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but is a loss to Exeter.

Sir Peter Emery: I had better withdraw the word "impertinent". However, some of the costs will not be incurred because the harbour will not be operating as a commercial harbour. I cannot estimate the variation, but there will be a considerable saving. I do not believe that one local authority should impose charges on another authority which is unable to continue with an operation because it is no longer viable. That is, perhaps, the best argument.

I can now give certain assurances to the House. The House will be pleased to know that a recommendation will go to the relevant Exeter city council committee on Monday 2 April that the objection of the Exeter city council be withdrawn because arrangements have been made between the present company and the authority which allow it to withdraw its objection. I am delighted that that is the case. I was informed that the Committee would have liked to have had the recommendation before this debate, but 2 April is the first date on which it can go to the Committee.

Mr. Prescott: What about compensation?

Sir Peter Emery: I cannot say exactly. All that I can say is that that is the recommendation.

There were three private objections. One was a private objection from a previous employer, which has now been settled, and two are outstanding. Mrs. Susan Winters, a chandler, used to sell goods round the docks. She has claimed that her income has been affected by the closure of the docks. I accept that that is the present position, but Exmouth docks are not her only source of income and her business is likely to be far greater with a marina. She will be able to supply more to the boats in the marina than she could to the slightly larger commercial vessels which previously used the docks. If the Bill goes to Committee, she has the right to make her case and I do not have to make it for her.

The second outstanding objection is from Mr. Stephen Lytton, who is a former assistant pilot. He is not employed by the company, but he is working with only 18 months' service. Even if he had been employed by the company, he could not have claimed a statutory redundancy payment;

but the company, realising his position, has made an offer to Mr. Lytton. However, he wants a settlement that would put all the former employees of the company, who have agreed to redundancy payments and other benefits, into a wholly unfair position. The company is still willing to make a fair settlement to the two objectors and it will continue to take that stance.

Mr. Prescott: The hon. Gentleman referred to two previous employees who, I believe, were shipping agents in the port. Can the hon. Gentleman confirm that they were shipping agents who had to move to another port because the company arbitrarily finished commercial operations at the port in December? Were they shipping agents and, if so, what—if any—compensation did the company pay them?

Sir Peter Emery: A shipping agent was supposed to be putting in an objection. I believe that he never put in a formal objection, but I should have to consult on that. He was a shipping agent in the port. Negotiations took place between the company and the gentleman, and he was happy to accept the terms. I cannot say what he is doing now. I believe that necessary compensation, which was acceptable to him, was negotiated. I am right in saying that no objection to the Bill was lodged by that individual.

The company strongly believes that it is not financially possible for it to reconstitute the dock as a commercial operation. If it were to be a commercial operation, the company would have to consider—this would not appeal to the Opposition—building up a trade in the importation of coal. Some of my hon. Friends might want that, but some hon. Members would definitely object strongly.

Mr. Prescott: Is the hon. Gentleman telling the House that it would be commercially possible to import coal and to meet the expenditure necessary to allay the anxiety about safety at the docks? He is now telling us that it would be possible to make the port profitable by importing coal. I thought that he was telling the House that the money needed to make the dock safe made it impossible for the dock to operate commercially. Which argument does the hon. Gentleman want to deploy?

Sir Peter Emery: The hon. Gentleman is being——

Mr. Prescott: Mischievous?

Sir Peter Emery: The hon. Gentleman would never be mischievous. However, he is putting words into my mouth. I have made it clear that the dock company considers that it could take no action to make the dock commercially viable again. I asked the company where, if it could choose, it would go for cargo and I have told the House its answer. The answer does not imply that there is any likelihood of that cargo alone reconstituting commercial activity in the dock. The company has made it clear that even its previous trade in agricultural feedstuffs has now gone elsewhere and the company's chance of winning that trade back are negligible. Clearly, there is no way in which the company or East Devon district council believes that the dock can be made a commercial proposition once more.

I want now to consider the benefits that would accrue for Exmouth. For a long time many people have believed that the area along the south coast to which I have been referring needs a marina. There is only anchorage in the estuary, and no marina along the east Devon coast in my constituency from Uplyme to Exmouth. One has to go round the Exe to Torquay before one finds such a facility.

Exmouth is a major tourist area and its income is dependent on tourism. The council and the overwhelming majority of people in Exmouth believe that a marina and the kind of development that we are discussing today would be excellent commercially for the town, and that is what they have recommended.

Mr. Prescott: There is some contention over a piece of land to which I believe the hon. Gentleman referred and which is mentioned in the promoter's note. That piece of land is known as Shelley Sands. Does the Bill cover Shelley Sands? If it does, it is a legitimate matter of concern for us this evening. Is the hon. Gentleman aware of an apparent dispute about the ownership of Shelley Sands? I have seen the deeds, titles and the correspondence between the local authorities and the people who contest that the port authority involved in the Bill has a right to that land. Is there a dispute? Will the courts have to decide it? Is there any uncertainty about that piece of land?

Sir Peter Emery: I am delighted to answer that. Under the section 52 agreement, the company handed over the Shelley Sands area of the basin to the East Devon district council. There can be no dispute about it. The company was quite willing to do so and that was part of the agreement in the planning application. I am glad that we have got rid of that problem.

Mr. Prescott: So that land is not covered by the Bill?

Sir Peter Emery: It is part of the planning application, but it is not dealt with in the Bill.

I apologise fo having detained the House for so long. I have tried to answer all the questions that were asked. If there are other questions, and I have no doubt that there will be, the right place for them to be asked is in Committee. As there are petitioners, the Bill will go to an Opposed Private Bill Committee and the Committee will examine it rigorously. I urge that the Bill be allowed to receive its Second Reading and proceed in the way that private Bills have proceeded for centuries since the first of these Acts, the Exmouth Docks Act, was introduced in July 1864. It should be brought to a determination sensibly and reasonably for the benefit of Exmouth and of everyone concerned.

7.53 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): The hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) set out quite properly to make it clear to the House that he has no interest in these matters. I am sure that he meant also that his company, Shenley Trust Services has no involvement in the matter either.

Sir Peter Emery: Not at all.

Mr. Cryer: When the hon. Gentleman was referring to himself, I realised that he was referring to the company that he owns and controls, and of which he is chairman.

Sir Peter Emery: I want to make it clear that neither I nor any company with which I am associated in any way —minority or majority—have any interest in the matter.

Mr. Cryer: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman and I wish that other hon. Members were as frank and open as

[Mr. Cryer]

he has been tonight. Sometimes, as the hon. Gentleman will be aware, hon. Members who may be shareholders in a company maintain that that company's involvement in a certain matter does not involve them because their personal property is not affected. The hon. Member for Honiton has made it clear that neither he nor his company has any involvement in the matter under consideration today.

Although it may not be the hon. Gentleman's fault, I thought that the statement on behalf of the promoters was poverty stricken. The hon. Gentleman said that the company consulted the Minister to discover whether an order would be possible, and under that order a public inquiry would have been necessary.

I do not anticipate that a public inquiry would be confronted with a statement consisting of three pages of double-spaced typescript to substantiate the case. The promoters may argue that a procedure is available in the Opposed Private Bill Committee. I am not concerned about that procedure. I am concerned with the private Bill that is being dealt with on the Floor of the House, and that hon. Members should have access to the maximum amount of information to help them judge the merits of the proposal. Frankly, three pages of typescript, which is all that is available to us, is less than adequate.

I was interested to learn that consultations had been carried out before the Bill was promoted and that the company had approached the Minister and sought an order. However, during those consultations, were local trade unions involved? Trade unions are a very important part of our community, although the Government try to crush them. I believe that they should be consulted about major developments such as the proposal in the Bill because jobs are involved. If there was the potential for jobs, the trade unions would have wanted to know about it and perhaps would have encouraged the venture.

No doubt, if the sponsor could say that the Transport and General Workers Union and the General Municipal Workers Union had given unstinting support to the proposal, that would have been prayed in aid. It is not often that Conservative Members like to stand shoulder to shoulder with trade unionists, but there are occasions when that happens.

Sir Peter Emery: I am not the fount of all knowledge and I have had to consult about that. I am told that consultations with the TGWU did take place.

Mr. Cryer: I am pleased about that. I should be happier if I knew the outcome of those consultations.

Paragraph 5 of the statement on behalf of the promoters states:

> "Following the acquisition of the Company by its present owners efforts were made to revitalise the commercial life of the docks, in particular by the importation of animal feedstuffs—

and the hon. Gentleman elaborated on that.

I wonder who the new owners of the company are. All that we have been given is the name of the company. I have not had the time to ask the Library to dig out the names of the directors and their interests. If I knew that, it would help me to be convinced that the directors are interested primarily in transport and not in making a killing from an increase in land values. There is a suspicion that the company could have been taken over, not because the directors were interested in developing the area as a dock, but because they were taking over an old company, with a relatively low capital value but which owned a large area of land, and because its potential value therefore far outweighed its actual capital value. If the planning consent was obtained and the dock transformed into a marina, hugely enhanced capital values could have been achieved for little investment——

Sir Peter Emery *rose*——

Mr. Cryer: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman when I have finished this point.

I can well recall that early in the 1970s my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and I dealt with the Eastbourne Harbour Bill, which was of much the same character as this Bill. One of our arguments was: why is so much money available for the development of marinas when so little is available for the development of proper long-term jobs in manufacturing industry?

Sir Peter Emery: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman again, but I simply want to provide him with information. He asked about the company that took over the ownership of Exmouth docks. It was a grain-importing company. It took over the docks so that it could import grain through that area for the rest of its business. That is the background to the company of which the hon. Gentleman has requested knowledge.

Mr. Cryer: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman, but I should like further information. I should like to know whether the company feels the need to diversify into land. After all, that is the growth area of the present enterprise culture.

Page 2 of the promoters' statement reports:

> "The Company applied to East Devon District Council in February 1986 for planning permission to construct the necessary berths, but the Council informed the Company that it was strongly opposed to the proposed modernisation of the docks facilities and the application was withdrawn."

By a happy chance, a matter of a couple of years later —the date is not clear because we have not had sight of the report—some consulting engineers reported that the docks were in such a seedy condition that

> "certain of the dock walls are unsafe, and could collapse if heavy machinery or vehicles are used at the dockside."

I do not wish to cast a shadow over the consulting engineers, but that was a most convenient report because the argument about the massive investment that is required to restore a port that has been so arbitrarily closed to dock work rests on that very report.

One of my complaints about this procedure is that we have been given only a sparse amount of information. I am slightly surprised by that because the sponsor of the Bill is the Chairman of the Select Committee on Procedure which, at this very moment, is considering private Bill procedure——

Sir Peter Emery: The hon. Gentleman, who is very knowledgeable about the workings of the House, ought to know that the Select Committee on Procedure does not have any powers whatever in relation to private Bills. Our terms of reference limit us to dealing only with the public Bill procedure. We have nothing to do with private Bills. The hon. Gentleman is wrong.

Mr. Cryer: I am pleased to hear that the Select Committee on Procedure is not considering the private Bill procedure, which is certainly the impression that is abroad in the House. Knowing how well versed the Chairman of the Select Committee on Procedure is in the promotion of private Bills, I must advise him that the House expects the maximum possible information. We have certainly not been provided with that tonight.

As I said, that engineering report is crucial—because the promoters have suggested that the cost of restoring the dock facility would be about £1 million and that a further £1 million would be required for new machinery.

Other courses of action may well be necessary. The alleged danger of the docks at the moment—the fact that certain dock walls could collapse if heavy machinery or vehicles were used at the dockside—might be a bald statement and might not reflect the position in 70 per cent. of the port. We do not know—it might apply to 80 per cent. of the port.

I digress to give an illustration. In the early 1960s two or three of us went walking along the then closed British Rail branch line from Keighley to Oxenholme. We examined the track and the bridges. We thought that the line could be made into a viable proposition. However, some people said, "Oh no, you cannot run a railway without ripping up all the track, cleaning and renewing the ballasts, replacing it or adding new ballasts, levelling the track, tamping it and all the rest." They said that some of the bridges needed renewing. Over the years since we opened the line on 29 June 1968, we have taken some track out of use and have done that work.

I use that as an illustration of the dangers of following such reports too closely. A couple of civil engineers gave us reports of great gloom and doom. One of them said that we would need £1 million to reopen the line. That demonstrates that if one considers an issue in different terms, one can produce a programme that does not require the investment to be made all at once. It is possible to plan a programme of renewals that can be implemented over 20 or 25 years. The service—in this case a dock—could still be operated to 50 or 60 per cent. of capacity, perhaps rising to 70 or 80 per cent.

We must ask: what proportion of the dock walls is unsafe? As the port is not working at full capacity, the dock walls that are unsafe may not be needed in the operation of the port. We simply do not know.

I am simply a Member of Parliament carrying out my job of scrutinising private legislation. It might be an unfortunate procedure—it was the procedure under which all the railways of this country were built—and it has unsatisfactory aspects, but as we are using that parliamentary procedure, we have the right to know precisely what is involved in the application. However, we are not being given the necessary information.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) recalls that I asked the hon. Member for Honiton some questions at the beginning of the debate. If the information had been deposited in the Private Bill Office while the hon. Member for Honiton was elaborating on the promotion of the Bill, I should have been able to have a quick look at it. It is a matter of great regret that that information is not available.

Mr. Prescott: On the contentious matter of the consulting engineers' report, which stated that the walls were not safe and that the docks should be closed, I understand that some of the objectors asked for the report, but were denied it. I do not know who was given the report —perhaps the Exmouth authority or the Devon authority was given it—but those whose livelihoods were at stake were entitled to ask for the full report on which they could make a judgment. As I understand it, they did not receive it.

Mr. Cryer: That is interesting information. I wonder whether copies of the report were available for the consultations with the Transport and General Workers Union. As my hon. Friend knows, that union and others have always assisted in planning for the future development of their areas. That is a characteristic of the trade union movement, although it is often not recognised.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): My hon. Friend is putting questions to the hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery)—or Botswana or whatever it is called these days. I saw the hon. Gentleman nod and wink to the people who are responsible for the Bill. If my hon. Friend were to hang around a bit longer—and I am sure that he has a lot more to say—he might see a message being passed from the promoters' representatives to the hon. Gentleman to enable him to answer questions. I suggest to my hon. Friend that he play the game. He should ask questions fairly slowly and deliberately, and intersperse them with the necessary arguments. The hon. Member for Honiton, in his state of health, cannot afford to keep running over to the promoters' representatives for answers. My hon. Friend must have a lot of questions to put to the hon. Member for Honiton, as, apparently, have other people. Wearing another hat, he has been asking questions at another level. This private Bill procedure is very murky. We know that these matters should not be dealt with on the Floor of the House. My hon. Friend should give the hon. Gentleman some time to get answers. I want to know the answers, as does everybody else in the Chamber, including those in the Gallery.

Mr. Cryer: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend. I raised the question of this report right at the beginning in order to give people time to provide the information. It is outrageous that people should come to Parliament for powers to close a dock, and expect to get those powers on the basis of two and a half pages of double-spaced typescript, with no report on the case on which the whole argument hinges—that the dock has to be closed as parts of it are unsafe. We are not told to what extent traffic is affected. We are not told whether the whole dock, or half of the dock, is affected. We are not told whether the dock could carry on at 50 per cent. capacity. I say to the promoters that this is not the way to go about things.

Mr. Prescott: My hon. Friend should bear in mind a point that has been made to me by people down in that area. The authority in east Devon has changed its position as to whether legislation should have to pass through the House before the granting of planning permission in respect of dock land. I think that the words that are now used are something like, "use their best endeavours". The reason given for the change was that several Members of the House of Commons are rather awkward about private Bills. Because of that awkwardness, promoters cannot be assured that they will have Bills passed by the House. I do not want to burden the hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) with unnecessary journeys across the Floor of the Chamber, but we must have answers to the questions that we put quite legitimately. The hon. Gentleman has a

[Mr. Prescott]

problem because a few truculent Members of Parliament do not co-operate. The point that my hon. Friend has been making is substantial. Where is the consultants' report? Hon. Members need to see that report before they can judge whether the process of closing the dock should be started.

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend is quite right. Parliament would be a poorer place if it did not have a few truculent, investigative Members. Actually, it would be best to deal with this matter by public inquiry. Such an inquiry would be presented with rather more than two and a half pages of double-spaced typescript. At inquiries, people produce great quantities of documents to substantiate their cases. Inspectors call for information, and witnesses are cross-examined. Anybody who treats Parliament as being less important than a public inquiry is just asking for trouble. Happily, there have always been dissident Members of Parliament who do not say simply, "Private business. It is time to be off. We do not have to be bothered with it." There are Members who take an interest in private business. It is all a matter of priorities in the expenditure of public money. It seems that making money is regarded as more important than making machines. That is why this country has a balance of trade deficit of £20,000 million. The Eastbourne harbour syndrome has been going on too long.

Mr. Skinner: I do not like my hon. Friend's reference to truculent and dissident Members of Parliament. As you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, know only too well, I am against the private Bill procedure. The whole thing stinks. It is about a few people coming here and making money on the side. These moonlighting Tory Members of Parliament have pocketfuls of money. Nearly every Tory Back Bencher has about five moonlighting jobs. We heard the other day about all the money that the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) had received from Blue Arrow. He said that he had given it back, that it had been returned.

My hon. Friend and I are exposing this business of making money. Tory Members do not mind what they do. They put people out of work; they close docks; they bring South African coal in through the Humber ports. They do not give tuppence for Parliament. The hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) is Chairman of the Select Committee on Procedure, yet he is in the middle of it. So I will not have this reference to dissident Members of Parliament. I come here to protect the public purse. I do not believe that public money should be spent in this way. The hon. Member for Honiton has problems—his Tory colleagues have deserted him. I do not know why. This must be a very murky business. Normally, one or two little Tory bootleggers trot between the promoters and the hon. Member who is presenting their case. The hon. Gentleman does not have anybody to do that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Briefly.

Mr. Skinner: The Bill is brief, and it is very costly. Every line in it will make a packet of money—probably for the hon. Gentleman.

Sir Peter Emery: Wait a minute.

Mr. Skinner: I do not know——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Skinner: I am just checking.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not casting aspersions on another hon. Member. That would be quite out of order. Secondly, his intervention has been quite long enough. I hope that he will clarify his remark.

Mr. Skinner: If the hon. Gentleman is disclaiming today, then he is disclaiming today. If he is disclaiming today, one has to buy it. But that does not mean that I will buy it tomorrow.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will satisfy me that he was not casting aspersions on the honour of another hon. Member.

Mr. Skinner: Let me make it absolutely plain. If the hon. Gentleman says that he has nowt to do with this Bill, that he is just sitting there for the good of his health——

Sir Peter Emery: The good of my constituents.

Mr. Skinner: If the hon. Gentleman satisfies you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you want to buy it, that is okay by me. All that I am saying is that my hon. Friend must expose the private Bill procedure. Somebody has to do it. Somebody has to stop this evil practice. It has nothing to do with Parliament. We should not be debating these things at all. It is high time that they were dealt with properly under local authority planning procedures. The local communities should be able to play a part——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I shall begin to forget who has the floor. Mr. Cryer.

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend makes some useful and cogent points. On the matter of dissident Members of Parliament, we are in agreement. Dissident Members of Parliament are those who challenge the received ideas about which my hon. Friend has been talking. One of these received ideas is that Members of Parliament may have jobs outside. We are full-time Members of Parliament, and that is a matter that could be taken to heart by many Tory Members.

To pursue the question of the information which has been provided, I have not yet finished commenting on the engineers' report. The hon. Member for Honiton said that this is a Committee point, but Opposed Private Bill Committees are not like Standing Committees where questions are argued, amendments are tabled and hon. Members can demand reports. The proceedings are conducted by lawyers who receive expensive fees for presenting a case. Happily, I have never been on an Opposed Private Bill Committee and I do not wish to serve on one, I hasten to add. Hon. Members who have served on them tell me that they get a strong impression that the lawyers are paid by the hour and spin things out.

Mr. Prescott: By the word.

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend says that they are paid by the word. There is not much opportunity for hon. Members to sift through engineering reports. The engineers' report is pivotal to the Bill, but the Committee stage will be conducted on the basis of submissions, so there will not be an opportunity for detailed examination. Questions may be asked, but the procedure is based on the position of the petitioners. Hon. Members do not undertake the examination. I do not agree with the hon. Member for Honiton that the procedure is satisfactory.

In paragraph 9 of the promoters' statement—

Mr. Skinner *rose*—

Mr. Cryer: I shall proceed with the question of the five petitioners after this intervention.

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend has talked about the Opposed Private Bill Committee procedure and said that it is not like other Committee stages. He talked about lawyers making pocketfuls of money. There is another serious consideration. My hon. Friend should explain at length what the Bill is about. An Opposed Private Bill Committee is composed of two hon. Members from the Government side and two from the Opposition side. The chances are that there will be a Tory Chairman who will have a casting vote, so there will be three votes against two. A recent private Bill, the Associated British Ports Bill, was in Committee for some 20 days. Throughout the proceedings the Chairman cast his vote against every amendment. My hon. Friend is well versed in those matters. He knows what happens when a Bill is not amended in Committee. There is no Report stage on the Floor of the House and it goes through like a dose of Epsom salts.

The hon. Member for Honiton talked about a Committee point, but my hon. Friend will not get a chance to raise it in Committee. My hon. Friend cannot serve on the Opposed Private Bill Committee because he has already played a part in the proceedings. Therefore, he cannot speak in Committee. If the Bill is not amended, because the hon. Member for Honiton's Tory Friends defeat every amendment, there will be no Report stage and the Bill will go straight to Third Reading when it comes back to the House. It is an evil system. My hon. Friend would do well to spell it out.

Mr. Cryer: I am grateful to my hon. Friend who has, as usual, made a cogent, relevant and emphatic intervention. I well remember the Associated British Ports Bill. Unfortunately, there were no amendments to the Bill, so it went straight through. As I recall it, it was on that Bill that the promoters, P and O, arranged a champagne supper to keep Tory Members here.

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend is a stickler for the truth, so I want to put him right. Yes, there are usually champagne parties organised to keep Tory Members here to vote the legislation through at the appropriate time, be it 10 o'clock, 11 o'clock or midnight. The champagne party to which my hon. Friend refers was on the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Bill, whose aim was to put money into the pockets of those who wanted a port system on the other coast.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are straying miles away from the Bill before the House.

Mr. Skinner: I appreciate that——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Skinner: People are bound to get excited sometimes——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is quite enough for an intervention.

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend has made another relevant and cogent point. He is correct. That champagne party was not arranged for the Associated British Ports Bill; it was for the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Bill. My hon. Friend is pointing to the fact that the Government have used the private Bill procedure to get legislation through and we have been inundated with private Bills, so much so that Associated British Ports, Felixstowe and champagne parties blur into one another. The hon. Member for Honiton has made it clear that there are no champagne suppers for this Bill. I suspect that that is why there will not be too many hon. Members here this evening.

I was about to deal with paragraph 9 of the promoters' statement. The hon. Member for Honiton explained that there were five petitioners. He said that fishermen have withdrawn their petition because they have had a legal, binding assurance. I should like to know what a legal, binding assurance is. An assurance does not normally vary legal weight. If something has legal validity, there has to be a means of applying it. Have the fishermen entered into a legal agreement with the company? Will there be a breach of contract if the company fails to honour its commitment?

An assurance is not a guarantee. It is just a claim that people will do their best. They give an assurance that something will be all right but that assurance does not provide the sanction of court action, which I should have thought was necessary to ensure that the fishermen had a guarantee, not just for the next five years, but for as long as fishing is to go on in the area. There should be a restrictive covenant on the building of the marina and a means of enforcing the covenant.

As the marina has not been built, I should like to know what provisions will be made. When the hon. Member for Honiton sums up, I should like him to tell us what he means by 'legal, binding assurance'. I do not want the fishermen of Exmouth to be sold short. I am concerned about them.

Mr. Prescott: I refer my hon. Friend to the note that we have been given on behalf of the promoters. In it they say:

> "the dock walls are unsafe, and could collapse if heavy machinery or vehicles are used at the dockside."

The hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) made the point that agreement had been reached with the fishermen who originally were not to continue their activities at the dock. We are all pleased to hear about the agreement. The hon. Gentleman also said that there would be refrigeration work; one assumes that heavy vehicles and machinery will have to be used in that work. There seems to be a conflict. If the fishermen are to continue their commercial activity, presumably lifting machinery and heavy vehicles will be necessary. That seems to be in conflict with the whole point of the debate—that the walls are unsafe for any commercial activity.

Mr. Cryer: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising an important point. I was coming to it in a moment. Of course, there will be the refrigeration facility that the hon. Member for Honiton mentioned. There may be a restrictive covenant on the land on which the refrigeration facility is to be built to ensure access from the estuary and from the land. There must be some guarantee for the future. My hon. Friend is right in his more general point on paragraph 8 of the promoters' statement. If a refrigeration facility is to be provided, heavy plant and equipment will be needed on the dock to provide it. There must be lifting machinery to move the fish from the boats

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on to the dockside and into the refrigeration plant, and the refrigeration plant must be substantial. All that must mean building, machinery and heavy vehicles on the dockside. My hon. Friend is right to point to the discrepancy.

The engineering report is crucial. It is curious that, just when the planning application was rejected and it was decided that a marina was the way forward, a report was produced which matched the case and helped to support the argument that it would cost millions of pounds to retain the dock facilities and that something else should be established.

That type of procedure helps to convince, among others, trade unionists. When workers are presented with a claim that there is a report and they do not see it, they should always double-check. The lesson for trade unionists is, always check what the employer puts forward. They may have been told that a report has been produced showing that the docks cannot work again because it would cost too much to make them work. The report being so pivotal to the argument, its absence makes me doubt the validity of the company presenting the matter to us. It shows contempt for our procedures and for Parliament.

Mr. Prescott: The more I listen to my hon. Friend and the valid points he is making, the more I am reminded of a further contradiction, which the hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) might wish to clarify. Its seems curious that an examination was undertaken which led to the conclusion that the dock walls might collapse.

The company made an application in the mid-1980s to the East Devon district council to modernise the docks so that they could deal with even bigger vessels, plus the construction of some riverside facilities. Surely engineering work must have preceded that application and should have revealed problems with the sea walls. To find those problems being revealed now is a little coincidental.

Mr. Cryer: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is curious that the undertaking of the report, although not its publication, should have assisted the company in presenting its argument. My hon. Friend is right to say that applying for planning permission involves submitting documents about what will be done and where. That should have involved a detailed examination of the circumstances in which the docks would be built. That, in turn, should have brought to light the condition of the dock walls. Apparently, it was overlooked.

One is bound to question the competence of the company in going ahead with a planning application to seek consent, having apparently overlooked a serious engineering defect, yet that defect suddenly comes to light two years later, when it is thought that a marina would be a better alternative. That calls into question the bona fides of the company in bringing the matter to Parliament without providing us with the information we need.

Unsatisfactory though the private Bill procedure may be, when we have discussed other Bills, the promoters have taken the trouble to circulate us with information and deposit plans in the Private Bill Office. No such efforts have been made in this case.

Mr. Skinner: Promoters of private Bills of this type do not always provide the necessary information and plans. We had a similar problem recently, when the promoters of the Redbridge London Borough Council Bill did not even provide a map. This place is treated with contempt because the Tories, having a majority of 150, say, "We will use the private Bill procedure. We will not need every Tory Member to back it. Only perhaps 200 Members will be needed, including 100 for the closure motion."

We now know why the Tory Whip, the hon. Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), came into the Chamber while my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) was speaking. That Whip, an important member of the royal household, must have asked the hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), "When will you want me?" He was saying, in other words, "Under the private Bill procedure, forget about free votes and voting according to conscience. When do you want me? When shall I bring the troops in to bring debate to an end?"

That is how the system works, and it is high time we did something about it. Let us stop this farce by which people give the impression that a matter is being brought to Parliament and is being dealt with by us, with every word—

Mr. Deputy Speaker Order. That is long enough for an intervention.

Mr. Cryer: Again, my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover makes a cogent, important and relevant point. I noticed the oleaginous figure of the Tory Whip, the hon. Member for Watford (Mr. Garel-Jones), enter the Chamber. As my hon. Friend says, he is organising matters.

We do not have the report of which I have spoken, because somebody has told the promoters, "Don't bother with the report. It could be a bit controversial. Different interpretations could be put on it and it might be said that dock work could proceed at Exmouth. But don't worry. All is organised. We have told the lads that they will be needed at 10 o'clock. They will come in then and vote." That is why the Whip came into the Chamber. Every now and then he comes in to check how things are going.

So my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover hit the nail on the head. This scrutiny is a facade and a formality. The Tories are using their majority as an elective dictatorship, a phrase used by Lord Hailsham when the last Labour Government had a tiny majority, if not a minority.

Mr. Skinner: We had a majority of one—Stonehouse —and we could not find him.

Mr. Cryer: Even though we did not have a majority, Lord Hailsham called us an elective dictatorship. Now that the Conservatives have a majority of 150 over Labour, the noble Lord says nothing.

Private Bills are supposed to have a separate path in Parliament. They are supposed to go through on a free vote, with independent scrutiny. It would be appalling if the Government used the private Bill procedure to impose their wishes on Parliament in contravention of tradition. But that is what they are doing, and the public outside are appalled. That is why they gave a massive thumbs down to the Tories at Mid-Staffordshire and why at the next general election the Tories will be run out of office.

The five petitions deposited against the Bill are detailed in clause 9. I have dealt with the position of the fishermen, and I look forward to the comments of the hon. Member for Honiton relating to so-called legally binding assurances that the marina will be open to fishermen in difficulties. The hon. Member for Honiton seemed to qualify the circumstances in which it would be open to fishermen in trouble. I should have thought that human compassion would have provided that guarantee, but a company that is seeking to convert a dock into a marina cannot be assumed always to have human compassion at the forefront of its thoughts.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East spoke about the loss to Exeter of £168,000 a year in dues, due to it as the navigation and river conservation authority. I should have thought that £168,000 in dues suggests a fair amount of traffic. The hon. Member for Honiton said that arrangements are being made by the company to allow the petition of Exeter local authority to be withdrawn. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East then asked him what the present position was. He could not say, because a committee of Exeter council has yet to meet to discuss the position on the closure of the docks and loss of fees. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Gentleman wishes to correct me, he should intervene.

Sir Peter Emery: I just wish to make certain that the hon. Gentleman understands the position. A recommendation has been made by a committee of Exeter council which has to go forward for confirmation. That will happen on 2 April. But the council is agreed that the petition should be withdrawn. I am simply giving the facts. That is the position with the Labour-controlled Exeter council.

Mr. Cryer: I wanted to confirm that position. Of course, the hon. Gentleman will realise that one of the glories of democratic procedures is that one is never sure of the outcome. We cannot guarantee the position at this stage, but we can expect a certain decision to be made. None the less, my argument is that Parliament should know that decision before it considers the Bill. It is an outrage that we are considering the Bill when committees have yet to meet and decisions have yet to be made. We cannot know the decisions, because the timing is wrong.

Mr. Prescott: The hon. Member for Honiton has put one construction on events, which is not a complete construction. He says that it is a Labour-controlled authority. That is true. I hope that many more areas, including Honiton, will be Labour come the next election.

I chose to speak to Exeter council. It was maintaining an objection to the Bill. It was told that, as East Devon district council had withdrawn the stipulation that the Bill was a first condition before it could agree to any commercial activity on the dock, all that was now required was best endeavours. The legal advice secured by the company was that it did not need the Bill.

Exeter city council was faced with either coming to a deal and obtaining compensation—I believe of the order of £70,000 for one year but it would be left with the bill after that—or proceeding with a legal action against the company. The cost would then fall on the ratepayers. We know that, when anyone goes through the courts to obtain an agreement, it is highly expensive. The agreement arrived at left Exeter with little choice once East Devon district council took its decision.

Mr. Cryer: It sounds as if the agreement is force majeure. It is blackmail, which I shall come to later. It sounds as if Exeter council has virtually been blackmailed into accepting the decision. It is all linked up with these best endeavours—the phrase used to cover the fact that it was just conceivable that the Bill would not slide through the House like a dose of salts. That is an unscrupulous attitude. It makes our procedure simply a facade. Either we have power or we do not. It must be made absolutely clear. Either we are dealing with the granting of powers to close the dock or we are not. If the Bill is superfluous to requirements, it means that there is some skulduggery at work.

Sir Peter Emery *rose*——

Mr. Skinner: Let skulduggery speak.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. Member for Honiton wish to intervene?

Sir Peter Emery: It was just that I heard certain comments which obviously did not reach you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

May I remind the hon. Gentleman of what I read to the House earlier? It is not a matter of best endeavours. The letter from East Devon district council said:

> "I can confirm that the Council's Planning Committee has given planning permission for the redevelopment of the Exmouth docks for a marina, together with the associated residential development, subject to formal closure of the docks by the necessary legal process".

That is not a matter of best endeavours. It refers to the Bill currently before Parliament. I read that letter to the House an hour ago. I am sorry if I was not clear, but that was the letter dated 23 March 1990 and signed by the chief executive.

Mr. Cryer: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for interjecting. The problem is that a statement has been provided by the promoters for Members of Parliament. It says:

> "The council is, however, concerned to ensure that the docks will be permanently closed to commercial traffic and, as part of the planning process, is requiring the Company to do its best to procure the enactment of the Bill, which would guarantee that the docks may be so closed."

That is a statement in support of the Bill. I assume that we must take it at face value. It is the basis of at least part of the debate. The hon. Member for Honiton is saying in effect that that statement is otiose and irrelevant because the local authority has said specifically that it requires consent to close the dock from a private Bill process in the House.

Why on earth was a supplementary statement not issued by the promoters, based on the information that the sponsor has given to the House tonight? We are bound to question the whole nature of the statement. What other parts are not quite right? For example, the statement said:

> "Consulting engineers have reported that certain of the dock walls are unsafe, and could collapse if heavy machinery or vehicles are used at the dockside."

Will we receive another statement that says, "That is not quite right because we have had a letter from the company that says that the dock walls could be unsafe, but we are not quite sure"?

We cannot ignore phrases in the promoters' statement. We must challenge and examine them. The hon. Gentleman is within his rights to say that the local authority has put a different emphasis on it. We must inevitably put a question mark where we have two conflicting statements from the same source, both of which apparently seek to promote the Bill. The hon. Member for Honiton will at least agree that it is confusing.

Sir Peter Emery: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is confused; he is usually too intelligent to fall into that trap. Best endeavours are being made to put the Bill through the House. That is normal and proper phraseology. If the hon. Gentleman considers it inadequate, I went further, to find out what it really meant to East Devon district council. I see no conflict in best endeavours being used. That is what I am doing. I am doing it not for the company but for my constituents. Therefore, I am making absolutely clear what East Devon district council says. Surely that is the information that the hon. Gentleman wants; it gives him the assurance he requires.

Mr. Cryer: There is clearly a gap here. The promoters could have used words such as "the local authority requires the company to procure the enactment of the Bill." The qualifying phrase, "to do its best" is not needed. If I examine the words carefully, it is because for years I have been a member of the Select and Joint Committees on Statutory Instruments. Words have importance in the delegated powers that Ministers use when issuing rules and orders.

Very often the careless use of words gives rise to court actions. That is why I examine words scrupulously. It is confusing for the promotors to use words in one way and then for a different emphasis to be provided by the Bill's sponsor, the hon. Member for Honiton. We should avoid such confusion, as we need the case to be clear and unambiguous, especially when so much information is not provided to hon. Members, but we are expected to make a judgment.

Mr. Prescott: This point is vital. I pushed the Exeter authority on why it changed its position. It is clear that something material changed in order for it to withdraw its objections. It was not simply that it would receive compensation of £70,000.

I talked to the legal advisers of the authority, who made it clear that things had changed with regard to the East Devon council. I was told that section 52 of a certain planning agreement was important to East Devon council, as it laid down that no more commercial development and housing would be developed on the dock should any plan be proposed. That was a proper concern, and the council wanted to be satisfied about that requirement. Just a couple of weeks ago, however, things changed, and we are now talking about best endeavours.

The information supplied by the promoters relates not only to best endeavours but to the company's ability to procure the Bill

"which would guarantee that the docks may be so closed".

How often have we debated the words "may" or "should"? They are at the heart of our legislative process. There is no doubt about what the promoters mean, as that is consistent with what I was told at Exeter. That information, however, seems to contradict what the hon. Member for Honiton has described as the position of East Devon council.

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend has thrown some light on a confusing position. We have not yet received a satisfactory answer. The promoters speak of actions that

"guarantee that the docks may be so closed."

We insert the word "shall" in primary legislation if we want something to be mandatory. We are now supposed to be dealing with such a mandatory decision, since we are not talking about a casual alternative to be available at some stage in the future when the company so wishes. The company has made an application to close the docks permanently after the temporary closure which it brought rapidly and arbitrarily to the port of Exmouth.

We are right to question what lies behind this Bill. It is not an inexpensive procedure to come to the House. Why are the promoters not saying that the company shall procure the closure powers? Why are they hedging it? It must be costing them thousands of pounds to come here to do all the preparatory work. Promoting private Bills is an expensive procedure, not a casual hobby. Why should people undergo such a procedure when they do not appear to be convinced of the need to undertake it in the first place?

If the information in the promoters' statement had been widely circulated in the area earlier, there might have been more petitioners. Five petitions alone have been deposited. I have already mentioned the fishermen, and I do not believe that the guarantees that they have received are satisfactory. We have already spoken about Exeter losing £168,000 per annum in dues. It is clear that there is some money connected with the dock, and it is not entirely without trade. The dock handled about half a million tonnes of goods a year, so it has had some traffic, which is important to remember.

Mrs. Susan Winters feels that her livelihood has been taken from her, and she is perfectly entitled to petition. Mr. Stephen Lytton, a former assistant pilot, wants a settlement. It is argued that he cannot be given a settlement different from other employees, as the redundancy terms have already been agreed and the company cannot go beyond them. The Committee stage of the Bill would enable Mr. Stephen Lytton to present his case, but if he is unemployed, how will he be able to afford to get down to London? I do not know the financial position of Mrs. Susan Winters, but she must come down to London to make her case.

Most of the petitioners want to employ a brief, but they do not come cheap. They are much more expensive than people who do useful jobs, such as engineers, social workers, nurses or firemen. They cost a great deal more —we are talking about fees of hundreds of pounds a day for a lawyer.

Mr. Skinner: It could cost thousands of pounds.

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend is right, because if one employs a barrister one must also have a solicitor.

All the lawyers on the Tory Benches—they are not here now, of course, as they are resting after their activities in court, having picked up thousands of pounds in fees—will go into the Lobby after the recess to vote for the continuation of the duopoly between solicitors and barristers. Those self-same lawyers went through the Lobby to attack the trade unions because they claim that they do not like a closed shop. However, they will merrily vote to continue their own closed shop, and seem to be able to satisfy their consciences in so doing.

The people who have made petitions against the Bill will face a considerable expense in coming down here to represent their case. That is unfair.

Mr. Skinner: It is an ill wind that blows no one any good. My hon. Friend has already pointed out that only five petitioners have come forward because the scheme was not well advertised down there. This "Howard's Way" scam has been spread around the harbour and the docks.

Given that the Bill might now receive some publicity in the Devonshire press, there is a slim chance that more petitioners will come forward. They might be able to get together to come down to the Committee to petition.

My hon. Friend has performed a useful service tonight, because we are now depending on the local press—no doubt some of them are hostile to the scheme—to use some of my hon. Friend's comments to get the mass army of non-poll tax payers from Devon, who are against the "Howard's Way" scam, to come to Parliament to petition in greater numbers.

Mr. Cryer: I hope that that is the effect of the debate, because it would be a great pity if people living in Exmouth who wish to oppose the Bill lost the opportunity because of a shortage of money. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover is right: by emphasising the circumstances, we are hopefully providing those people with a public service.

There was an interesting exchange earlier, when the hon. Member for Honiton talked about a complaint that he had had concerning the dock's activities. Because of the research carried out by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East, it turned out that some of the complaints arose because the dock company was not doing very much, for example, to suppress the dust caused by its activities. Is it possible that the same dock company that produced the report—which was so convenient, but which was not sent to hon. Members or published—was not doing very much, because it wanted to create as much strife and nuisance as possible, so that people would say, "For goodness' sake, close the port down, if you can't cover the dust or make the thing more quiet and effective"? That is a real possibility: certainly it has been done before to achieve the desired result.

As for the benefits for Exmouth, I am all in favour of benefits for all parts of the United Kingdom, but we must know who the benefits are for. Will they be for the company—the owners of which we do not know—or for the ordinary working men and women of Exmouth and their families? Will this be simply a device for converting land that has a use to the community and to the nation as a dock to an area where land values can start to soar?

The company directors may feel that grain is not a profitable activity, and decide to go into land. They will sit in their detached houses in the better part of Exmouth —or wherever they live—and watch the price of the land rise, without doing anything.

That is not uncommon. In many areas, local entrepreneurs have established factories making useful products such as lathes, milling machines and diesel engines—there is a long history of it; I can name the companies involved—but their sons decide that they do not like soiling their hands with industry. They then sell out—especially if the factory has an enhanced land value —buy a farm in Sussex and live the life of a country gent. That is not unknown. However, such family businesses —which are much hailed by the Conservatives—may have no sons to carry on the trade, and the daughters may not want to do so. Therefore, they sell up and start another life that they regard as superior to the values that form the basis of employment prospects in our country.

Mr. Skinner: Is my hon. Friend saying that closing down the docks and releasing land is perhaps only partly about building a marina? Is the marina a disguise, enabling the land to increase in price and the owners to sell it off for yuppie houses? If there was a marina, perhaps it would be only a relatively small one that would not take up all the land, and a big killing could be made by selling that land. Is my hon. Friend's interpretation that there is money to be made out of the price of the land, and that the marina is just a hook to hang it on?

Mr. Cryer: That is an interesting development of my thoughts. We are dealing with people who abandon useful activities that benefit the community and the nation. Those activities include providing employment, importing and exporting goods and maintaining the traditions of expertise and handling that have been built up over the years, with sons following their fathers into the docks and maintaining their expertise and knowledge. When all that is swept to one side by people who think only of making money, and not of maintaining a facility that is of great utility and benefit to the community, anything is possible.

The marina may be a sprat to catch a mackerel, and companies may have realised that they have to convince the local authority—even a Tory-controlled one—that they will bring a definite benefit. Therefore, they say "What about a yuppie marina?" There are only a few houses round about—not too many. There are problems with the marina, so they decide to make that tiny, fill in the rest of the land and develop it as a huge housing estate with enormously enhanced land values. I raise those matters simply to point out that we do not have the necessary information to make the sort of informed judgment that we should.

Interestingly, there was an affirmation of the importance of maintaining and developing traditions. Mr. Steven Spielberg, the noted film maker, spends millions of pounds making films which have attracted a substantial following. He invests a lot of money making them. When the closure of Elstree studios was being discussed, I asked Steven Spielberg why he came to this country to make films; after all, Hollywood is the repository of great traditions and expertise which have been built up over the years, provide a large part of television viewing and have a worldwide reputation. He said that it was because the craftsmanship in the United Kingdom at Elstree and Pinewood was better.

Steven Spielberg did not come here because of the dollar-sterling ratio, but because of skill and tradition. The crews in British studios contain an age range because the older members carry on and hand over the expertise to the younger members and the level of experience is maintained. In Hollywood the older members simply leave for other jobs and the average age of camera crews, set dressers and prop builders is much younger.

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend has a real feel for the subject, does he not?

Mr. Cryer: The answer is yes.

Every job is important, quite apart from the glamorous nature of film and television, although not all of them are given the degree of importance and emphasis that they deserve. However, the same sort of expertise and tradition is necessary to enable them to carry on. There is a real question mark over the pattern of employment available in the area.

The hon. Member for Honiton quoted from paragraph 10 of the promoters' statement which said that new job opportunities would be created. However, he did not say how many, which is crucial. Will they be equivalent to the

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number of people who worked in the docks—or will there be more or less? What sort of jobs will they be? Will they be in the leisure and tourist industries much beloved of the Government?

The invisible earnings about which the Government so often boast are becoming invisible because there is a deficit in invisible trade. Will the jobs created be in tourism? That sector of employment is badly organised, generally poorly paid and does not have the sort of career development of many other occupations. We have gained our position as a nation, not through subservient jobs such as waiting on tables, but through jobs which added value to materials such as steel and wood.

Mr. Prescott: What is wrong with waiting on tables?

Mr. Cryer: There is nothing wrong with waiting on tables. It is a perfectly good job, as dignified as anything else. But there is a limit to the development of the skill and its application, whereas manufacturing has a much wider range.

Mr. Skinner: You have been in the Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker, ever since I have been here for the debate, but we are in some difficulty now because the so-called sponsor of the Bill, the hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), is no longer present. My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) has been asking questions from time to time, and that is fair enough. Some the hon. Gentleman has answered, some he has not, some he cannot, and some he has plainly not wanted to answer because they were too difficult. But in view of his absence, can we proceed any longer? He has done a runner. Of whom can my hon. Friend ask questions? Will the Minister take notes on his behalf? If he does, he will turn the Bill into a Government Bill. There is a real problem here, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not know whether you have consulted the Clerk on it, but nobody who is in favour of the Bill is in the House to answer the questions that my hon. Friend is asking.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that that is not a point of order for me, and if he keeps on interrupting he will put the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) off.

Mr. Cryer: It will take a good deal more than my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover to put me off. Members of Parliament have the important job of scrutinising legislation. My hon. Friend's interjections are the result of his anxiety to carry out his duty as a Member of the House to scrutinise legislation. I have been speaking for rather longer than I intended because of the number of interventions.

The hon. Member for Honiton has sought to give me information and my hon. Friend is right. I am deeply dismayed that the hon. Gentleman is not here. I wanted to ask him about the number of jobs that will be provided. That is crucial. When the hon. Gentleman was present I said that I would come on to paragraph 10 in the promoters' document which refers to benefits

> "not only to those who have in the past suffered from the effects of the dock's commercial operations, but also to the town of Exmouth as a whole".

Those benefits should be quantified much more accurately. The sponsor's speech was mostly a series of platitudes, claiming that the Bill would be of benefit. If we are to authorise the closure of the docks and their replacement with a marina in which a great deal of money would be invested, we should have much more information about how that would benefit the town. That is one of the most important aspects in obtaining consent for the legislation.

I am sure that if the hon. Member for Honiton had given us an account which, as the lawyers say, demonstrated beyond peradventure that there would be benefits in the form of good jobs with training and prospects which would give satisfaction and pleasure to those who undertook them, we should have been only too anxious to see the Bill through. But we have not even been told how many jobs will be created.

I would have welcomed any proposal from the company to create a number of jobs and to encourage manufacturing. I know that manufacturing is not a high priority in the enterprise culture, except when it is imported from Japan. The Government sit back and say, "We do not have to invest in research and development or factories; we do not have to encourage people to invest, as the last Labour Government did through the ferrous foundries scheme, the wool textiles scheme and half a dozen other schemes, because the Japanese will come over and provide the factories." But the Japanese also provide the design and the technology. It is a step towards an economy in which we shall become a nation of assemblers and warehouse keepers. We need an economy with an important manufacturing component.

The hon. Member for Honiton has not demonstrated that the Bill will provide permanent jobs. There will be building jobs for building the marina. No one would deny that they are important, but there would be building jobs if the company decided to rebuild the dock walls and purchase machinery for the dockside. One would hope that such machinery would be bought in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Skinner: While my hon. Friend has been speaking I have been reading the Bill. It says nothing about providing jobs. My hon. Friend has a document which refers to various jobs, but does it add up to a row of beans? We are considering the Bill. My hon. Friend can have all the documents that have been dished out and the hon. Member for Honiton can make a speech about jobs, but the Bill is about closing the docks. It says nothing about providing jobs. I return to my original point. The chances are that the Bill is about making money out of land, closing the docks, concreting them over and making a big fat killing. The marina has been brought before the House as a possibility and no more. What does my hon. Friend have to say about that?

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend is right. I have in my hand not the Bill but the promoters' statement. I was analysing that statement. My hon. Friend is quite correct to draw attention to the fact that we are not examining the promoters' statement; we are being asked to pass the Bill. The powers are contained in the Bill, not in the promoters' statement. The promoters' statement is designed to encourage us to pass the Bill. My comments on the promoters' statement go back to the Bill.

There is absolutely no reason why the Bill cannot contain a commitment, although that would represent a legal obligation, to provide jobs. That is not extraordinary. In France, under successive Governments, not just that of

Mitterrand, which was not very Left-wing, but under Christian Democrat and Socialist Governments there has always been legislation ensuring that no person can be sacked for economic reasons without the consent of the employment Minister. The Labour Government should have introduced such legislation. We should have introduced much more legislation to provide workers' rights. We should have legislation equivalent to that in France, but we have not.

We can have legislation that provides for employment, and my hon. Friend is right to say that the Bill contains no such provision. We are providing the power for closure and concreting over for a range of alternatives about which we are not sure and we have not been provided with much information.

Mr. Skinner: My hon. Friend agrees with me that we are considering the Exmouth Docks Bill which would close the docks and no more. He has a bit of paper that has been passed along from the promoters. It contains a lot of inaccuracies and innuendos. That document could be similar to the Al Fayed document; it could be packed full of lies. That is what they did when they got hold of Harrods. They had a little document—a bit of paper that did not add up to a row of beans. The document that my hon. Friend has must be examined very closely. I reckon that we have to concentrate on the fact that the Bill is talking about losing jobs, not creating jobs.

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend is quite right. The Bill does not mention jobs——

Sir Peter Emery: Jobs cannot be included in the Bill.

Mr. Cryer: The hon. Member for Honiton says that jobs cannot be included in the Bill. The point that I am making is that legislation in France protects jobs. We could easily follow France's example. Why cannot the docks company set a pioneering trail? People would come from all over the country to see how it worked. Instead of sitting on its backside watching land values increase—Labour Members suspect that that is its intention—it could give a commitment to provide jobs.

Jobs are important. There are almost 2 million people unemployed in this country, according to the Government's dodgy figures, which have been fiddled more than 21 times, and under the old figures probably almost 3 million. It is important to consider legislation that affects jobs.

We may be misjudging the docks company. Tory legislation in 1981 removed grants aimed at ensuring that dock companies kept docks as docks and did not turn them into marinas or other yuppified pursuits. The Harbours Act 1964 provided grant aid for dock work improvement schemes, but it was repealed in 1981. We no longer have a scheme to encourage the company to provide the dock work facilities or career opportunities that must have existed for years in Exmouth.

A number of my hon. Friends wish to express their concerns about the Bill, so I shall conclude by commenting on the speech of the hon. Member for Honiton. He said that if the docks company is not allowed to proceed with the marina and land development it may consider importing coal.

Sir Peter Emery: I did not say that.

Mr. Cryer: The hon. Member for Honiton says that he did not say that, but that was the general tenor of his remarks. It seemed to be an attempt to blackmail the House into giving the Bill a Second Reading. It leaves a rather nasty taste in my mouth that an hon. Member should say to the House, "If you do not pass the Bill, something will happen to which you are deeply opposed." The hon. Gentleman may not have intended to imply that, because he knows that such a threat would be a matter for the Select Committee on Privileges.

Mr. Prescott: Not the Select Committee on Procedure?

Mr. Cryer: No, that would not be fair. I know that the hon. Member for Honiton would not want to become involved in such an argument, so I shall push that to one side. We should not entertain for a moment any threat of that nature from the company, the local authority or the sponsor, who did not really mean it in the first place.

The promoters have not made the case for the Bill. I have great reservations about it. The Bill does not guarantee jobs or anything except the closure of a dock that has already been closed. If the company has to seek authority to close the dock and if it does not receive it at some stage, it must have an obligation to open the dock. If not, why does it not just let the grass grow over and leave things as they are? The Bill seeks to remove an obligation from the docks company and we should be slow to agree to that. The sponsor should take back the Bill and talk to the trade unions to see what they think. He should amend the Bill before it is submitted again so that there is guaranteed employment. It should be decent employment, not routine labouring jobs with no prospect of developing manufacturing enterprise.

The promoters should ensure that they do the job properly, that they consult adequately and that they give guarantees about employment. They should also give a guarantee that Exeter city council does not have to foot the bill resulting from the decision of the docks company to close the dock. The Labour-controlled local authority—about which the promoters probably do not care—should not be left having to make up the money lost from the closure of the dock. It is clear that I have reservations about the Bill and I shall not give it my support.

9.25 pm

The Minister for Aviation and Shipping (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): It may be helpful for me to give the House the Government's view on the Bill. It is traditional for the Government to take a neutral stance on a private Bill and this Bill is no exception. The Government have considered the contents of the Bill and have no objection in principle to the powers being sought by the Exmouth Docks company. To obtain the powers, the company has no recourse but to promote a private Bill, as I shall explain.

As the House has heard, there is an alternative procedure provided for harbour authorities to obtain authorisation for the interference with private rights by means of a harbour revision order under the Harbours Act 1964. The Act also makes it possible for harbour authorities instead to resort to the private Bill procedure. The Exmouth Docks company applied in July last year for a harbour revision order under section 14 of the 1964 Act to permit it to close the dock to cargo traffic and to convert it into a marina. It was claimed that the order would have

[Mr. Patrick McLoughlin]

been within the purpose of the Act because the conversion of the dock to a marina would have constituted an improvement.

However, I decided on legal advice last October that that would not be an improvement within the meaning of the Act and thus that an order for the purpose would not be lawful. It may be interesting to note in this context that the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure, which has been referred to this evening, recommended that the permitted scope of orders under the Harbours Act 1964 should be broadened to allow general powers to be included for a wider range of developments to be authorised. The Government are considering the Committee's report and my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord President of the Council hopes that it will be possible to announce before long how he intends to take the matter forward.

It is for the promoters to persuade Parliament that the powers that they seek are justified. There are three petitioners remaining against the Bill and they will have the opportunity to present their objections to the Committee. The Committee will be in a far better position than we are tonight to examine in detail the issues involved and it will have the added advantage of hearing expert evidence. I hope, therefore, that the House will give the Bill——

Mr. Prescott: The Minister has explained precisely what the Department's role has been in the matter and how it considered whether the company could be given an order under the 1964 Act. As he said, the conclusion was that it would not be lawful under the interpretation of the Act. A Department of Transport press statement on 26 October 1989 said:

> "Mr. McLoughlin has decided that an order for this purpose would not be lawful, therefore no public inquiry will be necessary."

The explanatory note to editors makes it clear that the Government and the Minister took the view:

> "This would not be an improvement within the meaning of the Act."

Does that mean that the Government do not consider that the change of use from a commercial dock to a marina is an improvement? Will the Minister confirm that? Has he received any requests from the dock company for financial assistance to help with its safety problems?

Mr. McLoughlin: I cannot add to what I have already said. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that it is not usual for Ministers to disclose legal advice that they have received. If I had pursued the other procedure, there would have been cause for a public inquiry. As the hon. Gentleman said, I announced on 26 October that we could not follow that route, so, as I explained earlier, this private Bill procedure is the only recourse for the company.

I hope that the House will give the Bill a Second Reading to allow it to proceed in the usual way to a Committee for more detailed consideration.

9.30 pm

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East) Many of the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) merit answer; we would want to reflect on them before we vote on the issue.

The Minister's response highlights the difficulty that we face with private Bills such as this. We face the ever increasing practice of various port authorities of different kinds coming to the House to request the power to change their constitution in one form or another. The common factor binding those authorities is that they have discovered that a land bank is involved in docks and harbours. They realise that, if the rules and constitutional practices can be changed by closing the dock or changing the trust arrangements, a considerable amount of wealth can be acquired by developing the land.

That is obviously quite a proper consideration. Some people may believe that profit should be made from developing marinas and land. However, the Opposition are worried about port development. We want to ensure that Britain has an adequate port network, particularly as we are an island nation. The central argument is whether it is necessary to accept the judgment of the company that the port is no longer necessary and is unsafe and the company does not have the resources to meet the safety requirements for the port to carry on as a commercial enterprise.

The company's conclusion was not helped by the Government's early actions in port policy in the early 1980s when the Government removed powers to offer assistance to port authorities to make ports safe. The removal of the Government's role in those matters has complicated the issue. I do not know whether the hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) has had the privilege of seeing the consultants' report to which he referred. However, Opposition Members have not seen it and I know that some of the objectors have not seen it either. All they have seen is the three-page statement.

Sir Peter Emery: The report was seen by the East Devon district council and by Exeter city council. Therefore, it is not fair to suggest that the report has been kept secret.

Mr. Prescott: I said that a number of the objectors have not seen it. The hon. Member for Honiton referred to the objectors and referred to the fishing industry and the individuals. I had thought that the Tory party was concerned about individuals. It is the individuals who will be losing their jobs. The council will not be put out of work.

Sir Peter Emery: Only two.

Mr. Prescott: It is all very well for the hon. Member for Honiton to say that there are only two. There were 4,000 objections to the proposal, and there is a dispute. The hon. Member for Honiton knows better than most of us that there is a dispute in his area. He knows that there is a controversy over whether the docks should be closed and changed from a commercial operation as a port to a marina and profitable housing development. That is a matter of contention, as the hon. Gentleman knows; I have visited his constituency, and I am aware of it as well. About 4,000 people signed a petition——

Sir Peter Emery: In Exmouth?

Mr. Prescott: Well, I do not know whether the hon. Member for Honiton has walked along the dockland area——

Sir Peter Emery: I have.

Mr. Prescott: Yes, I am sure he has, but perhaps he met different people from those who came to me to protest. He knows that there has been correspondence complaining about this in the local papers. He knows from his files that there are divided views about the dock. I shall come to that in a moment, because it is an area in which any Member of Parliament has a legitimate interest. We must represent those constituents who live by a dirty dock and who legitimately complain to their Member of Parliament in an attempt to seek redress for those complaints, either through the public health authority, to which the hon. Gentleman has referred, or through another forum in the hope of ensuring that better circumstances will prevail.

At the heart of this argument is the mixing of commercial activity and housing, some of which is historical—although much of the housing must have been developed after the dock was opened, because the dock has been around for a long time. As I understand it, East Devon district council had a legitimate concern about changing its position on the laying down of conditions on housing developments in the dock area. It had to be satisfied that it did not have a commercial claim on the operation of the dock. I know that the council was concerned about the files of letters that it had received —no doubt from the hon. Member for Honiton—about wh[illegible] a commercial dock activity should continue in the area. There are legitimate concerns about that and about the environment that is directly affected.

I stress my earlier point that, over time, I have noticed more and more private Bills being introduced which ask the House for permission to change, for example, the purpose and operation of a dock. Indeed, only two weeks ago we considered the Tees and Hartlepools Port Authority Bill, which sought to change that port authority from a trust authority into a private company. That issue arose because a lot of money was tied up in trust arrangements that had been settled many years before, and, by law, the company was denied the right or the possibility of using that money for other purposes. It therefore decided to change its constitution. Again, that was a controversial matter about which legislation was brought before the House. We have not seen the last of port Bills coming to the House, asking for the privilege either of changing the law—by changing the original legislation—or of introducing a new Bill that would change the obligations of the existing port company.

At the outset, the hon. Member for Honiton asked whether we were concerned about the points raised by the Select Committee on Procedure in relation to the avoidance of planning inquiries. That is a legitimate concern, on which a Select Committee of this House has expressed its view. Those concerns are shared by hon. Members of all parties. However, as the hon. Member for Honiton himself said, that is not the case with this Bill. We are concerned about docks which, in some cases, have been in operation for hundreds of years and about the fact that their owners or operators decide that they want to change the terms of operation. We are concerned to establish whether the House has a legitimate right to examine such Bills and to decide whether the operators are making a legitimate request to change the character of a certain port.

The Exmouth Docks Bill seeks to provide that Exmouth docks will no longer operate as a commercial port. That means that shipowners and others who have access to those commercial port activities will no longer have the rights that were given them under the old legislation. The Bill seeks to change the port into a marina with dock housing. The development will basically be concerned with leisure activities.

However, the hon. Member for Honiton has now pointed out that fishing activities will continue in the area. We should like some answers on fishing, because we now know that those who had fishing rights—and those with trawlers who were allowed to land their fish—will be allowed to continue with those activities. As we have seen some movement on that matter, I am sure that the House will rejoice that some objectors whose livelihoods had been threatened have found some satisfaction.

As I understand it, when the proposals were first put forward, those people were told that they should go to another port if they wanted to continue with their fishing activities. I am sure that, like other hon. Members, the hon. Member for Honiton will welcome that move. We are glad that some satisfaction, however marginal and whatever the circumstances, has now been achieved by some of the objectors.

Mr. Cryer: Does my hon. Friend agree that, while we welcome the retention of fishing at Exmouth, the legal assurances that the promoters have explained are their guarantee that nothing will change in the future have not been spelt out? We really ought not to be overjoyed until we have been told exactly how the legal assurances will operate.

Mr. Prescott: That is a matter for concern. I see that the hon. Member for Honiton wants to give us some satisfaction on that point. I am delighted to give way to him.

Sir Peter Emery: If we had not had a speech lasting an hour and 33 minutes, I might have been able to give this information earlier.

The fishermen are protected by a condition under the planning consent and by an agreement under section 52 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971, both of which are legally enforceable.

Mr. Prescott: I hope that that will satisfy the fishermen. After all, they are the [illegible] judges, as I think hon. Members will recognise. The memorandum provided by the promoters says that the real concern is the safety of the dock. It is argued that the walls can no longer take the weight of heavy lorries or heavy machinery. But we have been told that freezing operations will be carried out at the dock.

Anybody who has been involved in the fishing industry, especially anybody who knows anything about freezing, realises that this operation involves the use of heavy lorries, heavy equipment and heavy warehouses. Are the promoters satisfied that the walls of this dock are strong enough? Would it be safe to carry out this commercial operation? If the walls are strong enough, I am confused as to the purpose of the Bill. Admittedly, the legislation has been put forward in a rather rushed form. We are told that the dock is no longer safe—so much so that commercial activities could cease at the end of December.

Sir Peter Emery: I shall try to assist the hon. Gentleman, as I have tried to do throughout the debate. Refrigeration operations will not be carried out at the dockside. In fact, the facility will be just away from the dock, in an area that would not be affected by the collapse of the dock walls. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the

[Sir Peter Emery]

equipment required for unloading small fishing vessels is very different from that which is needed to unload commercial bulk cargoes. The fishermen are satisfied that the guarantees that have been given, which are legally enforceable, are adequate.

Mr. Prescott: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his explanation. As I come from a fishing port, I am a little troubled. I assume that the situation in Exmouth must be similar to that in Hull.

Sir Peter Emery: No.

Mr. Prescott: In the respect that I have in mind, the docks are similar. I refer to the fact that trawlers tie up alongside the walls. I do not know that trawlers could tie up in any other way. The hon. Gentleman says that the warehouse will not be at the dock, and that the walls will not have to withstand the weight of heavy lorries, but it is admitted that the walls are not safe. They might collapse under the weight of a heavy lorry, or they might collapse anyway. It is generally admitted that the walls are unsafe. I assume that that is still the position.

Sir Peter Emery: I have no wish to keep interrupting the hon. Gentleman, but I must point out that the reinforcement that will be necessary for the marina will make Exmouth suitable for small fishing vessels. The hon. Gentleman's reference to trawlers shows that he does not understand the offshore fishing industry at Exmouth.

Mr. Prescott: I have been on that part of the coast, sailing and diving, and I have seen the vessels to which the hon. Gentleman refers. As he knows very well, I have actually been photographed on the dock. I have talked to the fishermen and looked at the facilities. That does not alter the fact that the central point is that the dock is unsafe. That is why it has been closed, why people have been made redundant and why the port authority says that it cannot continue commercial operations.

I take the point that apparently the dock authority is prepared to carry out the necessary work, but it only wants to do the work that is necessary to make the dock safe to build a marina and housing. I understand that 440 houses are planned. I read in the press that they are to cost £120,000 each; I do not know whether that is true. We are talking about a lot of money. It seems that money can be provided for work on the docks to provide a marina and housing, but not for commercial activity. It is not that the company has not got the money; it just wants to use the money for a different activity.

Each time we go through the argument, different conditions are made. I was under the impression that it was difficult to improve the dock and that the company did not have the money. Now we learn that it will come out of the leisure development. As is often the case, leisure developments provide more money than commercial activity. That is the argument here, that people want to make more profit from a marina and housing instead of carrying out the dirty work of a commercial port.

Mr. Cryer: There is an interesting thought. Perhaps the repairs should have been carried out under the legislation that established the dock, or under the Exmouth Docks Act 1870. Perhaps the company should have done the repairs and should be carrying on work as a dock. If the company has come to us for approval of closure, it must have been incorrect in closing the docks without our approval.

Mr. Prescott: That point should be borne in mind. It is causing confusion. The argument is that the company suddenly discovered that the walls were unsafe, despite the fact that it made an application in 1985 to extend the dock for more commercial activity. One would have thought that the weakness in the dock walls would have been discovered then. The assumption is that the company has only discovered the weakness in the walls; how convenient that the discovery was made after the Minister told the company that it could not pursue its proposals by order under the 1964 Act.

It is interesting to note that, if the change in activity could have been pursued by an order rather than by a private Bill, it would not have cost the company anything. The Government can bring in an order to change the use from a commercial dock to a marina. One can see why people want to pursue that course. They do not need lawyers; they just ask the Government to do it and it does not cost them a penny. It costs plenty to bring forward a private Bill, involving legal advice and a parliamentary agent. Everyone knows that it is an expensive business. We have read about it in the reports of the Select Committee on Procedure.

I hope that the hon. Member for Honiton is listening. I know that he is being pressed on all sides by people seeking his advice——

Mr. Skinner: He is trying to organise two tellers.

Mr. Prescott: I do not know whether tellers are involved. We will have to wait and see whether the Government will organise support, as they do in so many of these cases.

Is the hon. Member for Honiton aware of the information that I have received from people in the area, that an application to develop housing was made not only just after the company found that the dock walls was unsafe? According to the information given to me, the company has made applications over the years for housing, but they have been refused. If that is correct, it did not happen when the company found that it could not operate a commercial dock because the walls were unsafe. It always wanted to develop housing.

The company which owns the dock has its own development company. Some of the directors on the board of the dock company own the development company which is making the bid for the development. The general view is that they have always wanted to change from dock activity.

Continuing that theme, it is possible within a few years, if there is a refusal to allow housing development, to make a public nuisance of the dock, so that eventually people demand that the dock be closed. The owners in that situation do not tidy up the dock but leave it scruffy, with the maximum dust and dirt. Lorries are allowed to stand around the dock area, so that people complain about them. That is not unique to Exmouth. Action of that kind is taken in many dock areas in Britain.

In other words, we are not discussing the fact that it cannot eventually be used as a commercial dock. The owners want to develop it for houses and so on, and they have wanted to do that for some time. I am sure that the hon. Member for Honiton has files about that, spanning a number of years. I thought that it was a dirty terrible dock. The fact that the company was prosecuted shows that it was not too concerned to clean it up.

The company wants it to become a public nuisance. It wants the public to clamour for the dock to be closed, because it is more profitable to develop a marina and housing. It is more profitable for the yuppies in London than for people who want to live and work there, dockers and others involved, such as shipping agents. I am talking of the ones and twos, as the hon. Member for Honiton contemptuously described them. We are talking not of ones or twos but of thousands of people who have protested and written about this matter.

The facts that I have given put a different complexion on the application that is before the House. Should the dock be closed because it is unsafe? It always was the considered intention of the family who owned it to close it. They wanted to do that not simply for the development of the dock. Apparently they wanted to use it for a massive development, of which there have been reports, involving much more than we have heard.

I am told that the dock company wishes to sell the dock to invest the rollover money in a golf course, a restaurant and a leisure complex on Woodbury common. May we be told more about that? This is the first stage of a massive development in the area, and it has always been the intention to undertake such a development. All the arguments about it being an unsafe dock and so on have the objective of making more money from the development of a marina and housing.

Sir Peter Emery: If the hon. Gentleman is making a serious rather than a nonsensical point, he might have examined the capital expenditure and repairs and renewals expenditure over the period to which he is referring. In the last four and a half to five years, over £1,593,000 has been spent—hardly the expenditure of people who are planning to waste the dock or put it into a useless situation. Please let us leave emotion out of this. The people of Exmouth want the improvements, and the hon. Gentleman should remember that.

Mr. Prescott: It is not unknown for me to become emotional. On this matter, the hon. Member for Honiton is clearly emotional. He is talking of people who are planning a development that will cost £63 million, so £1 million is chickenfeed compared with the money that will be made out of the development. In any event, it might take the sum he mentioned to keep the dock legally in line with work that must be done.

We have been told that the company wanted to do additional development, and that is a legitimate point to make. The company asked for permission to develop the riverside facilities almost opposite what is known as Shelley beach. East Devon district council was not prepared to permit plans that mixed housing and dock development, which is a reasonable point of view.

Is it suggested that that meant the end of the dock because it would be closed to traffic? The hon. Member for Honiton said that trade had been stabilised and that it was not a growing dock. If he knew anything about dock traffic, he would know that it fluctuates. The figures of movements must be taken over a number of years. He made a good point when he said that, over five years, the movements had stabilised at 500,000.

The trend of what has been happening to the docks shows that in 1978 it had 279 vessels going through it. By 1988, it had achieved 532 vessels. An awful lot of vessels were coming in. In 1978, the total traffic was 158,000 tonnes. The hon. Member for Honiton gave even later figures than I had; he gave figures for 1989. By his own admission, the total traffic had grown to 523,000 million tonnes by 1989. We cannot accept his argument that somehow the increase in traffic was due to the coal imported during the miners' strike. Presumably, the dock does not import as much coal as it did. The port is growing, with ever more ships coming into it and more trade.

What alarms me is that, for the first time, an application has been made by a port authority to close a port that is growing, not one that is dead. We often have legislation to close ports that are dead. We have far too much port capacity in this country, and we have to close some of it. Sometimes it is necessary to come to the House and apply for permission to do so. That is not the case here. We are faced with property developers who want to close an expanding port, not a declining one. Many people in the area feel that the port is absolutely necessary.

When the hon. Member for Honiton gave us some explanations earlier, he said, "Why should Exeter be an objector?" He said it almost with contempt, because, as he threw in, it is a Labour council. He did not want to consider the arguments. He did not seem to be aware that Exeter city council is the navigation authority. It has responsibility for maintaining navigation lights and all the facilities on the river. That is why it imposes a levy on the ships. The levy that it received—the hon. Gentleman said it was £160,000—goes towards financing that.

If the council loses that money, as it clearly will next year, where will it find the extra money? Either it will take it from Exeter residents or from yachts that ply up and down the river or it will increase the charges or cut the costs. Either way, Exeter is not in a happy position.

All that Exeter has done is obtain an agreement that half the money—about £70,000—will be paid over to it. It is a raw deal for Exeter. Someone will have to pay for the navigational lights; they must be maintained even if only one yacht goes up and down the river. Exmouth port authority has relieved itself of the burden by simply shifting it on to the Labour council. That does not seem to worry the hon. Gentleman, but even in that area there will be Tory ratepayers, and they will pay the difference. I hoped that he might be worried about that because they will have to finance the charges.

Sir Peter Emery *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House divided: Ayes 68, Noes 16.

Division No. 149] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Arbuthnot, James
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Boswell, Tim
Bowis, John
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chapman, Sydney
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Emery, Sir Peter
Favell, Tony
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forth, Eric

Freeman, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gorst, John
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lightbown, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mills, Iain
Moate, Roger
Morrison, Sir Charles
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Squire, Robin
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thurnham, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Warren, Kenneth
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Roger King and
Mr. Jacques Arnold.

NOES

Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Beckett, Margaret
Boateng, Paul
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Home Robertson, John
Livingstone, Ken
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Murphy, Paul
Pike, Peter L.
Prescott, John
Sheerman, Barry
Vaz, Keith

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Bob Cryer and
Mr. Dennis Skinner.

Mr. Speaker: Fewer than 100 Members having voted in the majority in support of the Question, I declare that the Question is not decided in the affirmative.

Debate to be resumed on Thursday 19 April.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Bill *[Lords]* may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Bill *[Lords]*

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New clause 1

PART IIA: SEIZURE AND DETENTION OF DRUG TRAFFICKING CASH

'(1) A customs officer or constable may seize and, in accordance with this section, detain any cash which is being imported into or exported from the United Kingdom if its amount is not less than the prescribed sum and he has reasonable grounds for suspecting that it directly or indirectly represents any person's proceeds of, or is intended by any person for use in, drug trafficking.

(2) Cash seized by virtue of this section shall not be detained for more than forty-eight hours unless its continued detention is authorised by an order made by a justice of the peace or in Scotland the sheriff; and no such order shall be made unless the justice or, as the case may be, the sheriff is satisfied—

(a) that there are reasonable grounds for the suspicion mentioned in subsection (1) above; and

(b) that continued detention of the cash is justified while its origin or derivation is further investigated or consideration is given to the institution (whether in the United Kingdom or elsewhere) of criminal proceedings against any person for an offence with which the cash is connected.

(3) Any order under subsection (2) above shall authorise the continued detention of the cash to which it relates for such period, not exceeding three months beginning with the date of the order, as may be specified in the order; and a magistrates' court or in Scotland the sheriff, if satisfied as to the matters mentioned in that subsection, may thereafter from time to time by order authorise the further detention of the cash but so that—

(a) no period of detention specified in such an order shall exceed three months beginning with the date of the order; and

(b) the total period of detention shall not exceed two years from the date of the order under subsection (2) above.

(4) Any application for an order under subsection (2) or (3) above shall be made by the Commissioners of Customs and Excise or a constable if made to a justice or magistrates' court and by a procurator fiscal if made to the sheriff.

(5) At any time while cash is detained by virtue of the foregoing provisions of this section—

(a) a magistrates' court or in Scotland the sheriff may direct its release if satisfied—

  (i) on an application made by the person from whom it was seized or a person by or whose behalf it was being imported or exported, that there are no, or are no longer, any such grounds for its detention as are mentioned in subsection (2) above; or

  (ii) on an application made by any other person, that detention of the cash is not for that or any other reason justified; and

(b) a customs officer or constable, or in Scotland a procurator fiscal, may release the cash if satisfied that its detention is no longer justified but shall first notify the justice, magistrates' court or sheriff under whose order it is being detained.

(6) If at a time when any cash is being detained by virtue of the foregoing provisions of this section—

(a) an application for its forfeiture is made under section (*Forfeiture*) below; or

(b) proceedings are instituted (whether in the United Kingdom or elsewhere) against any person for an offence with which the cash is connected,

the cash shall not be released until any proceedings pursuant to the application or, as the case may be, the proceedings for that offence have been concluded.'.—*[Mr. John Patten.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 2

FORFEITURE

'(1) A magistrates' court or in Scotland the sheriff may order the forfeiture of any cash which has been seized under section *(Part IIA: seizure and detention of drug trafficking cash)* above if satisfied, on an application made while the cash is detained under that section, that the cash directly or indirectly represents any person's proceeds of, or is intended by any person for use in, drug trafficking.

(2) Any application under this section to a magistrates' court shall be made by the Commissioners of Customs and Excise or a constable and to the sheriff by a procurator fiscal.

(3) The standard of proof in proceedings on an application under this section shall be that applicable to civil proceedings; and an order may be made under this section whether or not proceedings are brought against any person for an offence with which the cash in question is connected.'.—*[Mr. John Patten.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 3

INTEREST

'. Cash seized under this Part of this Act and detained for more than forty-eight hours shall, unless required as evidence of an offence, be held in an interest-bearing account and the interest accruing on any such cash shall be added to that cash on its forfeiture or release.'.—*[Mr. John Patten.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 4

PROCEDURE

'(1) An order under section *(Part IIA: seizure and detention of drug trafficking cash)*(2) above shall provide for notice to be given to persons affected by the order.

(2) Provision may be made by rules of court with respect to applications to any court under this Part of this Act, for the giving of notice of such applications to persons affected, for the joinder, or in Scotland sisting, of such persons as parties and generally with respect to the procedure under this Part of this Act before any court.

(3) Subsection (2) above is without prejudice to the generality of any existing power to make rules.'.—*[Mr. John Patten.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New clause 5

INTERPRETATION OF PART IIA

'(1) In this Part of this Act—

"cash" includes coins and notes in any currency;

"customs officer" means an officer commissioned by the Commissioners of Customs and Excise under section 6(3) of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979;

"drug trafficking" has the same meaning as in the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 or, as respects Scotland, in Part [illegible] of the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 1987;

"exported", in relation to any cash, includes its being brought to any place in the United Kingdom for the purpose of being exported;

"the proceeds of drug trafficking" has the same meaning as in the said Acts of 1986 and 1987 respectively and includes proceeds received by any person before as well as after the coming into force of this Part of this Act.

(2) In section (*Part IIA: seizure and detention of drug trafficking cash*) above "the prescribed sum" means such sum in sterling as may for time being be prescribed for the purposes of that section by an order made by the Secretary of State by statutory instrument subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament; and in determining under that section whether an amount of currency other than sterling is not less than the prescribed sum that amount shall be converted at the prevailing rate of exchange.

(3) For the avoidance of doubt it is hereby declared that notwithstanding sections 8 and 9 of the Isle of Man Act 1979 references in this Part of this Act to importation into or export from the United Kingdom include references to importation into the United Kingdom from the Isle of Man and exportation from the United Kingdom to the Isle of Man.'.—*[Mr. John Patten.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

Clause 4

UNITED KINGDOM EVIDENCE FOR USE OVERSEAS

Amendment made: No. 1, in page 4, line 29, at end insert—

'(2A) Where it appears to the Secretary of State or, as the case may be, the Lord Advocate that the request relates to a fiscal offence in respect of which proceedings have not yet been instituted he shall not exercise his powers under subsection (2) above unless—

(a) the request is from a country or territory which is a member of the Commonwealth or is made pursuant to a treaty to which the United Kingdom is a party; or

(b) he is satisfied that the conduct constituting the offence would constitute an offence of the same or a similar nature if it had occurred in the United Kingdom.'.—*[Mr. John Patten.]*

Clause 25

EXPENSES

Amendment made: No. 2, in page 18, line 20, at end insert—

'(2) Any money representing cash forfeited under Part IIA of this Act or accrued interest thereon shall be paid into the Consolidated Fund.'.—*[Mr. John Patten.]*

Title

Amendments made: No. 3, in line 2, leave out second 'and' and insert

'; to enable the United Kingdom'.

No. 4, in line 5, at end insert

'; and to provide for the seizure, detention and forfeiture of drug trafficking money imported or exported in cash'.—*[Mr. John Patten.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

10.13 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): I have no wish to delay the House on this important Bill. I sometimes wonder whether, now that the House is televised, we should have a barometer of the cost of keeping the House running at this time of night and evaluate speeches in terms of the cash that it costs the taxpayer to pay for keeping the House running. That would probably have a good influence on our speeches.

It is important for us to make one or two points on Third Reading. First, the Government have—this is quite a change from usual—acceded to several requests that we made in Committee. That is a mark of the fact that the Bill received all-party support and, for a change, in Committee received a positive response from the Government. The tightening up of legislation, as represented by the new clauses, has been a result of the Government listening to the Opposition case which was made reasonably cogently in Committee. We are pleased to have the changes to the Bill and new clause 1 is of particular relevance and importance.

We have supported the Bill for the simple reason that it will help the forces of law and order in Britain to combat international criminality of every kind, whether it be drug traffickers, money launderers or violent gangsters. They are serious matters. If it allows us to accede to two important international conventions and makes it easier for the Government and for future Governments to chase international criminals wherever they may be and bring them to justice, this small Bill, which has all-party support, will be worth while.

However, we would have liked the Government to have taken a firmer line on one aspect. The Government still seem to believe that the City of London and, to some extent, the international banking community based in London, is a sort of gentleman's club with values and principles in accordance with which everyone acts.

We said in Committee, and we remind the House tonight, that completely unscrupulous forces are at work in the City of London and in the international banking community. I do not make that charge about every banking institution, nor even about most banking institutions, but the Government should wake up to the fact that a marginal group of people in the banking industry do not care from where the money comes or where it goes. The laundered money that keeps this wicked business going internationally is still moving round the City of London.

In the coming months, scandals about international involvement in money-laundering schemes in the City will come to light and the Government will have to come back to the House to take more measures to deal with them. I make that point in all seriousness. When that happens I hope that my remarks on Third Reading will be remembered.

When the Bank of England gave evidence to the Select Committee it was asked what measures it would introduce further to curb the ability of banks to launder international drug money, to which the Bank of England said that it did not have any positive ideas. The Select Committee said that that was not good enough and that it was the Government's job to tell the Bank of England that they knew what was going on, that they wanted it stopped and that they wanted the mechanisms by which that could be done to be introduced quickly. The Bill gave us the opportunity to tighten up even more on such trade, but it has not been taken.

I reiterate that the Opposition believe that in the near future scandals and revelations will make us take seriously what is going on in some institutions, albeit marginal ones. These are serious matters in terms of the amount of money involved and we shall have to take further steps to control those institutions.

As I said, if we had a barometer to show how much each speech cost, we might make shorter speeches. I do not intend to detain the House any longer on a Bill which has the Opposition's full support and which will lead to the apprenhension of more criminals and international drug traffickers.

10.19 pm

Sir John Wheeler (Westminster, North): I, too am glad to give the new amendments to the Bill a very warm welcome. Like the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), I hope to be brief.

The new amendments will certainly help to bring the United Kingdom law into line with article 5 of the Vienna convention. The new amendments are most timely as the ministerial conference on drugs takes place in April, when I am sure that the United Kingdom intention to strengthen the law will be regarded as a welcome example by other countries and their delegates attending that conference.

My Select Committee is always pleased when its recommendations find currency in legislation so speedily. The House will know that the Home Affairs Select Committee reported on 8 November last year and I warmly congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister on his willingness to follow the Select Committee's recommendations and amend the Bill.

During its visit to the United States last year the Committee was most impressed by the evidence from the officials of the various services concerned with drug trafficking and money laundering. The United States customs service argued persuasively that there was a serious loophole in British law, which enabled cash to be moved in and out of the United Kingdom. Evidence from the United Kingdom customs, the Metropolitan police and the national drugs intelligence unit confirmed that loophole.

For those reasons, the Select Committee made clear recommendations to make it illegal to import or export the proceeds of drug trafficking or other serious crimes and to allow customs officers to detain money entering or leaving the country if they knew or suspected that it arose from the proceeds of such crime.

I am glad, therefore, that the Government's new clauses seek to deal with those loopholes. We shall have to experience the exact way in which the legislation will be enforced, and it would be helpful if my right hon. Friend made some comment on that.

Tonight's proposals apply to the proceeds of drug trafficking and not to cash or money from other offences that can be seized within the United Kingdom under part VI of the Criminal Justice Act 1988. I invite my right hon. Friend to consider extending those provisions to non-drugs money laundering. I congratulate the Government on introducing the new clauses, which I warmly welcome.

10.22 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I, too, congratulate the Minister on accepting the recommendations of the Home Affairs Select Committee. It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler), who is the Chairman of the Committee. The Committee's work on drugs and the evidence that we took, particularly in America because of the problems there, were extremely valuable in terms of our recommendations.

However, I want to sound a couple of notes of caution. The first concerns the relationship between the police and the customs service. In paragraphs 103 to 1[illegible] of our report, we emphasised the need for close co-operation between the police, the customs and the regional drug squads. It is extremely important that we monitor carefully the way in which those provisions operate.

I am concerned at the number of complaints that I have received from constituents about the way in which some customs officers operate. Constituents who go abroad wearing gold jewellery and return wearing the same gold jewellery are then told by customs officers that they had that jewellery made abroad, particularly in India or Pakistan. I hope that customs officers, having been given this new power, will exercise it particularly carefully.

I should like to bring to the Minister's attention the need to ensure that we place more emphasis on preventive work. The Bill is about international co-operation, but on its visit to America the Select Committee discovered that the American enforcement agencies made several mistakes, through no fault of their own, but simply because it was the first time that they had dealt with drugs such as crack. Our services made similar mistakes. The Minister and the hon. and learned Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) have said that preventive work is being emphasised, but it is no good merely catching the international criminal and seizing the proceeds of his crime —we must work to ensure that demand reduction is a reality.

I have just returned from a brief visit to India. The governor of Gujarat, which, as I am sure hon. Members know, has a long coastline and a common border with Punjab, is concerned that the international drugs trade is increasing from that area. Gujarat would like assistance from the British Government. We can offer our expertise in dealing with such problems and the lessons that we learned from the mistakes made by the Americans. It would be useful if the Minister mentioned to the Minister for Overseas Development the need to provide aid to support Governments who are trying to stop the flow of drugs.

I should like to see more emphasis placed on exchange visits for police and customs officers to America and the sub-continent so that expertise, which is vital in the fight against the drugs trade, is developed.

I read the Committee's proceedings on the Bill with much interest. The Committee stage was quick, but it showed that hon. Members are committed to doing all that they can to stop the spread of this obnoxious international crime.

10.26 pm

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg (Hampstead and Highgate): For some considerable time, the subject of drugs has been of much interest to the Council of Europe. On 29 January, a joint meeting of several committees in Strasbourg was

[Sir Geoffrey Finsberg]

addressed by Margaret Anstee, who is the director-general of the United Nations' office in Vienna and is in charge of the war against drugs. It was one of the most fascinating but terrifying meetings that I have attended. Coldly and dispassionately, she told us of the growing drugs problem, which stretches way beyond the bounds of what any rational person would have thought possible. It certainly persuaded the Council of Europe to do more than it had already done.

Margaret Anstee's talk prompted me to table a question to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, which she answered on 9 February. I asked whether we will be able to ratify the 1988 United Nations convention. It is extremely important that we do so as rapidly as possible.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) said, a ministerial conference with a somewhat longer than necessary title—the world ministerial summit to reduce demand for drugs and to combat the cocaine trade—is being held in London on 9-11 April. My right hon. Friend the Minister knows that the Bill has received all-party support. The amendments that have been made tonight should command the full support of the other place. Does my right hon. Friend believe that it will be possible for Britain to ratify the convention before that conference takes place? It would be an enormous boost if we were able to do so, and a tribute to that dedicated servant of the United Nations, who is also a British subject.

10.28 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I want to consider the future operation of the legislation in the context of 1992. The aim of the Common Market, which is not recognised here, but is recognised in the Strasbourg Assembly, is for the complete removal of barriers. Reservations have been expressed in the Trevi group of Home Office Ministers, but there is pressure from the Common Market to remove customs barriers. There is a group known as the kangaroo group because it wants to leap over barriers. Prominent members of the Conservative party support the kangaroo group. [HON. MEMBERS: "Kangaroo group?"] It is a suggestion of leaping over barriers. I know that it seems a strange description to the House of Commons, but it is a sign of the dedication to federal solutions which looms large inside the Common Market.

There is no point in passing legislation—with which we agree—to attempt to control drug trafficking while there are pressures to dismantle the very apparatus that helps to control that trafficking. New clause 1, which provides the power for customs officers to seize cash which is believed to be the proceeds of drug trafficking or to be intended for use in drug trafficking, will, of course, be rendered null and void if we are not allowed to give those powers to customs officers in traffic between ourselves and the other 11 member states.

It is a matter of grave concern. The Government's reservations to the Trevi group of Ministers have never been spelt out. I fear very much that the insidious power of federalism will lead to the diminution of important safeguards for our country. I have always taken the view, and expressed it in the Common Market Assembly, that the notion there that a strong barrier round the 12 is in some way a substitute for a number of barriers inside the Common Market is inadequate. A number of barriers around the member states are a far better deterrent than one big barrier.

I assure the House, without equivocation, that there is pressure for the single unitary customs union of the Common Market.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Waddington) *indicated dissent.*

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Cryer: I see that the Secretary of State and the Minister of State are showing that they agree with maintaining barriers. I am pleased by that assurance, and I shall continue to seek such assurances whenever the subject is raised because it is important.

The seizure of even more dangerous items than drugs and associated facilities, such as the seizure of nuclear triggers by Customs and Excise yesterday—on which they are to be congratulated—is a sign that vigilance is required. I know that the triggers were destined for a country outside the Common Market, but the principle of surveillance and examination is the same and must be retained if the Bill is to be enacted properly.

10.33 pm

Mr. John Gorst (Hendon, North): The Bill's intention, which is wholly laudable, is to enable the United Kingdom to co-operate with other countries. We shall co-operate especially by serving other countries' legal processes, by obtaining evidence and by facilitating the appearance of British witnesses at court hearings. Those are unexceptionable objectives, but the ends must always be in harmony with the means taken towards their achievement and the ends do not justify the means in this case.

I have a crucial question for my right hon. Friend the Minister which hinges on the meaning of the word "person" in paragraph 4 of schedule 1. The paragraph says:

> "A person shall not be compelled to give in the proceedings any evidence which he could not be compelled to give . . . in . . . the United Kingdom".

However, that provision would not apply unless the claim of the person was conceded by the court in the foreign country. Can a certain type of Crown servant in this country, perhaps a police officer, be compelled to give evidence or, perhaps more pertinently, can he be prevented from doing so?

The reason why I am concerned about that will become apparent if I describe what happened about three years ago in the case of Captain Simon Hayward, who was arrested on a drugs trafficking charge. That example will show that I am not voicing a simple theoretical concern.

In the criminal proceedings brought against Hayward in Sweden, the Swedish authorities sought to call two British police officers who were working at the time for the national drugs intelligence unit. They were to have given evidence on information that they had received from an unnamed criminal source in this country. However, the officers had visited Sweden earlier to collect intelligence. During their visit, they passed on certain police-to-police intelligence to the Swedes, and before they left the country, they lodged it with the Swedes in a signed memorandum.

Thereafter, the British authorities received a request from Sweden asking for the officers to give evidence at Hayward's trial.

I am glad to say that the then head of the national drugs intelligence unit, Assistant Commissioner Colin Hewett, took a highly responsible attitude. He informed the Swedes that he was not prepared to allow his officers to give evidence, because it was clearly hearsay. Moreover, it was evidence that would not have been admissible in proceedings if they had been brought in this country. To put an end to it, Mr Hewett added that neither of his officers could vouch for the truth and accuracy of their information.

Notwithstanding that, the Swedish authorities were still able to use the intelligence handed to them by the two officers. They merely informed the Swedish court that the officers would have said what was in their statements had they been called. As a consequence of those events, I am glad to say that the previous Home Secretary was sufficiently disturbed by what had happened to order an inquiry by the chief inspector of constabulary, which resulted in new guidelines for the police.

However, when my right hon. Friend the Minister of State replies to the point about schedule 1, can he tell me whether the changes that have come about with new advice to the police are reflected in the Bill, or can such disquieting anomalies be repeated? With the advent of much closer co-operation in international crime today, everyone applauds efforts to facilitate international co-operation in the investigation and prosecution of international criminals. Equally, no one would wish to make provisions in this country, about the admissibility of evidence in another jurisdiction. However, are proper safeguards incorporated in this Bill? Will they enable abuses to be stemmed in Britain before they can be enacted in other countries over which we do not have control?

Does schedule 1 ensure that, before complying with a request for assistance, British courts will have to satisfy themselves that the witness from whom evidence is to be taken will only be providing evidence that would be admissible in our courts? Will the Home Secretary be able to get an agreement from a requesting state that the only evidence sought from witnesses from this country will be first-hand evidence and not, as happened in the Hayward case, second-hand evidence given by one person about what another witness might have said had that other witness turned up to give that evidence?

Furthermore, can my right hon. Friend assure me that the provisions of the Bill will not become a charter for unscrupulous criminals to make wholly unfounded and, in this country, inadmissible allegations in front of foreign courts with the blessing, so to speak, in ignorance, of our own British courts? If so, they will effectively be turning a blind eye to what may happen afterwards, outside their jurisdiction.

Allegations could then easily be made against an innocent individual in the hope that those allegations might be relayed to a third party, who could then give evidence with impunity under the protection of foreign jurisdiction. Unless we are vigilant, there could even be the temptation for the authorities, on an international scale, to steer international prosecutions to those countries that are none too choosy about their methods, as long as they get convictions.

I should like my right hon. Friend to assure me that that will not be possible and that the Bill contains provisions to ensure that it cannot happen.

10.40 pm

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Some time ago it became apparent to the Government and to the Prime Minister in particular that they should do something about drugs. We all know that in this modern world the drugs problem has grown at a tremendous pace in some countries. In America, with a population of 200-odd million, the problem has grown much faster than here in Britain. It is now feared that the situation obtaining in America could occur on these shores; so it became a political issue.

Although I understand the motives behind it, I believe that the Bill is little more than cosmetic. I have no doubt that the Minister of State will explain all those good motives but, for the life of me, I cannot see how this kind of cosmetic can play a significant part, although I should like to think that it could.

I was talking to someone recently about the American situation. Its drugs problem has grown at a geometric rate. That person came over here only last week. He had retired after working in a college and was 60-odd years of age. When I asked him what the drugs problem was like, he said that as many as 30 per cent. of young people were on hard drugs. I asked him what was happening about that. He said, "Politicians stand up and make a lot of noise about doing something about it."

The United States of America is almost equivalent to the Common Market in terms of population. What is being said today is that, if we join those other western democracies, we can somehow or another wave a magic wand and control all the laundered money that is made from drugs. Do not get me wrong—I think that that is a sound idea, but I need to be convinced about how, in a free enterpreneurial society, such as is rammed down my throat by Tory Ministers every day, those freebooted entrepreneurs who do not believe in controls of any kind can control the drug money when they do not even know where it is coming from.

It is a bit odd that that massive contradiction has not crossed the mind of the Minister of State, who reckons to be such a logical thinker. He is well endowed in the classics and all the rest of it——

Mr. John Patten: That is a smear.

Mr. Skinner: I am trying to get the Minister deselected.

Let us face it: if the Prime Minister says that she does not believe in controls of any kind, but on another day she tells her Ministers, "We'll control the drug money flow," that is a total contradiction. Much as I should like to see that happen, it can be achieved only if the Government have control of the banks. If the Prime Minister is going to come along and say, "We have a big drugs problem; it is not as big as in America, but we are going to control it and stop the money, and the only way of doing it is by controlling the banks first"——

Mr. Greg Knight (Derby, North): That is not in the Bill.

Mr. Skinner: The hon. Member, who, I understand, is prevented by convention from speaking, says that it is not in the Bill. I am not talking about what is not in the Bill;

[Mr. Skinner]

I am talking about what is in the Bill. As it is a weak, cosmetic Bill, it is incapable of doing all the wonderful things that it is supposed to do.

Then there is the question of the exchange rate mechanism of the EMS. Eventually the Government will decide to join the ERM. I want to make it abundantly clear that I shall vote against joining. I am not in favour of the free movement of capital and labour in the Common Market. Joining the exchange rate mechanism will not improve the lot of people who believe in collective action.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. This Bill does not say anything about the exchange rate mechanism. The hon. Gentleman knows very well that a Third Reading speech must be confined to the actual contents of the Bill.

Mr. Skinner: I do not want to teach grandmothers to suck eggs, but I have to point out that this Bill attempts to control the flow of money made in the business of drugs. The point that I am making is that this is a cosmetic exercise. Such control cannot be exercised in an entrepreneurial society. I hope, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you will accept the logical extension of that point.

If the supporters of this Bill travel further down the entrepreneurial road of money exchange in a greater Common Market, the ability to control drug money will be diminished. I understand that contradiction, as do some of my hon. Friends. It may be that some Conservative Members agree with me about the exchange rate mechanism. Do not let anyone tell me that loosening the bonds, allowing money to flow even more freely, will make it easier to control drug money. That is a total contradiction. Let nobody try to tell me that this Bill has no bearing on these matters.

If it is possible, in this fairyland society, to control the flow of drug money, why do the Prime Minister and the other Ministers tell us that credit cannot be controlled? The reason is that, with the lifting of exchange and other controls, money is flowing here, there and everywhere. Let nobody, at this time of the night, tell me that, if credit cannot be controlled without such high interest rates, it will be possible to control this drug money. We cannot buy what the Government are trying to sell.

If this Bill is passed, it will not harm anyone, but it will not bake any bread either. Let that be understood. Some time ago the Prime Minister said, "We've got to do something about drugs. We'll control the money." Suppose that some Tory financier is found to have laundered or used money made from drugs, even if he did not actually make it himself. Does anyone really believe that, if the trail led to a Cabinet Minister, or to the friend or husband or wife of a Cabinet Minister, it would be admitted that the money had come out of a laundered drug fund? Does anyone believe that this Government would slap on proper controls? No, that would not happen. The authorities in the United States could not do anything about Noriega's money, so they captured Noriega. They had to abandon the idea of controlling the flow of money. They had to do something physical.

It is not the first time that such a Bill has been introduced. The Bill is based on a knee-jerk reaction. The Government want to tell the nation that they are doing something about the problem—"We are all in favour of apple pie and motherhood and against sin, so we will introduce a Bill and tell the world that it will change everything." We all know that in a free, entrepreneurial society, where there are no controls, it is not possible to control the drug money. Let the Government get on with the Bill and get it carried in their quaint little way, but they should not expect anything serious to develop.

10.49 pm

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): When the Bill was published, concern was expressed in some quarters about its effect on tax offences in other countries. When my right hon. Friend the Minister of State heard about the concern, he dealt with it as we have come to expect of him—with promptitude and helpfulness. I express my gratitude to him for doing so.

10.50 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): The title of the Bill is the Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Bill. An equally apposite name might have been the Criminal Justice (Inter-party Co-operation) Bill. I think that almost all hon. Members are in favour of it, perhaps with the exception of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), who feels strongly about the matter; of course, I respect his strength of feeling. Apart from him, every hon. Member who has spoken in the House and in another place has done so warmly in favour of the principles of the Bill. I agree with the hon. Member for Bolsover that one cannot expect legislation to change human nature and to work wonders, but I think that this Bill will do many useful things.

Parliament has already been united in support of measures to combat the evils of drug trafficking and international crime. The Bill has been no exception. It is important that that should be so because the problems caused by international criminals, including drug traffickers, are very serious. It would be wrong if people who prey on society could feel that they had friends in any part of the House.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) and to the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) for their support of the Bill, which has been scrutinised properly in Committee. I am also grateful for the advice that we received over some months from the Select Committee on Home Affairs, under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler). We have benefited much from that advice.

I am pleased that we were able to respond so quickly to the report of the Select Committee, to which my hon. Friend and others gave such distinguished service. The report was published on 8 November. With all-party co-operation, I do not think that we have done badly in managing to include some elements of the report in the Bill. We try as a Government to respond quickly and constructively to points made by Select Committees.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North about the loophole in the movement of cash connected with drugs. We have acted on it. However, he raised an issue that goes beyond the scope of the Bill and, indeed, the scope of my remarks on Third Reading if I am to stay within order—what we can do about the increasing amounts of cash derived from the proceeds of serious crime apart from drugs. The House will probably want to consider that matter over the next couple of years. It may be raised, although not necessarily by the Government, in a forthcoming criminal justice measure. I think that we are on a rolling frontier. I welcome the fact that hon. Members on both sides of the House are keen to develop ways of dealing with international crime, be it drugs or other serious crimes, which debauches the financial markets in the way to which the hon. Member for Bolsover referred.

Mr. Iain Mills (Meriden): Will my right hon. Friend include in his comments the concern that has been expressed about industrial counterfeiting?

Mr. Patten: I know my hon. Friend's longstanding interest in that subject, a matter that we shall have to continue to consider in the Home Office and in the Department of Trade and Industry. I shall bear his point in mind.

The hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr Vaz), who served on the Select Committee on Home Affairs, spoke about Customs. I shall draw his remarks to my right hon. and learned Friend. Plans are already in hand to train and instruct Customs officers in the operation of the new provisions, and there are plans to give greater advice to the general travelling public.

I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's point about people who travel always wearing a gold chain and the problems that can arise. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr Forth), is always impeccably dressed and adorned. I will brook no criticism of his sartorial standards, including the chains he wears.

In dealing with the preventive point of the hon. Member for Leicester, East, I must not stray too far on Third Reading. I will draw his remarks to the attention of the Minister for Overseas Development in relation to the Gujarat coast. In the next three years, the United Kingdom's overseas aid for all drug-related purposes will be about £21 million.

Mr. Sheerman: My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East made a telling point. The Minister will recall that in Committee we discussed the training of Customs officers. Although my hon. Friends and I have given great support to the Bill, we have expressed concern about Customs officers who are ill-trained and who might pick on people taking cash through and hold that money. I appreciate that a new clause will allow interest to be paid on money that is held for some time, but we must consider the reputation of Customs officers in dealing with the people to whom my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East referred, in terms of jewellery and so on.

We have commented on the way in which the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs likes gold jewellery. It is no joking matter when a Customs officer can say, without good reason, at any time to somebody coming through Customs with a large amount of money that it could be drugs money. We could be embarking on a dangerous precedent. The Select Committee had a better suggestion, which was declaration.

Mr Patten: I share the hon. Gentleman's concern for the proper training of Customs officers, men and women who sometimes have a difficult and sensitive task. I am happy to tell the House that plans for training, and for giving advice to the public, are well advanced.

My answer to the point of my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) is that, alas, we are unlikely to be able to ratify in the time available, not because we do not want to do so but because for ratification we shall need equivalent provisions for Northern Ireland. That will have to be done by way of an Order in Council, which the Government intend to bring forward as soon as possible.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: Was it beyond the bounds of possibility for the drafting and introduction of that Northern Ireland instrument to have proceeded at the same time?

Mr. Patten: I am advised that even with the best endeavours it would not have been possible. I share my hon. Friend's disappointment. These matters are sometimes difficult, when we are translating provisions made on this to the other side of the water. I served as a junior Minister in the Northern Ireland Office and remember the complexity of translating the one to the other.

I do not know whether the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) found it unnerving to have the Home Secretary and I broadly agreeing with him. However, we did not say anything, so it is not on the record and will not affect his chances of reselection.

The anxieties of my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, North (Mr. Gorst) on schedule 1 perhaps go much wider than most other anxieties that have been expressed. But they are proper anxieties and I welcome the fact that he made those points to the House this evening. They relate more generally to the use that can be made overseas of evidence taken in this country or obtained from people who have travelled from this country to act as witnesses. His points were connected with the case of Captain Simon Hayward, in which my hon. Friend has taken such a notable interest.

The Bill cannot affect the law on admissibility of evidence in another country. Unfortunately, we can do nothing in this jurisdiction about the law in another country. In the normal course of events, people from Britain who are asked to travel abroad to give evidence in criminal proceedings will probably have a reasonable idea of the ground that they will be expected to cover when they appear in court. If they conclude, for whatever reason, that they do not wish to give the evidence sought, nothing in the Bill will permit them to be compelled so to do. I pondered carefully on what my hon. Friend has said about the matter in the past. But that is about as far as it is possible for the Bill to go. If someone travels voluntarily to another country to give evidence, he or she will naturally become subject to that country's laws. If he fails to respond to what, under the law of the country, may be a perfectly legitimate question, he may render himself liable to be penalised, in exactly the same way as if someone came here to give evidence in our courts.

Mr. Gorst: At the heart of my right hon. Friend's reply is the problem of which countries we are dealing with. If the country has a legal system that we respect—I mention no country by name—the fears do not arise in practice. However, if we find in practice that certain countries are guilty of abuses, will it be possible to revise the arrangements with those countries?

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend makes an important point. My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and future Home Secretaries will have substantial powers of discretion over whether to admit requests for evidence or to allow prisoners to be sent, with their consent, to give evidence. After all, if someone came to give evidence in our courts, we would expect him to abide by our law. If he refused to answer a question for some reason which was not acceptable on our terms, it would be open to the court to take action for contempt. I stress again that none of this is affected in any way by the Bill.

However, I was affected by the kind remarks of my hon. Friend the Minister for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot). Several strong fears were put forward by the financial community. I tried to respond as swiftly as possible to make sure that the Bill satisfied the anxieties of the banking community and others in international accountancy and other contexts.

This is an important Bill. It will not in itself solve the problem of drug trafficking or international crime—it would be foolish to suggest that—but it will enhance our ability to co-operate with our friends and neighbours overseas in tackling these serious evils. As such, it is an important arrow in our legislative quiver.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

CONSUMER GUARANTEES BILL [MONEY]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Consumer Guarantees Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(a) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(i) any expenses incurred or compensation payable by a Minister of the Crown or Government department in consequence of the application by the Act, in relation to its enforcement, of Part IV of the Consumer Protection Act 1987, and

(ii) any increase attributable to the Act in consequence of such application in the sums payable out of such money under any other Act; and

(b) the payment of sums into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Mr. Forth.]*

Statutory Instruments, &c.

RATING AND VALUATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

That the draft Gas and Electricity Industries (Rateable Values) (Amendment) Order 1990, which was laid before this House on 26th March, be approved.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Question agreed to.

LEGAL AID AND ADVICE (SCOTLAND)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

That the draft Advice and Assistance (Financial Conditions) (Scotland) Regulations 1990, which were laid before this House on 6th March, be approved.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Question agreed to.

LEGAL AID AND ADVICE (SCOTLAND)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

That the draft Civil Legal Aid (Financial Conditions) (Scotland) Regulations 1990, which were laid before this House on 6th March, be approved.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

Question agreed to.

Gynaecology (Privacy)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Patnick]*

11.3 pm

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): My previous Adjournment debate might have been the shortest on record. I cannot claim that I shall break that record tonight, but I shall be as brief as possible as the Minister for Health has already dealt by letter with one of my two requests from that earlier Adjournment debate, which was reflected in its title.

Following my attempt to speak during my previous Adjournment debate and the Opposition's determined and successful efforts to ensure that women's health care issues were discounted at their pleasure, the Minister kindly wrote to me to state that she was altering the method of scrutinising hysterectomy data so that the women concerned could not be identified. I express not just my gratitude for her action, but that of the Royal College of General Practitioners, whose president, Dr Pereira Grey, practises in Exeter at the university.

Tonight I ask the Minister only to consider a particular aspect of the new contract for general practitioners. The contract contains many excellent features, but, as it is not yet in place, it naturally has some sharp edges. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health always listens and I am grateful to him for his thoughtful help on several issues during more than five years, war widows to name but one, and I know that he will listen to and think about what I say.

The cause of my concern is the new system of target payments for cervical smears. We have moved from stepped sessional payments to a steep incline. If a doctor reaches up to 50 per cent. of his target list—in England and Wales the target list is women between 25 and 65; in Scotland between 20 and 60—he will receive nothing. When he hits 50 per cent. and reaches up to 79 per cent. he will receive £760. For reaching 80 per cent. plus of his target he will receive the handsome sum of £2,260. Is that too steep an incline? I believe that it may have unexpected and possibly unwelcome results.

I do not question the importance of preventive medicine. During my time with the Save the Children Fund I launched the "Stop Polio" campaign. Several years ago I found to my abhorrence that, in Lambeth, children had a 37 per cent. uptake of immunisation against polio, but once the fund had established the campaign in Malawi, we managed to achieve a 95 per cent. success rate there. It is galling that in a developed country such as our own we should have such a low uptake of immunisation. The same is true of cervical smears.

Cervical smears represent intrusive preventive medicine and, although the GP has a crucial role to play, the final right to respond lies with the patient. The effectiveness of cervical smear has also been questioned—a subject into which I do not intend to delve. An article in *The Lancet* of 22 June 1989 questioned:

> "Do cervical smears reduce mortality and morbidity?"

It asked whether there are some harmful effects from such smears. The case for smears is not quite as clear cut as that for immunisation against childhood diseases such as polio. I shall not explore that interesting matter, but I commend the article to the Minister. I am sure that he has seen it. I believe that it contains some analysis, which, on reflection and once the cervical smear programme has continued, may prove to be more important than we now realise.

Tonight I want to draw attention to the steepness of the targeting. I want the Minister to consider the data that I offer in terms of lists from GPs, which demonstrate their difficulties in reaching their targets in an acceptable manner. The Minister should reconsider the way in which we can assure women that their preventive health care in this matter will be best looked after.

I believe that there should be a case for informed dissenters—women who are educated of the need to have a smear, are well informed, but who take the conscious decision not to have it. I should like such a woman not to be dominated by the knowledge that she may be disadvantaging her GP financially by a large sum of money. Consider the woman who might represent the 79 per cent. target rather than the 80 per cent. attainment, who believes that she is withholding that large sum of money from her doctor. I should like to find a way of allowing her to opt out without affecting the doctor's income.

The test is not thought to be relevant to certain categories of women—for instance, those who have never been sexually active, those who are severely mentally or physically handicapped, nuns, ethnic minorities, women who have had hysterectomies, the terminally ill and those undergoing treatment for long-term conditions. Let us take the example of ethnic minorities: given the clustering of different groups in the United Kingdom today, many women on the target list might well belong to a religion which would cause them to feel unhappy about being treated by a male practitioner in any event. I know that the Minister shares my concern about the shortage of women GPs. Younger women, in particular, will feel very distressed if the test is pressed on them as a matter of urgency and priority, but women in their early 60s—whether or not they belong to ethnic minorities—will also feel unhappy if they are continually pressed to take the test, perhaps many years after they have ceased to be sexually active.

This is not an attempt to pretend that some GPs are unscrupulous and will be unpleasant. In the very best practices there may be an over-zealous receptionist. I received a letter from a widow of 64 who was deeply distressed. She had visited her GP and found that he was away; she saw a stand-in doctor, who, although delightful, "targeted" her fiercely, saying that if she did not have the test his income—or that of her own GP—would be at risk. She went home. Since then, the receptionist has telephoned her a number of times.

My constituency contains a higher-than-normal proportion of mentally handicapped people. I hasten to add that that is not caused by any inborn genetic error, but is due to exceptionally good provision of medical care and social welfare. Parents bring their children to live there, because they know that they will receive the best possible treatment. That has skewed the lists of some GPs—as has the fact that the constituency contains more than one convent: nuns and virgins are at almost incalculably low risk. A male doctor will be admitted to an enclosed convent only in extremis, and it would be extremely distressing if the sisters were subjected to such pressure.

At the other end of the spectrum, I was talking this morning to a GP in Glasgow who has an unusually high turnover of young women because of the local student

[Miss Emma Nicholson]

population. She has an annual "handover" of 12 per cent., but manages to target only 46 per cent. She is a very determined woman, and is keenly aware of the necessity involved. There is a good deal of social deprivation in her area, and she finds the pattern interesting. She writes letters to all the previous smear patients, and to all eligible women. I know that the Minister will be very interested to hear that the response rate from those eligible women, who are not normally seeing her, is as low as 5 per cent. I must admit that I am puzzled as to how a keen and eager woman GP with a large socially deprived population in the east end of Glasgow, who through her best efforts is reaching only 46 per cent. of the target, can do any better.

I have a batch of material from different areas, which I shall show the Minister after the debate, if I may. It contains letters from general practitioners telling me of their particular difficulties and why they find this a daunting target. One GP from Middlesex has an over-large number of special patient groups on his list, including a convent, two homes and five community hostels for the mentally handicapped. Another practice in the north-east reached 75·6 per cent. of its cervical cytology target in 1987-88. However, the GP does not believe that the practice can reach the 80 per cent. requirement for the higher target payment because of the resistance to smear tests encountered in women in the 60-64 age group. That is a prevalent feature in areas such as mine, where there is an unduly high age profile.

I have several other examples of where difficulties arise, including inner cities. A GP practising in Manchester states:

> "I am working in an inner city area where it's difficult enough to motivate people to come along anyway. If you do your patients' smears or vaccinations and then they move on"

he also has an area where the mobility rate is high—

> "you find that you are doing work and not being paid for it."

The mobility of the British population causes great problems for GPs. The latest survey shows that we each move, on average, once every five years. The slowness with which medical records follow the patient makes it difficult for the GP to have an up-to-date and accurate register to obtain the payment. It is probable that only 45 per cent. of GPs have an accurate age, sex register.

If doctors have this steep target payment, it is difficult not to believe that at least a few of them will be intrusive and invasive, which may upset many women. I should be unhappy if that happened. While nearly all the doctors to whom I spoke were totally in favour of cervical screening for all sexually active females, they were also in favour of a woman's right to say no, without being afraid of upsetting her GP or even, in extreme cases, being asked to leave his or her list. Will the Minister consider those points?

11.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Roger Freeman): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) and convey to her the apologies of my hon. Friend the Minister for Health who cannot be with us tonight. My hon. Friend the Minister was hoping to have replied to an earlier attempt at this Adjournment debate, and I am a poor substitute to deal with this subject.

I welcome my hon. Friend's support for the screening programme. She describes it as invasive, which I can understand. It is an important programme for women between the ages of 25 and 64, who should be screened at least once every five years. We should not forget women over the age of 64, who should also benefit from regular screening, although they are not part of the more formal programme to which I referred. I am also grateful for my hon. Friend's comments about the measures on anonymity of information which we have introduced, in terms of statistics passing from general practitioners to the family practitioner committee. That was an important step to protect information about individual hysterectomy becoming, at least in patients' minds, too widely known.

Some 2,000 deaths a year can still be attributed to cancer of the cervix, which is 2,000 too many. Screening can undoubtedly reduce that number. Experts in the Department of Health estimate that an effective screening programme could reduce that number by 80 per cent.

To illustrate our belief that we can do better, my hon. Friend might be interested in two recent reports, one from the Association of Community Health Councils of England and Wales, and the other from the department of epidemiology and social oncology in Manchester. They have published data based on their respective surveys of community health councils and district health authorities. Among community health councils, take-up has varied between 16 per cent. and 75 per cent. Of the 99 out of 185 community health councils which responded to the questionnaire, 34 gave an indication of take-up. The majority, 24, reported take-up ranging from 46 per cent. to 75 per cent.

Of the 178 out of 190 district health authorities which responded to the surveys, only 66 provided information on take-up; 22—33 per cent.—reported take-up of between 51 per cent. and 75 per cent., and 28—42 per cent.—reported take-up of between 26 per cent. and 50 per cent. My hon. Friend will agree that we can and should do better to save the lives of as large a proportion as possible of the 2,000 or so women who die each year. Those statistics suggest that we can do better.

The present position is as my hon. Friend described it. It might be helpful to put it on the record that for the lower base payment to be made there must be a 50 per cent. take-up. If that is achieved, on each quarter day after 1 April one quarter of £760—the amount payable per annum for the average practice—will be paid. The average practice will have 430 women. If the practice is larger, the payment will be commensurately larger, and vice versa. The figures that my hon. Friend quoted were for average practices.

If at the end of the quarter in question more than 50 per cent. of the available patients who fall to be screened have been screened, the payment will be made, and the same applies to successive quarters. If the percentage arising on the quarter day is 80 per cent. or more, the sum will be three times higher. My hon. Friend referred to £2,280, and a quarter of that will be paid on the quarter days.

Health authority clinics can do the screening. If they do, they contribute to achieving the target, but the doctor does not receive the proportionate payment for what the clinic achieves. The same is true for immunisation and vaccination.

It is important to note that we have increased the capitation payments which apply whether or not the doctor achieves either the lower or the higher targets. As my hon. Friend will recall, that has been increased from £8·95 to £12·40 per head per annum.

It might be helpful if I try to set down four basic aims of the screening programme. First, we want to try to reach all categories at risk. I have to part company with my hon. Friend at this point because the Department has received medical advice that all women, except those who have had hysterectomies, whatever their status or professional calling in society and whatever their history of sexual activity, are in theory liable to catch cancer of the cervix. We want to reach all categories.

Secondly, we believe that reaching the 50 per cent. target should be achievable for all doctors. It is interesting to note that the Doctors and Dentists Remuneration Review Body, in its calculation of the average award for next year of an 11·5 per cent. increase in remuneration, assumed that all doctors would achieve at least the basic 50 per cent.

Thirdly, the higher target—the 80 per cent. target—should be seen as a real bonus and challenge. The nub of the problem that my hon. Friend described is the pressure that may arise through seeking to achieve a higher bonus. However, we have so structured it that it presents an additional 0·8 per cent. in doctors' remuneration, so that if a doctor achieves the higher target, his remuneration is increased by 12·3 per cent. for the year 1990-91.

My hon. Friend cited certain categories for potential exclusion. I am not suggesting that we should act on her proposals, but if we did, logically we should aim for 100 per cent. target payment. If we excluded all those categories, including those who refused screening as a matter of conscience and those who failed to respond to two or more letters, instead of the 80 per cent. target which is an attempt to recognise that some women may not wish to enter the screening programme, we should increase the target figure.

Our fourth aim is to reach all geographic areas of the country. My hon. Friend referred to inner city problems. She must have been thinking of the Asian community where social or religious pressures might be involved in any consideration of taking up the screening programme. She might be interested to know that we have recently funded four cancer screening development workers at Kirklees, Camberwell, Liverpool and north-west Thames. I have seen the link workers working with the Asian community in Leicester—particularly the women—to explain the benefits of screening. It is vital to make sure that women doctors are available to provide the screening.

We also provide an extra incentive for those working in the inner cities who may have difficulty reaching the higher target figures by providing a special inner city supplement of £8·80 per head. That is the maximum, so with an average patient list of 2,000 patients in a practice in an inner city deprived area, the doctor could earn £17,000 over and above the remuneration that would be payable in my hon. Friend's constituency or mine which do not suffer from inner city deprivation.

I am not suggesting that that is a substitute for achieving the higher target figure, but it must be remembered that it is a relatively generous programme that will affect 10 per cent. of the population.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): There is a serious question of interference with civil liberties and individual freedom. Nobody would challenge the well-meaning nature of what the Government are doing and the desirability of it, but I hope that my hon. Friend will keep in mind that in some areas, such as my constituency, substantial numbers of Muslim ladies do not want to subject themselves to the screening programme; nor do the doctors wish to impose it on them. I have heard of a doctor who has 600 nuns on his list of patients. In those circumstances there are considerable problems. I know that my hon. Friend is concerned about these matters, and I ask him to bear in mind the strength of feeling. There comes a time when the nanny state should not go too far and invade people's freedom.

Mr. Freeman: The hon. and learned Gentleman re-emphasised the main and final point that my hon. Friend raised—

Mr. Lawrence: I am the Minister's hon. and learned Friend.

Mr. Freeman: The hour is late and this is the third Adjournment debate that I have dealt with in the past 48 hours.

Members of the Muslim community are as liable to cancer of the cervix as are those in any other section of the community and it is our responsibility to make sure that there are proper incentives, and no more, for the general practitioners involved to educate and encourage members of the Muslim community, as well as nuns and virgins, to have screening. The medical advice that we have received is that all except people who have had hysterectomies could be susceptible to cancer of the cervix and it could be beneficial for them to have regular screening.

I look forward to studying the cases presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West. It is most unprofessional for a doctor to place pressure on a patient over and above explaining the benefits of screening. Such pressure is unnecessary and reprehensible, and where it occurs the Department will ensure that family practitioner committees pursue it.

It is not our aim that pressure should be placed on women. If they decide, for whatever reason, not to take the screening test, that is their right and no further pressure should be brought to bear. That should not entail a penalty for doctors. I have already said that achievement of the higher target will bring a bonus—an increase in average remuneration of 11·5 per cent. We do not want doctors to give up once they have reached the 50 per cent. base target and to say, "I shall never reach the target of 80 per cent., so I will make no further effort." They should remember that a capitation payment is offered, and that it is their duty to draw to patients' attention the benefits of the screening programme.

May I give my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West five assurances? First, I shall report directly what has been said tonight to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State, who is concerned about the matter. Secondly, the Department will carefully monitor the outcome of the new doctors' contract and whether pressure is brought to bear on patients. Thirdly, we shall give careful thought to the national campaigns and to the campaigns aimed at explaining to the ethnic minority communities the benefits of screening in a sensible and balanced way. Fourthly, the Doctors and Dentists Remuneration Review Body will monitor carefully the remuneration of doctors to ensure that they suffer no financial penalties if, after hard endeavours, they

[Mr. Freeman]

are unable to reach the higher target. Fifthly, I look forward to reading the dozen cases that my hon. Friend mentioned. I shall pursue them and write in detail to her.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-eight minutes to Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 30 March 1990

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Orders of the Day

Consumer Guarantees Bill

Order read for consideration of Bill, as amended (in Standing Committee).

9.34 am

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough and Horncastle): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your guidance about the precedents for the recommittal of a Bill to a Committee of the whole House, which I understand we are about to do to reconsider clause 12, because of the failure to include a money resolution. Page 507 of "Erskine May" under the heading "Recommittal of Bill" states that you are entitled to accept a recommittal

> "(d) to enable the committee to consider in a regular manner a clause improperly agreed to before a money resolution had been passed".

That paragraph then refers back to page 495. I read through that page to find a precedent for the recommittal of a private Member's Bill, but could not find anything.

I am grateful to the staff of the Public Bill Office and the Journal Office who helped me with my considerable research. We found no precedents in the 21st edition of "Erskine May" for a recommittal. However, in the 20th edition—I am not sure whether you have a copy here, Mr. Speaker—on consideration of the Road Traffic Bill *[Lords]* 1930, the Speaker called the attention of the House to the fact that, while considering a new clause, the Standing Committee had agreed to an amendment which authorised the payment of certain fines to the Exchequer, which it had no authority by way of money resolution to do. That is a precedent for what I think you will allow to be in order today. I have taken the precaution of bringing that Bill with me, and you will notice that it is not a private Member's Bill but a Government Bill.

I undertook further research and found another precedent for what will happen today in our consideration of the Mineral Workings Bill on 18 June 1951. I do not want to take up more time than necessary, but——

Mr. Speaker: Order. What is the hon. Gentleman's point of order? He is drawing my attention to precedents.

Mr. Leigh: My point is that I have established that there is no precedent for a private Member's Bill to be recommitted to a Committee of the whole House because of an error connected with a money resolution. Do you accept that there is no precedent and that we are setting a precedent today not to improve our procedures, but to right an error?

Mr. Speaker: It is an interesting point. The hon. Gentleman drew my attention to page 507 of "Erskine May" and I draw his to page 505. The answer is that there is no procedural obligation on the House to recommit the Bill to the Standing Committee that considered it. A Committee of the whole House is perfectly capable of regularising the position. The fact that this precise course may not have been followed before is irrelevant. I have selected this motion by the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) who is in charge of the Bill. If hon. Members oppose it, they are free to speak against it.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will have seen in this morning's newspapers that last night the farm price talks in Luxembourg broke down. That means that the farming industry will enter the 1990-91 farm price year not knowing what farm prices will be. Clearly, that is bad for the farmers and those——

Mr. Speaker: Order. What has it to do with the Consumers Guarantees Bill?

Mr. Marshall: Do you know, Mr. Speaker, whether a request has been made for a statement on the matter?

Mr. Speaker: We should proceed with the Bill.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It relates to the matter before us.

Unfortunately, I was travelling back from the other side of the globe last night in order to be here this morning. I got *Hansard* first thing this morning to see what transpired in respect of the money resolution last night, but that edition of *Hansard* only covered the business up to 10 pm. Before we consider the motion on the Order Paper, surely we should be told exactly what happened last night. Furthermore——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman was not here, but had he been he would know that the money resolution —*[Interruption.]* Order. I am dealing with this. The money resolution was passed last night; if the hon. Gentleman looks at the Votes and Proceedings he will see that.

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South-West): I beg to move,

That the Bill be recommitted to a Committee of the whole House in respect of clause 12.

The recommittal of the Bill became necessary when it transpired, after the Bill had been reported from Committee, that the provisions of clause 12, if passed into law, would involve the expenditure of such sums of public money as would need the authorisation of the House by a money resolution. The application by clause 12 of part IV of the Consumer Protection Act 1987 would cost an estimated £1 million to enforce.

Clause 12 was considered in Committee without the authority of a money resolution. I must add that I hold no responsibility for that, and I have a letter from the Minister to confirm that. The motion for recommittal——

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jones: No.

The motion standing in my name will allow us to correct the irregularity.

Mr. Viggers: The hon. Member for Clwyd South-West (Mr. Jones), the promoter of the Bill, would not give way to me when I sought to make an obvious point—that two

[Mr. Viggers]

kinds of legislation come before the House. The first is public, Government legislation which is led by Ministers and for which the Government are responsible. The second type of legislation is private Members' legislation for which an individual Member is responsible.

Today we find ourselves in a monstrous situation. I am not reassured by the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West who seeks to exculpate himself from any responsibility when it has everything to do with him. He is the private Member who sought to put the Bill before the House. He is responsible. If he got it wrong, his advisers should have advised him better.

Who is responsible for this lash-up?

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Not as bad a lash-up as the poll tax.

Mr Viggers: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman on whom I can rely to intervene on my speeches.

Are the Government responsible? The Government will be responsible for the legislation when it is implemented.

Mr. John Marshall: If it is implemented.

Mr. Viggers: My hon. Friend is correct.

I know that the Government have expressed satisfaction with some parts of the Bill. I remember the Sale of Goods Act 1893 well from my student days, when I learned about it in my studies to become a solicitor. I know that the Government believe that that Act could do with some revision and updating. Are the Government responsible for the conduct of the Bill? The answer must be no, because the promoter of a private Member's Bill leads by explaining why he believes it to be a good idea. The Minister intervenes during the debate, virtually by way of amicus curiae, to give the Government's view of the Bill.

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): Surely in such circumstances Ministers usually listen and guide hon. Members on such matters. I hope that the Minister is listening now, as I am not sure that he may not be the villain. Before my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) dismisses the role of the Minister, I am not so sure that the real responsibility does not lie on the Front Bench.

Mr. Viggers: I am concerned that the Government have some responsibility, because, if and when the legislation becomes law, it will be for the Government to implement it. Imagine the difficulty, however, if we had passed the Bill into law and then found it was defective. It would have been the Government's responsibility to administer the necessary changes. We cannot relieve the Minister and his advisers of some of the responsibility.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): When the Bill was in Committee, I implored the Minister many times to give us his advice, but he rarely did so. I do not want to make a lot out of this, as I want to get the Bill into the right state so that it can be passed, and I do not want to be accused of filibustering—I hope that that is not the aim of the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers). The hon. Gentleman must be advised that, so far, the Minister has not been extremely helpful.

Mr. Viggers: I was not discussing whether the Minister has been helpful or not, but whether the Minister is responsible for the legislation.

Mr. John Marshall *rose*——

Mr. Viggers: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me, but I shall not give way; I am anxious not to delay the House.

The Minister must accept some responsibility, and I would be interested to hear his thoughts on this matter. He must have rafts of advisers—I suspect, not too far away —who have followed the Bill with keen interest. One or more of them must feel some responsibility, and perhaps some shame, that we have reached this stage and require the special motion now before us. I am afraid to say that the Government have some responsibility.

The second responsible group are those close to your august Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I remember seeking to introduce various ten-minute Bills under Standing Order No. 37, as it then was. Then I sought the advice of the Clerks of the House. They helpfully told me that there was a back way round the normal requirement for a money resolution. I was able to put my Bill before the House by claiming that the money would come from the national insurance fund. That quirk was helpfully pointed out to me by the Clerks who can be helpful on such occasions.

How can it be that Homer has nodded in this case? How is it that the Clerks allowed the Bill to reach this stage without pointing out its defects? What were they doing? That we have been let down in this way is an effective breach of the privileges of the House. Previously, when someone was guilty of a breach of parliamentary privilege, he used to be called to the Bar of the House. He had to account for himself and stand at the Bar while his case was debated. I believe that, until the 19th century, the person accused of such a breach had to kneel at the Bar. In this case it might be appropriate for the Clerk of the House to kneel at the Bar.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman realises that the Clerks give their advice to hon. Gentlemen in private. On reflection, I am sure that he will accept that public criticism of the Clerks is not seemly.

Mr. Viggers: I have sought to identify the second group to whom we should look for blame in this matter, but I intended to say that it is not the Clerks, whose services we all respect, who are primarily responsible. I have been in the House for 16 years and no body of people are more devoted to their duty and more skilful in guiding individual members than the Clerks.

The third party with responsibility is obviously the promoter of the Bill. We know that he has been advised by the National Consumer Council. Two days ago, it committed the extraordinary discourtesy of issuing a most abusive press release about me without the courtesy of sending me a copy. That press release was drawn to my attention during a television interview, when the interviewer produced it and asked me for comment. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister can assure me that the NCC is not in receipt of any public funds. It would be wrong if a body that behaved in such a way was in receipt of such funds.

Mr. John Marshall: I understand that my hon. Friend the Minister, who this morning has been described as unhelpful, is responsible for giving the National Consumer

Council £2 million of taxpayers' money. Is issuing press releases attacking Members of Parliament a sensible way of spending taxpayers' money?

Mr. Viggers: I am horrified to hear that it is £2 million of public money. We are discussing whether the House should waive its normal rules and allow a money resolution to be attached to a private Members' Bill, thereby allowing a further £1 million a year to be spent. We should not allow that to pass.

The House of Commons has a limited number of opportunities for Members to present private legislation. Many of us are unsuccessful in the ballot. It is disgraceful that an individual who was successful has put before the House a defective Bill, causing us to debate this issue on a Friday, when most hon. Members want to be in their constituencies. I oppose the motion.

Mr. Leigh: I, too, oppose the motion. As you may not have heard, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because you had not quite come into the Chamber when I was raising my point of order, I have done some research on this matter. We are talking about setting a precedent, and I do not believe that we should set it. Its roots lie in the speech of my hon. Friend the Minister on Second Reading on 26 January 1990, when he said:

> "The exchanges illustrate my earlier point: that the Standing Committee proceedings on a measure such as this —a long and complex measure for which Standing Committees on private Member's Bills are not entirely suited —would lead to even greater problems that might be very difficult to resolve. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle for having highlighted the point."—[*Official Report*, 26 January 1990; Vol. 165, c. 1236.]

My hon. Friend was looking into a crystal ball and foretelling the kind of problems that might arise on the Bill. This highly complex measure, with a considerable number of clauses, is not an appropriate subject for Standing Committee proceedings. That is illustrated by the mess we are in.

Unlike some hon. Members, I was here until the Adjournment debate last night. I was sitting on the Bench where my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) now sits advising the Minister. I saw the Minister come into the Chamber like a dark creature of the night, a saturnine figure dragging his chains. I think that perhaps he lives hanging from the rafters. The House was almost deserted. Where was the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones)?

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I should like to clarify a point. The motion that we are debating is that the Bill be recommitted to a Committee of the whole House. Surely the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) should restrict his remarks precisely to the motion. May I ask you, Sir, to call him back into order?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope that the hon. Member will leave order to me; otherwise, we might get into a muddle on this very complicated day. I realise that the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) was on his preamble, but it would be helpful to the House to remind him that we are dealing with the recommittal of clause 12. Remarks should be directed to that matter, not to the whole Bill.

Mr. Leigh: I am simply speaking on a constitutional point. I do not believe that a precedent should be set. As you will know from your great experience in the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, precedents are not set every day. We are not some little banana republic where one can do what one likes and change the rules simply because someone has made a cock-up—which is what has happened with the Bill. We change the rules because we want to improve procedures.

When I was carrying out my research for my point of order last night in the Public Bill Office and Journal Office, I was told that it was not entirely unusual for precedents to be set and that a precedent had been set recently to allow a guillotine on Lords amendments. That is a major issue, and it is central to what the Government want to do. Presumably, the Government persuaded Mr. Speaker that that action was in the interests of good government and legislation. This matter is entirely different.

It is extraordinary that no one spotted this problem before. I made the effort of looking at the Committee proceedings. I thought that there would have been considerable discussion on clause 12 and that these matters might have come up. I suppose that I should have been warned, because I was here at the start of the Second Reading debate, when the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West gave a cursory speech, lasting some 15 minutes, on this highly complex measure. I can only assume that, rather than wanting to inform the House on every clause, he galloped through his speech because he thought, wrongly, that other hon. Members would want to speak at some length. I spoke for only eight minutes, and the average length of speeches that day was 15 minutes.

If the House wishes, I can refer in more detail to the speech that the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West made on Second Reading. I see no mention in it of clause 12 or any evidence that he had researched adequately as someone who had been given a unique opportunity with the No. 1 spot—something for which many of us have waited many years. As a result, we are faced on a Friday morning with having to set these matters right.

Mr. John Marshall: My hon. Friend has spent a lot of time researching the Committee and Second Reading debates. How much time did the Committee spend discussing clause 12? One would have thought that there would be lengthy discussion in Committee and that this point would be raised then.

Mr. Leigh: Exactly. I thought that I would go through the Standing Committee debates and find out whether my hon. Friend the Minister had given advice, backed up by an entire team of civil servants. How many civil servants are sitting in the Box now? I can count no fewer than seven——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Member that it is not in order to refer to civil servants in the Box or in the Gallery.

Mr. Leigh: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Some blame must attach to the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West. There was only a cursory discussion of clause 12 in Standing Committee C on 14 February 1990. The hon. Gentleman moved amendment No. 82, the Chairman said that it would be convenient to take another amendment and, judging by the length of the *Hansard* reference, the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West spoke

[Mr. Leigh]

for no more than two minutes. That was the end of the consideration of clause 12. I am prepared to give way to him if he can convince me that there was more discussion. Unfortunately, I did not have the privilege of serving on the Standing Committee.

Was my hon. Friend the Minister a member of the Committee? Was he present on 14 February 1990? Why is his name not listed? Instead of doing his duty and warning the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West that a money resolution might be necessary—advised as my hon. Friend is by the weight of the civil service—I see no reference to his having intervened at that point. Why is there no evidence that the mind of the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West was exercised on this point?

We may seem to be nit-picking, although I do not think that we are. This is an important point. The matter has been dealt with before. I need not go through all the points that I raised in my point of order, but they are of some relevance. Only twice in our parliamentary history have we had such a motion. For instance, the Road Traffic Bill was presented on 18 Februry 1930 by the then Minister of Transport, Mr. Herbert Morrison, but because it was a Government Bill and because of its content, it was entirely different from the measure that we are now discussing. Let me illustrate that by quoting the then Minister of Transport, Mr. Herbert Morrison—a man whom I have always admired——

Mr. John Marshall: Shame.

Mr. Leigh: I have always admired him.

Mr. Marshall: I am appalled that my hon. Friend should admire the late Herbert Morrison, who was the originator of many of the nasty council estates that disfigured London for so long. I am also appalled that he should recommend a course of action followed by a Government led by Mr. Ramsay MacDonald. I should have thought that the fact that Mr. Ramsay MacDonald was in favour of it would convince the promoter of the Bill that he should not be.

10 am

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) that that is a long way away from the recommittal motion on clause 12.

Mr. Leigh: I want to illustrate my point by explaining that the Bill that Mr. Herbert Morrison introduced was entirely different in kind and in substance from this Bill —not only by reason of being a Government Bill but because of its size. Mr. Herbert Morrison said:

> "The Bill which we now introduce is a consolidating as well as an amending Bill."

I am not aware that the Consumer Guarantees Bill is a consolidation measure. Mr. Morrison continued:

> "There is, I am glad to say, in the last Schedule to the Bill, much existing legislation repealed."—[*Official Report*, 18 February 1930; Vol. 235. c. 1205.]

I am not aware that the Consumer Guarantees Bill repeals existing legislation.

This is a constitutional point, and precedent is most important, because we base all our procedures on it. But I found no precedent for this motion in connection with the Road Traffic Act 1930, so I sought inspiration from the proceedings on another Bill—the Mineral Workings Bill 1950—in the hope that I might find a measure on all fours with today's motion. What I found was something quite different. The then Minister of Local Government and Planning, Mr. Dalton—another famous figure in Labour party history—said:

> "This Bill makes financial arrangements in connection with the announcement which I made on 4th July . . . and the Special Development Order".—[*Official Report*, 9 April 1951; Vol. 486, c. 664.]

In essence, what he said was that that Bill was about financial arrangements. In that respect it was entirely different from this Bill. The Mineral Workings Act 1951 was a major Government measure to repair damage that had been done to a number of sites because of mineral excavations. Mr. Dalton said that the places that he had visited resembled the "deserts of the moon".

I then decided to see whether, with the help of the Clerks, I could discover any further information on this matter. I am not privy to all the inner workings of the Whips' Office. I leave such matters to my hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Mr. Dorrell), who is sitting behind the Minister. I discovered an interesting letter from the Clerk, then Kenneth Bradshaw, to the then Chief Whip, my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling), on 17 January 1980. It said:

> "You raised with me at the Table earlier this week the question whether motions to recommit bills fell into the category of motions which could be moved without notice and therefore required special vigilance from your point of view."

I emphasise the word "vigilance". That is why I raised my point of order: this is a constitutional matter and we should be exercising vigilance.

The letter continues:

> "Since then, we have looked at every recommittal motion since 1945 to see when and in what circumstances this kind of motion has been offered without notice, and might therefore be so offered in future."

We must remember that this is a letter from a distinguished Clerk of the House. I make no criticism of the Clerks, who have always been most courteous and who have advised me in the most correct fashion.

The letter continues:

> "These bills are normally Government Bills, and written notice is invariably given of motions to recommit them".

I return to the point that I raised at the beginning of the debate. Was written notice given in this case? All we had in this case was the Minister slinking in at the dead of night to table the motion. A former distinguished Clerk of the House has told us, first, that motions are normally restricted to Government Bill, and, secondly, that written notice is given.

The letter continues:

> "It is true that at the end of the committee stage of the controversial House of Commons (Redistribution of Seats) Bill 1979"—

some of us remember how controversial that was; it was very different from the Bill that we are discussing today—

> "a motion to recommit the Bill a Committee of the whole House was accepted by the Chair and put to the vote. The circumstances were, however, unusual. The recommittal motion was offered at about 3.00 am, and the occupant of the Chair was reluctant to delay the House while the Speaker was woken up".

I want to know whether Mr. Speaker was woken up last night. Did the Minister bang on his door at 3 am and inform him of what we should be discussing today?

But let me finish my quote:

"the occupant of the Chair was reluctant to delay the House while the Speaker was woken up to exercise his power of selection (which he alone can do). As the procedure under which the House considers a motion to recommit a bill is very brief . . . the Chair decided to let this motion go forward. The intention of the mover was in any case known in advance, and the (then) Government Whips were kept fully informed, so that there was no question of anyone being surprised."

I want to know where the Chief Whip is. And where is the Patronage Secretary? We are talking about setting a precedent, and frankly this is not good enough. We have already found out that Mr. Speaker was not woken up and there is no sign of the Patronage Secretary—just an empty green Bench and a couple of junior Whips. I am led to think that the Government are not treating the matter sufficiently seriously. I hope that, at the end of the debate, the Minister will offer us an apology and give us an explanation.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Eric Forth): My hon. Friends have asked me a number of questions. I hope that I shall be able to catch your eye in due course, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so that I may explain. Some fairly serious allegations have been made against me, but I feel that I can explain my role and that of the Government in this matter. Having said that, I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) will leave out references to the Patronnage Secretary, who does not have a role in the matter. I shall accept my share of responsibility in due course.

Mr. Leigh: I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

There is another member of the Government whom I should like to see present today. I do not see the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, but, according to my research —I may be wrong because I was advised of this by another hon. Member and I have not had an opportunity to confirm it—it is the Chief Secretary who tables such motions.

Mr. Forth: I shall refer to the matter in my remarks, but let me make it clear that the Financial Secretary to the Treasury puts his name to money resolutions. As I shall also explain, I was here last night to move the money resolution to show good faith on behalf of the Government.

Mr. Leigh: Again, I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

Mr. John Marshall: My hon. Friend has mentioned various members of the Government who he feels ought to be present, but so far he has not referred to the Department of the Environment. It seems to me that the House is all too willing to place additional responsibilities on local authorities and then complain about the community charge levied by those authorities. Does my hon. Friend agree that a representative of the Department of the Environment should be here to discuss this further additional burden upon community charge payers throughout the country?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am sure that the hon. Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle will remember that we are dealing with a motion to recommit clause 12.

Mr. Leigh: I do not wish to delay the House any longer than I need to, to underline my constitutional point, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

How extraordinary it is that the promoter of the Bill —the man who has piloted the Bill through the House so far—has not only informed the House that he was not aware that a money resolution was necessary; apparently he was not here last night and knew nothing of what the Minister was doing. I may have misunderstood and I shall happily give way to the hon. Gentleman if he wishes me to do so. Is this a private Member's Bill or a Government Bill? Is it really up to my hon. Friend the Minister to rescue the hon. Gentleman from his own mistakes?

I am piloting a private Members' Bill through the House at present, and I do not expect Ministers of the Crown to rescue me from my own folly. Ministers of the Crown are supposed to give their views and observations on private Members' Bills on behalf of the Crown. They are not supposed to intervene in this detailed manner in private Members' business.

That is another constitutional point. The promoter of the Bill should have spotted the difficulty and ensured that a money resolution was incorporated in the Bill. I must say that, in that regard, some element of responsibility must rest with the Clerks, whose job it is to advise on these matters, although, as I said before, I make no criticism of them. We are not experts. I do not entirely blame the Bill's promoter, and perhaps if I had been bringing in such a Bill I would have made a similar mistake.

The Opposition are constantly criticising the Government for increasing the community charge and public expenditure in a way that they do not like. I do not want to waste the time of the House by quoting from the speech made on Second Reading by the promoter of the Bill, but I have read through it. Presumably he was trying to convince the House by what he left unsaid that the Bill would cost nothing. At the end of Second Reading and proceedings in Committee we found that the Bill would be a charge on the public purse.

Are our procedures worth nothing? Every schoolboy who studies our constitution knows that a Bill has to go through Second Reading, Committee and Report stage, during the last of which any amendments considered in Committee are considered again by the whole House. Finally, a Bill is given its Third Reading. Schoolboys are not told that in some cases, because mistakes are made, matters are sometimes swept under the carpet and someone says, "Let us send it to a Commitee of the whole House." We should reject the motion and send the Bill back to Committee for proper discussion which it has clearly not enjoyed thus far. I shall vote against the motion.

Mr. Wilshire: Unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), I rise to speak not because I oppose the Bill but because I want some guidance from the Minister and the promoter to help me make up my mind whether to vote for or against the motion. As hon. Members have said, the procedures being followed raise fundamental constitutional issues and cannot be allowed to go unchallenged. We must know whether what we are doing is right or merely expedient. If it is right, I shall vote for it; if it is a matter of expediency to help somebody out of a hole, I shall not vote for it.

I make no apology for detaining the House because two important constitutional issues are raised. First, how do we legislate and how is Britain governed by its legislature? Secondly, what is the quality of our legislation? We need to think about those matters before we go any further.

[Mr. Wilshire]

Some hon. Members have said that anybody who wishes to go down this road is simply using a procedural ploy to try to kill the Bill.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): Quite right.

Mr. Wilshire: The intervention makes my point.

The *Official Report* makes it crystal clear that in Committee I said that I am not seeking to wreck the Bill. I wholeheartedly support its objectives and the record will bear me out. Every hon. Member wishes to encourage competition in the market place.

Mr. Griffiths: It is becoming apparent that the hon. Gentleman has come halfway round the world to sabotage the Bill and that there is an orchestrated attempt to sabotage it. That is the purpose of all the bogus filibustering points of order and amendments. Spurious points of order have been made, not one of which has been accepted by you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as genuine. It is a monstrous filibuster to ensure that the consumer is the victim and to ensure that the rights of producers are protected by their vested interests.

Mr. Wilshire: That was a fascinating speech rather than an intervention, and it was wrong from start to finish. I am perfectly content to stand by my record and I do not worry about such ill-researched accusations. I sat through Second Reading and made constructive comments. The Opposition moved a closure motion which prevented me from making further constructive and helpful comments. I served on the Committee and I defy the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) to find anything that I said there which was a wrecking tactic. My contributions were constructive. I pointed to weaknesses and offered to try to improve the Bill on Report. I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman again if he wishes to advance evidence to back his stupid claims.

Mr. Griffiths: If the Government were genuine in wanting to protect the consumer, by this stage we should be well into the proceedings and not engaging in nitpicking on technical aspects of the Bill. Notes have been passed to Conservative Members from the Minister's Parliamentary Private Secretary and the Government Whip has been speaking from behind his hand issuing instructions to his colleagues. The tactics being employed are quite clear and we deplore them.

Mr. Wilshire: I shall deal with this continuing nonsense. It is clear from the intervention that if something is important to the Labour party, blow the constitution and the procedures of the House. I shall return to that. When it suits the Opposition's purpose, procedures seem not to matter. I was accused of returning to this country to take part in an attempt to kill the Bill. I shall explain why I made every effort to be here today. It is a courtesy to be involved in every stage of the Bill. I am sorry that I could not be here last night. At least I am prepared to apologise even if other hon. Members are not. I came back because I have played a constructive part from the beginning, and I wished as a matter of courtesy to the House to see the Bill through to the end. I reject the allegations that have been made.

10.15 am

Mr. Viggers: In view of the offensive attack by the Opposition, I should point out to my hon. Friend that when the issue came before the House on 26 January I was the first to intervene in the promoter's speech to say that I had a serious concern on behalf of the consumer electronics industry with which I have no financial connection whatever. I said that appendix 2, which lists the products that are the subject of the Bill, was too wide and I asked the promoter whether he would be prepared to consider revising that list. I have already expressed serious concern about the breadth of the Bill and I find it most offensive that the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) should accuse me and others of seeking to filibuster and to destroy the Bill. That is certainly not my purpose.

Mr. Wilshire: My hon. Friend's intervention underlines the fact that the allegations being levelled against us are based on no research whatever. They are not backed by the facts, which makes one wonder just who is trying to wreck the Bill.

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend will remember that I spoke on Second Reading and have followed the Bill closely. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) accuses us of wrecking tactics, but we did not create the situation. There has been no suggestion that this is the fault of those Back Benchers who did not sponsor the Bill. We have yet to hear whether the fault lies with the Minister or the promoter. We are being accused of delay and I find that offensive.

Mr. Wilshire: I entirely agree, and I shall return to that.

As I was seeking to make clear to the House when I was interrupted by Opposition nonsense, every hon. Member seeks to encourage competition in the market place between producers and products. There is no dispute about that. It is equally important to understand, when speaking about procedural matters, that the second objective of the Bill, which is about clearing up any doubt about consumer rights, is supported by all of us. Thirdly, when we pursue important procedural matters it is because we seek a better quality of product through legislation. There is no basic disagreement. It is possible to have concerns about procedural matters without being opposed to the objectives of the Bill. It is dangerous, however, to play fast and loose with the procedures of a sovereign Parliament merely because the intentions behind a Bill are laudable.

I realise that procedural wrangles excite people. Equally, I understand that such wrangles make bad viewing and bad listening. It is important, therefore, to spell out why procedural wrangles are sometimes [illegible] fundamental importance to the British people as well as to the House. First, it must be understood that this is a sovereign Parliament. We do not have a constitution and, to put it bluntly, if we wished to do so we could change anything we wished. We could pass whatever legislation we liked. That could be a dangerous power. If we are considering setting a precedent and behaving like a sovereign Parliament, as we have every right to do, we need to stop and think for a moment. We should step back from consumer protection and talk about the sovereignty of Parliament and the interests of the British people.

Secondly—this is a danger to guard against—we are about to enter into a discussion on whether the ends justify the means. Those who wish to question the means of keeping the Bill on the tracks are being accused of being against the Bill, but I am concerned that we do not take what history has shown time and again to be a dangerous step. When the ends are made to justify the means, awful things have a horrible habit of following. It is important that we take time to consider that.

Thirdly, even if we accept that the procedure that we are discussing is right for a sovereign Parliament, and even if we reject the worry about the ends justifying the means, what about the slippery-slope argument—that having done it once, it is convenient to do it again, perhaps in small ways initially—until in three, four or five years' time we discover that the House of Commons, far from being a protector of the British people, has become an organisation which will do anything on the spur of the moment merely because it suits the convenience of a private Member or the Government of the day? These matters are so fundamental that we need to stop and think about them.

The way in which legislation is processed is at the heart of every democracy, and we bring the process into disrepute at our peril. When mistakes are made, as has clearly happened in this instance, we have to learn to live with the consequences. It seems that we are being told that with a bit of sleight of hand, a quick vote and a shuffle, we can get rid of the record and start again. On a matter of such importance to the National Consumer Council and to consumers, we are being asked to do the opposite of what the Bill sets out to achieve.

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend was kind enough to explain why he was unable to be present last night. I moved the money resolution at about 11 pm, almost at the close of the day's proceedings. My hon. Friend may not appreciate that I was able to move the resolution formally because the promoter was unable to be present. There was no debate on the resolution. My hon. Friend must understand that we have not had a chance to consider the money resolution in the way that we normally would. I hope that he will bear that in mind.

Mr. Wilshire: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention as I wished to refer to that very matter. That is why I raised it on a point of order at the beginning of the debate. I wished to establish from *Hansard* what was said last night. There are some important issues to consider, and I shall refer to them in due course.

It is important to understand that the purpose of the Bill is to ensure that the manufacturer or supplier of a product is not allowed to get off the hook if it suits his convenience. That is at the heart of the Bill, but to enact it we are being asked to let the drafter, the promoter, the Minister and everyone else go back to the beginning again because a mistake has been made. That privilege will not be granted to a manufacturer if the Bill takes its place on the statute book. We are being asked to set a dangerous precedent.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that the promoter is engaging in a charade with the House? I draw the attention of my hon. Friend to amendments Nos. 133 and 134, which stand in the promoter's name. I note that the promoter is not even listening. His amendments would provide no guarantee. Indeed, if they were accepted they would make this discussion irrelevant. It is disgraceful that the hon. Gentleman is prepared to table amendments in a hole and corner way which, if accepted, would take the guts out of his Bill. We are wasting the time of the House. As I have said, if amendments Nos. 133 and 134 are agreed to, this discussion will be irrelevant.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We must not anticipate amendments which may be discussed later.

Mr. Leigh: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. A serious matter has been raised. My hon. Friends and I have been accused of trying to waste time when we wish to debate important constitutional issues. We are being asked to agree to a motion which would enable the Bill to be reconsidered in Committee by a Committee of the whole House, to agree to a money resolution and to spend £1 million of public money, when there are amendments which, if agreed to, would wipe out all that we are dealing with now. Those amendments have been tabled by the promoter. It is a farce from beginning to end and there is a danger of the House being brought into disrepute. I urge you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to adjourn the sitting for a few minutes so that the promoter can reflect on what the hell he is playing at.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The procedure before us is complicated enough without introducing further complications. Let us take one step at a time. If we do that, we may get on better.

Mr. Wilshire: I shall follow your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

For the moment, I shall be pleased to debate constitutional issues rather than the details of the Bill. It is vital that we separate what is fundamental to the way in which the country is governed from a piece of legislation that we may have to consider at another stage. First, we must overcome the hurdle of whether we can deal with the Bill this morning, but if I am asked to support the Bill I shall need to have frank answers to some pertinent questions. The formal statement made by the sponsor was, in my judgment, wholly inadequate and did not help me to make up my mind. We need to be persuaded why we should support the motion rather than being told why the motion is necessary. We must consider whether to support the motion, not whether it is necessary. We must consider whether we should set a precedent so as to enable the Bill to take its place on the statute book.

If the promoter can spare a moment from his discussion on tactics, I wish to put some questions which he must answer. First, may we be assured that clause 12 is the only clause which involves a money resolution, or shall we be told at some later stage that there is another? There must be a categorical assurance on the record so that we know where we stand. If things go wrong again, the same arguments cannot be advanced a second time.

Next, who is responsible for this cock-up?

Mr. John Marshall: Language!

Mr. Wilshire: I am only echoing what was said earlier. I believe that the term that I used properly describes the mess in which we find ourselves and I do not apologise for using it on this occasion—it is the best description that I can think of.

Who is responsible? Is it the National Consumer Council? The briefing that it sent to all hon. Members for

[Mr. Wilshire]

Second Reading, in support of a Bill which it openly admits to having sponsored and prepared from the beginning, and then persuaded the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) to bring forward, states on page 2 under the heading "Legally Sound":

> "The report was drawn up by an NCC working party, including practising lawyers and leading academics."

So the report was right. The most telling part of all states:

> "The Bill was drafted by experienced counsel with guidance from a leading authority on consumer law and technical assistance from the Former First Parliamentary Counsel."

10.30 am

Given that expertise, and that claim about how well things have been done, it is odd that we should be in this mess. Will the promoter of the Bill tell me whether the NCC has anything to answer for? Alternatively, was it the promoter himself? At the beginning he said no, and of course I believe him, but it would be helpful for him to explain in some detail why the answer is no.

No one has yet asked whether the Department of Trade and Industry was somehow responsible. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister could tell me what Sir Humphrey and Bernard were up to during this process. Or, to come closer to home, was the Minister himself responsible? I am sorry to say this, but it must be put on the record if we are seeking to find out who got it wrong. Did his silence, for which he has been criticised, conceal something that he knew?

If it proves impossible to dig the Bill out of this mess, many accusations will follow. There will be attempts to spell out for the British public who was to blame. I can already imagine the toothy smile on a Sunday night, with a series of little pictures saying that these are the people who spoke about the procedures of the United Kingdom —send them a postcard. I can equally see some screaming headlines in *Which?*, with little photographs—*[Interruption.]* Does the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) wish to say something? It seems not.

Hon. Members will be accused of trying to kill the Bill, for whatever reasons. We must get this clear from the beginning. If people outside the House wish to apportion blame, we need to know the truth about who is to blame, or the wrong assumptions will be made.

Thirdly, will the promoter address the question of why the mistake was made? His answer will colour the way in which I vote. Was it because the people who prepared the Bill did not seek advice, or because they did not follow advice? It is important for us to know. Perhaps it was because they did not stop to think.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Tedious repetition.

Mr. Wilshire: Opposition Members may say that I am talking nonsense and accuse me of not wanting an answer, but I want an answer. If someone can show that the mistake was made in good faith, I will have some sympathy for the people who have got themselves into such a pickle. If it was done because someone could not be bothered, however, or because they thought that they knew better than the professional advice that they received, we are being asked to pay too high a price. We are being asked to get someone off the hook because of incompetence. The democratic process is far more important than any piece of legislation, however worthy that legislation may be.

Fourthly, why is the promoter asking for a Committee of the whole House? That is dangerous. If clause 12 is considered in isolation by the whole House, what about the other clauses? What about those hon. Members who did not serve on the Standing Committee? Surely we cannot consider a money resolution's implications and a specific clause if hon. Members have not heard the detail of the other parts of the debate. It is doubly dangerous to ask the whole House to deal with a little bit of a Bill that has not been considered in detail.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): It is done every time.

Mr. Wilshire: It is not done every time. If my hon. Friend had been here from the beginning, he would have heard it said that we are in danger of setting a precedent —[HON. MEMBERS: "He was here at the beginning."]—In that case, I withdraw that comment unreservedly.

It is certainly dangerous to ask the whole House just to consider clause 12. If we are to involve the whole House in detailed consideration of just one bit, the House should be entitled to consider every clause to put the Bill into context; otherwise, we are in danger of committing "ad hoccery" as well as setting precedents.

Those are four genuine questions to which I want answers. I hope that either the promoter of the Bill or the Minister—or both of them—will seek to answer those questions. Who made the mistake; why did they do it; why the whole House; and are we certain that clause 12 is the only clause involved? I do not speak for others, but the answers that I receive will determine how I vote later.

Mr. Gale: I am sad that so few of the Bill's original sponsors are here this morning. I am certain that many of them will have issued press releases to their local press, saying how strongly they support the concept of consumer protection legislation. I do not doubt that the leader of what used to be called the Liberal party, whose name is appended to the Bill and none of whose colleagues are present, will have ensured that the relevant hocus-pocus leaflets were issued the length and breadth of the land.

I strongly believe that all the sponsors of the Bill must take full responsibility for our present position—and I say that as one of those sponsors. I believe that to some extent we have failed in our duty in Committee. I say that with no pleasure whatsoever. There are hon. Members present who believe that this piece of consumer protection legislation is necessary: my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd)—not an original sponsor of the Bill—was stalwart in Committee in putting his point of view. Clearly it is our responsibility that the money implications of the legislation were not perceived in Committee—I accept that unreservedly—it is apparent that many hon. Members are inexpert in parliamentary draftsmanship, and not entirely expert in foreseeing all the financial implications of private Members' legislation.

It has been correctly said that this is an ambitious piece of legislation—perhaps over-ambitious for a private Member's Bill. It would have been helpful if my hon. Friend the Minister, with the support of his civil servants, had in Committee been able to say that there were financial implications that needed further consideration. Had that been done, we could have addressed the matter—even at a late stage—in Committee.

My hon. Friend the Minister has been accused of failing in his duty. I am saddened about that, and that aspersions have been cast on the performance of his civil servants and on that of the Clerks—which is unusual in the House, as we take responsibility for our decisions. It is our duty vigilantly to scrutinise legislation and to get it right. I am therefore grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister because although he did not raise the matter as a member of the Committee, at least he came here at a late hour last night and instigated the motion that we are now debating to allow the Bill to stay on the rails. Had he not done so, the proceedings would have collapsed because the Bill would have been unsound.

In essence, the Bill is simple. It seeks to give consumers guarantees that are worth the paper on which they are written. They must be written clearly and must be meaningful. As was said on Second Reading and in Committee, the products that we are seeking to include are those upon which most households, albeit infrequently, spend very large sums of money. Although my hon. Friend the Minister does not agree with every dot and comma of the Bill, I know that he believes that additional protection is necessary, either through this Bill or under the Sale of Goods Act 1979. I hope and believe that those hon. Members present today also believe that additional consumer protection is necessary.

At the start of this morning's proceedings, Mr. Speaker ruled that it was in order to take this opportunity to correct an error made by the Committee, and therefore by the House. I do not regard that as setting a dangerous precedent, as some have suggested. The procedures of the House have been followed and Mr. Speaker has ruled that we are in order. Our procedures exist not to prevent legislation but to assist its passage. We want to get the Bill right. A large number of important amendments have been tabled both by the Bill's sponsor and by others, and we need to debate them this morning.

I hope that the House will not this morning send out a message to the public that we either wish to kill the Bill or that we are not concerned with the need for greater consumer protection through proper guarantees. I hope that the House will take this opportunity, which has quite properly been afforded by Mr. Speaker under our procedures, to accept the motion as swiftly as possible, so that the necessary corrections to the Bill can be made. We can then move on to discuss important amendments that will not only improve the legislation but make it possible for it to pass through its stages and become an Act that will give consumers the protection that I, at least, believe they deserve.

Mr. John Marshall: I was surprised when, earlier in the debate, my hon. Friend the Minister was described as unhelpful. I have known him for some time. He and I, together with our hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) were elected to the European Parliament in 1979. My hon. Friend the Minister is an independent person, and he became known as a highly conscientious and hard-working MEP. Now that he is a British Minister, he has unfortunately lost his independence, but he remains as hard-working and conscientious as ever.

Both my hon. Friend and the Bill's sponsor knew last night that a money resolution was required. It is obvious that the Bill's sponsor knew that, because it was he who tabled the motion on the Order Paper in respect of clause 12. However, it is significant that, of the two individuals who are the kernel of the debate, it was my hon. Friend the Minister who was here last night to move the money resolution. My understanding is that the Bill's sponsor was not even here. Who is the more helpful Member—my hon. Friend or the Bill's sponsor? It is quite clear that it is very much my hon. Friend, who has been at the forefront in this matter.

It is appalling that a number of hon. Members have criticised the civil servants and the Clerks of the House, who must be silent advisers. As one of my right hon. Friends said on another occasion, advisers advise and Ministers decide. To attack advisers is deplorable and unparliamentary. They have no redress—*[Interruption.]* It should be put on the record that advisers are hard-working, conscientious and, perhaps, reasonably well paid.

10.45 am

I am appalled that so much of the time of the House is being devoted to this discussion when the Bill's promoter wants to take the guts out of his own legislation. He intends to move amendments Nos. 133 and 134. Had he done that in Committtee, I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister would have accepted them. I should like some guidance from my hon. Friend on whether he finds the amendments acceptable——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not anticipate amendments that will be discussed later.

Mr. Marshall: They are relevant to this debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We are being asked to commit clause 12 to a Committee of the whole House, yet later the Bill's sponsor will move an amendment asking that a large slug of the Bill be removed. Clause 12 will then be irrelevant. How can the sponsor ask that clause 12 be committed to a Committee of the whole House and then later, on Report, ask that it be taken out of the Bill? It is Alice in Wonderland.

Has there ever been another occasion on which a Bill's sponsor has come to the House on a Friday morning and asked for a discussion in time that has not been allocated? I am sure that the House is aware that some of my colleagues want other Bills, such as the War Crimes Bill, to be considered by a Committee of the whole House. The Bill's promoter wants a Committee of the whole House to discuss clause 12, and then later he will say, "Take it out." That is monstrous. I cannot understand the logic that makes him think that this is the way in which the House should spend its time on a Friday morning.

This very important clause 12, which we are being asked to debate and then to take out of the Bill, seeks to impose statutory duties upon local authorities to enforce the provisions of the Bill—the provisions that the sponsor then wants to remove. The clause is a monstrous further imposition upon local Government. We are asking trading standards officers, who already have many important responsibilities—which many of us feel are not adequately carried out—to undertake additional responsibilities at a cost to the community charge of £1 million.

Only yesterday, Labour Members told us that the community charges were too high. I wonder how they will react when some authorities are capped in a few weeks' time. Will they vote for or against capping? This morning they are planning to increase the level of local Government expenditure—and at a time when trading standards officers cannot carry out all their current responsibilities. It

[Mr. Marshall]

is highly irresponsible to discuss a clause that will add to local Government expenditure and the responsibilities of local authorities.

It is monstrous that the Bill's sponsor should waste so much of the time of the House asking us to debate clause 12 in detail, and then, when we come to debate amendments Nos. 133 and 134, ask us to take the guts out of the Bill. If the hon. Gentleman had had the courage to say that in Committee, my hon. Friend the Minister would have accepted the amendments, and the House would not need to spend time today discussing a Bill that its own promoter believes is highly defective.

Mr. Squire: As I said at the beginning of my speech on Second Reading, I have a long-standing interest in Lombard North Central, which employed me before I became legitimate—if that is what one does on entering the House—and I remain a financial adviser to that company. However, that interest is not relevant to the motion before the House. When we debate the amendments, I hope that I may have an opportunity to explain that, thanks to the Bill's promoter and to the amendments that have been introduced, the finance industry is now satisfied with the Bill, whereas it was somewhat anxious about its original form. I make that point now in case there is any suggestion that I am speaking on behalf of that industry.

As I also said on Second Reading, parts of the Bill are important and should be put on the statute book, whereas other of its provisions are unworkable. I have tabled amendments that seek to improve what I consider to be the unworkable provisions.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale), a sponsor of the Bill, on his fair summation. I share his view that the Bill deserves support, but unlike my hon. Friend, I find it difficult to approve of the Bill in its entirety—partly because of my experience of the finance industry over a number of years.

My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) legitimately raised the question of whether the House can be certain that no other part of the Bill similarly requires a money resolution, or some other form of resolution. That goes to the heart of our difficulty this morning. I am not too concerned about where responsibility for the error lies, with one exception that I shall mention later. Perhaps I was unfairly critical earlier of my hon. Friend the Minister, but we shall hear about that in a moment. However, I am sure that all right hon. and hon. Members are united in wanting to avoid any repetition of such an oversight. To do so, the House must establish where the responsibility for the error lies.

If the responsibility for this lies with my hon. Friend the Minister, it is arguable that the House should, today or on another occasion, instruct Ministers that they have a responsibility to ensure that a Bill's promoter—be it a Department or a private Member—is advised of any provisions in it that will require specific additional parliamentary action. It may be that ultimate responsibility for the oversight does not lie with my hon. Friend the Minister. If not, it must be that of the Bill's promoter. In that case, I should have an enormous amount of sympathy with the hon. Gentleman, having myself piloted a Bill through the House.

Whatever the theory may be, it is impossible in practice for every right hon. and hon. Member to be wholly aware of the more arcane aspects of parliamentary procedure and to be able unaided to spot an omission such as that which we are now debating. Even if a right hon. or hon. Member is expected to be so informed, the Select Committee on Procedure should consider how Members of Parliament—and the problem particularly affects ordinary right hon. and hon. Members—can be provided with sufficient information to ensure that the need for a money resolution is identified early, so that the House does not need to waste time when it should be debating the amendments that I am anxious to reach.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point, and he approaches the problem rationally. It may be helpful if I explain the procedure that is followed. Before a Bill reaches the Floor of the House for its Second Reading, it goes before a senior ministerial committee considering the following week's business. It used to be the most senior committee below the Cabinet. At that level, all the procedural expertise of the Government is brought to bear. The Department concerned advises the committee as to whether it opposes the Bill, and other interests within Government point out any procedural flaws or shortcomings. From the very start, the Bill now before the House should have been subject to scrutiny at the most senior level below Cabinet. It is inconceivable that the Minister and his Department could not have known of the flaw.

Mr. Squire: The House will be most grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, who speaks with past ministerial experience. If one accepts the accuracy of his remarks—and I certainly do—then clearly the finger points at my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs and at other Ministers.

The principle is of such importance because, although the legislation in question is a private Member's Bill, it is still a public Bill of this House. What if the Government had produced non-controversial legislation—for example, the National Health Service and Community Care Bill, or even the community charge Bill—and at the eleventh hour or later, had told the House, "We're terribly sorry, but we're advised that the Bill needs a money resolution to cover a particular clause."? I can imagine what the response would be. The Minister concerned would be laughed out of the Chamber, and the House would be unable to take any decision, perhaps for one week, and be held up to ridicule—as would the Government, and, arguably, rightly so.

When a Bill leaves Standing Committee, it becomes the property of the whole House and the distinction between a Government Bill and a private Member's Bill is no longer relevant for virtually all purposes. That, for the benefit of the public watching or reading this debate, is the significance of the matter before us.

As to the principle of what business should or should not be considered on the Floor of the House, during my 11 years in this place, it has been clear to me at least the kind of legislation that is conventionally considered by a Committee of the whole House—[Hon. Members: "The Patronage Secretary is here at last."] It is not often that my right hon. Friend the Patronage Secretary arrives in the Chamber in the middle of one of my speeches, but whether that is a good thing or bad, I am not sure.

One category of legislation that is usually considered by a Committee of the whole House is that involving major points of principle. Right hon. and hon. Members will soon be debating embryo research, when I understand that a key clause of that Bill will be considered on the Floor of the House. Many right hon. and hon. Members hold strong views on that subject, so it is right and proper that it should be debated in the Chamber rather than in Committee. Another category is legislation of constitutional importance.

11 am

Mr. Viggers: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) for intervening in his speech. Eleven o'clock on Friday is the normal time for statements and I see that the Patronage Secretary has just arrived. I am not sure whether he is the harbinger of a statement.

Late last night I was given information for the first time that the Ministry of Defence has unilaterally broken off negotiations with the borough of Gosport in my constituency about the future of the Royal Naval armaments museum there.

The borough of Gosport wished to take over the armaments museum, which contains unique and priceless artefacts ranging from the time of Henry VIII through to nuclear weapons and weapons used in the Falklands campaign. That museum is of great importance to my constituents.

The point of order is that I was not informed in advance of that unilateral decision by the Ministry of Defence. Within the rules of order, for example under Standing Order No. 20, or in some other way, is it possible to seek to bring this important issue before the House?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is a request for a statement from a Minister. At this stage it is not possible for the hon. Member to use Standing Order No. 20 procedure, but I am sure that he will find other ways to raise that important matter. In the meantime, I am sure that what has been said has been heard on the Treasury Bench.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will be aware that I am one of the sponsors of the early-day motion on the Birmingham Six. In a Granada television drama documentary two weeks ago serious allegations were made about police brutality and the way in which the police had forced confessions out of the defendants. Yesterday, the deputy chief constable of the Yorkshire constabulary, who is conducting the inquiry into the now disbanded West Midlands serious crime squad, revealed that a number of police documents and notebooks have gone missing. Surely we should have a statement on that important matter today. If the Home Office does not clarify the issue there will be further doubt about its good faith in the matter of the Birmingham Six. Can we have a statement on that today as a matter of urgency?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I give the same answer to the hon. Gentleman as I gave to his hon. Friend. He should seek other ways to raise that important matter in the House. I am sure that his comments will also have been heard on the Treasury Bench.

Mr. Squire: I hope that the House does not believe that I have finished my speech.

I was talking about the second reason for Bills to be legitimately debated in a Committee of the whole House —major constitutional issues.

Scottish devolution is one obvious example. If we were to have a Labour Government—however unlikely that is —I am sure that they would wish to discuss such as issue on the Floor of the Chamber, and no one would argue with the principle behind that. We would argue with the policy but not with the principle of taking it on the Floor of the House.

I do not argue that clause 12 is of such major or constitutional importance, but discussing it on the Floor of the House means that we seem to be acting out of mere convenience, rather than sending the Bill back to Committee for detailed examination, and I regret that, because it is not the right way for us to proceed.

Mr. Gale: My hon. Friend has said that this is a matter of administrative convenience. I am sure that the House wishes the Bill well and wants it to proceed. Therefore, this debate should be seen as a way forward rather than simply as a matter of administrative convenience. To take up his other point, there is a precedent for discussing financial matters in a Committee of the whole House. This subject is a financial matter and there is no reason why, as such, it should not be considered by the whole House.

Mr. Squire: I do not want to enter into an argument with my hon. Friend as I have much respect for him. However, my impression is that big issues—such as the Budget—tend to be discussed on the Floor of the House and others in Committee. I am happy to accept the principle behind what he says.

I regret that we are in this position today and I shall be happy when we come to discuss detailed amendments to the Bill.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

As the Patronage Secretary is present and as he has such important influence in this place, I should like to know whether he will make a statement about the Greenham Common situation developing across the road on College Green, where one person was camping out with a notice board at the beginning of the week and now there are more than a dozen people. Every time I go past on my way to my office and back again I am accosted by people who ask me to sign petitions. When I tell them that the matter on which they are crusading appears to be the community charge, and that I like it, they are extremely abusive to me.

This morning there is a large notice there asking drivers to toot as they go past if they dislike the community charge. Since that is taking place within the curtilage of this House, where we discuss national issues and where visitors to our capital gather in large numbers, is it appropriate that such a group of people should be allowed to remain on the green?

I have made inquiries and asked for the matter to be brought before the House urgently. I have been given to understand that by some freak accident private consent was given for one person to be on the green for a limited time. However, this is developing into a Greenham Common situation and we must deal with it urgently or it will bring the House into disrepute. Think of the noise that

[Mrs. Teresa Gorman]

will be caused in the neighbourhood by the tooting of many car horns—by drivers who I have no doubt support the community charge.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I think that the hon. Lady is saying that the situation that she describes is taking place within the precincts of the House, and I shall cause inquiries to be made.

Mr. Bellingham: I do not want to delay matters, and I was not planning to speak in this short debate until the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) launched into an attack on the motives of Conservative Members. He talked about nit-pickers. I did not arrive in the Chamber until about ten minutes to 10 o'clock, and I am certainly not a nit-picker. I came to listen to the debate; I did not come to filibuster or to cause trouble. I have not had Whips and Parliamentary Private Secretaries hovering around me to tell me what to say, because I support the principles of the Bill and I have admiration for the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) who is its promoter. He is a good friend of mine and we have worked together closely on such matters as firearms and timber preservatives.

Far be it from me to try to put the boot in to the hon. Gentleman on his big day; that is the last thing I would wish to do. However, having listened to the debate for an hour and a half, I feel strongly that a number of important issues have emerged. I do not see how we can skirt round them in the way that some hon. Members wish to do.

I admire the sponsor of the Bill and the way in which he has presented it. It is weighty and full for a private Member's Bill and will carry considerable risks, even though hon. Members on both sides of the House support it. I find it extraordinary that the omission was not noticed earlier.

I understand that, in his brief introductory remarks, lasting one minute, the sponsor said that he had had expert advice on the Bill. He had access to a number of leading authorities on the subject. I find it extraordinary and beyond belief that they did not manage to spot this pitfall. It is staggering. The Bill was in Committee for a number of hours and although there was only a short discussion on the clause, at that juncture he was in a position to receive advice and help from a large number of people.

One of the principles of private Members' Bills is that they will not have major revenue or financial implications. I should have thought that the first thing any private Member would do, when presenting a Bill, would be to look carefully at those aspects. *[Interruption.]* I ask my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) to listen for one second. I am co-sponsor of his Bill on agricultural rights of way and we have considered the revenue implications in considerable detail. I am the second sponsor of the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle, on which we had a good debate.

My hon. Friend and I went through the Bill with a fine-toothed comb. We satisfied ourselves that that Bill contains no revenue or finance-raising implications. I should have thought that that was the primary task for any hon. Member who promotes a private Member's Bill. It is extraordinary that this problem was not spotted earlier. If that pitfall in clause 12 has been spotted, what about other clauses? We may suddenly spot another ugly financial implication. That may also apply to other private Member's Bills.

I congratulate the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs on coming to the House last night to table the motion. However, he ought to have spotted this problem earlier. It is wrong for any hon. Member or Minister to cast aspersions on Clerks or civil servants. I have been in the House on a number of Fridays during the last year or so. I came to support the Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle, and I was here about a month ago to support another private Member's Bill.

I have never seen the Box so full of civil servants as on this occasion. It shows how hard they have been working on the matter. It is wrong for anyone to conclude that they are in any way to blame. We are elected to the House to scrutinise legislation. It is up to us to spot these matters. It is not up to Clerks or civil servants to do anything except guide us and help us when we need assistance. It is wrong to launch any attack on them, and I should like to distance myself from any such attacks.

My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) referred to fundamental constitutional matters. It may be easy to do what seems to be neat and sensible on the day, but we could be creating an unfortunate precedent. In 10 or 15 years, another hon. Member, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle, might come to the House on a Friday morning weighed down by *Hansard* reports and law books, pick up the report of this debate on Friday 30 March 1990 and take it as a precedent. We must be careful not to create a precedent. Therefore, the Bill ought to be referred back to the Standing Committee and looked at in great detail.

We are here this morning, ironically, to provide the consumer with guarantees, but we are also here as guardians of our constituents' interests and freedoms. If we create a precedent simply for the sake of expediency, we may come to regret it. We must therefore be cautious and bear in mind the point that was raised a short while ago: that it is ludicrous beyond belief that we should be discussing the committal of clause 12 to a Committee of the whole House when an amendment has been tabled to delete the clause. Are we not in "Alice in Wonderland"? We have reached the stage when we ought to return the Bill to the Standing Committee where the matter could be properly sorted out.

11.15 am

Mr. Forth: It is obvious from what has been said that hon. Members are very concerned about the matter. However, that concern has been expressed only on this side of the House. The Opposition do not seem to be concerned about this important issue. That puzzles me. When I have given my explanation, I expect the sponsor of the Bill, the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) to give his explanation of these matters. He has been strangely silent up to now. However, that is a matter for him.

My hon. Friends have raised a number of important issues. However, I ought first to point out somthing that all hon. Members should bear in mind—that this is a private Member's Bill.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): The Minister has made it clear that the Government do not want the Bill. He has organised that lot; they are filibustering instead of allowing the Bill to make progress. I have been sitting on a Committee that made progress on a Bill. We always make progress when I am on a Bill. The Minister is deliberately adopting delaying tactics. He intends to kill the Bill, if that is possible, but he had better watch out.

Mr. Forth: If the hon. Gentleman is so confident that Bills in which he is involved always make progress, he ought to have involved himself a little more with this Bill during its previous stages. Obviously it needed considerable help.

Mr. Leigh: Before we hear any more nonsense about my hon. Friend trying to kill the Bill, will he confirm that he came here last night and saved the Bill from extinction? Will he also confirm that, if he had not come to the House last night and tabled the motion, the Bill would already have been dead?

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I shall return to that point in a moment.

A number of my hon. Friends have criticised my role, but I hope that I shall be able to satisfy them that I have done my best to discharge honourably my responsibilities throughout the proceedings on the Bill.

I emphasise that this is a private Member's Bill and that therefore the primary responsibility for it must rest with the sponsor. It should not and cannot be otherwise. The Government are responsible for their Bills. Hon. Members who are fortunate enough to come high in the ballot for private Member's Bills must take responsibility for their Bills. Therefore, the primary responsibility throughout the proceedings lay with the sponsor and with those from whom he sought advice.

I assume that the hon. Gentleman sought advice from various sources—from the House authorities, as I do from time to time, and from the National Consumer Council. My hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) raised that point. Therefore, I should emphasise that taxpayers fund the National Consumer Council to the tune of £2 million a year in order to further the interests of consumers. Generally speaking, the council does good work.

However, in view of that council's conduct, to which my hon. Friend referred earlier—which shocked me and I shall be looking into it—we shall have to look at the way in which that council conducted itself in terms of the advice that it may or may not have given to the sponsor of the Bill.

Furthermore, if the National Consumer Council, funded by taxpayers money, is using that money to launch attacks on hon. Members, we shall have to look into the council's conduct and into the use into which it is putting taxpayers' money.

Nigel Griffiths: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Forth: You bet I will.

Mr. Griffiths: Is the Minister saying to the House that he will investigate the National Consumer Council and that he is threatening to withdraw its funding if his investigations substantiate certain allegations that have been made?

Mr. Forth: In view of the allegations that were made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport, I should be doing less than my duty as, for the time being, the custodian of this large amount of taxpayers' money if I did not look closely into the way in which the National Consumer Council is conducting its affairs. I hope that the hon. Gentleman would be shocked and dismayed if I did not do that, as part of my duty.

Mr. Martyn Jones: The press release to which the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) referred was released by me. It said exactly what I intended it to say.

Mr. Forth: That is helpful. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Viggers: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Forth: In a moment.

If it is the hon. Gentleman who is making scurrilous and unjustified attacks on my hon. Friend, that exemplifies what has happened throughout the proceedings on the Bill. That will have to be looked into; obviously it bears some examination.

Mr. Viggers: I simply want to put on record the fact that if I inadvertently misled the House, I apologise. I was not given a copy of the press release. I understood that it was from the National Consumer Council, but obviously I was incorrect.

Mr. Forth: We shall have to clarify these matters properly. I do not want to dwell on them, but I wanted to pick up the point that my hon. Friend raised.

We have established that, as this is a private Member's Bill, primary responsibility for its conduct must rest with the promoter and his advisers. However, I want to give the House my explanation, and, if necessary, my apology.

Mr. Alan Williams: A little while ago the Minister made threats—not even veiled threats—against the National Consumer Council. In view of the comments of the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers), can we take it that the Minister now withdraws those threats?

Mr. Forth: If what is alleged has taken place, it needs to be investigated. When I have established to my own satisfaction that matters are in order, no further action will be necessary.

Mr. Alan Williams: An hon. Gentleman has stood here in the House and said that the press release was his. Is the Minister accusing another hon. Gentleman of lying to the House, which is not permitted under the rules of the House?

Mr. Forth: We are making rather heavy weather of this. I hope that Opposition Members are not trying to delay the proceedings, but it is beginning to look as if they are. I am trying to explain my role in this from the Dispatch Box, as many of my hon. Friends have asked me. All that Opposition Members can do is seek to delay the proceedings. That is rather disgraceful, but as the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) has asked me, I shall say it again in words of as few syllables as I can manage.

The sponsor of the Bill and the National Consumer Council worked closely, and they bear joint responsibility for the Bill. It is no secret that the Bill grew out of a report by the National Consumer Council, which, I understand, was largely responsible for drafting the Bill. If scurrilous accusations have been made about someone, we know not who made them at this stage, nor do we know the role that

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the National Consumer Council may or may not have played in the matter, but as it is an organisation in receipt of taxpayers' money, we should be satisfied about how it is spending that money.

Mrs. Gorman: As my hon. Friend rightly pointed out, the Bill was originally produced by the National Consumer Council. However, the Confederation of British Industry has criticised the drafting of the Bill because the evidence on which it was drawn up was so poorly assembled and the transactions of which people allegedly complained had not been evaluated or quantified. So the CBI made very strong criticisms of the National Consumer Council.

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend is perfectly right. As proceedings unwind today, we may have to look more closely at the roles and relationships and what different people and organisations have said and done, but I do not want to get unduly bogged down in that now.

A few moments ago, I was attempting to clarify for the House my role in the matter, and in doing so I accept my share of the responsibility. As my hon. Friends have pointed out, by convention if not by rule of the House, the Government are responsible for laying money resolutions when they are established as a necessary part of a Bill. That much is clear. In the normal course of events, a money resolution should have been tabled before the Bill left Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) pointed out that I was present throughout the proceedings of the Committee, as I should have been, and that none of us identified that a money resolution should have been a necessary part of the Bill. Casting around for blame, as some of my hon. Friends have done, is probably a fruitless exercise, although a vital point may have been concealed. It has led to the constitutional point raised so ably by my hon. Friends the Members for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) and for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire), and I shall return to that in a moment.

Let us focus on why this private Member's Bill was given a Second Reading and completed its Committee stage without that need having been identified. I accept my personal share of the responsibility, but at the same time I totally exonerate officials in my Department and deny that they were in any way to blame. The officials in my Department have played an honourable, expert and detailed role throughout. I accept that the blame for not spotting the need for a money resolution is mine alone. However, during this morning's proceedings we have established that it was not so obvious that the Bill required a money resolution that we should have spotted it as readily as some have suggested. That is my only exoneration of my role.

Mr. Squire: The right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams), in a helpful intervention in my speech, referred specifically to a senior committee. I assume that he was speaking from experience. Can my hon. Friend shed some light on that, as it appears to be one way in which that discrepancy might have been discovered, if such a Committee exists?

Mr. Forth: I might have to be uncharacteristically coy. My hon. Friend is trying to get me to reveal some of the inner workings of Government, which by tradition are not revealed, certainly from the Dispatch Box, and I hope from nowhere else either. I concede that the Government consider such matters, but it is not necessarily the case that procedural matters are dealt with by the Government, as their collective responsibility relates to policy matters, but not procedural matters. We are dealing with a procedural matter.

Mr. Alan Williams: The hon. Gentleman must be aware that, when a Bill goes before the non-existent committee which none of us admits operates under whichever Goverment are in power, if there is a major procedural fault in the legislation, that would normally be pointed out as part of the background to the Bill.

Mr. Forth: Yes, but we are getting our time sequence out of synchronisation. If a Bill went to the committee that hon. Members have hinted at, that committee would not be obliged to identify whether a Bill required a money resolution. That normally happens in Standing Committee, as the clause that requires a money resolution might well be deleted in Committee. Therefore, it is only reasonable to say that, until the Committee stage had been completed, we could not identify whether there should be a money resolution.

Mr. Williams: I am delighted to see the Minister digging himself into a pit, but he is digging himself increasingly deeper. The Bill would have been considered by that committee before its Second reading, but the Minister is saying that no one would have cared whether it needed that money resolution, although it should have been tabled at that time, because it was possible that the relevant clauses might have been removed in Committee. However, the Minister did not move an amendment to delete those clauses, so he was either culpable or irresponsible.

Mr. Forth: I am beginning to wonder about the right hon. Gentleman's motive in this. Is it not peculiar, as some of my hon. Friends have already pointed out, that the promoter of the Bill should come to the House and move recommittal into Committee for a clause that he may subsequently want to delete? There are all sorts of anomalies and inconsistencies, but those of my hon. Friends who have not been involved in the Bill up to now —although a number of hon. Members on both sides of the House have—may be beginning to get the flavour of the Bill. I have to say with all my normal charm and courtesy that the conduct on the Bill throughout has not exemplified coolness, preparation or determination. It has exemplified a degree of chaos and a lack of organisation which have made the Bill its own worst enemy.

As my hon. Friends have pointed out, it is a large, complex and controversial Bill, as the number of representations we have all received will illustrate. That in itself would be bad enough, but the fact that the promoter of the Bill has not received good advice means that we have reached this stage with a procedural point on our hands, with doubts being expressed about how, why and where it should have been tabled and with me having to stand at the Dispatch Box having to explain my role in events. That illustrates the problem that we face.

Mr. Wilshire: Before my hon. Friend departs from his point about blame and responsibility, may I say that it is typical of his generosity and graciousness that he is willing to carry the can? However, I find that surprising and difficult in this case. Is he saying that Back-Bench Members can draft what we like and that, if we are lucky in the ballot, we can wash our hands of the responsibility for ensuring that it complies with our procedures? If that is his thesis, I find it extraordinary. As I said earlier, the NCC gave an undertaking that expert counsel went through the Bill. Are we not entitled to expect that, if outside experts say that they have done something, they must carry their share of the blame?

11.30 am

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend is entitled to express that view. We are trying to tease from this confusion where the relative responsibilities lie, which is difficult. I hope that my hon. Friend agrees that, if this morning's proceedings have done nothing else, they have helped the House to consider the pitfalls and traps that we can fall into and see whether we can avoid them in future. The hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West may have done all future promoters of private Members' Bills a large service in inadvertently bringing to their attention and that of the House, the House authorities and the Clerks the fact that this problem can easily arise. It has taken us all by surprise.

I shall attempt to give an explanation of my role. It was not until last week that, almost inadvertently, we identified the lacuna in our procedures and the Bill. I moved as quickly as possible to establish the procedural position and what responsibility I may have had in the matter. Towards the end of last week, we established beyond reasonable doubt, bearing in mind all the points about precedent that my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle has raised, that a money resolution was required for the Bill. I was then told that, by convention, it had to be moved by the Government, in Government time. I hope that my hon. Friends understand my position and that the promoter will give me some credit for moving as quickly as I could to find Government time and to persuade my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury to put his name to a money resolution and commit public funds to the Bill, should it be necesssry if the Bill is passed.

I then ensured that I was in the House in person at 11 pm last night to make sure that the money resolution was approved. I was surprised that the promoter was not present, and he must give his explanation of that. I am pleased, although only to one extent, that the House approved the money resolution on the nod. It leaves us with the slight difficulty that, even at this stage, we have not had an opportunity fully to debate what the money resolution might mean. I hope that such an opportunity may arise.

We are still considering the procedural motion whether we should refer the Bill to a Committee of the whole House to consider the implications of clause 12 and the money resolution. I do not want to detain the House much longer. I hope that, when we decide whether to recommit the Bill, we shall have an opportunity fully to consider the implications of the money resolution.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): Will my hon. Friend support this procedural motion?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend will agree that what the promoter says will be crucial in persuading us whether we should support the motion. I have not yet made up my mind. *[Laughter.]*

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): That is a revealing display from Opposition Members, especially considering all their recent criticisms that the Government are oppressive with private Members' Bills and always interfering with them. Here is a Minister with an open-minded, flexible attitude, encouraging the promoter to give a lucid, reasonable explanation of his attitude.

Does my hon. Friend agree that every promoter is in charge of the progress and success of his Bill, and therefore should be competent to steer it through? Does he agree that it is good fortune to win the ballot for Bills and procedures? My hon. Friend has reacted fairly and reasonably in saying that he has not yet decided his stance on this complicated point. This is an unusual procedure and mistakes have been made, yet all we hear from Opposition Members are ignorant guffaws. I am sorry to use such a strong adjective. Does my hon. Friend agree that Opposition Members should welcome his being potentially so helpful? I thank him for taking this attitude.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. This is a revealing episode. My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne has asked the promoter to explain how he saw the procedure developing and I am waiting to hear the answer. [HON. MEMBERS: "Well, sit down."] It is distressing that Opposition Members appear to mock us for listening to the debate on this important procedural and constitutional issue before making up our minds.

Whether the House approves the recommittal is an open question. We may set a precedent. We have certainly teased out some serious problems. I must say yet again, although I do not wish to over-emphasise the point, that the primary responsibility for the scrutiny, integrity and progress of a private Member's Bill must rest with the promoter. The Government may or may not have a role of one kind or another, but they certainly must not be seen to be responsible for ensuring that the Bill proceeds or is in order.

Given all those factors, I shall listen to the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West and then decide whether it is right to support the recommittal, or whether we should reconsider the Bill in some other way or at some other time. I hope that I have satisfied my hon. Friends who have asked questions. I have been as open with them as possible in explaining my role. I have given my apology to the House for any oversight of mine. I have tried to persuade the House that I moved as quickly as possible to ensure that the Bill would not fall as a result of an oversight by me or the promoter.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: I appreciate that. I really want to know my hon. Friend's intentions. I accept that we have a serious procedural difficulty and that we must be cautious. I do not take the high constitutional line adopted by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh). My hon. Friend the Minister could advance the interests of the House. He will remember that he did not manage to block the Bill on Second Reading, because the House showed its support by the procedural means of accepting the closure.

If my hon. Friend can say that the Government are well disposed towards the central intentions of the Bill and that, if this motion fails, they will legislate along the lines of the Bill, making full use of my hon. Friend's breadth of

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experience and the extraordinarily hard work of his Department on the Bill, I will be satisfied that his intentions are good.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, because he allows me to make my position clear. He sat through the Committee stage and he knows that I was never happy with the Bill. I always thought that it contained serious flaws and difficulties, and the advice I gave on Second Reading and in Committee was that it was "irredeemable and irrecoverable".

I have made no secret of the fact, however, that we want to update the Sale of Goods Act 1893 and that part V of the Bill therefore has my support. I have also given an undertaking that, partly as a result of the National Consumer Council report and partly as a result of the Bill, should the Bill not succeed, I shall want to consider the whole subject of guarantees to see what can properly be done. I have said that before, and I am delighted to repeat it. That does not mean that I do not support the Bill in its present form: I am waiting to see how it might emerge either from recommittal to Committee or on Report. I shall then decide how to advise my hon. Friends.

Mr. John Marshall: My hon. Friend is renowned for his statesmanlike approach to such matters. Will he confirm to the House and to the promoter that, if the promoter's amendments Nos. 133 and 134 were passed, my hon. Friend would be able to recommend to the House that the Bill should be approved?

Mr. Forth: Among the guidance that the promoter will seek to give the House on the procedural matter of a recommittal to Committee, I hope that he will explain why those rather odd amendments have appeared in his name. I accept that we shall come to them subsequently, but they are germane to our debate, as it is rather interesting and somewhat puzzling—I share my hon. Friend's confusion—that the amendments have appeared out of the blue and without, as yet, a word of explanation from the promoter.

I hope that I have given a full explanation to the House of my position on the Bill. If there are any other matters that need to be clarified, I shall be delighted to do so. We now all look forward to hearing the advice of the promoter. Perhaps he will give us an inkling about how he believes we shall proceed during the rest of the day.

Mr. Martyn Jones: I am deeply saddened by what we have heard in the past two and a quarter hours. The Government move business motions and procedural motions regularly. On Wednesday they moved two procedural motions relating to the Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Bill, as well as a money resolution last night. Much of the debate on this motion has been totally insignificant.

As the promoter of the Bill I accept responsibility for it, but I have already said that I will not accept all responsibility. A number of problems were inherent in the procedures on the Bill. I shall not lay blame in any quarter, but I am extremely glad that the Minister has also admitted that he is to blame. That is a move forward and I like the way in which he has put matters right.

I should like to put matters right regarding the money resolution. I saw the title of the Bill come up on the annunciator and I was on my way here when it disappeared off the screen. I judged that it was an uncontroversial measure and had gone through on the nod.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): Will my hon. Friend also accept that the Government had to put a money resolution through on the Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Bill last night and extend the long title of it before amendments were debated because they had made a cock-up?

Mr. Jones: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As I have already said, such motions are tabled by the Government all the time without two-hour debates about their constitutionality.

11.45 am

Mr. Richard Shepherd: Did the Government notify the hon. Gentleman that they intended to table the money resolution?

Mr. Jones: Yes, they informed me on Monday and I was grateful. I assumed that it was a procedural measure which would cause no problems. No problems arose last night about that money resolution or about the one for the Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Bill.

Mr. Dykes: I am intrigued by all this. Surely the promoter of a Bill should be present when its money resolution comes before the House. Why did the hon. Gentleman miss that particularly important moment?

Mr. Jones: One of the sponsors was in the Chamber and I would have been here within minutes. The hon. Gentleman knows very well that one cannot predict exactly when an item of business will come before the House. If he does not admit that, he is not the man I thought he was.

Mr. Dykes *rose*—.

Mr. Jones: I shall not give way and I will not be a party to talking out my own Bill.

I wish to put straight the many unnecessary and trivial comments that we have heard today. [*Interruption.*] Credit is due to the Minister for putting right what he admits was his mistake. He said he was to blame and I commend him for that. [*Interruption.*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. There are too many private conversations going on. I want to hear what the hon. Gentleman is saying.

Mr. Forth *rose*—

Mr. Jones: I give way to the Minister.

Mr. Forth: I did not hear exactly what the hon. Gentleman said because of the hubbub from the Opposition. I said that we must all share an element of the blame, but the promoter of the Bill has the main responsibility. I hope that I admitted that I was prepared to accept that to the extent that Government have any role in private Members' Bills, I had a responsibility. I hope that the hon. Gentleman accepts that I discharged my responsibility thereafter.

Mr. Jones: Obviously the Minister did not hear what I said because of the hubbub, but *Hansard* will put the record right for both of us. I am trying to give the Minister credit for accepting his part of the blame, but obviously I accept overall responsibility.

I am sure that hon. Members also accept that, as a Back Bencher, I do not have the panoply of advice available to Ministers. In all honesty, I accept the overall responsibility, and for any bad advice that I have been given from whatever source. I am not attempting to lay the blame elsewhere. I am glad that the Minister has accepted his responsibility and has done his best to put the matter right. He demonstrated that by tabling the money resolution, which is a ministerial responsibility.

I hope that the House will accept the unexceptional motion. A mistake was made but, whoever was responsible, it was made in good faith. I hope that we can proceed into Committee.

Question put:

The House divided: Ayes 85, Noes 0.

Division No. 150] **[11.48 am**

AYES

Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chapman, Sydney
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dixon, Don
Dykes, Hugh
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fisher, Mark
Fookes, Dame Janet
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Harris, David
Haynes, Frank
Heffer, Eric S.
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Illsley, Eric
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Loyden, Eddie
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Madden, Max

Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Murphy, Paul
Norris, Steve
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Rathbone, Tim
Richardson, Jo
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Trotter, Neville
Vaz, Keith
Viggers, Peter
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Wheeler, Sir John
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Andrew F. Bennett and
Dr. John Marek.

NOES

Nil

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Edward Leigh and
Mr. David Wilshire.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Bill be recommitted to aCommittee of the whole House in respect of clause 12.

Order read for consideration in Committee.

Mr. Viggers: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can you confirm that the motion is debatable?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is correct; the motion is debatable.

12 noon

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): On a separate point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I gave you notice that I intended to raise this point of order, which has nothing to do with the Consumer Guarantees Bill, although it relates to a matter of concern to the House.

I would welcome your guidance in respect of a circular letter from the Department of the Environment, which was on the board this morning, for all Members of the House, dealing with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, dog registration and other matters. I do not propose to comment on the contents of the letter, but it has been brought to my attention that a number of complaints have been received from hon. Members and from hard-working Members of staff—the doorkeepers who look after the message and letter boards—about the increasing frequency of circular letters from Departments that are put on the board for all Members.

I must emphasise that I am not criticising ministerial colleagues. Presumably it is the civil servants who decide whether to send such letters. The difficulty is that that practice creates unnecessary extra work for the doorkeepers, who presumably have to deal with 650 copies of each letter. No doubt the Department is understandably seeking to save postage costs by not sending the letter through the normal postal service, addressed to individual Members at the House of Commons or at their own addresses. Although the money-saving exercise may be desirable and praiseworthy in one sense, one must ask whether it is right for the House to be burdened in this way.

Presumably it is not an urgent letter, although it may be of interest to hon. Members. If the matter were urgent, one could understand a hand-delivered message being left on the board for all hon. Members. Equally, a hand-delivered letter for a smaller number of hon. Members would be understandable. But surely a universal circular letter from a Department on a non-urgent aspect of policy should go through the normal postal service rather than being allowed to place an extra burden on the House authorities. I would welcome your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is raising an important point. I think that he realises that it is a matter not for the Chair but for the Services Committee.

I suggest that he makes his point to that Committee and asks it to consider the matter.

Motion made, and Question Proposed, That this House do immediately resolve itself into a Committee on the Bill.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): This is no filibuster; it is an attempt to get some legislation out of the administrative chaos that the promoter of the Bill has created. We find ourselves debating this motion at 12.2 pm because of the chaos and mayhem for which the promoter has accepted primary responsibility. It is always encouraging when a politician stands up and says, "Mea culpa," and this morning we have heard the encouraging

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sound of two politicians doing so. We should congratulate both of them on their willingness to accept their share of responsibility rather than seeking to hide behind the skirts of civil servants—or even their trousers.

There is one positive reason why the Bill should not be debated in Committee this morning. By tabling amendments Nos. 133 and 134, the promoter has indicated his willingness to remove the guts of his own Bill. The Minister has made it clear from the beginning, that the Government would welcome the amendment of the Sale of Goods Act 1979 and I think that the Opposition would do the same. If amendments No. 133 and 134 were carried, that is what would happen. If we delayed our debate on the Bill until the next private Members' day, we should give the promoter of the Bill the opportunity to go to the Minister, who is a very reasonable gentleman—on this and on every other matter—and ask, "Can we do a deal?" I am sure that if the hon. Gentleman went to the Minister with that progressive attitude, the Minister would be happy to do a deal.

We should not debate the measure further this morning, because we are getting into controversial style —not usually the style of the Minister or of Conservative Members generally. We have been pushed into it by the events of last night. Given that that is the case, we should give the promoter of the Bill the opportunity to go behind the Chair to talk to the Minister and see whether a compromise can be reached.

If we debate this Bill, we shall be prevented from debating the other private Members' Bills whose titles appear on the Order Paper. No doubt some hon. Members will have read the Raoul Wallenberg (Memorial) Bill, which is the next Bill on the Order Paper. If we were not debating motions related to the Consumer Guarantees Bill, in this slightly cantankerous way, we should be debating that Bill and I came to the House hoping that we should be doing so. As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Raoul Wallenberg was one of the great heroes of the second world war. As a citizen of neutral Sweden——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not be tempted to discuss the next Bill, which may or may not be called today.

Mr. Marshall: I hesitate to cross swords with a man of your eminence and experience, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but surely we are faced with alternatives. We can carry on debating the Consumer Guarantees Bill or we can drop that Bill and go to the next item on the Order Paper, which is the Raoul Wallenberg (Memorial) Bill. We must weigh the relative merits of dealing with the current Bill and of dealing with the next Bill and we can do that only if we discuss, albeit briefly, the provisions of the next Bill. Raoul Wallenberg was a great international figure——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but I must reiterate that this is a narrow procedural motion and he must stick to it in his speech.

Mr. Marshall: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Squire: Is not my hon. Friend overlooking the fact that if, as I suspect, the Raoul Wallenberg (Memorial) Bill has universal appeal, we may reach later Bills, including the Local Government (Access to Information) (Disabled Persons) Bill, on which I am very keen?

Mr. Marshall: My hon. Friend is right. As I hope that no one will object to the Raoul Wallenberg (Memorial) Bill, we may reach later Bills, one of which is the Rape in Marriage (Offence) Bill. The Government have shown their progressive approach by announcing an inquiry. I had hoped that that Bill would be reached this morning, because it would bring the law of England and Wales into line with the law in Scotland, which would be a progressive step. My hon. Friend the Minister has a deep knowledge of Scottish law, because, like me, he lived in Glasgow for some time. He knows that Scottish law is frequently superior to the law in England and Wales and I have no doubt that he would like the law in England and Wales to be brought into line with that in Scotland on this matter.

We must examine closely the alternative before the House this morning, which is to discuss the Raoul Wallenberg (Memorial) Bill. Wallenberg was a great hero of the second world war. One hundred thousand lives were saved because those people were given a Wallenberg passport——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman has not quite got my point. He must not anticipate Bills that may or may not be discussed later. He was perfectly in order in the first part of his speech, and I am sure that he will stick to that theme.

Mr. Ron Davies: He will repeat it.

Mr. Marshall: I must appeal against attempts to impugn my name. Perhaps the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) wishes to make a proper intervention, in which case I shall happily give way. If he does not wish to intervene, he should bow to the normal courtesy of the House and allow an hon. Member on his feet to continue to speak without uttering sedentary interventions which distract that hon. Member and affect the good humour of the House.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg (Hampstead and Highgate): Both my hon. Friend and I hope that the Raoul Wallenberg (Memorial) Bill will be reached. Does he agree that the best way to ensure that is to sit down and let the present Bill proceed?

Mr. Marshall: I was slightly surprised when the lady who hopes to succeed my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) announced that, if she was elected to the House, she would give up acting. She should quickly learn that politicians can act too.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is being tempted, but I am sure that he will act within the rules of order of the House.

Mr. Squire *rose*——

Mr. Marshall: I give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Squire: If my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) had heard the whole of this morning's debate, he would understand that so many amendments are necessary to get the Bill into an acceptable state that, if the motion is accepted, there is no question of the Raoul Wallenberg (Memorial) Bill being reached.

Mr. Marshall: My hon. Friend takes the words out of my mouth. It is clear that, if we were fully to discuss the many amendments to the Bill, and especially amendments Nos. 133 and 134 which were tabled by the promoter, we would have no opportunity whatever to proceed to the long agenda before the House. We all came here to talk about the important Bills on the Order Paper, and it is essential for us to reach them. I am glad to see that the promoter is consulting his colleagues. He should consult the Minister to see whether there is a way out of this impasse.

All hon. Members have accepted the need for the Sale of Goods Act 1979 to be amended.

Mr. Dykes: Can my hon. Friend give the House more guidance on this matter, because some semantics and confusion are creeping in, although I am sure that that is not his fault? Is he saying that the proposed amendments are so complicated and lengthy that there is no possibility of a compromise, or does he feel that that possibility still exists and that there is still time as the Bill has substantial support?

Mr. Marshall: I am sure that there is the possibility of a compromise, but I suspect that there is not much compromise in the atmosphere today. However, if we all had a weekend in our constituencies and came back on Monday, I am sure that the spirit of compromise would prevail. My hon. Friend the Minister is a reasonable and moderate man and has made it quite clear in Committee and in the House that he would like to see the Sale of Goods Act amended. There is no doubt that the promoter would also like to see it amended, as would almost every hon. Member.

The way to do that is for the promoter of the Bill to recognise that, given the number of amendments to the Bill, we will not have an adequate chance to debate them today. I appeal to his good nature and ask him to do a deal with the Minister. Such a deal would be more likely if we did not debate the Bill today. We should defer it and move on to the Raoul Wallenberg (Memorial) Bill and the other important Bills on the Order Paper. I appeal to the hon. Gentleman not to let pride come before a fall. If he has too much pride in his creation, there is a danger that it will fall. If he adopts a moderate approach, he will make progress.

12.15 pm

Mr. Richard Shepherd: I am sure that my hon. Friend does not mean to be so gratuitously rude to the promoter of the Bill. I served on the Committee that examined the Bill and, like other hon. Members, I commend the promoter for his extraordinary courtesy. He went as far as he could to meet all objections, to the extent of moving amendments to ensure that they were debated. There is no question of pride going before a fall. Some of us would have liked the promoter to be more assertive on some points, but his conduct has been exemplary.

Mr. Marshall: I apologise to the promoter if I was being gratuitously offensive. That is not my style, nor that of the Minister. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) for his intervention.

I appeal to the Bill's promoter to allow the spirit of compromise to reign and to do a deal next week with the Minister. No one would then object to the Bill, subject to amendments Nos. 133 and 134 being made. That would be a much better path for the House to follow than to debate the Bill later today.

Mr. Wilshire: We have had a long debate on the first issue that we had to decide, which was a matter of some constitutional importance. I welcome the fact that the House has now made clear its view. We now know where we stand in terms of the principle of what we have to do to put the matter right. If we can put it right, the consumer will get a better deal in future.

Having taken that decision in principle, we now face some serious additional procedural issues arising from the motion to recommit and deal with the Bill immediately. If we pass the second motion, we will give the Bill preference over all others. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) has said, there are 24 other matters on today's Order Paper. As well as giving the Bill special treatment, we are ignoring the normal parliamentary timetable. I have often heard hon. Members complaining about not enough time being allowed or about somebody trying to steamroller legislation through the House.

Once again, we are having to consider serious procedural issues, and we have seen blood pressure rise. We saw the symptoms of that a moment ago. I have no doubt that, before I sit down, we shall hear again the allegations that this is a great waste of time.

Mr. Ron Davies: Absolutely.

Mr. Wilshire: That intervention makes my point. The Opposition are saying that the procedures about how we run the United Kingdom are a waste of time. We shall also hear them say that hon. Members were not elected to get involved in such things. This is not a waste of time, because Parliament's job is to protect the rights of a whole range of people.

In the course of one sitting, we have granted the Bill one big favour and are being asked to give it a second. As I said first time round, if I and other hon. Members are to be persuaded to vote for a second big favour we need to know the reasons. I asked four questions earlier, and I think that I got about one and a quarter answers. That is no way to treat the House. If there is a desire to get legislation through, reasons have to be given, especially on a Friday morning when the Whips are not involved.

Mr. Ron Davies: Not much! There are more Whips on the Government side than on this side.

Mr. Wilshire: There are more Whips on the Government side, and that is a demonstration that Conservative Members are far more ready to listen to the reasons for voting for or against.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): The Government Whips are not on the Front Bench. They are busily going round trying to orchestrate a filibuster on this matter. I was told that the Government Whips were trying to mount a sophisticated exercise. Anyone who has experienced the crude filibuster this morning must know that it is aimed at wrecking part I of the Bill.

Mr. Wilshire: That is a fascinating intervention. When the hon. Gentleman looks at *Hansard*, he will see that I

[Mr. Wilshire]

said that there are more Government Whips in the building and in the Chamber today than Opposition Whips. I commended my hon. Friends for being here on a Friday morning willing to listen to the debate before making up their minds.

When we are asked to do favours in the House, the reasons for them must be spelled out. Some questions must be posed and answered if we are to make progress. The first issue that was raised by the Opposition is the question of wasting time. Are we wasting time?

Mr. Ron Davies: Yes.

Mr. Wilshire: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. Whenever I seek to clarify how the Opposition view these matters, they obligingly tell me that anyone who seeks to talk about the procedures of the House and the nation's constitution is wasting the time of the House. Let them continue to say that. The more that they do so, the more the people will understand what the Labour party really stands for.

My hon. Friends and I are not wasting time, and I say that for some important reasons. Private Members' Bills are the precious right of all Back-Bench Members. Back-Bench Members queue each year in their hundreds for the right to introduce a private Member's Bill, and each year 20 strike lucky. Of the 20, only six, on average, stand anything like a realistic chance of getting legislation on to the Statute book.

Mr. Dykes: So fantastic is the opportunity for the first six of the 20 that I have always regarded it as sacred that the promoters with that good fortune watch every millimetre of the development of their Bills all the way through the legislative process, including—I do not wish to be unkind—money resolutions. It is entirely feasible to tell when money resolutions will appear on the Order Paper, for example. It surprises me if there is the slightest appearance of insouciance on the part of a promoter that could jeopardise his Bill, which may be wanted by many hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Is my hon. Friend rather depresesed by what he has seen? There are many desirable features of the Bill which hon. Members on both sides of the House welcome, subject to suitable amendment if there is time. Does my hon. Friend agree that what we have seen during the passage of a significant piece of legislation has been rather saddening?

Mr. Wilshire: I would not say that I am depressed, but I understand what my hon Friend says. I am more alarmed than depressed by the position in which we find ourselves.

In defending the rights of Back-Bench Members, it is important that the House sends a message to all those who are present this afternoon, and to those who are not, that hon. Members who are fortunate enough to secure a place in the top 20, as it were, and especially in the top six, must understand that the House will apply the same standards of scrutiny and care to their Bills as it applies to Government legislation. If it does not, private Members' occasions will become ever more sloppy and their Bills ever more badly drafted. As a result, precious opportunities to legislate will be lost. The message must be that Back-Bench Members get it right before they start.

We must speak up for all Back-Bench Members, but we must remember that there are supporters of worthy causes outside this place who have interests as well.

Mr. Gale: Is my hon. Friend suggesting that all legislation should be right before it begins its passage through this place? If so, my colleagues on the Government Front Bench might have something to answer for.

Mr. Wilshire: That is an interesting thesis, which I shall not pursue. If my hon. Friends and I went down that track, we might be here until next Friday. It would not then be possible to make progress.

We must consider the rights and interests of supporters of worthy causes as much as the rights and interests of Back-Bench Members. As I have said, hundreds of Back-Bench Members queue every year to take their chance in the ballot, and at the same time there are hundreds of good ideas queueing up every year. Almost all those ideas would, in some shape or form, make for a better Britain. Only 20 of all the many good ideas will ever get into print in any one year, and of the 20 only half a dozen are likely to take their place on the statute book.

However, each of the hundreds of ideas, if implemented, stands some chance of righting a wrong, and each one will help individuals who have particular problems. Most important of all, each idea has the backing of enthusiastic supporters. We must consider the enthusiastic supporters of the Bill that is before us, including enthusiastic Members, but at the same time we must take account of and speak up for those who support causes that have not secured first place in the ballot.

If we are tempted to give special treatment over and over again to one cause, we are in danger of riding roughshod over the interests of other Back-Bench Members. We are in danger also of turning a deaf ear to those who have good causes who have not been lucky enough to persuade six of our collegues to take them on board.

We must protect the rights of Back-Bench Members, the sponsors of private Bills that are designed to further worthy causes and the members of pressure groups, but we must consider whether it is important to take time to deal with procedural issues when there are matters that other hon. Members wish to pursue so that other private Members' Bills can find their way on to the statute book. I believe that we should give attention to procedural matters.

To recommit the Bill now would be to fly in the face of the normal timetables of the House. I have not been in this place long enough to be a procedural expert, but as I understand it there have to be several days between a Second Reading, a money resolution and consideration in Committee. That has been the procedure since I have been in the House. Good reasons have always been advanced why any proposals to rush legislation through the House should not be entertained.

There are two reasons why it is important to have a breathing space in this instance. The motion relates only to clause 12, but it takes us back, in effect, to Second Reading, which took place on the general understanding that the Bill did not involve public expenditure. That was the premise on Second Reading. That was the premise when we considered each clause in Committee.

As a result of the Division earlier this morning, however, we know now that public expenditure is involved. I did not feel satisfied, and I am not now, that only clause 12 would involve public expenditure. I consider that the premise on Second Reading has been undermined. It is important, therefore, that every hon. Member should be given appropriate time to consider whether the view that he or she took on Second Reading is the view, bearing in mind what has happened this morning, that he or she will wish to take in future.

Even if hon. Members are satisfied on the generality of the Bill, what is the position of clause 12 now that we know that public expenditure is involved? Only half an hour ago, the House decided that clause 12 was different from the rest of the Bill and should be considered again. Normally, half an hour is entirely inadequate to decide whether we should vote for or against something, especially when the rules seem to have been changed.

On both counts, the normal procedures of the House matter. There should be time for all hon. Members to consider their position. Fewer than 90 Members voted this morning, and many hon. Members are not here and thus are not able to consider whether they wish to vote one way or the other. We must bear in mind the fact that every hon. Member is now involved. The vote was for the whole House to consider the Bill, rather than just a Standing Committee. Although some members of the Standing Committee are here who have had the opportunity to consider the issues and can probably contribute again, every other hon. Member now has a stake in what we are doing.

12.30 pm

All those hon. Members who are not present, who received the National Consumer Council briefing at the outset, were told in words of one syllable on page 2 of the briefing that no public expenditure was involved——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is straying somewhat into remarks that would have been in order on the money resolution last night. I remind him and the House that all we have to decide is whether to consider the Bill in Committee now.

Mr. Wilshire: I am grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That underlines the point, that no hon. Member was willing or able, or present with the necessary information, to pursue the question last night. It is vital—certainly when we discuss clause 12—that we look in detail at whether the expenditure is adequate. I willingly accept your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

As far as I can see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, even within the terms of your guidance on the narrowness of the motion, we still need answers to questions. Why is the Bill so much more important than 25 other measures? Just because it has a strong pressure group and that pressure group has easy access to the television, must we give it preference over everything else? [HON. MEMBERS: "It came first in the ballot."] That was one of my earlier points. Coming first in the ballot gives an hon. Member the first chance to do something. It is a privilege and a piece of luck, and the hon. Member must get it right. The further up the ballot he is, the more right he must be on the first occasion.

It is unfair to other Back Benchers—Nos. 2 to 20 in the ballot, and all those who were not lucky enough to reach the top 20—to say that, just because one hon. Member has reached No. 1 in the ballot, the others do not matter, and to demand a second or third go. The promoter must tell us, if we are to vote with him, why the Bill is so much more important than all the other measures that have come before the House in this Session.

Mr. Martyn Jones: It is more important because it will protect the rights of consumers, extend to them a right that they have not had before and put industry right on quality control. That is far more important than any legislation with which we have dealt in this whole Session.

Mr. Wilshire: That is a fascinating point. *[Interruption.]* As my hon. Friends have been saying from sedentary positions, there is an amendment to come that will undermine that.

As we have said repeatedly, no one dissents from the statement that the Bill's objectives are good. It will help people and improve competition. However, before we come to the details of that, we must be clear whether those objectives—however laudable—should be allowed to ride roughshod over the procedures of the House, the rights of Back Benchers and the rights of pressure groups, lobbyists and others with good ideas. We must have answers. Simply asserting that the Bill is better than all the others is not good enough. Why should we give it a second chance this morning at half an hour's notice?

Mr. Dykes: I disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) and with the similar arguments deployed by our hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) who is not in the Chamber at present, against an immediate Committee stage for clause 12. I hope that the promoter does not misunderstand my motives. I have expressed my distress that a potentially important piece of legislation has, for whatever reason, been deliberately mishandled. I am sorry to have to put it like that. Mistakes have been made. As I was not a member of the Standing Committee, I shall refrain from referring presumptuously to all the details.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) has followed our proceedings in immaculate detail, as he always does. That is due to his pristine legal training some years ago. I do not suggest that he is not still a young man, but he was even younger then. That legal training led him to appreciate the importance of attention to detail.

My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne was correct in a number of aspects, but I disagree with the fundamentals of his argument. He and others of my hon. Friends said that to win the ballot was precious; that even to follow each centimetre would be too wide, and that we must follow each millimetre of the process.

The Government are known for their robust attitude in a number of policy areas, and it is no apology for them to say that, by and large, they are opposed to private Members' legislation. It is wrong to suppose that Mr. Nice Guy—I do not necessarily refer to the promoter—can say that it does not matter if there are a few accidents in Committee because when the crunch comes everything will be put right in later stages of the Bill. Legislation is a complex business. We know that civil servants do not like private Members' Bills. They regard them as an impertinent intrusion into public life, where legislation is drafted rather badly by civil servants, pursued rather badly by Ministers and taken through to what we usually end up with—bad legislation which needs repealing or adjusting. That is the entrancing aspect of our system.

[Mr. Dykes]

It is no use any promoter saying that the real world is unfair because that is how it is in the mother of Parliaments. This is a robust parliamentary assembly where people watch every point. I see you nod your assent, Madam Deputy Speaker——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. I must correct the hon. Gentleman. I am speaking to my Clerk. I have nothing to add to what the hon. Gentleman is saying.

Mr. Dykes: I am grateful for that comment, Madam Deputy Speaker, which was very interesting. I am making only a short speech, but I entertain the modest hope that you will nod at one or two of my assertions if I am on the right lines. I always look to the Chair for the psychological guidance that we all seek on such occasions.

I have tabled some amendments and I would like them to be debated if there is time. I am in favour of the broad outline of the Bill, subject to a number of crucial amendments to which I hope that the Government will respond positively. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Minister has already hinted that they will. Therefore, we should move on to Committee stage immediately.

The hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) worries me a little. He is universally regarded as an honourable Member of the House and he handled the Committee stage with a degree of politeness——

Mr. Richard Shepherd: And generosity.

Mr. Dykes: My hon. Friend is right. The hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West, handled the Committee with politeness and generosity. The Committee had three or four sittings. This may be a complex Bill, but that is still a hefty Committee stage to debate amendments and clauses. It is not as though there was just one stage and then it was noticed that there were serious flaws. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would admit that the stages prior to the painful muddle in which we now find ourselves, whatever the cause, were fair and acceptable.

The hon. Gentleman intervened a few minutes ago to suggest that the Bill was unique and that nothing else in the ballot mattered. He suggested that it was the only significant piece of legislation this Session.

Mr. Martyn Jones: I was referring to Government legislation, not to private Members' Bills.

Mr. Dykes: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's correction. I thought that he meant that. I wish that I had been a member of the Committee, because then I could have enjoyed his very attractive demeanour. I can understand why people are keen to see his Bill progress.

Mrs. Gorman: Is something going on here?

Mr. Dykes: When I had the good fortune to be second in the ballot some years ago—I shall not say when, as it was a long time ago—my Bill eventually became an Act. It is now known as the Dykes Act. Some people have unkindly remarked that it is a good cure for insomnia, because anyone who starts reading it is guaranteed to doze off in five minutes flat. In any event, it was a very worthy piece of legislation, and I am very proud of it. In the beginning, the then Government were hostile to my Bill, but we brought them around and they eventually supported it. All the majesty of the Civil Service came into play in respect of the drafting—I always remember the phrase, "Lending you a spare pen." It was very helpful and I received endless advice.

There was a psychological transformation when the Administration came on to the scene, using all the impressive power available to any Government to support what I considered to be a very worthy measure. Nevertheless, I did not take the view that the Administration were obliged to provide that assistance because my Bill was a unique piece of legislation and it would be an appalling state of affairs if it did not become law. I did not take the view either that the Bills behind mine in the ballot were of no importance. It is usually said that the first six Bills to be successful in the ballot have a reasonably good chance of reaching the statute book, depending on their subject matter and proposals.

I hope that the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West does not think I am giving him a condescending lecture when I say to him and to his right hon. and hon. Friends that their attitude is also important.

Mr. Viggers: Does my hon. Friend agree that those of us who are sympathetic to the broad concepts of the Bill feel that it goes rather too wide and that they should make their concern known to the promoter? Does my hon. Friend agree also that it is sometimes necessary to compromise if a Bill is to succeed?

Mr. Dykes: Yes, my hon. Friend makes with greater eloquence the point that I tried feebly to make earlier. In textual and constructional terms the end result may look different from the Bill that one originally devised or had drafted by parliamentary agents, but that is all part of the process. I share the view of my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) that it would be marvellous if this Parliament were mature enough to undertake the same searching examinations of Government Bills. The attitude of any Administration—I am not getting at the present one and my right hon. and hon. Friends know that I am an enthusiastic supporter of most aspects of Government policy and action—is to regard their own legislation as being beyond close scrutiny. We all go through the motions, of course, and there are times when any Government have to concede a point, but the Government really want Members of Parliament to pay only the slightest amount of attention to their proposals and then turn up for the 10 o'clock Division on Second Reading and support a Bill through all its other stages.

However, in the case of a private Member's Bill—here I have sympathy with the promoter—the Government undertake a massive search of every word and every line, and keep saying, "This clause hasn't been properly drafted." We pay tribute to the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills for his work in trying to improve the constitutional behaviour of this House. We know of endless examples of badly drafted, inadequately thought-out clauses which later have had to be altered. They are not even part of the usual alternance, to use a French phrase, of the party battle, when a new Government repeal the previous Administration's legislation. That is one of the cruder aspects of political life, but I refer more to this House, the realities of Government attitudes, careless drafting and so on.

A promoter is entitled to say, "My Bill deserves just treatment because it is in proper order." That may be the consequence of the efforts of the Public Bill Office, which is very helpful, a parliamentary agent or draftsman, or intervention by expert Government draftsmen. At present, we are only debating an immediate Committee stage, which I favour, in respect of clause 12—the others having been dealt with. There are other amendments on other clauses and I should refer to them if it were not out of order to do so.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman would be out of order if he did that.

Mr. Dykes: I knew that you would say that, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I am grateful to you for reminding the whole House of that fact.

That is the spirit of most of the amendments and it is interesting to note that they have mostly been proposed by Conservative Members. My colleagues take a great interest in this subject. I wish that more Opposition Members had been here today to support the motion.

A number of the amendments would produce significant improvements in legal, juridical and operational aspects of the Bill. That end could have been served if the Bill had been handled correctly so far. There is still time for the Committee stage on clause 12 to take place. It need not take up much time. We could then make further progress and I am strongly in favour of that.

12.45 pm

Mr. Richard Shepherd: I have seen a number of damascene conversions in the course of my membership of the House and I have watched my hon. Friends' activities with enthusiasm today. They have identified two procedural problems and they are right to do so. I do not think that any hon. Member can complain when hon. Members use procedural techniques in relation to measures that they wish to oppose, but I wish that there were a little more even-handedness. It is not unfamiliar to my memory that the Government occasionally make cock-ups, but our natural instinct is to appreciate that a measure is important and that we should therefore try to find ways to move the business of the House forward.

The question before us is whether we continue with the Bill. That is really what it is about. I judge from debates in Committee, on Second Reading and today that there is a body of my colleagues who do not like the Bill. They feel that it is fundamentally flawed. I am not trying to apportion blame or credit but to observe that that has a relevance to whether we should debate the motion now.

I have watched the Whips, with their usual vigour on a Friday morning, scurrying around to point out observations and arguments which might be of use in prolonging the debate. I have watched the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown), who was Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Minister in Committee, trying to further the argument on the procedural debate about whether the Bill should proceed. I judge from all those activities, and from the curious statement by my hon. Friend——

Mr. Bellingham: I should correct my hon. Friend on the role of my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown). I assumed that he was Parliamentary Private Secretary to the hon. Member for Gainsburgh and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh).

Mr. Shepherd: My hon. Friend's eye roved further. The hon. Member was extending the role of a Parliamentary Private Secretary to give counsel to others.

When we weigh up whether it is appropriate to continue with the Bill and the amendment on the Floor of the House we should weigh the various forces that have contributed to the present position and whether it is worth supporting the motion.

I have come to the conclusion that the Minister was deeply opposed to the Bill from the beginning. He felt that it was not appropriate to make that argument about the details and areas of error straight out, but he was fundamentally opposed to the Bill. To bring it to an end, he used a technique—I make no complaint because I, too, have tried to move a Bill through the Chamber—which elicited a response less characteristic of the traditions of the House but which achieved the same object.

The Minister takes the view that the Bill must not proceed. He tried to talk it out, but the House decided, through the procedural motions in Second Reading, that the Bill should go to Committee. Then the Minister sat through Committee giving neither guidance nor help despite the extraordinary generosity and kindness of the promoter of the Bill who always wanted to know in what way he could meet the objections. The *Official Report* of the Committee proceedings shows that amendments were passed. The promoter of the Bill attempted to address those questions in Committee. The Minister must have been aware for some time that a money resolution would be required. I regret that I was unaware of the fact that a money resolution would be needed. The question is whether we should be discussing it now. The use of procedural devices will ensure that the Bill does not proceed today, so it is doomed.

Mr. Forth: Can my hon. Friend say what, in his judgment, led the promoter of the Bill to table amendments Nos. 133 and 134 which seek to delete the major part of his own Bill?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) and the Minister go down that road, I must emphasise that the only question before the House is whether the House should resolve itself immediately into a Committee of the whole House. I hope that hon. Members will address the very narrow question that is before the House.

Mr. Shepherd: I am trying to keep within those narrow confines, Madam Deputy Speaker. If the House agreed to that motion, we should be unable to raise many matters. I do not know on what basis the Government have raised such fundamental objections to the Bill, but they have led the entire Whips Office to gee itself up and scuttle around today, which means that the Bill is doomed. However, the Government have not put forward their arguments openly. I regret that we have been unable to discover what the Government's objections are—other than the fact that people outside this place, who have not been named, fear the Bill. As they would not come up front and discuss the matter, it is fruitless to consider the Bill now. The Minister has made it clear that he does not intend to allow the Bill to pass. We should therefore not continue to discuss it but acknowledge the means by which the Minister made his point and got his way.

Mrs. Gorman: I came to the House this morning—as, I am sure, did many other hon. Members—and gave up a number of constitutional engagements in the hope that we would reach the Tax Relief for Household Employers Bill, which I introduced to the House under the ten-minute rule. Had I had any inkling that the House would spend such an inordinate amount of time on the Consumer Guarantees Bill, I should not have bothered to come. My morning could have been spent more profitably.

The Bill that I introduced has attracted a great deal of attention throughout the country. I cannot speak to it now; that would be out of order. However, the drafting of the Consumer Protection Bill must have been incompetent; as a result of which we are spending an enormous amount of time on a procedural matter.

The National Consumer Council is receiving £2 million of taxpayers' money to fund its activities, and it has persuaded the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) to promote the Bill. Surely, therefore, if it knows its job, it should have thrashed out all these points——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I dislike having to be heavy-handed when I am in the Chair, but this is a very narrow motion. All that we are debating is whether clause 12 should be immediately considered in a Committee of the whole House.

Mrs. Gorman: As one of the hon. Members whose Bill is listed for today, I am sorry about that, because it means that those of us who had attended for other purposes will be crowded out.

Mr. Bellingham: I have said that I feel strongly that the Bill should go back upstairs into Committee, so that it can be properly considered and all the important matters can be examined. I should like to ask my hon. Friend the Minister exactly what the position will be if the House decides that the Bill should go back upstairs so that all these matters can be thrashed out. I came here this morning with a view to supporting the Bill.

Mr. Forth: My understanding is that the House has made a decision of principle to recommit the Bill to a Committee of the whole House. The only decision that we have to take is whether we do that now or subsequently. I hope that that helps my hon. Friend.

Mr. Bellingham: It helps me enormously. Obviously there will not be time to conduct the Committee stage of the Bill on the Floor of the House. Is there any possibility of a way being found to get the Bill back into Committee upstairs, as we have come across a number of serious pitfalls?

Mr. Squire: Is not the reality of what we have just heard from my hon. Friend the Minister that, if we do not debate the Bill today, my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House will need to find another time for the whole House to debate it?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. This is a private Member's Bill; therefore, it is debated in private Members time.

The only decision we are taking now is whether we proceed with the Bill in Committee here. That is the narrow decision we are taking now.

Mr. Bellingham: I am sorry for causing a slight side track.

I came here hoping to go through some of the arguments on Report. As I have said on a number of occasions, I support many aspects of the Bill. I support it in principle as there is a great deal of good in it, but I am saddened by the complications that have been thrown up today.

It goes without saying that, had the Government found themselves in the same predicament with one of their less controversial Bills such as the Water Bill or the Bill dealing with the poll tax system, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister described it the other day, Opposition Members would have been going berserk. They would have been going haywire and seizing every possible opportunity to filibuster and reprimand the Minister and his officials for not spotting that discrepancy. Opposition Members cannot complain about hon. Members such as myself, who came here this morning hoping to participate and to play a constructive part in the debate only to find total chaos and that people evidently have not done their homework.

I hope that we can find some way of proceeding constructively so that we can examine the Bill in detail with the right amount of time. If we try to rush it through this morning, we shall be issuing hostages to fortune and setting a very bad example indeed.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. May I make it quite clear to the House that our only concern this morning is whether we immediately resolve ourselves into a Committee on the Bill to debate clause 12? That is the only thing that we are discussing.

Mr. Gale: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it not also the case that the decision to commit the Bill to a Committee of the whole House has been taken, so that the only question is whether that is done now? If it is not done now, is it not the case that it will not happen at all?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Edward Leigh: I wish to oppose the motion, and take as my text the words on the flysheet of the twentieth edition of "Erskine May" which are addressed not to the current Speaker but

> "To The Right Honourable George Thomas, MP Speaker of the House of Commons, and to The Speakers of the Commonwealth, within whose hands the priceless heritage of Parliament is securely held".

It is strange that in the current edition of "Erskine May" those words have been changed to:

> "The Speakers and Officers of Commonwealth Parliaments, all of whom guard the precious heritage of Parliamentary government."

"Priceless" is much stronger than "precious".

I oppose the motion because of the word "now" and because written notice has not been given. As a result, colleagues have not had an opportunity to study the issue or come to the debate. To convince the House of my view, I have researched all such motions since 1945. I hope that the House will forgive me if I refer to what has happened in the past, but it is germane to our decision whether to approve the motion. I apologise to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, if you do not have the 20th edition of "Erskine May". No doubt your Clerks can find you a copy.

1 pm

We can exclude two groups. There are motions, of which there were apparently many before the 1960s, to recommit a Bill at the beginning of its Report stage to a

Committee of the whole House in respect of specific amendments. Apart from the fact that that practice was discontinued in the 1960s, it does not cover this matter. The second group of recommittal motions can also be discounted as they concern the recommittal of hybrid Bills, and we are not talking about one today.

In deciding whether we should commit the Bill to a Committee of the whole House now, we should consider that written notice has not been given. I address my remarks specifically to why we should not commit the Bill because written notice has not been given. A Bill may be recommitted

"to enable a new clause to be added to the bill when the House, on report, has passed the stage at which new clauses are taken."

That has happened in the past and we could proceed along those lines. New clauses are taken at the beginning of report stage before any amendments to the Bill.

Such a recommittal motion would require written notice. In the past, such a procedure has been used to recommit a Bill, but in this case no written notice has been given. Because of that, it would not be fair to rely on that purpose.

Secondly a Bill my be recommitted

"to enable the committee to take advantage of an instruction from the House to make amendments which would otherwise be outside the scope of the bill."

We are not talking about amendments outside the scope of the Bill, so this does not fall into that procedure. I understand that, again, the recommittal motion would require written notice so that the House could be properly informed of the amendments. No written notice has been given.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The House has agreed the recommittal motion. The hon. Gentleman should stop referring to it.

Mr. Leigh: Surely we are now talking about whether the motion should take effect now. I am coming to that point.

Finally, a Bill may be recommitted

"to enable the committee to reconsider amendments they had previously made."

We could perhaps use that procedure now. "Erskine May" cites the Education Bill 1970, when the Opposition defeated the Government in Standing Committee on the motion, That clause 1 stand part, thus effectively crippling the Bill. The Government moved to recommit the Bill to the same Standing Committee with a permissive instruction to the effect that it had power to put back clause 1. Once again, notice was given.

I rest my case on that. We should not allow this part of the Bill to be debated now, because no written notice has been given. I have gone through the precedents and, as far as I can tell—I am not a constitutional expert and others in the House know considerably more that I do—there is no precedent to recommit a Bill to a Committee of the whole House, which is what we have just done, or any precedent for this motion. No doubt, Madam Deputy Speaker, you can be advised by your Clerks, but that is the worrying point.

This matter is serious because a number of other Bills have been listed for consideration after this one. As well as that I have tabled a number of amendments to the Bill. If we were to discuss the matter now it would take up a great deal of time. A large amount of public money is involved and, given that it is past 1 pm, there is virtually no chance of the Bill reaching Report Stage. If that were the case, I would have no opportunity to discuss my amendments. For those reasons, and the procedural motions I have discussed, I believe that we should not deal with the Bill now. We should allow written notice to be given and come back to it on another Friday.

Mr. Forth: The matters that we are discussing are important, and it is right for them to deserve the attention of the House.

We are reminded this morning that the Bill obtained its Second Reading because more than 100 people were here to support it. That point was reinforced by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), who has always been a supporter of the Bill, who voted for it on Second Reading and who participated in its Committee proceedings.

It is interesting that, this morning, on the vote on the recommittal to a Committee of the whole House, only 85 hon. Members went through the Lobby in support. Many of them must have been my hon. Friends, because there have been precious few Opposition Members present all day. It looks as though enthusiasm for the Bill is declining. As it has proceeded through its different stages, it appears that fewer people have been prepared to be present to support it. That probably reflects the level of support and interest it has commanded outside the House. If the evidence of the postbag is anything to go by, there is little support for the Bill. That has given me comfort in my less than enthusiastic support for it—again noted by my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills.

We must decide whether the House should now resolve itself into a Committee to deal with the important matter of clause 12. I can appreciate why my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) believes that we should let the Bill go through now so that we can get on to more important things.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: I am sure that my hon. Friend will not mind me saying that, given the bad acoustics, it would be easier if he addressed Mr. Deputy Speaker rather than talking to me. The acoustics are so lousy that I cannot hear much of what he is saying.

Mr. Forth: What a pity that we can no longer look at the colleague to whom we are addressing our remarks. I am conscious of what my hon. Friend has said, so, if he will forgive me, I shall talk out of my right ear so to speak in the hope that he can follow my remarks.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate asked why we could not let the Bill go through now. However, problems associated with the late appearance of the money resolution, referred to earlier, as well as problems associated with clause 12, must be considered. We must consider whether to go into Committee now so that we can address those matters, especially as we have yet to consider the money resolution in any detail given that it received its formal approval last night.

We must decide whether we are able now to deal with the money resolution and everything that flows from it. My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) has already asked whether other hon. Members could now participate in a Committee of the whole House. Do they know that that is about to happen?

Apart from anything else, we do not have a Treasury Minister present, but we may well want such a Minister to advise us on the implications of the money resolution. I could do my best on behalf of the Government, but I am

[Mr. Forth]

not completely confident of dealing with all the matters that might arise as a result of that money resolution in the absence of a colleague from the Treasury.

Mr. Martyn Jones: If the normal procedures had applied, the money resolution would have been considered after Second Reading, and the Bill would then have been considered in Committee. As a member of that Committee, the Minister would have taken advice from a Treasury Minister and brought it to the attention of the House. I should have thought that the Under-Secretary of State would anticipate this circumstance, as he tabled the motion last night, which was passed nem. con. The Government had an opportunity then to vote, in effect against the Bill, but they did not. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would now have the advice from his Treasury colleague and could make those points to a Committee of the whole House.

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman makes a perfectly fair point. I remind him that the money resolution was laid before the House in the name of my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, as is right and proper in these circumstances. I made sure that I was here on the Treasury Bench last night, as was my duty, to see that money resolution safely through the House in order to give a fair wind to the Bill and to ensure at least that it would not be an obstruction and prevent consideration of the Bill proceeding.

We have agreed the recommittal, but have not yet decided whether it should take place now. Given the comments by my hon. Friends, that point is worth considering, if only because of what would happen to the Bill were we not to consider it in Committee now. I think that we are clear in our minds about that and no doubt you will guide us if we are not, Madam Deputy Speaker.

As I understand it, if we decided not to proceed now, the Bill would go back into the private Members' Bills queue and, if time were available, would be considered in Committee. I am not sure whether that gives the Bill peculiar difficulties, but I think that some of my hon. Friends have that approach in mind. If we followed it, it would give everyone time perhaps to consider the implications of the money resolution and look again at clause 12 and perhaps even, as my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) suggested, give the Bill's promoter time to look at his Bill again, consider its state and all the difficulties connected with the limited time available to private Members' Bills.

I hope that the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) will speak after me to advise the House what should happen. We presume that he wants to go ahead now with the Bill, but he has not told us the strength of his feeling on the matter or why it should go ahead. Given the importance of clause 12 to the Bill, it is appropriate to consider it seriously.

I remind the House that clause 12 states:

> "The following provisions of the Consumer Protection Act 1987, and section 25 of the Trade Descriptions Act 1968, shall apply in relation to the enforcement of this Act, and in relation to offences under this Act or under any regulations under this Act, as they apply in relation to the enforcement of, and in relation to offences under that Act".

The clause raises important points, as I think the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West would agree. It means that trading departments and officers would be responsible for enforcing the Bill's provisions, unless the House subsequently passed the hon. Gentleman's amendment to delete this part of the Bill—a mystery that we have not yet resolved. At this late hour, we are still waiting for it to be resolved. I have invited the hon. Gentleman to explain, but he has not yet done so.

I hope that the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West will seek to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker, to make it clear to us why he thinks that it is important to deal with this matter now rather than subsequently, whether he thinks that hon. Members have sufficient evidence with which to deal with this complicated matter and whether it might be advisable for me to seek further advice from my Treasury colleagues on the detailed provisions of the money resolution. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will give us all that guidance.

This is an important matter and my hon. Friends have made clear their concerns. Although it may well be appropriate for us to deal with this point now, unless the Bill's promoter answers our questions, we shall find it difficult to make a determination. I sense that some hon. Members feel that it would probably be inappropriate to give the Bill further detailed consideration now. On the other hand, some hon. Members feel that that would be appropriate. I shall await the remarks of the promoter of the Bill before deciding whether to support the motion.

1.15 pm

Mr. Martyn Jones: I think that we should resolve ourselves into a Committee immediately. In any case, the House cannot do much more business today, and I understand that the Minister responsible for the next Bill is not here.

The Minister's second question was about my amendments numbers 133 and 134, and I should be out of order if I sought to discuss them now. He will find out the answers if he joins us in voting for the motion.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 77, Noes 0.

Division No. 151] **[1.16 pm**

AYES

Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Boateng, Paul
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Carrington, Matthew
Chapman, Sydney
Clay, Bob
Cohen, Harry
Conway, Derek
Corbyn, Jeremy
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dixon, Don
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fisher, Mark
Fookes, Dame Janet
Fraser, John
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gordon, Mildred
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Heffer, Eric S.
Hind, Kenneth
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Illsley, Eric
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Loyden, Eddie
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Madden, Max
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Quin, Ms Joyce
Rathbone, Tim
Richardson, Jo
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Shersby, Michael
Shore, Rt Hon Peter

Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Squire, Robin
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Trotter, Neville
Viggers, Peter

Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wells, Bowen
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilshire, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Gale, and
Dr. John Marek.

NOES

Nil

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Edward Leigh and
Mr. John Marshall.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill immediately considered in Committee.

Clause 12

ENFORCEMENT, DEFENCES, ETC.

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Wilshire: On a point of order, Miss Boothroyd. I ask you to clarify which clause 12 we are considering. It seems from what I heard this morning that the consideration and amendment of the original clause 12 in Standing Committee was out of order because the appropriate formalities had not been completed. Are we considering the original clause 12 or the amended clause 12?

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Miss Betty Boothroyd): We are considering clause 12 in the recommitted Bill, which was amended in Standing Committee C. It is clause 12, at line 25 on page 7. I hope that all hon. Members understand that.

Mr. Squire: I am pleased that you gave that ruling, Miss Boothroyd, otherwise the time that I spent in preparation might have proved to be wasted.

When I spoke earlier today I declared what was probably an irrelevant financial interest. I declare now a non-pecuniary but relevant interest, which is that I have the honour of being one of the vice-presidents of the Institution of Environmental Health. As a glance at clause 12 will show, that esteemed body will be responsible for administering, at council level, the duties that the Bill imposes, and especially those set out in clause 12.

Like other hon. Members, I raced for a copy of the report of the proceedings in Standing Committee to digest what was said on clause 12. It would be fair to say that it was something less than a satisfactory meal. It seems that the debate lasted for about 30 seconds, and that that time was spent applying the clause to Northern Ireland. I find today that there are amendments to delete Northern Ireland, so perhaps the Standing Committee proceedings were unnecessary.

The clause is concerned with the Consumer Protection Act 1987 and its application to the Bill. I have a few questions and comments to put to my hon. Friend the Minster or to the promoter, the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones), whoever is the appropriate person to respond to them.

The apparent effect of the clause is that trading standards authorities would be under a statutory duty to enforce the provisions of the Bill by reason of the application of section 27 in part IV of the Consumer Protection Act 1987. I stress that: I shall return to the words "statutory duty". I would appreciate some assistance from my hon. Friend the Minister, but it seems that the Secretary of State, who is included in the definition of an enforcement authority in section 45(1) of the Act, would have enforcement powers, but not a duty to enforce.

1.30 pm

Will the Minister give us an idea of how he expects the Secretary of State to exercise what, on the face of it, is a discretion rather than a duty? I hope that hon. Members perceive the distinction. We can all see how duties can be exercised and can be set out; Secretaries of State are clearly answerable under a number of Acts. When powers but not duties are laid down, however, a Minister may presumably choose to ignore a vote in the House and say, "I personally have no wish to exercise those powers, and I will not exercise them."

The power of enforcement appears to be exercisable in relation to the Bill generally, but the Bill creates civil rights and obligations. For instance, clause 8, which deals with the enforceability of guarantees, obviously does not deal with a criminal offence. The Bill therefore covers both civil rights and criminal offences. Surely it is not appropriate for trading standards authorities to seek to enforce civil rights: that would introduce a whole new concept into law. Is the intention for the authorities to limit their enforcement activities to possible criminal offences? That is the logical interpretation, but it is not how the Bill is currently drafted.

Let us assume that that is the intention. It is unclear to what extent—if at all—some of the provisions of part IV of the 1987 Act would be applied for the purpose of enforcing the criminal provisions in the Bill. There are two reasons for my uncertainty. First, many of the provisions apply only for the purpose of enforcing specific parts of the 1987 Act. That is not unusual: often legislation contains unique aspects specifically designed to ensure that it works properly. Is it intended that the provisions of the Bill should be included in all the references to those specific parts?

Secondly, many of the enforcement proceedings in part IV of the Act—for example, the power of customs officers to seize and detain imported goods in section 31—are inherently unsuitable for use in enforcing the provisions of the Bill. There are other provisions that cannot be applied without modification; I shall not go into the details, but that requires careful thought. Examples are sections 29(2), (3), (6) and (7). None of the provisions in part V of the Act is applied. A provision restricting the disclosure of information on the lines of section 38 would also be needed. Those points are important, but, for reasons at which I can only guess—as I was not a member of the Standing Committee—the Committee did not discuss them. A provision concerning the service of documents, on the lines of section 44 of the Act, would presumably also be needed.

So far I have concentrated on what I consider to be the defects in the clause as it is currently drafted. As we are already in Committee and have had relatively little opportunity to table amendments, we must either ask for a response from the Minister or hope for amendments to be tabled in the other place.

We must be clear about the Minister's response. It is fairly standard practice—every hon. Member has

[Mr. Squire]

encountered it in Committee—for a Minister to say, "I accept the principle," or "I accept the need for change, but the wording is not right,"—or a variation on that—and promise to table amendments later. Clearly my hon. Friend will not have the opportunity to table amendments today, but I press him strongly to accept my concerns if he considers them valid, and to instruct those in another place to table the appropriate amendments.

Clause 12 is arguably one of the most important clauses because it deals with enforcement. Even with the best of intentions, if there is no enforcement the Bill will fail in its aims. Of course, we are here primarily to discuss the money aspect and the impact of the clause on local authorities and environmental health officers. My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) referred to the impact on the community charge because a statutory duty is being placed on local authorities. It is not an option; it is a statutory duty. When the Committee discussed clause 12 in February, it was before the surge of correspondence on the community charge. Regardless of hon. Members' views about the community charge——

Mr. Ron Davies: The poll tax.

Mr. Squire: Indeed, some call it the poll tax. I have been rather more outspoken than some, but no one can deny that there has been a surge of interest, almost an obsession among the public about the size of their community charge bills compared with those of other people. The provisions of clause 12 will directly increase the amount of community charge. I cannot speak for other hon. Members, but I have not yet received any letters saying, "Please make the community charge higher." Some people have used rather stronger language than that, but they certainly did not suggest that it should be increased. Indeed, they strongly suggested that it should be lower.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister or the Bill's promoter can explain the impact of clause 12 on staffing levels. That matter was not debated in Committee, but as it imposes a statutory duty it is important to know the consequences. On Second Reading, the promoter, the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West—whom I congratulate on his manner—said that each year

"14 million people are dissatisfied with products . . ."—

presumably those figures came from the National Consumer Council—

"and only half will have their problems resolved."—[*Official Report*, 26 January 1990; Vol. 165, c. 1174.]

That means that 7 million people are dissatisfied.

Mrs. Gorman: Does my hon. Friend really believe that there are 7 million complaints each year? Is it a genuine figure or is it made up, having been extrapolated from a much smaller number by virtue of the number of people in the population? I cannot think of an organisation that could handle that number of complaints.

Mr. Squire: My hon. Friend puts me on the spot. I am taking in good faith what the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West said on Second Reading. I cannot account for his figures, but I am sure that when he speaks he will give the points of reference that my hon. Friend rightly seeks to establish.

I have no idea how many of those 7 million dissatisfied people would take the matter further and complain to trading standards officers or what action would then follow. Let us suppose that 10 per cent. of complainants are so upset that they pursue matters with their local environmental health officers. One is then talking of 700,000 new cases each year—I can answer my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) to that extent—involving a statutory duty to act. Environmental health officers will have no option but to attend to those complaints. They cannot say, "We would like to do so, but those complaints are not a matter of priority."

There are 400 local authorities in this country, and right hon. and hon. Members can calculate for themselves the extra work load that will be placed on members of the institution of which I have the honour to be a vice-president. I calculate that each local authority will have to deal with an additional 1,500 cases per year, with major implications not only for the Consolidated Fund but for local authorities, and therefore for the community charges that they make.

I do not know what priority local authorities would give to such complaints. I confess that I have not spoken to the institution in that respect, so the following are my views alone. If one considers three of the important duties of environmental health officers, one's concern begins to increase. EHOs are required, for example, to certify whether a house is in such a bad state of disrepair that no one should be expected to live in it. That is a critical responsibility, and I should not want to see anything else take precedence over it. EHOs are also called upon to deal with complaints about excessive noise, and with the whole subject of food safety and public health—which the public acknowledge as a proper responsibility of local authorities and of the members of the Institution of Environmental Health Officers who undertake it. How are EHOs expected to cope with all that work and investigate an additional 1,500 cases—and that may be an underestimate—per year? I know from my involvement in the institution and from my previous political life as a local councillor that there remains a significant national shortage of properly qualified personnel to fill the role of environmental health officers.

If politics is about priorities, we must ask ourselves whether it is right to place the new responsibilities introduced by clause 12 on people who are becoming more important by the month. I spend a great deal of time travelling around the country to give talks on environmental issues. The points that I have made are brought to my attention time and again by the public. It is seldom that people complain to me as dissatisfied customers. The number who do so is tiny by comparison with those who say, "Please do something to reduce the hellish noise that I have to suffer in my flat," or ask, "Are the products that we eat or drink safe?"

I want answers from my hon. Friend the Minister on the questions that I asked earlier, and a response from the Bill's promoter on the points that I put to him. If their responses satisfy me, I am prepared to move on, to debate the other amendments to which I referred.

Mr. Wilshire: I am relieved that the procedural matters are behind us, so that we can turn at last to a Bill, the objectives and principles of which have had the support of people right across the political spectrum from the very beginning. I hope that we may now make progress.

We must sort out three things in our minds. First, we must take account of the fact that this is a Committee of the whole House. Therefore, for the benefit of those not party to our earlier deliberations we must clarify exactly what clause 12 seeks to do. Secondly, at no stage during the deliberations of the Standing Committee did we give any thought to public expenditure in the context of the objectives of the Bill. Having let procedural matters go through so rapidly, it would be improper to allow what appears to be £1 million to go through without careful scrutiny. Thirdly, we must ask ourselves whether, as a Committee of the whole House, we are justified to try to put right at the 11th hour matters that there has been plenty of time to put right before now.

First, we should be clear about the exact meaning of clause 12. As my hon. Friend the Member for Horncastle (Mr. Squire) said earlier, it will give trading standards authorities a new statutory duty. My hon. Friend was talking about opportunity to do things, but in this context we are talking about a duty that will be required of those authorities and if they are in dereliction of that duty the public will have a right to require action to be taken. Little discretion is involved. If we go down that track, as sure as day follows night, public expenditue will be incurred. It is crucial to understand the powers that we are giving to those authorities.

1.45 am

Section 39 of the Act concerns the all reasonable steps defence. That is right and proper and I do not quarrel with it. If one is hauled up before a trading standards authority it is proper to say, "I did my best." Section 40 says that if the law is broken one can take action against a second person as well as the principal person involved. I also think that that is a sensible technicality. Before dealing with technicalities of that sort, however, we must return to the principle which is at stake in clause 12.

I can identify the following principles. Given all the debate about local government at the moment, should we be giving local government, via clause 12, yet another job, whether funded or not?

Mr. Ron Davies *rose*——

Mr. Wilshire: I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Davies: I do not wish to intervene.

The Second Deputy Chairman: The hon. Member was too generous in giving way.

Mr. Wilshire: I am known throughout the House for my generosity, and I willingly give way to Labour Whips as well as to Whips on my own side if they wish to break their silence.

If I can gather my wits rather than my Whips about me, should we be giving local government yet another job when we are not sure where the money is to come from? Secondly, are the trading standards authorities the right enforcers for this? My hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch touched on that and I will develop the argument in a moment. Thirdly, has the trading standards authority been consulted? I will explain in a moment why I ask that question.

Is it right for the House to give local government yet another job? Before I came to the House, I spent 11 years as a councillor in local government. That experience has made me wary of what appears to be a habit of all Governments of whatever persuasion, and the promoter of the Bill is falling prey to the same dangerous habit. Time and again, they decide that something is a good idea, approve the principle, shunt it off to local government and blame local government if it goes wrong. That concerns me greatly. Local government is already in difficulty as a result of the tasks given to it. Many local authorities have difficulty repairing houses within a reasonable period. Shoving yet another task on to them means that they will not be able to tackle fundamental problems.

There is great debate about overspending by local authorities and it is undeniable that many local authorities are *unjustifiably spending far too much money*. For different reasons, all parties are critical of local government expenditure and the question is being examined by people of all political persuasions. It is therefore essential to ask whether we should add to local authorities' expenditure in this way.

It is also necessary to consider whether the trading standards authorities ought to enforce the provisions of the Bill. I served on a county council and a public protection committee. Trading standards officers of great quality, ability and enthusiasm have been involved in the enforcement of the criminal law. Parliament specifies the penalties. Trading standards officers have the role of policemen in local government and enforce the criminal law. If they are given the powers provided in the Bill, we shall for the first time be turning then into enforcers of civil rights. That would be very dangerous. It would muddle their role of enforcing the criminal law with the enforcement of civil rights and local government would be given a role for which it is not well suited.

What are trading standards authorities to do if they are given the dual role of enforcing both the criminal law and civil rights? Are they to take the view that their true role is to deal with the criminal law, ignore the civil rights bit and all will be well? If so they would overlook the point that I made earlier—that they will have a statutory duty to enforce everything, not just to enforce the bits that they think appropriate while ignoring all the others. We should be setting a dangerous precedent if we provided local government officers with such powers.

We must also inquire into whether the trading standards authorities have been consulted. I should not have bothered to raise the matter, but for something that came to light in Committee. We were told by the British Radio and Electronic Equipment Manufacturers Association that it was not consulted about the Bill, yet that association represents some of the leading high street names in terms of manufacturers of radio and electronic equipment. BREEMA wrote to the National Consumer Council on 8 November:

> "The Members expressed surprise that the Association was not consulted during the preparation of the report as their goods are specifically mentioned and they would have been able to offer useful and practical advice, since it is clearly both in their interests and in the interests of the public to have a scheme which is a workable proposition."

That was an example that we heard of in Committee of an interested party not being consulted.

We must therefore find out whether the trading standards authorities have been consulted and, if so, whether they are worried about civil rights, whether they believe that they will be able to enforce everything in the Bill or whether they believe that only certain powers should be given to them. I should like some answers. We have to consider which parts could be enforced. I am not a lawyer, but I have some more questions about the detail of part IV. I do not know whether my hon. Friend the Minister is a lawyer or whether he could get some legal advice, but my hon. Friend the Minister, the promoter of the Bill or someone else might like to intervene to explain

[Mr. Wilshire]

whether the whole of part IV, which we are seeking to include, is suitable for the Bill. Is it applicable to the objectives of the Bill and is it enforceable by trading standard authorities? I am not a lawyer, but I gather that there are some doubts about whether the whole of part IV is suitable, applicable or enforceable. Before we vote on the clause, we should consult somebody who can clarify whether that is the case.

Bearing in mind that I have still not heard an answer all these hours later as to whether it is only clause 12 of the Bill which requires a money resolution, can somebody please tell me whether part IV is the only part that is relevant or are we going to find at some subsequent date that parts of other Acts should have been brought in? As there has been so much confusion in the past we need that to be cleared up. Because we have a money resolution and because, contrary to what we were told at the outset, we now know that public expenditure is involved, we have to discuss that. It is wholly irresponsible for us to wave aside money in the hope of getting a measure on to the statute book because its objectives are laudable.

Mr. Squire: Does my hon. Friend agree that if the Committee had met when things were as lively as they seem to be at the moment every right hon. and hon. Member on the Committee would have known about the high profile of the community charge or poll tax, and had they known that the money resolution was necessary they would have given clause 12 much greater attention than we have given it today?

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: On a point of order, Miss Boothroyd. Will you confirm that the right time for hon. Members to discuss the money resolution was last night when it went through without any debate? Is this not another example of the way in which hon. Members have deliberately set out to filibuster by not taking things at the right time?

The Second Deputy Chairman: There is some reason to refer to it on clause 12.

Mr. Wilshire: I am grateful for that, Miss Boothroyd, as it is fundamental that we consider the question of expenditure.

Mr. Bennett: Why did the hon. Member not speak against it last night?

Mr. Wilshire: If the hon. Gentleman would not try to shout me down, he would get an answer—if he wants an answer rather than having a closed mind, having made his point.

As we have now been told that the clause has financial implications, it is essential that we discuss it. When we considered the Bill in Standing Committee we were told on good authority by the sponsors of the Bill and the people who drafted it that there were no public expenditure requirements. Our discussion in Committee was based on the fact that no part of the Bill involved public expenditure, so I certainly make no apology for saying that last night and this morning the rules have been changed by the House and now that we are in Committee we have to consider whether we should pursue the matter given its financial implications.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch asked me whether I would care to speculate on the views of other hon. Members, and I would not. If my hon. Friend checks my track record over the years in local government and here, he will know that I consider that every time that there has been any suggestion of the expenditure of public money it is critical that we examine it. I make no apology for that because one of the reasons why we get ourselves into a mess in the town halls and in Parliament is that we do not think hard enough about whether expenditure is justified and whether we have the money to spend in the first place. We must consider public expenditure.

The Minister moved the money resolution last night, so perhaps he can tell me how the sum of £1 million was reached. During my 11 years in local government I became cynical about figures put to me with comments such as, "It's not much", "It really doesn't matter", "We don't mind, do we?" and "It will be all right in the end". As sure as eggs were eggs, in the final accounts for the year the figure was not the same figure or even double—usually it was out of sight because nobody had asked the relevant questions in the first place.

2 pm

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend will appreciate the difficulty for anybody at this stage of estimating the size of an appropriate money resolution because we have not finally formed the Bill. At best it can be only an estimate for the good reason that he gave in Committee—he may want to return to some of these issues—that the details of the substantive clauses and the way in which the Bill may be operated would have a direct effect on the burden on trading standards departments and thus on the size of the money resolution. It is not unreasonable that a best estimate was made. I hope that my hon. Friend will give that some thought and, if I may say so, be a little more charitable and not press the point about the £1 million.

Mr. Wilshire: I certainly accept the integrity of those who tried to work out the figure. My experience suggests that sometimes the sum turns out to be greater. We are considering this in good faith, but has the advice of the would-be enforcing authorities been sought? Does the trading standards authority agree that £1 million is a reasonable sum?

Are we justified in trying to put these matters right? We already know that when we reach Report amendments Nos. 133 and 134 are tabled to remove clause 12. In other words, we are being asked now to include clause 12 and to agree public expenditure, when we shall shortly be asked to remove it again. What are we doing? What sort of side show are we running when we start doing strange things like that?

This business of putting the clause in, taking it out and putting it back in again highlights what plagued the Standing Committee stage of the Bill from the beginning. We tried to deal with sloppy drafting and sloppy procedure. This morning we have again been asked to bale out the Bill. So far, we have decided that we should do so, but I still have my doubts. It is probably more sensible to reject clause 12 now and make it crystal clear that no Committee, whether a Standing Committee or a Committee of the whole House, is prepared to have served up to it matters that have not been thought through. No Committee should be expected in one morning to say, "All is forgiven, we shall put it right."

Before we go any further we must be clear about important matters of principle. Should we give local government another job? Are the trading standards authorities the right people and have they been consulted? Is using part IV of another Act suitable? Is it applicable to what we are trying to do? Is it the only relevant part of other Acts that we need to consider?

We need to explore the financial issues more thoroughly than we have done. We have heard the Minister's view on whether £1 million is the right sum. We have not yet discussed whether, if £1 million is available and we are prepared to go along this track, this is the best use of that money. I should like to come back to that, if there is an opportunity. There are so many demands on extra money in local government that before we say, "OK—more money to this cause," should we not look at the other demands being placed on local government?

The other issue of finance yet to be mentioned—perhaps the Minister would care to comment on it—is who will provide the extra money. Will central Government put up that £1 million and spread it about? What about Government policy? Do we agree that we should be bearing down on public expenditure? If central Government are not to provide the money, one is bound to ask who will. If the money is to be provided by the local charge payer we are back to the debate about whether community charges should be as high as they are or lower.

Although this is a late hour in our proceedings, there are fundamental questions which must be answered before it would strike me as sensible to allow clause 12 to stand part.

Mr. Forth: It might be appropriate and helpful to the Committee if I tried to give some answers to the questions posed by my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire). In doing so I shall give some of the background to the money resolution, which has been mentioned and criticised in certain respects.

Clause 12 provides that part IV of the Consumer Protection Act 1987, which gives the basis for enforcement, is to apply in relation to the enforcement of the Bill. The application of part IV of the 1987 Act requires the expenditure of money for a variety of purposes. That is why the money resolution has been tabled. I shall not take the Committee back to the long debate that we had earlier this morning about the resolution.

Mr. Ron Davies: This is about the third time the Minister has spoken today. He would command much more respect from the Opposition if he made it abundantly clear that his objective is not to try to sort out the procedural irregularities identified, but to kill the Bill. That is what he is doing. If that is what he intended from the outset, why on earth did he not have the integrity to come to the House on Second Reading to ensure that the Government, who apparently oppose the Bill, brought in their troops to vote it out? He is doing himself no good by carrying on as he is.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his advice as to how I should present my public image—presumably he is an expert in such matters. If I want to enrol with his charm school I shall ask him if I might, but, in the meantime, I am entitled to give my explanation to the Committee in response to the questions put by my hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: This is a filibuster.

Mr. Forth: I shall happily give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Bennett: I am sure that the Minister accepts that he spent a lot of time this morning orchestrating his hon. Friends to talk on the procedural motions so that we did not get to the merits of the Bill. It is rather odd that a Government who could guillotine the Social Security Bill could also double the amount of time available to debate the procedural motion before us today. Does the Minister want the Bill or not?

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman is right that I spent a lot of time this morning discussing this matter, unlike him. It is regrettable that the hon. Gentleman should come floating in here after 2 pm when we have been here since 9.30 am giving serious and careful consideration to some difficult procedural, substantive matters. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will reconsider his case and perhaps cool his temper a little. He should think more carefully before he intervenes again, but I am always happy to give way to him as that helps me enormously.

We were talking about the money resolution and the way in which it underpins the Bill. Earlier we made reference to the fact that the Government and I have used our best endeavours to assist the promoter to reach at least this stage in our proceedings.

My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne asked several questions and I shall go through them as quickly as I can. The enforcement provisions of the Bill put a duty on the weights and measures authorities in Great Britain and the district councils in Northern Ireland. We shall return to Northern Ireland later as an amendment deals with it. That would follow from the application of section 27 in part IV of the Consumer Protection Act. Such a duty would include, except in the case of weights and measures authorities in Scotland, where appropriate, bringing criminal proceedings for offences under the Bill.

Enforcement authorities would have various powers —for example, to make test purchases and carry out searches—as a result of the application of part IV of the Consumer Protection Act. An enforcement authority includes the Secretary of State and any other Minister of the Crown in charge of a Government Department and any such Department, as well as weights and measures authorities in Great Britain and district councils in Northern Ireland. Money may be spent by enforcement authorities in the exercise of those powers. There is, therefore, a role for the Secretary of State in that respect.

The application of section 34 in part IV of the Consumer Protection Act means that an enforcement authority would be liable to pay compensation in certain circumstances in respect of the seizure and detention of goods. Money would be required to meet any such liability. I do not wish to go into tedious detail, but those points begin to illustrate the powers of local authorities, trading standards departments and the Secretary of State and the necessity, where appropriate, to pay compensation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Spelthorne asked the reasonable question: at this stage in our deliberations, how do we estimate the costs? I cannot give a definive answer. I suggested earlier that one could make only a best estimate, given our experience in these matters. I can say no more than that the figure in the money resolution is

[Mr. Forth]

appropriate. This complicated Bill introduces major new duties, powers and responsibilities. We are therefore entitled to be a little wary of the money resolution.

The further payments provided by Parliament under the money resolution encompass

> "(i) any expenses incurred or compensation payable by a Minister of the Crown or Government department in consequence of the application by the Act, in relation to its enforcement, of Part IV of the Consumer Protection Act 1987, and
>
> (ii) any increase attributable to the Act in consequence of such application in the sums payable out of such money under any other Act; and
>
> (b) the payment of sums into the Consolidated Fund."

This is necessary to deal with the situation that would arise as a result of the application of section 35 in part IV of the Consumer Protection Act, under which an enforcement authority may, in certain circumstances, recover the expenses of enforcement. If it does so, the money recovered is required to be paid into the Consolidated Fund. No one has yet touched on that rather interesting provision, but we may want to return to it if we give the Bill greater scrutiny.

I have tried to set out in simple terms the basis on which the Committee may want to proceed in considering the relationship between clause 12 and the money resolution. I hope that I have helped the Committee. If other matters arise, I may seek to catch your eye again, Miss Boothroyd.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 12 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Bill reported, with amendments; as amended (in Committee and on recommittal), considered.

Ordered,

That the Bill, as amended, be considered in the following order, namely: Amendments to Clauses, Amendments to Schedules and New Clauses.—*[Mr. Martyn Jones.]*

2.15 pm

Mr. Martyn Jones: I beg to move amendment No. 133 in page 1, leave out from line 5 to line 10 on page 10.

I understand that with this it will be convenient to take amendment No. 134, in page 15, leave out from line 2 to line 20.

The amendments would delete all the consumer guarantee provisions of the Bill, leaving only the Law Commission's proposals on the Sale of Goods Act 1979. I have tabled them with considerable regret but, faced with insuperable opposition and deliberate blocking tactics, I felt that there was no alternative. I see no point in hearing the Bill talked out in such artificially engineered circumstances. Most of the other amendments have been drafted by the Government or the Department, and the message must be clear: it is not that what I sought to achieve cannot be done; it is that the Government do not want it to be done.

The Minister's assurances that he will look again at guarantees will be examined for action at an early date. It is as if the Minister is deliberately snubbing his predecessor, Baroness Oppenheim-Barnes who instigated the review that led to the Bill. It appears that he is snubbing the National Consumer Council a body whose members are appointed by the Secretary of State. It is as if he is snubbing the numerous Conservative Members who have given me much welcome and strong support and disregarding the views of many of his hon. Friends. I am afraid that he is also snubbing the House. He did not vote against the Bill on Second Reading—indeed, no hon. Member voted against the principle of the Bill. He neither moved nor supported a single amendment in Committee and he has tabled not one amendment for debate today. That is either because those amendments in the names of other Conservative Members emanate from his Department or because his Department is indolent. The title, "The Department of Indolence" would suit the Department better than its present title "The Department for enterprise".

The Department sets the examples for business that the Government want to set. Nothing could be clearer than its failure to support the Bill, which would provide a voluntary guarantee—a statement made by business about the quality of its product, which would encourage competition and benefit business as well as the consumer.

What is left in the Bill—the implementation of the Law Commission's proposals—has some value, especially to Scotland. For the rest, the people of this country will simply have to put up with shoddy goods and lousy service for another 18 months or so. Then this Bill—or, rather a similar Bill—will be re-introduced, because a Labour Government will be strong on substance, not on form, and strong on rights, not on words.

Mr. Squire: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Are we discussing only amendments Nos. 133 and 134, or are we discussing all the amendments?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): We are discussing amendment No. 133 with amendment No. 134.

Mr. Squire: And all associated amendments?

Madam Deputy Speaker: And the associated amendments, yes.

Mr. Viggers: This is rather confusing. The promoter of the Bill said that he was moving amendment No. 133 but we are actually discussing new clauses 1 to 3, amendments No. 133 and 134, all other amendments to parts I to IV of the Bill, all amendments to clauses 16 to 23, except for amendment No. 4, and all amendments to schedules 1 to 4. As I understand it, that is the selection. That means that we are discussing the whole range of the first batch of amendments as selected by Mr. Speaker, which covers the whole Bill.

I regret the situation in which we find ourselves. I made my position absolutely clear at the very beginning on 26 January, when I was the first person to intervene in the speech of the promoter of the Bill to point out that I thought that he was being over-ambitious and that schedule 2 was too widely drafted. I drew his attention to the fact that serious concern had been expressed by a number of people who felt that as the schedule was so widely drafted, it would catch areas for which there had not been proper consultation, and damage would be caused. On 26 January, I made my position clear.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Viggers: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, who is probably the world's greatest expert at wrecking private Members' Bills.

Mr. Bennett: I make no apology for the fact that on occasions I filibuster in the House, but I always make clear what I am trying to do. I object to Conservative Members claiming that they are in favour of a Bill while busily trying to talk it out. It seems that the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends who have been filibustering have achieved what they wanted: my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) has tabled amendments that would delete most of the Bill. Surely the kind thing to do would be to sit down and let us have a vote. The hon. Gentleman is speaking in support of what the promoter is being forced to do by these filibustering tactics. The hon. Gentleman has go what he wants, and it shows ill grace to destroy the Bill. He will not even allow the last bit of the Bill to be put to the vote.

Mr. Viggers: I am not normally regarded as someone who takes more time than is necessary to make a speech. I spoke for only nine minutes this morning. The hon. Gentleman asks me to explain my position. On the basis of my study of the Bill, I would have been content to see it proceed, provided it contained my amendments Nos. 78, 79 and 80, which reduce the scope of appendix 2, and amendments Nos. 72 and 73, which deal with the powers of the Secretary of State to extend appendix 2. However, on further study of the Bill, I realised how wide-ranging it would be and how seriously it would affect existing trading arrangements.

During the debate on clause 12, we talked about the cost of the Bill to the taxpayer. It has been said that the Government are good at providing obligations but not very good at providing the resources to meet them. I should like to expand on obligations elsewhere, but, in order to make progress I shall not do that.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 134, in page 15, leave out from line 2 to line 20.—*[Mr. Dorrell.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

2.21 pm

Mr. Forth: We have now arrived at the stage at which I had hoped we would arrive, and that gives me some cause for encouragement. We have given careful thought to the Bill, not only on Second Reading and in Committee but during today's debate. We have been in and out of Committee today, which is an unusual procedure, and with the co-operation of the promoter of the Bill and other hon. Members, we now have a Bill that I can recommend to the House.

I shall explain briefly why that is the case. Throughout the passage of the Bill, Opposition Members have asked about my position. I hope that the Bill's promoter will agree that I have always made my position and that of my Department and the Government quite clear.

Dr. Marek: Rubbish.

Mr. Forth: I hope that the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) will have a quiet word with the promoter, who I am sure will confirm what I am about to say. The hon. Member for Clwyd South-West (Mr. Jones) came to see me at the outset and asked me about my attitude to the Bill. I said that I could not support it in the form in which he brought it to me. We have discussed the part of the Bill which is now before the House, and as a result of deleting parts I to IV, the Bill now consists only of part V. I recommend it to the House.

I told the Bill's promoter that it would be good for consumers if he could see fit to promote such a Bill. Subsequently, there have been other consultations and conversations between me and the promoter and representatives of the National Consumer Council. Those consultations took place at all stages of the Bill, when thought was being given to what sort of Bill the Government could support. Opposition Members have taxed me on this matter again and again. I have always made it clear that the Government had serious reservations about parts I to IV. The reasons for that related to the principle and, even more important, to the practice. On more than one occasion—I think on Second Reading and in Committee—I said that the Bill was irredeemable and unworkable in the form in which it existed. I should say—I hope that I am not divulging any great confidences of Government or relations between Ministers and officials——

Mr. Wilshire: My hon. Friend has returned to a point that he made some time ago. It is that the Bill, as it stood, was unworkable. Does he agree that with the change that has been made, it is eminently workable and eminently sensible? Does not that prove that those of us who have had to receive a huge amount of criticism and attack for wasting time have been vindicated for having fought throughout for the objectives of better service, better products and better competition? Have not we been proved to be right and to be the people who really care? Does my hon. Friend agree that common sense has finally broken through?

Mr. Forth: I should not want to go down that road with my hon. Friend.

I welcome the co-operative spirit of the promoter, the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones). I believe that if he supports the Third Reading of the Bill, as I urge my hon. Friends to do, we shall have a Bill in the name of the hon. Gentleman that will do a great deal for consumers and advance consumer law considerably. I beg my hon. Friends and Opposition Members to support the Bill's Third Reading.

2.26 pm

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones). His stalwart efforts have done more than any of those expended by others in recent times to highlight the problems that consumers are facing. He gave consumers some considerable hope. It is a tragedy that we are left only with part V. I know that it was not his wish—it was certainly not the wish of the Labour party—that we should be left only with that. I pay tribute to hon. Members on both sides of the House for the support they have given my hon. Friend and the Bill, and I know that they will be equally disappointed.

I have with me a file which contains more than 100 letters, many of which provoke considerable soul-searching. I am sure that the Minister would agree with me if he were to read them. The file contains letters from disabled people who cannot obtain suitable replacements for the new goods which they bought. The Bill in its entirety would have entitled them to justice in the first year

[Mr. Nigel Griffiths]

—to a replacement if the product was out of commission for two or four days, depending on significance, and to a replacement if it was out of action for more than 21 days.

It is terrible that neither the Minister nor the Government could accept those modest provisions. It is sad that they have done so much damage to consumer affairs by not accepting the Bill in its entirety. They could find it in their hearts only to accept a small part of the Bill. I welcome the small part that has been accepted. The next Labour Government will seek to introduce provisions to cover the original Bill.

2.28 pm

Mr. Martyn Jones: As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) said, the Bill before us is not the one that I hoped to see. I hoped that the many consumers who suffer from shoddy goods, including Friday afternoon motor cars and tea-break washing machines, would have some protection, some guarantee in law. I regarded that as necessary to improve product control in British industry. I sought to set out in legislation the facts of a guarantee, the sort of guarantee that consumers would like to have for refunds or replacements. The Minister has said that he will continue to examine guarantees, and I hope that he will do so. I shall continue to press for that examination and for legislation. I believe that we shall see relevant legislation at the Minister's behest, at that of the European Community or as a result of the action of the next Government, which will be a Labour Government.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Raoul Wallenberg (Memorial) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

2.29 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Raoul Wallenberg saved the lives of more than 100,000 Hungarian Jews. Last year, I tried to secure honorary British citizenship for him. I feel that the least that the House can do is to approve the Second Reading of my Bill, whose aim is to erect a monument to a man who saved so many lives.

It is 45 years since the disappearance of Raoul Wallenberg; probably the only person who knows what happened to him is Andrei Gromyko. He has been honoured by countries throughout the world. Surely the least that we, the British people, can do is agree to this brief, simple Bill.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Private Members' Bills

PERFORMING ANIMALS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Bill not printed. Second Reading what day? No day named.

ADOPTION (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 20 April.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACT 1984 (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 20 April.

POLL TAX (RESTORATION OF INDIVIDUAL PRIVACY) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 27 April.

RAPE IN MARRIAGE (OFFENCE) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 27 April.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for an hon. Member —such as myself—to name the objector as the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Patnick), the Government Whip, and thus put his name on the record?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

MOTOR TRADE (CONSUMER PROTECTION) (No. 2) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 20 April.

NEWLY QUALIFIED DRIVERS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) (DISABLED PERSONS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 11 May.

BLASPHEMY BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

TAX RELIEF FOR HOUSEHOLD EMPLOYERS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Bill not printed.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 20 April.

BLASPHEMY (No. 2) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

CONTROL OF AMUSEMENT ARCADES BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

EDUCATION (SCHOOL GOVERNING BODIES) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 20 April.

GREYHOUND BETTING LEVY BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [16 February].

Hon. Members: Object.

Debate further adjourned till Friday 20 April.

FOOTBALL SPECTATORS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 20 April.

BRITISH RACING COMMISSION BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 20 April.

HARE COURSING (ABOLITION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day?

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): On behalf of the hon. Member concerned, I should like to move the Second Reading.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) is present.

Mr. Cohen: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 27 April.

Mr. Corbyn: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I apologise for the confusion; I was merely trying to assist my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen). So that we may know when the close season for hare coursing starts, is it in order for the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Patnick) to give us the information? Many hon. Members who support the Bill would like to talk to him about it——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. That is not a matter for the Chair.

TERM AND QUARTER DAYS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 27 April.

Mr. Cohen: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am not sure whether my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) was correct in saying that it was the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Patnick) who objected to my Bill. According to my recollection, it was the hon. Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham).

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. If one voice has been raised in objection, the Chair must take that objection.

Mr. Corbyn: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. There is a great deal of confusion among Conservative Members. The hon. Members for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham) and for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Patnick)——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman may think that there is confusion in the House, but the important point is that there is no confusion in the Chair.

RADIOACTIVE MATERIAL (ROAD TRANSPORT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 20 April.

MARRIAGE (REGISTRATION OF BUILDINGS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 20 April.

RADIATION EXPOSED CROWN EMPLOYEES (BENEFITS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have to decline to propose the question on this Bill, as it duplicates a new clause proposed to the Social Security Bill and rejected by the House.

Mr. Corbyn: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. If the new clause proposed in the Social Security Bill—which is similar, but not identical to this Bill—was rejected by the House, surely this Bill is in order because it is a separate matter on which the House has not decided because it is not identical to that new clause.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. In fact, there is a more significant matter, which is that the Bill has not been moved.

House of Commons Members' Fund

2.35 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): I beg to move,

That in pursuance of the provisions of section 3 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1948 and of section 2 of the House of Commons Members' Fund and Parliamentary Pensions Act 1981 the maximum annual amounts of the periodical payments which may be made out of the House of Commons Members' Fund under the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1939, as amended and the annual rate of any payments made under section 1 of the said Act of 1981 shall be varied as from 1 April 1990, as follows:

(a) for paragraph 1 of Schedule 1 to the said Act of 1939, as amended, there shall be substituted the following paragraph:

1. The annual amount of any periodical payment made to any person by virtue of his past membership of the House of Commons shall not exceed £2,916 or such sum as, in the opinion of the Trustees, will bring his income up to £5,364 per annum whichever is the less:

Provided that if, having regard to length of service and need, the Trustees think fit, they may make a larger payment not exceeding £5,619 or such sum as, in their opinion, will bring his income up to £8,067 per annum, whichever is the less:

(b) for paragraph 2 of that Schedule there shall be substituted the following paragraph:

2. The annual amount of any periodical payment to any person by virtue of her being a widow of a past Member of the House of Commons shall not exceed £1,464 or such sum as, in the opinion of the Trustees, will bring her income up to £3,913 per annum, whichever is the less:

Provided that if, having regard to her husband's length of service or to her need, the trustees think fit, they may make a larger payment not exceeding £2,808 or such sum as, in the opinion of the Trustees, will bring her income up to £5,256 per annum, whichever is the less:

(c) in paragraph 2A of that Schedule for the words 'the annual amount of any periodical payment' to the end of the paragraph, there shall be substituted the words:

'the annual amount of any periodical payment made to any such widower shall not exceed £1,464 or such sum as, in the opinion of the Trustees, will bring his income up to £3,913 per annum, whichever is the less:

Provided that if, having regard to his wife's length of service or to his needs the Trustees think fit, they may make a larger payment not exceeding £2,808 or such sum as, in the opinion of the Trustees, will bring his income up to £5,256 per annum, whichever is the less:

(d) in section 2(1) of the said Act of 1981, for the words from the beginning to the end of paragraph (b) there shall be substituted the words:

'the annual rate of any payments made under section 1 shall be—

(a) £1,698 if the payments are made to a past Member; and

(b) £849 if the payments are made to the widow or widower of a past Member'.

I understand that it will be for the convenience of the House also to discuss the next motion on the Order Paper:

That the whole or any part of the sums deducted or set aside in the current year from the salaries of Members of Parliament under section 1 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1939, and the whole or any part of the contribution determined by the Treasury for the current year under section 1 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1957, as amended by the House of Commons Members' Fund and Parliamentary Pensions Act 1981, be appropriated for the purposes of section 4 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1948, as amended by section 12 of the Parliamentary Pensions Etc. act 1984.

The motions have been tabled in my name and those of right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House who share with me the responsibility, as trustees, of administering the House of Commons Members' Fund.

The purpose of the first resolution is to provide for an increase in the present levels of grants and payments that may be made under the Members' Fund legislation. Those were last revised in April 1989. The proposal now is that they should be increased from 1 April 1990 by about 7·6 per cent., in line with the increases approved for public service and state retirement pensions in February this year.

More than 50 years have elapsed since the first Members' Fund Act received the Royal Assent in 1939. During that time—it is important to put it on record that it was not until 1964 that Members of Parliament first became entitled to superannuation benefits as of right—many former Members and their surviving dependants in financially straitened circumstances have been fund beneficiaries. It is a matter of regret that the level of support which successive trustees of the fund have been able to provide for them, over the years, has been extremely modest.

As the House will know, a problem of particular concern to the trustees is that the whereabouts of our former colleagues or their widows or widowers is not always known to us. All hon. Members will have received a copy of a letter from Mr. Dobson, the fund's secretary, about this difficulty, and I am happy to say that there has already been a positive response to our request for help in identifying former colleagues, or their dependants, whose financial circumstances entitle them to assistance from the fund. We have so far received 20 responses, with eight possible new cases. Any further help we can be given by Members in finding possible new beneficiaries of the fund will be most welcome and much appreciated.

The provisions for which I now seek the approval of the House are set out in detail in the motion on the Order Paper, and they can be briefly summarised. Sub-pararaph 1(a) deals with the provision for grants to ex-Members. It is proposed to increase the basic annual grant to £2,916, subject to an income limit, including the grant, of £5,364. In the case of ex-Members with longer service and in need, the grant may be increased to a maximum of £5,619, subject to an income limit of £8,067 per annum.

Sub-paragraphs 1(b) and (c) deal with the provision for grants to widows and widowers of ex-Members. It is proposed to increase the basic annual grant to £1,464, subject to an income limit, including the grant, of £3,913. Similarly, in the case of widows or widowers of ex-Members who had longer service, and where there is need, the grant may be increased to a maximum of £2,808, subject to an income limit of £5,256.

As to as-of-right payments under the House of Commons Members' Fund and Parliamentary Pensions Act 1981, sub-paragraph (d) of the motion relates to ex-Members who gave 10 years' service before October 1964, and to the widows or widowers of such Members provided for by the 1981 Act. It is proposed to increase annual payments to £1,698 in the case of ex-Members and to £849 in the case of widows or widowers. The additional annual costs of those increases is estimated to amount to £6,960.

The second resolution relates to section 4 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1948, which authorises the trustees of the Members' fund to make

"such periodical or other payments as they think fit"

to ex-Members, or the widows, widowers or children of ex-Members, for

"the purpose of alleviating special hardship".

That section of the Act, together with section 1 of the 1957 Act as amended, provides that in any year, for the purpose of making such payments, the House of Commons may by resolution direct that the whole or any part of the amount contributed by Members, together with up to £22,000 of the Treaury's contribution in the year, be appropriated. The total that may be appropriated under that provision is £37,600.

At present, nine beneficiaries receive payments totalling £15,552 per annum under that section, and the moneys to be appropriated are needed both to continue those payments and to fund any further cases that may arise.

I commend the resolutions to the House, and in doing so I pay further tribute to Jim Dobson and Tony Lewis and to their colleagues in the Fees Office, whose humane concern for the Fund's often very elderly beneficiaries is admired by all of us who see at first hand their work in administering the Fund. They are deserving of the warmest appreciation of the whole House.

2.41 pm

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): I join my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) in congratulating the Fees Office. Anyone referring to the Fees Office finds that everyone there, from Mr. Dobson down, is willing to help in any way that they can. My right hon. Friend's motions are partly a consequence of the very hard work put in by Mr. Jim Dobson and his staff.

Question put and agreed to.

HOUSE OF COMMONS MEMBERS' FUND

Resolved,

That the whole or any part of the sums deducted or set aside in the current year from the salaries of Members of Parliament under section 1 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1939, and the whole or any part of the contribution determined by the Treasury for the current year under section 1 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1957, as amended by the House of Commons Members' Fund and Parliamentary Pensions Act 1981, be appropriated for the purposes of section 4 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1948, as amended by section 12 of the Parliamentary Pensions Etc. Act 1984.

Infant Mortality (Neuroblastoma)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

2.42 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): When Professor Karol Sikora, the consultant oncologist and radiologist, launched the disturbing report "Caring for Cancer" last Friday, he attracted wide public attention for his statement that thousands of people die of preventable cancer in Britain today. As a cancer specialist, he spoke of British hospitals that are

"more poorly equipped than many in the Third world"

and strongly criticised "badly organised" services for cancer patients.

This debate is about children who suffer from cancer and the widespread belief that much more could be done not only to improve the health care that they receive but sharply to reduce deaths among them. At present, childhood cancers are the third biggest killers of children aged under 14 in this country.

Shortly before Christmas 1988, a normally happy and boisterous three-year-old was taken to his doctor by his mother, who thought that he looked slightly off-colour and that he had a passing infection from which, with the help of one antibiotic or another, he would soon recover and once again be his happy and normal self. When the family GP examined the child, he found a lump in his abdomen. Tests undertaken later showed it to be a neuroblastoma, which is one of the most dangerous forms of childhood cancer.

Within a week the toddler of whom I speak was fighting for his life. By last March, the happy December child was blind in one eye and looked like a victim of the Ethiopian famine. Despite 80 days of the most intensive form of chemotherapy given to children, and 26 treatments with radiotherapy from the latest linear accelerator, sadly the child died.

About one in 10,000 children are believed to be born with a neuroblastoma which, in 95 per cent. of cases, gives rise to symptoms before the age of five. While in some cases the condition goes into remission of its own accord, only 25 per cent. of British children with it survive; the others are diagnosed too late. Dr. Tom Stuttaford, a former Conservative Member of this House, writing in *The Times* has said:

> "The grief which parents have to suffer is not made any lighter by the knowledge that 90 per cent. of these cancers could be detected at a stage when simple surgical treatment would give an 85 per cent. cure rate, but that the screening of babies which uncovers neuroblastomas is not carried out because of the cost."

Dr. Stuttaford went on to say that in Japan babies are screened for neuroblastoma, that treatment starts there with far higher prospects of success and that, if we screened here, many children's lives could be saved. Dr. Stuttaford, like everyone else, is concerned most about saving life and the relief of suffering, but he also looked at comparative costs. After comparing the current costs to the NHS of treating cases of neuroblastoma, most of which could be saved if simple surgery replaced the present high-tech treatment, he sought to show that screening also made good sense financially. In a subsequent letter to me, he spoke of the urgent need to press the case for screening. He went on:

[Mr. Alfred Morris]

"The screening service has reduced mortality overseas in those areas which have a high incidence of neuroblastomas. There is no reason to suppose that British neuroblastomas would behave differently from foreign neuroblastomas."

Not only doctors, but also the bereaved families of children who have died from neuroblastoma say that there are far too many preventable deaths from this scourge. They believe, in the words of a letter I have had from one of the bereaved, that death from neuroblastoma is in most cases now

"a preventable tragedy of childhood".

To discover where the Secretary of State for Health stood on this vitally important matter—using the word "vitally" in its literal sense—I tabled parliamentary questions asking him, first, how many babies were born with neuroblastoma in each of the last five years for which figures were available, and also how many children died of the condition in the same period. The reply, on 27 November last, was a holding answer from the hon. Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman), the Under-Secretary of State for Health, as follows:

"I shall let the right hon. Member have such information as is available as soon as possible."

Thus it seemed that no information was immediately available to Ministers and in fact the substantive reply to my question, again from the Under-Secretary of State, was not given until more than two weeks later, on 12 December, when I was told:

"The latest available data on newly reported cases of childhood neuroblastoma cover the years 1971-80, and indicate that during that period 374 new cases were reported for males aged 0-14 years and 277 cases for females."

The reply concluded:

"The number of deaths from neuroblastoma during this period, or for a later five-year period, could only be determined at disproportionate cost." —[*Official Report*, 12 December 1989; Vol. 163 c. *631*.]

So the Department of Health's most up-to-date statistics on the incidence of neuroblastoma are 10 years old and the numbers of children who die, year by year, from this most dangerous form of cancer are unknown to the Government because Ministers think it too costly to collect them.

My concern about the reply of 12 December was widely shared and I sought, in a further parliamentary question, to find out exactly what the Minister's use of the term "disproportionate cost" meant and, in fact, just how much the Government would have to spend to establish the number of more recent child deaths from neuroblastoma.

The Under-Secretary of State's reply to my further question was as follows:

"Approximately £1,600."

The reply went on:

"National mortality statistics do not routinely identify neuroblastoma as a cause of death, and this figure represents the estimated staff cost of identifying and extracting this information from the death certificates of all children who have died from cancer."

The Government do not, therefore, know the number of child victims of neuroblastoma—and are now seen as not wanting to know—because they regard £1,600 as too high a price to pay for finding out. By any reckoning, that is a shaming and shocking admission. The reactions of the families and doctors of children affected were not too difficult to predict. Everyone I have discussed the reply with sees it as scandalous and I hope that the Minister will agree that his Department really must take immediate steps fully to inform itself about both the incidence of neuroblastoma and the number of children who die from the condition.

My other parliamentary questions were about screening and the costs to the NHS of treatment in cases of childhood neuroblastoma. The Government are not persuaded that screening—the cost of which has been independently estimated to be £1·9 million—is justified. They claim to be keeping research and development in this field, at home and abroad, under regular review. As to costs, the hon. Member for Surrey, South-West (Mrs. Bottomley), the Minister of State for Health, again revealing the Department's disturbing lack of definitive information—indeed, wilful ignorance—told me in a parliamentary answer on 27 November last:

"Comprehensive information on the costs of treatment for this condition is not available, but it has been estimated that in one region these are about £45,000 per case."—[*Official Report*, 27 November 1989; Vol. 162, *c.101*.]

The grandfather of the three-year-old boy whose case I described earlier told me that he had never consciously heard the word "neuroblastoma" until his grandson was struck down by this condition. He wrote:

"I was not aware that a simple screening could save perhaps over 90 per cent. of the children affected, at such little cost . . . Even when time has, to a little extent, faded the pain of seeing my grandson go through the horrors of such violent chemotherapy and radiotherapy, I still believe that funds must be granted. After all, what is £1·9 million, if it is going to save so many young lives, when we are prepared to spend not much less than that to protect badgers or natterjack toads to survive the motorcar?"

What the child's grandfather did not know when he wrote to me was that, much apart from spending £1·9 million, the Government are refusing even to pay £1,600 to find out the number of victims of childhood neuroblastoma. I hesitate even to think how he and other bereaved relatives will react to that disclosure, of which they are likely to learn for the first time from this debate.

As for people more generally, at least they will need no further confirmation of the truth of Professor Karol Sikora's statement of deep concern last Friday about cancer care in this country. I believe that the general public will see it as being at once wrong headed and inhumane for the Government not to know all the facts about the incidence of neuroblastoma, the number of children who die from the condition and the comparative costs of present treatment and of screening.

The House may recall that I had the honour some years ago, after opening the debate on arrangements for the international year of disabled persons at the United Nations in New York, to chair the world planning group which drafted the charter for disabled people worldwide. The document was presented to heads of Governments all across the world and its aims and principles were received with approval by the Prime Minister at No. 10 Downing street.

The charter's first aim was to maximum the prevention of disability and killer diseases, not because reducing the cost of care is of high importance but because saving lives and preventing human distress is the highest of priorities. With a membership of specialists drawn from the north, south, east and west of the world, the committee that I chaired was unanimously clear that no other aim could ever take precedence over prevention. But prevention here in Britain is put at a discount if, due to hideously false economies, the Government are not aware of easily obtainable facts and when proposals, even for limited screening—such as those put to the Medical Research Council by Dr. Alan Craft, a paediatric oncologist at the Royal Victoria Infirmary in Newcastle-on-Tyne—are seen as scientifically acceptable but still await funding. All that he asks for is a proper and publicly-funded evaluation of the problem, which will cover, in the first place, the whole of Scotland and the northern, Yorkshire, north-west, Mersey and south-west regions of England.

I know that there is more than one view of the Japanese screening programme. It is argued that its design is flawed, that its efficacy is difficult to measure in that Japan has no national system for cancer death registration and that, given due funding, we could achieve scientifically better results here. But among senior specialists in Britian, in whose work we can take pride, I have found only one view of Dr. Craft's proposals, namely, that they are scientifically acceptable and merit urgent approval of the funds necessary to put them into effect. Indeed, his method of investigating is described in a letter that I have had from Dr. John Pritchard, consultant/senior lecturer in paediatric oncology at Great Ormond street, as "spot on".

This being an Adjournment debate, time is at a premium and I want the Minister to have ample opportunity to respond to the plea from families and doctors alike for more purposeful action by the Government to prevent every avoidable death from childhood neuroblastoma. Manifestly the Minister must very urgently now secure up-to-date information on the number of babies born with this condition. Just as clearly, he must accept that it is totally indefensible for the Government to refuse to find out how many children have died from neuroblastomas in the past 10 years and that it was gratuitously hurtful to the bereaved families to say, in his Parliamentary reply to me, that £1,600 is too much for the Department of Health to find for that information.

I ask the Minister also to publish, at a very early date, a report on his Department's "regular review"—to recall the reply to another of my Parliamentary Questions—of

"research and development in this field at home and abroad"—[*Official Report*, 27 November 1989; Vol. 162, c. 101.]

Why should the outcome of that work stay locked up in the Department of Health when it is work done at public expense and irrefutably of high public importance? How can Members of Parliament, the families of children with neuroblastomas or the doctors who work among them, judge the quality of work that is hidden away from them?

Most of all, there is a compelling case, which I hope the Minister will concede before we conclude this debate, for immediate public funding of the screening programme proposed by Dr. Alan Craft. In the view of bereaved families the need to press ahead with his proposals is not only compelling, but grievously overdue. The central truth here, of course, is that policy making itself is blind if policy makers are not in possession of all obtainable facts. Inexcusably, facts have been available which, for 10 years now, the Government refused to discover on the grounds of cost—minimal cost—and that must now be corrected.

The requests that I am making are not extravagant—nor are they only my requests. They are the very least that the families and doctors of children who have died from neuroblastoma want to see. As well as conceding them unequivocally today, the Minister should also agree to meet representatives of the families and of medical specialists in childhood neuroblastoma to hear their submissions at first hand.

I must warn the Government that the campaign for more official effort to reduce the death toll from childhood neuroblastoma will not go away. It will be vigorously pursued for as long as it takes to satisfy the families of children who have already died—and those of children who are dying now—that nothing which could possibly be done to prevent avoidable further deaths is being left undone.

Finally, I should like to thank Dr. Stuttaford for exciting public interest in the issues at stake, the families who gave me information to inform the parliamentary questions that I tabled, in particular, Colonel John Reid of Thirsk, the Neuroblastoma Society for all its humane work in this area, Professor Judith Chessels of the Institute of Child Health and Dr. Jon Pritchard for writing to me. Among many others, I thank the right hon. Lord Pym, a former Leader of the House of Commons who is now active in another place, both for the help that he gave me and for his obviously very genuine concern for the children and their families whose case I now commend to the House.

3 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Roger Freeman): The right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) is a tough and doughty debater. I greatly respect his position and experience. The House is grateful to him for raising this issue so lucidly. He was a much respected predecessor in my post. Some 16 years ago, he started in my lowly position and then rose to more senior positions in the Government.

I agree that the affliction of neuroblastoma is appalling. It is a childhood cancer. We do not know its causes, but we certainly know the consequences. When the right hon. Gentleman referred to the case of a three-year-old, I thought of my three-year-old daughter, who is fortunately in good health, and I can imagine the appalling tragedy and consequences for the family, let alone the suffering of the poor child. I sympathise with his arguments to draw the attention of the House and the Government to the disease.

I shall give the right hon. Gentleman three assurances. First, during the debate he said that the Department had been unable to answer the detailed question about the number of deaths by following normal governmental procedure. This is the first chance I have had to reflect on that, and no gratuitous offence was intended. I am persuaded by his arguments and I shall instruct officials at the Department of Health to find the figures by searching through the death certificates of children who have died from cancer and to ascertain the most current information about those who have suffered from the disease. That will be at exceptional cost, but the right hon. Gentleman's arguments merit exceptional treatment. I hope that he will accept that assurance in the spirit in which it is offered. I shall be in touch with him about how we can inform the House.

Secondly, the application for research to which the right hon. Gentleman referred is being examined by the Medical Research Council. The case still needs to be argued on its merits and I do not believe that justification is as simple as the right hon. Gentleman suggests. I assure him that the application will be properly studied on its merits and will be considered in competition with other

[Mr. Roger Freeman]

elements of vital research. Thirdly, I am happy to meet him and representatives of parents whose children have suffered. That is the least I can do.

Some parents feel strongly that a mass screening programme is the answer. The aim would be to detect the disease at an early stage,—for example six months, when treatment offers the best hope of success. In fairness to them and their children, we must be reasonably certain that such a programme wouldbe soundly and scientifically based and above all, that it would save lives.

To establish the effectiveness of screening would require either research, or comparison with the experience of other countries, or both. I understand that the Medical Research Council has received an application for the funding of a large-scale trial of a technique based on testing the urine of babies at about six months of age. It is considering, in consultation with my Department, what support may be available from public funds.

I cannot tell the House today what the outcome may be. It is a detailed, complex and costly proposal, which must be examined on its merits and in relation to many other vital research priorities. I can, however, assure the House that the concerns expressed are well understood and will be taken into account in that process. We are grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for raising the issue and causing attention to be focused on it. In the remaining time I believe that it would be helpful if I set out the background against which a decision must be reached.

First, we must consider the scale of the problem. It is, of course, immense for every individual affected, but the likelihood of it happening is extremely slight. The recent average for the number of children diagnosed with neuroblastoma in Great Britain is 73 a year. That is approximately one for every 10,000 live births and represents 5·7 per cent. of all cases of childhood cancer. From 1979 to 1988 an average of 44 children a year have died from the disease, or about one for every 16,000 live births. Twenty-four per cent. of children are diagnosed at under one year of age and 75 per cent. at under five years. Where children are picked up with the disease at under a year old, or with the disease in its early stages, they have a good chance of survival. The outlook, however, is poorer for those aged more than one year or with more advanced disease. Even so, the latest available figure for annual deaths from neuroblastoma is about 40 per cent. less than what it averaged from 1953 to 1975.

As we understand it, the situation is getting a little better. Moreover, the proportion of children who are surviving for five years after diagnosis has steadily increased from 15 per cent. for those diagnosed in 1971 to 1973 to 43 per cent. for those diagnosed in 1983 to 1985. That strongly suggests that, overall, treatment is becoming more effective.

Since the 1970s there has been a tendency to concentrate expertise in the treatment of childhood cancers in specialist centres and there is come evidence that that, in itself, has an impact on survival and quality of life. At the same time it must be noted that the long-term side-effects of aggressive treatment in childhood—chemotherapy—may take 15 to 20 years to show up. The potential benefit of early detection and gentler treatment, which is less likely to have such side-effects, must be acknowledged. A difficult judgment must be reached on whether the reduction in mortality and morbidity expected from screening is likely to be significantly greater than that produced by continuing improvements in treatment.

Secondly, evidence from abroad, notably Japan, must be weighted. The Japanese authorities introduced a national screening programme in 1985, based on the experience of two regional schemes which were already running. It is too soon to assess the impact of the national programme, but evidence from the regional schemes has not so far demonstrated a reduction in mortality as a result of screening. Nor is there as yet any evidence of a reduction in the number of children first diagnosed after one year of age and with advanced disease—that is, those at greatest risk, for whom early detection should offer the most benefit. So no evidence has yet been produced that the Japanese are catching the disease earlier, perhaps because screening at an early fixed time misses those who suffer affliction later. On the other hand, a research trial proposed for this country would require a period of five or six years to run, and a similar period to follow up all the babies screened. So, another judgment must be reached, on whether conclusive results are likely to become available from Japan, or elsewhere, more quickly than from the United Kingdom.

Thirdly, as with other screening schemes, there are potential pitfalls and uncertainties that must be addressed. For instance, at certain stages of its development, which may be early or late, neuroblastoma can clear up spontaneously. There is evidence that the number of such cases may be up to 40 times greater than the number of cases diagnosed in the normal way, when a child comes to a doctor with symptoms. As a result of autopsies or post mortems we believe that cases can go undetected, which are clearly malignant. Screening will detect cases that would not otherwise have come to light, and that means that children could be subjected to unnecessary investigation and treatment. That could result in distress for them and uncertainty for their families, and it would not have the slightest effect on the toll of mortality from this disease. Where, on the other hand, screening detects advanced disease, there is no reason to suppose that treatment would be any more successful than if the child had been diagnosed in the normal way and had presented for treatment. Again, there would be no effect on mortality.

Even more crucial, perhaps, is the question of misleading results—false positives and false negatives. If a child is screened positively as having neuroblastoma and turns out not to have it, the potential for distress and uncertainty for him and his family is clear. If a child is screened as free of the disease and subsequently turns out to have it, that potential is tragically magnified. Those are not hypothetical examples. There is some evidence to suggest that children will develop neuroblastoma at the age of one year or more, which could not have been detected by a urine test at six months.

A small-scale pilot screening service in Tyneside has already successfully identified two cases of neuroblastoma from a population of just over 22,000 babies, but it has also produced both false positives and false negatives. A judgment has therefore also to be reached on the extent to which a large-scale trial is likely to replicate those results —and to pick up the cases that would have cleared up spontaneously—and whether national screening is an acceptable price to pay for detecting those cases, which will in fact become lethal at a stage when they are more likely to respond to treatment.

Fourthly, a judgment must be reached on the understandable pressures that the proposed research will create. I gather that the test used has so far proved simple to administer and acceptable to parents and health professionals. If the test proved effective in reducing mortality, the potential gain in terms of high-quality years of life saved could be enormous. It is precisely to establish conclusively what difference screening makes that a major trial has been proposed. Because the disease is comparatively rare, this would need to involve the monitoring and follow-up of very large groups of infants, both screened and unscreened, over a number of years.

During that period, there would be pressure to extend screening to all babies, whether or not it eventually proved to be of measurable value. That would be entirely understandable—the test offers hope—but it would flaw the scientific basis of the trial. It would be quite wrong to create the expectation that an untested procedure will be made universally available as a routine service.

Any prospect of reducing the toll of suffering and death from childhood cancer deserves the most serious consideration. That consideration is now in hand in relation to neuroblastoma. I emphasise that a decision has yet to be made and that the factors that I have mentioned and the views expressed by the right hon. Gentleman will play an important part in reaching it. I hope that he will welcome my assurances and pass them on to those whom he represents.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twelve minutes past Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 2 April 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

GREAT YARMOUTH PORT AUTHORITY BILL *[Lords]*
(By Order)

RIVER TEES BARRAGE AND CROSSING BILL *[Lords]*
(By Order)

Orders for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 19 April.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Personal Pensions

1. **Mr. Haynes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether the Government Actuary's estimate that personal pensions schemes would cost the national insurance fund £2·018 billion in 1990-91 has been updated; what is his most recent estimate of the cost; and what the cost is expected to be in 1991-92.

6. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the most recent estimate of the cost of personal pensions schemes to the national insurance fund in 1990-91; and what is the cost expected to be in 1991-92.

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Tony Newton): The Government Actuary's latest estimate of the cost to the national insurance fund in 1990-91 of personal pensions is £1,910 million, assuming that 3·9 million personal pensions are in force by the end of 1989-90. If the assumed number in force remains unchanged to the end of 1990-91, then the estimated cost in 1991-92 is £2,090 million.

Mr. Haynes: This is another con trick by the Government. The Secretary of State did not admit, but I hope that he will, that the Government will run the insurance fund into a deficit of £500 million. That will be their answer. Who will suffer? In the main, it will be pensioners. That is how the Government treat pensioners. They should be ashamed of themselves. They are filling the pockets of the rich by pouring money into private pension funds so that somebody can get a nice rake-off at the expense of pensioners. It is a shocking state of affairs.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman made his points with his characteristic charm, but he appears not to have looked at the figures on the national insurance fund, which currently is running a surplus twice as high as the level recommended by the Government Actuary. It is expected to be higher in the forthcoming year, partly as a result of steps that I have already taken to deal with a problem that might otherwise have arisen. The earlier statistics show that about 90 per cent. of people with personal pensions earn less than £13,000 and that more than 40 per cent. earn less than £6,000 a year. If the hon. Gentleman regards those people as rich, he is living in a dream world.

Mr. Jones: I cannot ask my question in the manner of my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes), but if, as the Secretary of State suggested, the fund is in surplus, why is it not being used to pay pensioners a decent pension in line with European pensions? Is not the net effect, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield said, that pensioners are paying for the profits being made by insurance companies?

Mr. Newton: Let us be clear, because there is considerable misunderstanding, that the overwhelming bulk of the cost is not the so-called incentive but the rebates for contracting out introduced by the Labour Government in the mid-1970s. The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) has not suggested the ending of contracting out. A major reason for the expected drop in the balance of the fund is the substantial reduction in national insurance contributions which the Government made last October to help many lower-paid people.

Mr. Dunn: Does my right hon. Friend agree that pensioners want financial security and stability in retirement? Do not employees have many choices—remaining in SERPS, taking out a personal pension or belonging to an occupational pension scheme? Why are Opposition Members so negative on this matter?

Mr. Newton: I must leave Opposition Members to explain that. Personal pensions have been an astonishing success, which reflects people's welcome of the greater choice that they now have. The Opposition's attitude is yet another illustration of their persistent unwillingness to let people decide things for themselves.

Mr. Meacher: On what possible grounds can even this Government spend £2 billion on a bribe for people to invest in a highly speculative and risky pension scheme when they freeze child benefit for three years, deny pensioners a share in rising national incomes by breaking the link with earnings and will not even financially protect pensioners from eviction from residential and nursing homes? When will the Government ever learn that the people totally repudiate that order of values?

Mr. Newton: As the hon. Gentleman knows, it is absolute nonsense to suggest that, in general, pensioners have not been sharing in the country's rising prosperity. I have always accepted that there are less well-off pensioners, whom we have been trying to help in other ways. Since the Conservative party took office, pensioners' incomes have, on average, been rising faster than those of the rest of the population, partly because of the growth of occupational and now personal pensions, adding to the security of provision for retirement. If the hon. Gentleman's remarks about rebates, which embrace the existing contracting-out——

Mr. Meacher: No.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman described as a bribe a sum, two thirds of which consists of the rebates introduced by the Labour Government in the mid-1970s. I take the hon. Gentleman's remarks as a clear threat to the continuation of those arrangements.

Disabled People

2. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on his proposals to help people who are partially incapable of work.

The Minister for Social Security (Mr. Nicholas Scott): We will be introducing, from April 1992, a wholly new benefit for this group, to be called the disability employment credit. For the first time, there will then be a benefit aimed specifically at helping disabled people to support themselves in work.

Mr. Taylor: My right hon. Friend announces an important measure which will give a good deal of self-respect to disabled people who wish to work. They will not now be penalised for doing so. Is he involved in consultations with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment to ensure that sufficient companies provide places of work and proper facilities for disabled people so that his Department's scheme can be fully taken up?

Mr. Scott: The Department of Employment already spends about £350 million a year to obtain work for disabled people and keep them in employment. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment will shortly bring forward new proposals, to which the whole House will look forward, to provide services for disabled people.

Mr. Alfred Morris: Will the Minister confirm that he expects to save £10 million on the new benefit, as I was told in a recent parliamentary reply, and that this must be a policy decision, as transparently it cannot have been based on detailed costings? Why is this such a big new deal for disabled people when the Government expect to save £10 million and will the right hon. Gentleman introduce a consultative document on this new benefit?

Mr. Scott: The Government obviously have a duty to produce the best estimate they can and to put it before the House. There is great uncertainty about the final expenditure on this benefit because we do not know what the take-up will be. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman does not criticise the principle that disabled people who are in work but who perhaps are unable to work to full capacity should be supported by the benefit system.

Income Support

3. **Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a further statement on income support entitlement in respect of elderly people living in private residential homes.

Mr. Newton: As I announced to the House on 28 March, I propose to make further substantial increases at a cost of £45 million from 13 August to the income support limits that apply to people in residential care and nursing homes. These are in addition to the increases in the limits which will take effect on 9 April and which are the largest increases since 1985, amounting to £100 million a year.

Mr Smith: Notwithstanding the right hon. Gentleman's concessions last week, does he accept that many thousands of sick and elderly people face a considerable shortfall on their residential costs in nursing and residential homes? The survey carried out by the National Federation of Housing Associations showed that one in five faced a shortfall of £60 a week or more. Is not it time that the Secretary of State acted to help those people, to stop them facing eviction and to end the needless worry to which his policies have subjected them?

Mr. Newton: I have taken action that I think will contribute to the hon. Gentleman's objective. I repeat the point that I made towards the end of our debate on the subject last week. Many of the bodies to which the hon. Gentleman referred—the National Federation of Housing Associations and any other voluntary and charitable bodies—have made it clear to me that, although they believe that there should be an increase in the limits, they do not expect the Government necessarily to make up the full difference between the charges that the homes levy and the current income support limits, because it is part of their policy to provide a higher standard of amenity than they think it reasonable to expect the taxpayer to pay for.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend's announcement last Wednesday was warmly received by those who run private residential homes and by the people who live in them. He will know that many wish to move to the new regime outlined last Wednesday as soon as practicable. Will my right hon. Friend say whether, if good progress is made in the current year in negotiating contracts between local authorities and private homes, income support can be raised in 1991-92 to the new levels envisaged in his statement?

Mr. Newton: I repeat what I said to my hon. Friend clearly last week: to the extent that we have good information about what local authorities are contracting to pay in advance of the next uprating due in April 1991, I shall, of course, ensure that that is taken into account in setting the limits for next year.

Mr. Meacher: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the £5 extra for elderly people in residential homes which he announced last week is little more than a gesture—merely the contribution to which he referred—given that the National Federation of Housing Associations survey found that in more than half of the homes the shortfall is now over £30 a week? If Conservative Back-Bench Members are satisfied with that, does not it show that they are far more concerned with propping up a Government on the ropes than with protecting 176,000 elderly and frail patients from eviction?

Mr. Newton: First, the hon. Gentleman neglected to acknowledge that the £5 extra is on top of the £10 increase that is about to take place, making £15 extra in all on the current limit of £140. That is an increase of significantly more than 10 per cent. Secondly, the hon. Gentleman failed to acknowledge that the major pressure is undoubtedly on nursing homes, in respect of which I announced a further increase of £10, making £20 in all.

Pensioners

4. **Mr. Lester:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the latest available figures on the proportion of pensioners whose incomes fall in the lowest fifth of national income distribution.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): The latest available figures show that in 1987 only 24 per cent. of pensioners had incomes in the lowest fifth of national income distribution, whereas in 1979, 38 per cent. of pensioners fell into the lowest fifth.

Mr. Lester: I thank my hon. Friend for those figures, which are the result of a policy consistently balanced between state provision and savings and between personal and superannuated pensions. Does she share my view about the remaining 24 per cent.—many of them in agricultural constituencies such as hers—who may have had no opportunity to take out superannuated pensions or make personal provision and who remain in a relatively difficult position? Will she undertake to keep her eye on the programme that we started for the over-75s which recognised their position?

Mrs. Shephard: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the balanced nature of the Government's policies towards pensioners. He is also right to draw attention to the increase in pensioners' incomes from savings and occupational pensions. He mentioned the October package for older pensioners which we introduced to give them additional help through extra premiums. I remind him of the arrangements for disabled pensioners and for those over 75 and over 80. Finally, I remind him that between 1979 and 1989 expenditure on benefits for the elderly increased by 22 per cent. in real terms.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Minister aware that the best way for the Government to help the 24 per cent. of people who are right at the bottom would be to take away the £26·2 billion that went to the 1 per cent. who are the wealthiest in the population in tax cuts over the past 10 years and hand that to the 24 per cent? At the same time, the Government should hand back the £12 a week that the 24 per cent. lost as a result of the Prime Minister and her Ministers cutting the link between earnings and prices for pensioners.

Mrs. Shephard: The Government have honoured their manifesto pledge to keep pensions in line with the rise in prices. I repeat that the most important point is the rise in pensioners' total incomes. I remind the hon. Gentleman that between 1979 and 1987 pensioners in the lowest quintile experienced a 19 per cent. increase in real terms in their average total net incomes.

Mr. David Martin: While my hon. Friend is on the subject of income from savings, will she raise with the Treasury the treatment of interest under the £16,000 savings rule, the majority of which, as I understand it, is treated as having a 20 per cent. return? If that cannot be changed, will my hon. Friend ask the Treasury where one can find investment yielding 20 per cent. net, because I would like to know myself?

Mrs. Shephard: My hon. Friend draws attention to the greatly welcomed increase in capital limits announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his budget. I remind my hon. Friend that 150,000 pensioners stand to gain as a result of the change in the rules on the capital limits. That was no mean achievement for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

My hon. Friend appears to be confusing the capital limits and the 15p taper. For each £1 of tariff income, 15p is removed from the allowance made to the beneficiary. I do not think that my hon. Friend has fully understood the announcement made by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Social Fund

5. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the capacity of the social fund to respond to the claims of all the people in need *(a)* in the United Kingdom and *(b)* in Scotland.

Mr. Scott: Since April 1988, the social fund has concentrated help on those most in need in Great Britain, principally recipients of income support, through the payment of 2·2 million loans and grants at a gross cost of £347 million. The corresponding figures for Scotland are 212,000 at a gross cost of over £34 million. Last week I announced an increased budget of £215 million for the fund in 1990-91.

Information relating to Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Wray: Does the Minister agree that this is a disgraceful piece of legislation and that the social fund will take over from the loan sharks? Some of my constituents are a giro away from starvation and the social fund offers no help because of its cash limits. Does the Minister agree that it is time that we returned to single payments to deal with the problems of the poor?

Mr. Scott: As I recall, the single payments scheme did not have many friends on the Opposition Benches. It was subject to a great deal of criticism. Moving away from a scheme that depended entirely on whether claimants fitted the terms of particular regulations to one in which social fund officers can use their discretion within the limits of the budget is a great step in the right direction.

Mr. Dickens: Is my right hon. Friend aware that under the old single payments scheme many rackets were run by second-hand shops? Aided and abetted by some social workers, people handed in shopping lists for 130-odd items on demand. That could not be right; it was a licence to print money. Is my right hon. Friend satisfied that the new system—the social fund—has the merit of circulating the same amount of money, and more money as it is added to, and benefits many more people because the money must be repaid and people must think twice about the items for which they ask?

Mr. Scott: In was the latter point which enabled me to increase the gross budget to £215 million for the year that has just started. I agree with my hon. Friend that there was widespread abuse under the single payments scheme. The size of the budget was doubling every two years and we were right to get rid of it and move to the social fund.

Mr. Kennedy: Does not the Minister realise that the social fund has created a poverty cul-de-sac? Many people will not make the initial approach to inquire about support because they know that it will be in the form of a loan and that it will be debited from their other already meagre state benefits. What analysis has the Minister's Department carried out in Scotland and in the United Kingdom of the number of people who, after their initial approach when the changes were introduced, no longer even bother going to their local DSS offices to find out whether support is available because they know that they cannot afford to pay it back?

Mr. Scott: As for analysis and research, apart from monitoring the position in our local offices, as the hon. Gentleman knows we have commissioned research by the social policy research unit at York university, and we look forward to its analysis of the position and in particular its judgment whether the social fund is meeting the needs that it was designed to meet. I should think that we shall get the report early next year.

Pensioners

7. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the average increase in incomes since 1979 for those pensioners who receive all of their income from state benefits.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The latest available figures show that between 1979 and 1987 pensioners who received all their income from state benefits had experienced a real terms increase of over 27 per cent. At the same time the proportion of pensioners in this position fell from 22·5 per cent. in 1979 to 15·9 per cent. in 1987.

Mr. Rowe: I thank my hon. Friend for that encouraging reply. Given that the Conservatives will be in charge of this country for the next decade as well, will she assure hon. Members that the group of people who were long-term unemployed at the end of the 1970s will receive the same consideration as old-age pensioners who depend on state benefits at the moment?

Mrs. Shephard: I assure my hon. Friend that the Government will continue to apply successful social security policies which in turn depend on a successful economy. When they are re-elected, the Government will do just that.

Mr. Eastham: Are not the figures that the Minister presented rather misleading when one considers that VAT, gas bills, and electricity bills have nearly doubled and that people will have to pay a minimum of 20 per cent. of the poll tax?

Mrs. Shephard: No, Sir. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the figures that I have given represent a real terms increase.

Personal Pensions

8. **Mr. Hayes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the latest estimate of the number of people who have taken out appropriate personal pensions.

Mr. Newton: Just over 3·6 million people have so far taken out appropriate personal pensions.

Mr. Hayes: I warmly welcome what my right hon. Friend says and accept that pensioners on the state pension had an increase of 27 per cent. in real terms between 1979 and 1987. But does my right hon. Friend aggreciate that not everyone regards the state pesion as a top-up and that, despite the Government's generosity and his Department's commitment, many people find it difficult to make ends meet? Will my right hon. Friend try in the next few months to bring forward some imaginative proposals to help people who are in serious difficulties?

Mr. Newton: I should make it clear to my hon. Friend that we regard the state basic retirement pension—the national insurance pension—not as a top-up but as the foundation of provision for retirement. That is why we have protected its value. The important point is that personal pensions and occupational pensions are a growing part of people's income in retirement, and we welcome that. We also acknowledge that not everybody has such pensions or savings. It is to that group that we directed an additional £200 million last October. I note my hon. Friend's proper ambition to see the process go further.

Mr. Flynn: Does the Secretary of State share the anxiety of the regulatory body, the Life Assurance and Unit Trust Regulatory Organisation, which has described the advertising of personal pensions as wildly inaccurate? Does he agree with the independent pension investment research consultant who estimated that at least 1 million people will end up with totally indequate pensions because they have opted to leave SERPS? As that deception of 1 million people has been the result of Government legislation, when will the Secretary of State announce his plan to inform those people that their only chance of a decent pension is to return to SERPS?

Mr. Newton: Obviously, I do not accept the basic thrust of the analysis implied in the hon. Gentleman's question. It was Government legislation, the Financial Services Act 1986, that set up LAUTRO—that is the Life Assurance and Unit Trust Regulatory Organisation—precisely to ensure that advertising of financial services of all types was proper and not misleading. That very fact shows our concern to ensure that people are properly advised.

Child Benefit

9. **Mr. Orme:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the current value of child benefit it it had been uprated in line with inflation over the past three years.

Mr. Scott: The value would be £8·60 a week from later this month.

Mr. Orme: Is not that figure an indictment of the Government's policy and of the amount of which parents and children have been robbed? When will the Minister's Department stand up for child benefit? In the past, the Secretary of State was known to be an open supporter of such a benefit, so why are not he and his colleagues fighting to ensure that there is an uprating every year and that mothers and children receive the benefits to which they are entitled?

Mr. Scott: Child benefit remains important help for many families—in fact, for 6·7 million families. I tend to share the view of Mrs. Castle, when she was Secretary of State and introduced the benefit, that indexation of child benefit would be inappropriate and that Parliament would wish to exercise its judgment about the balance of family support, year by year.

Sir Ian Lloyd: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the existence of virtually any rate of inflation is a precise and inescapable index of the fact that the community as a whole has overfunded its requirements in relation to resources by precisely that amount? To the extent that a beneficiaries—or any one else in society—have their income guaranteed by uprating, is not that a guarantee that inflation will continue? If not, does my right hon. Friend agree that that creates the massive problem of who will bear the burden of reducing inflation?

Mr. Scott: My hon. Friend has added yet another reason why it is inappropriate to index this benefit, as has been suggested by the Opposition. For other reasons, we need to assess our priorities on family support each year when the time comes.

Personal Pensions

10. **Mrs. Roe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received about his proposals requiring a pension scheme to fund increases on wind-up.

Mr. Newton: We have received a number of representations, some suggesting possible repercussions for certain businesses and some suggesting that a requirement for pension increases should apply generally. In the light of the representations, I announced that pension schemes will be required to pay annual increases on pensions resulting from future service. On pensions based on past service, in addition, where schemes have a surplus, they will have to guarantee increases to members.

Mrs. Roe: Does my right hon. Friend agree that those proposals represent a major step forward in the protection of millions of people who hold occupational pensions? Does he further acknowledge that the greatest protection for holders of pensions is a strong economy and low inflation? Can he give the House any details about pensioners' incomes from occupational pensions since 1979?

Mr. Newton: My answer to the first two parts of my hon. Friend's question is yes. The average income received by a pensioner with an occupational pension was nearly £45 a week in 1987, which represents a 77 per cent. increase over the amount received in 1979.

Pensioners

11. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of *(a)* all pensioners and *(b)* recently retired pensioners are receiving income from savings.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The latest available figures show that in 1987, 73 per cent. of all pensioners and 82 per cent. of recently retired pensioners received income from savings.

Mr. Nicholson: Does my hon. Friend agree that those figures are encouraging, and is she aware that in 1987 only 24 per cent. of pensioners were in the bottom fifth of national income distribution, whereas in 1979 the figure was 38 per cent? Does she agree that that, too, is encouraging and does she further agree that the Budget will further encourage savings?

Mrs. Shephard: My hon. Friend was right to draw attention to the encouragement to save given in the Budget of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, particularly the measure known as TESSAs, or tax-exempt special savings accounts, which will further increase the value of pensioners' savings. The abolition of the composite rate of tax will also particularly help pensioners.

Mr. James Lamond: Will the Minister clear up the points raised earlier by the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin)? Why are pensioners' savings over £3,000 deemed by her Department and other Departments to give them a return of 20·8 per cent. per annum, when nowhere can that percentage return be found with safety? Should pensioners look for another Barlow Clowes in order to achieve it? Can the Minister give us a list, which we should be happy to pass on to our pensioners, of where they can find that return on their savings?

Mrs. Shephard: The point about the £1 per week in income that is assumed for each £250 of capital over £3,000 is that it helps to take into account the resources of a claimant in order to target help on those most in need. It is true that some claimants will be taken out of entitlement to benefit because their total income, including tariff income—which is not actual income from savings—is sufficiently high to disqualify them. I assure the hon. Gentleman that it is not a matter of taking out pound for pound. The assumption is that there is an income of £1 per £250, but the amount that is taken from the allowance paid in benefit is 15p in each pound, which is a generous taper—much more generous than under the previous arrangement.

Mr. Cormack: Does my hon. Friend accept that as it is proper to encourage saving now for the future, we should not penalise those who saved in the past, and there should be a closer relationship between deemed income and real income? Would she kindly have a word with her right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer who has shown himself to be devoted to savers and savings?

Mrs. Shephard: I am sure that my hon. Friend is capable himself of having a word with our right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He should realise that as a result of the measures, among people with £10,000 of savings, there will be about 70,000 gainers in community charge benefit and about 25,000 gainers in housing benefit. In both cases, it is about half the total number of gainers. That is not a discouragement to savers.

12. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimation has been made by his Department of the effect of the budget on pensioners' households.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House will welcome the changes announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget last month—many of which will benefit pensioners, and some of which I have already mentioned.

Mr. Winnick: Welcome as the raising of the ceiling on savings undoubtedly is—the Opposition have pressed for it for a long time—what justification can there possibly be for pensioners whose total income is £61·81 a week to pay £18 a week in rent, due entirely to the drastic cut in housing benefit in 1988, details of which—and of other cases from my constituency—I have sent to the Minister? Why do the Government continue to treat pensioners with such contempt?

Mrs. Shephard: There will be many gainers within housing benefit, precisely from the announcements made by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Some 75,000 pensioners as individuals will gain from those announcements.

Maintenance Payments

13. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures are being taken to make the arrangements for recovering maintenance from absent fathers more effective; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: We are reviewing the maintenance system to see what changes need to be made in the way that maintenance is assessed and collected, and plan to bring forward proposals later this year. Meanwhile, we are seeking to improve the existing system in various ways, most recently by the proposals contained in a new clause added to the Social Security Bill last week. The amount of maintenance received for lone-parent families on benefit increased from £155 million in 1988-89 to an expected £180 million in 1989-90, and we plan a further increase to £260 million in 1990-91.

Dr. Clark: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the considerable hardship suffered by lone wives and lone mothers when fathers refuse to pay maintenance, sometimes even after court orders have given them instructions to do so? Does my right hon. Friend agree that those absent fathers are cheating not only their own children but the taxpayer, because the £200 million to which he referred could be better spent elsewhere in the social security system?

Mr. Newton: Yes. I have no doubt that it is right to improve maintenance arrangements in the interests of lone parents and their children, and to ensure that financial responsibilities do not necessarily fall on the taxpayer.

Child Benefit

14. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations he has received on the uprating of child benefit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: We have received a number of representations from hon. Members, organisations and individuals expressing a wide variety of views.

Mr. Morgan: Will the Minister persuade the Secretary of State for Social Security and the Prime Minister that, following the Government's U-turn on capital allowances in respect of poll tax, they should take another look at child benefit? Does not the Minister agree that the most cynical form of attack on the incomes of ordinary families is to allow child benefit to wither on the vine? The Government do not have the guts to abolish it altogether, and realise that its value should stay in line with purchasing power and be uprated each year. Will the Minister inform his ministerial colleagues that the 7·6 million families who receive child benefit know, like the lone parents to whom the previous question referred, that it is free of any stigma—which is why it is so important to the mothers of this country?

Mr. Scott: There is no policy of allowing child benefit to wither on the vine. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has a duty, year by year, to review that benefit in the light of several factors. In recent years, we decided to concentrate help on less well-off families, poorer pensioners and the long-term sick and disabled, rather than uprate child benefit.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Committal Procedure

64. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Attorney-General if there are any proposals for changes in the committal for trial procedure; and if he will make a statement.

The Solicitor-General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): A consultation paper on mode of trial procedure and committal proceedings was issued jointly by the Home Office and the Lord Chancellor's Department on 27 July 1989. A copy was placed in the Library, and the responses are now being considered.

Mr. Hughes: The right hon. and learned Gentleman will be aware that there is widespread concern that the committal procedure should be improved. Does he share the view held by practitioners and many others affected that the present system is slow, ineffective, expensive, and thereby unjust? If he does, how soon will all those shortcomings be put right?

The Solicitor-General: The hon. Gentleman has obviously read the consultation paper. The shortcomings that he mentioned are among the many reasons why we put the matter out for consultation, to try to produce an improved procedure.

Crown Prosecution Service

65. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement about recruitment to the Crown prosecution service.

The Attorney-General (Sir Patrick Mayhew): The recruitment of law clerks and support staff is generally satisfactory. The recruitment of lawyers has improved steadily, with total numbers in post rising from 1,200 in 1986 to just under 1,600 today. There is an overall shortage of lawyers of about 20 per cent., but that is partly due to the complement being increased by 25 per cent. Recent improvements in pay, newly authorised changes in the career structure and a very promising legal trainee scheme will all improve the ability of the service to recruit and retain able lawyers.

Mr. Marshall: In view of events in north London recently, is my right hon. and learned Friend satisfied that the CPS is as competent as it might be?

The Attorney-General: I believe that my hon. Friend refers to an episode on a Saturday two or three weeks ago in Brent magistrates court, which I dealt with fully in a written answer on 23 March to the hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) and in a Select Committee of this House. That was a regrettable case of human failure coupled with a deficiency in the system. Steps have been taken to remedy the system in that branch and to ensure that all other branches check their own systems.

Mr. Fraser: I acknowledge the very full explanation that the Attorney-General provided of that incident. If to reduce the number of people held in custody and prison numbers, we were to adopt the Scottish system of ensuring that all defendants go to trial within 100 days of being charged, when would the CPS be able to cope with such a time scale?

The Attorney-General: I do not think that there is any deficiency in the ability of the CPS to cope. Time limits of that order and in some cases, less are already in force. In Manchester a limit of 112 days between committal and arraignment has been in force since April 1988.

Director of Public Prosecutions

67. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Attorney-General when he last met the Director of Public Prosecutions; and what subjects were discussed.

The Attorney-General: I last met the Director of Public Prosecutions on 27 March when we discussed matters of departmental interest.

Mr. Winnick: Will the Attorney-General confirm that incitement to murder is an extremely serious criminal offence? Can he explain why those in Britain who have in the past year called for the murder of a British citizen have had no action taken against them? Surely it is necessary for the law to apply to all.

The Attorney-General: Of course, the law should apply to all and of course, the offence of incitement to murder is extremely grave. The hon. Gentleman's question has been dealt with by me in an answer to a previous question in the House and has been debated on more than one occasion in another place. The Director of Public Prosecutions has publicly expressed his view that incitement to murder is always a very grave offence. He has drawn the attention of chief constables throughout the country to that view and to the context in which he expressed it, that is, the Salman Rushdie affair.

Mr. Latham: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm, in relation to that matter, that there could have been no question, one hopes, of such a decision being taken purely on the grounds of political policy?

The Attorney-General: No decision is ever taken purely on the grounds of political consequence, if I heard my hon. Friend's last word correctly, nor is it ever taken on grounds of partisan interest. In this case, the decision was taken entirely on the basis that there was insufficient evidence of an admissible nature to give rise to a reasonable prospect of a conviction. That is the test which the code for Crown prosecutors imposes. It is only once that test has been passed that the question arises for any prosecutor as to whether the public interest requires a prosecution. That stage was never reached on that occasion.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Does the Attorney-General agree that perjury is always a very serious offence? Is he satisfied that the perjury committed to obtain entry into London's financial markets and the ownership of a major London business has been considered properly in connection with the Harrods affair?

The Attorney-General: Of course, I agree that perjury is always a serious offence. The hon. and learned Gentleman will know, of course, that by statute there are certain evidential tests to be passed for the prosecution of perjury. The Directors of the Serious Fraud Office and of Public Prosecutions issued a joint statement in which they made clear the reason why no prosecution was being brought for that or any other offence in the case of the Fayeds.

68. **Mr. Dickens:** To ask the Attorney-General when he will next be meeting the Director of Public Prosecutions; and if he will make a statement on the criteria on which it is decided to bring forward a prosecution.

The Attorney-General: I frequently meet the Director of Public Prosecutions and I expect to do so again this week. The code for Crown prosecutors provides that the institution or continuation of criminal proceedings should depend upon the availability of sufficient admissible, substantial and reliable evidence to afford a realistic prospect of conviction and upon the public interest requiring a prosecution.

Mr. Dickens: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the public will welcome that clarification, because many hon. Members receive letters asking why prosecutions are not brought in certain cases? Will he assure me that those guidelines are under regular review?

The Attorney-General: The guidelines are reviewed by the Director of Public Prosecutions as the code is repeated as an appendix to the Director's annual report, which is made to me and published. I believe that, in this respect, they are sensible and right, but the Director is always open to suggestions for a variation of them. However, we believe that they have stood the test of time and are fair, sensible and provide a realistic and proper guide.

Ms. Mowlam: Does the Attorney-General believe that the code is working properly when it takes well over 12 months to review many cases involving police accidents? As he well knows, we in Cleveland have been waiting well over 12 months for a number of cases, about which we have already written to him. We have been told that there have been delays and problems in record keeping. We should like to know this, for both the police and families involved: does the Attorney-General consider that the DPP and the Crown prosecution service are doing the job adequately when people are having to wait that long for decisions?

The Attorney-General: I think that the hon. Lady would wish to provide a specific instance of what she regards as an unwarrantable delay. There are two types of criticism on the use of the state's prosecuting power: first, that it takes a long time for decisions to be made for a prosecution to be brought and secondly, that a prosecution has been brought hastily—either of which can lead to injustice. There must be a diligent examination of the evidence available; where that evidence is insufficient, a request should be made to the police to see whether it can be improved. If it cannot be improved, then—not until then—the prosecution must be abandoned.

Trials (Delays)

71. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Attorney-General what is the average delay between committal and trial in central London, Maidstone, Bristol, Cardiff, Manchester, Leeds and Birmingham.

The Solicitor-General: The average waiting time between committal to the Crown court and start of hearing is 17 weeks in central London, in Maidstone court administrators group it is 13 weeks, in Bristol it is 15 weeks, in the Cardiff group it is nearly seven weeks, in the Manchester group it is just over 11 weeks, in the Leeds group it is 14 weeks and in the Birmingham group it is 9·6 weeks.

Mr. Fearn: Does the Solicitor-General agree that there is even more delay when the person committed is in one of our prisons or remand homes?

The Solicitor-General: I should agree, not that there is more delay, but that the delay is more serious if someone is in custody. We take that very much into account when trying to ensure that such cases are brought on more quickly.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Vietnam

74. **Mr. Boyes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has given any further consideration to restoring bilateral aid to Vietnam.

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) on 12 March.

Mr. Boyes: It is a bit tricky to ask me to refer to something without giving me notice. Is not it a fact that Vietnam has done all that it can to meet the conditions set by the Minister before aid can be resumed? For example, there have been reforms in the economy, including the introduction of market forces and the lifting of some state controls. In those circumstances, how can the Minister justify withholding aid to one of the poorest countries in the world?

Mrs. Chalker: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman has not caught up with the previous oral Question Time and the debate that we had on the night of 27 March. We believe that Vietnam is seeking to put its economy in order, but it has not yet agreed even a shadow programme with international financial institutions and still has outstanding arrears of more than $133 million to the International Monetary Fund and $6 million to the Asian development bank. As soon as a shadow programme is in place, I hope that we shall be able to continue the work, which we have already begun, on possible aid projects for Vietnam.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Is not the resolution of the problem of the Vietnamese boat people closely linked to the need to bring Vietnam back into the community of nations? Will my right hon. Friend make that point when she next visits her opposite number in Washington?

Mrs. Chalker: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We are awaiting a reply from Foreign Minister Thach of Vietnam to the representations made by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office. As soon as we hear that the Vietnamese are prepared to take responsibility for their people, who are to return to Vietnam, we shall be in a far better position to continue our efforts. I shall make those points when I visit Washington later this month.

Mrs. Clwyd: Does not the Minister accept that the IMF report commends Vietnam for making every effort to meet its payments? Does not she agree that, despite its policy, it has taken out a commercial bank loan in an attempt to clear its debts? How can she justify Vietnam being the only one of the poorest 50 countries in the world to which Britain gives no aid? If she accepts, as she did in the debate on 27 March, that poverty is acute in that country and assistance needed, why does not she have the courage of her convictions and restore bilateral aid to that desperate country?

Mrs. Chalker: The hon. Lady heard me say in the debate in question that it was an IMF staff report. The report has not yet been accepted by the IMF board. I explained during the debate that there must be a high percentage of agreement. In the meantime, we hope that Vietnam will have a shadow programme, because that will enable us further to consider what we are already doing in terms of aid through non-governmental organisations for Vietnam. All countries that want to receive programme aid are being required by the donor community to have an economic recovery programme; that is what is needed for Vietnam, as well as the resolution of the Vietnamese boat people problem.

Mr. Wells: Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is a case for aid to Vietnam, which overarches the issue of the boat people? It is, after all, one of the poorest countries in the world, and a programme that invited the Vietnamese Government to change the economic framework in which other people were being asked to work would benefit that country and its neighbours very much.

Mrs. Chalker: I am aware of what my hon. Friend says, but certain elements are required by all donors. We have been examining possible routes for aid in preparation, not only on the basis of the NGO suggestions to us three weeks ago, but by looking at the United Nations development programme projects. Later this month when the Mekong committee meets again to discuss the water-sharing agreement for the Mekong basin, a United Kingdom observer will be present, and we shall see whether that will afford a route for assistance in future when a programme is agreed.

ODA Training (Women)

75. **Ms. Abbott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking to ensure that data are collected on the percentage of women participating in Overseas Development Administration training provided in developing countries.

Mrs. Chalker: In-country training takes place under a variety of local arrangements, sometimes at the level of individual capital projects. In these circumstances precise statistics are difficult to gather, but we have already taken action to improve our data collection.

Ms. Abbott: Does the Minister accept that, given that as many as 80 per cent. of women in developing countries are involved in agriculture, it is important that any training involves and reaches women in those countries?

Mrs. Chalker: I thoroughly agree with what the hon. Lady says, but providing training for women in some of these developing countries is not a straightforward matter, because very often it is the Governments of the recipient countries who nominate. As they nominate so few women, it is difficult to include them, but if the hon. Lady refers to a report published a year ago, entitled "Women, Development and the British Aid Programme", she will find a good deal of detail on the way in which we are helping such women.

Miss Widdecombe: What steps are being taken by Britain to encourage recipient Governments to nominate more women to development projects? Once the problem has been analysed, what practical steps can this country take?

Mrs. Chalker: We continue to press recipient countries to nominate more women; it is a point which comes up in every aid discussion that I have with Presidents and Prime Ministers wherever I go in the world.

European Single Market

76. **Mr. Alan Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has sought from the European Commission a comprehensive assessment of the effects of 1992 in the European Community on African, Caribbean and Pacific countries.

Mrs. Chalker: The United Kingdom has pressed for greater openness in trading in the EC, especially in the fourth Lomé convention, to ensure that countries such as the African, Caribbean and Pacific states are able to benefit fully from the single market. The new Lomé convention contains positive arrangements for 1992 on commodities that uphold traditional commitments and meet our single market objectives.

Mr. Williams: I accept the Minister's concern about this matter, but how does she explain that the DG-I study seems to concentrate on Asia and Latin America while excluding some of the poorest Commonwealth areas in the Pacific, the Caribbean and Africa? Why are we not making stronger representations for their inclusion?

Mrs. Chalker: I know that it is complicated, but the detail is as follows: DG-I is the directorate general of the Community, which looks after Asia and Latin America. Commissioner Marin, who looks after African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, heads up DG-VIII, which is a separate division. That also takes account of the assistance necessary for those countries under Lomé 4.

Mr. Lester: Can my right hon. Friend tell me what progress is being made on abolishing European Community quotas for Caribbean rum?

Mrs. Chalker: The United Kingdom secured an agreement at the last Lomé round, which will permit all Caribbean exports to the Community to come forward. In addition, national quotas are being phased out and we have a binding commitment after that, I think in 1995, to end Community quotas on rum as well. It was the United Kingdom action that achieved the start to the end of quotas on rum.

Sir David Steel: The right hon. Lady will be aware that the vast bulk of African debt is owed to European Community countries. Since 1992 will mean a leap forward in our prosperity in Europe, does she agree that that would be the time to take a collective initiative in the European Community to relieve African debt?

Mrs. Chalker: I expect that the Commissioner concerned will be putting a recommendation to the EC development committee at the end of May, when we shall consider it.

Mr. Foulkes: Does the Minister accept that the countries that will be harmed most by the advent of 1992 are those which are most vulnerable—especially Mozambique and Ethiopia? Why has she not answered the question asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mrs. Williams) and said that she and her colleagues will carry out a comprehensive review to identify which countries will be harmed by 1992 and what should be done to help them?

Mrs. Chalker: The hon. Gentleman may be aware that the Overseas Development Institute inquiry reckons that, on balance, there will not be difficulties. We are, of course, totally prepared to look at the effect on Mozambique and Ethiopia and other poor countries. In the light of our considerable help to them, we are greatly aware of what needs to be done. There is no point in expecting trouble when the harmonisation of standards will mean that those countries that gain most through trade and not from aid will have just one hurdle to overcome instead of 12.

Mr. Boyes: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I will take it later.

London March (Disorder)

3.32 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Waddington): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the disorder in central London last Saturday.

It is with a sense of outrage that I make this statement today and I am sure that that outrage is shared by all hon. Members. Hon Members will have seen on television some of the acts of criminal violence and viciousness which occurred and which no decent person could fail to condemn—condemn without reservation.

At the end of the day's events, 339 people had been arrested for public order and other criminal offences, including riot, affray and criminal damage. Some 374 officers of the 2,198 on duty were injured, of whom 58 required hospital treatment. Several officers were knocked unconscious, others received head injuries, and one officer sustained a fractured jaw and is still in hospital and has either now had or is about to have an operation. Eighty-six members of the public have reported injuries. Some of those people were in no way concerned in the demonstration but were bystanders who were attacked by the mob. Forty police horses were used and 20 were injured. There have been about 250 reports of damage to property, but the full extent of it has yet to be assessed.

I shall now turn to the day's events. At about noon the demonstrators wishing to take part in the march began to assembly at Kennington park, and at 1 o'clock they set off. More or less at the outset a group tried to take over the head of the march, but the police and stewards prevented them. However, as the march went up Whitehall, small groups began to leave the main body and congregate opposite the entrance to Downing street. A group sat down, partly obstructing the remainder of the march and encouraging others to do so. Most of the marchers carried on. Another group attempted to pull down the barriers and break the police line. Some arrests were made and further officers were called up in support, but the troublemakers refused to move on and, increasingly, the police line came under violent attack from missiles.

Meanwhile, the remainder of the march had been halted at the bottom of Whitehall and a previously agreed diversion was set up which sent the march up Bridge street, Victoria embankment and Northumberland avenue. The police had by then brought in mounted officers to help move the hard core of troublemakers up Whitehall and into Trafalgar square, and when this was achieved, a cordon was set up on the junction of Whitehall and Trafalgar square. This cordon, however, came under severe attack from people in the square.

At 4.40 pm the rally ended and most of those assembled dispersed peacefully, but about 3,000 troublemakers remained behind, the hard core having assembled near the building site at the corner of Northumberland avenue. Scaffolding was dismantled and used as missiles. As police officers cleared demonstrators from the site, the site huts were set alight. South Africa house nearby was attacked, a window broken and a small fire started. Officers protecting the front of the embassy came under severe attack. Mounted officers were brought in to help; and using officers with protective clothing and mounted officers, the police set about dispersing the troublemakers, who split up into four groups, each of which then went on the rampage, looting shops and causing damage to property and vehicles—even attacking a car with people inside. It was not until later in the evening that they finally dispersed.

All responsible Members of the House and the country at large will wish to condemn unreservedly the disgraceful criminal behaviour which occurred. All responsible members of society will wish to join me in paying tribute to the police for the courage and restraint which they showed in dealing with some of the most ferocious violence we have ever seen on the streets of London. I should also like to thank the ambulance and fire services for the part that they played during and in the aftermath of the disorders.

The police are now going to make every effort to bring to justice those who committed these appalling crimes. A team of 100 officers has been set up to take charge of this major criminal investigation. There is plenty of evidence available, in the form of photographs and film, to enable those responsible to be identified, and I hope that all sections of the press and television will co-operate to the full with the police investigation.

I have called for a full report from the Commissioner on the day's events and he will be reviewing what lessons are to be learnt from what occurred.

The right of peaceful demonstration is one which I will always defend, but the scenes in our capital city on Saturday had nothing whatsoever to do with peaceful demonstration. Clearly, a large number of people set off bent on violence. There can be no justification whatsoever for the savage and barbaric acts that millions saw on their television screens—not just in Britain but also, sadly, round the world. A clear message must go from this House that those responsible should be brought to justice.

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): The Labour party condemns, without reservation or qualification, the violence which took place in and around Trafalgar square last Saturday. In a democratic society, no cause can justify such conduct. It is literally intolerable.

May I offer the sympathy of Opposition Members to those police officers who were injured while trying to perform the near-impossible task of containing such a large number of rioters. We also offer our sympathy to the innocent civilians who were the inevitable victims of the riot. Of course we are grateful to the police and the ambulance and fire services for the duties which they performed.

May we offer our support to those parts of the Prime Minister's Sunday statement, echoed by the Home Secretary today, which defended the right of a free people to demonstrate peaceably? We endorse her view that a way must be found of ensuring that peaceful demonstrations are not hijacked by a lawless minority.

Of course we welcome the criminal investigation that has been set up, and I echo the Home Secretary's hope that it will be afforded every possible assistance.

Has the Home Secretary considered a fuller inquiry of the sort which the Prime Minister seemed to be suggesting on television yesterday evening? Such an inquiry could examine every aspect of the disturbance from the strategy for its containment to the individuals and organisations responsible for the riots. It is inconceivable that violence on such a scale was spontaneous. On Saturday, I called for exemplary sentences for those who were convicted of committing criminal acts. May I today emphasise the importance—perhaps the greater importance—of prosecuting those who planned and organised the mayhem?

I understand that journalists have given the Home Secretary—as they have given me—copies of material circulated during Saturday's demonstration by an organisation advocating violence for violence's sake. In its broadsheet, that organisation wrote:

> "Scraps with cops may not stop the poll tax but . . . who needs an excuse for a fight with the bill?"

That organisation can be identified. It seems to me that it has certainly committed an indictable offence which should result in immediate prosecution.

I conclude as I began, by reiterating what I know to be the spirit of the whole House. All democrats will combine in demanding the rooting out of the threat to our free society which was perpetrated by individuals and organisations who were responsible for the disgraceful scenes and conduct in the capital last Saturday.

Mr. Waddington: I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's condemnation of the violence, for his remarks about the part played by the police and for his sympathy for the police and civilians who were injured. I am also grateful for his thanks to the police and the ambulance and fire services. There will be two inquiries: criminal investigation and an inquiry carried out by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis to see what lessons can be learnt from what occurred. There is no doubt that there were organisations bent on violence and their part in this sad affair will be thoroughly examined.

Sir John Wheeler (Westminster, North): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the whole House and the people of Britain owe a great debt of gratitude to the Metropolitan police for the way in which they defended the principle of parliamentary democracy and freedom last Saturday? We wish the police officers who have been injured a speedy recovery, especially those who remain in hospital. Does he further agree that when the inquiries are undertaken they should include an investigation into the identity of the anti-poll tax lobby, what affiliation it has with other political groups, how it is funded, how it organised the motorcade of young people into London last Saturday, why so many young people came, whether some of them were paid and what were the links with the disorder that subsequently occurred that evening?

Mr. Waddington: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks about the part played by the police and for his wishes for a speedy recovery to those officers who were injured. My hon. Friend asks who was behind the anti-poll tax demonstration. I gather that the part played by Militant is well known and that something over 500 buses were used to bring people into the centre of London—[HON. MEMBERS: "What is wrong with that?"] People have a right to demonstrate peacefully and, as I have already said, I firmly stand for that right, but I hope that the organisers of such demonstrations will remember the appalling burdens that they place on the police who have better things to do, the inconvenience—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Home Secretary.

Mr. Waddington: We now know from the events on Saturday the danger that they cause to ordinary citizens, the likelihood of criminal elements attaching themselves to those demonstration as an excuse for violence and the appalling damage that this sort of incident does to our reputation abroad.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): May I, on behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends, express our outright condemnation of this predetermined violence, which puts in peril freedom of assembly and expression in this country? Those who foster violence are the enemies of our society. We are deeply sympathetic to not only the police, who faced great personal danger, but the innocent members of the public who were injured, and we are grateful for the courage shown by many people in terrifying circumstances. Will the inquiries consider the apparently large discrepancies between the number of demonstrators claimed by the police and the number claimed by the organisers? How many were present and what agreements were reached with the police under the Public Order Act 1986 before the holding of the meetings?

Mr. Waddington: Once again, I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his expression of sympathy for the police and members of the public who suffered injury. He is right to join us all in condemning the violence. I referred to an inquiry that will be carried out by the Commissioner to see what lessons can be learnt from what occurred.

The hon. Gentleman asked how many people were involved in the demonstration. I gather that the organisers issued some quite extraordinary figures, and that they did so before the march began, but I am told by the police that the figure is more than 40,000. The organisers of the march were in touch with the police. After this vicious element —"element" is perhaps the wrong word, because it suggests only a few, when it could have been as many as 3,000—started attacking the police in Whitehall, the police managed to get the rest of the march turned round at the bottom of Whitehall and showed commendable presence of mind in so doing.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Is it my right hon. and learned Friend's experience that if open meetings of crowds of peole are exhorted to break the law it inevitably ends in violence? Does he expect those who so exhorted that crowd on Saturday to be condemned by the Leader of the Opposition?

Mr. Waddington: I think that my hon. and learned Friend is entirely right. It does not help if hon. Members exhort peole to break the law. Do they expect those whom they seek to influence to draw a neat distinction between one sort of law-breaking and another? Do they expect the people whom they seek to influence to break the tax not to be encouraged to break policemen's heads? Hon. Members —it is estimated that up to 30 of them are involved—who have been exhorting people to break the law should be thoroughly ashamed of themselves.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield) *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Mr. Benn.

Mr. Benn: I am grateful to the Home Secretary for saying in his opening remarks that the whole House would share his view that violence was wrong. No hon. Member of this House advocates, supports or condones violence. As the right hon. and learned Gentleman said in his statement, that view was shared by the organisers of the demonstration who throughout co-operated fully with the police. In Glasgow, where the same organisation planned

[Mr. Benn]

the same sort of demonstration, there was no violence. I ask the Home Secretary to accept that peaceful protest has long extended to conscientious objection, of which the suffragettes were some of the most notable examples. Peaceful conscientious objection is absolutely legitimate.

Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that there should be a public inquiry, headed by a High Court judge, which could hear the evidence of those who were present? Will he bear it in mind that, after his predecessor had made a similar statement at the time of Wapping, the Northamptonshire police produced a report that included criticism of the Metropolitan police? That inquiry was commissioned by the Government of the day. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept that British history shows that despair and a sense of social injustice have often lain at the roots of civil disturbance, and that the Government have a heavy responsibility for that?

Mr. Waddington: Again, I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's remarks in so far as he condemns violence, but he seems to be very selective on the question of which laws people should obey and which laws they are exempted from obeying. I see no parallel between the present situation and the suffragettes. I cannot remember the right hon. Gentleman condemning the appalling violence at Wapping and Orgreave.

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the Metropolitan police are extremely grateful for his generous tribute, which was echoed by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley)? Does he agree that they acted efficiently and courageously and that the terrible toll of 374 officers and 20 horses injured reflects probably the worst violence that we have seen this century? Will my right hon. and learned Friend assure the House, the public and the police that every effort will be made from the film and videotape recordings of this affair to identify those who are responsible and to prosecute them quickly with the full rigour of the law? While my right hon. and learned Friend is about it, will he ask the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis to take a close look at one of the fringe organisations known, I believe, as Class War, a representative of which on radio today, referring to Saturday, said, "We had a wonderful day"?

Mr. Waddington: My hon. Friend is entirely right that the police acted efficiently and courageously. All of us are unreserved in our admiration for them. I assure my hon. Friend that every effort will be made to identify the criminals involved. A great deal of film is already available, and I hope that all those who have other film in their possession will make it available to the police. I shall certainly follow up my hon. Friend's suggestion and see what information we have about the people behind Class War.

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): Does the Home Secretary agree that if the analysis that is being made of this very serious event in the metropolis this weekend is at the level that it was caused by a letter from 30 Members of Parliament, it is no wonder that the crime rate is growing so high and there is violence in prisons, because we are not facing up to the causes in our society and what it is all about? Cheap political speeches on television do nothing for someone like me who is concerned about this situation. One says in one's drawing room, "Oh, my God, they will politicise anything." Would it not be better to have a full inquiry and find out what motivates the people who were involved, from where they get their money and what sort of education they have had —*[Interruption.]*—because they are not the people who vote for my hon. Friends or me—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Mr. Rees.

Mr. Rees: It is time that we found out what is going wrong in a society in which law and order are breaking down.

Mr. Waddington: I assure the right hon. Gentleman that those whom I saw yesterday afternoon were certainly not Tory voters——

Hon. Members: Thatcher's children.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The whole House is concerned about this matter. I hope that we shall not make it a party political issue.

Mr. Waddington: I do not think that it is very helpful, after criminal wickedness of this sort, to talk about the need for an investigation into the causes of violence. I think that one can identify quite easily the cause of the violence in this case—sheer wickedness.

Mr. Cranley Onslow (Woking): May I support what my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) just said? There can never be too many tributes to the police for the courage that they show in doing their duty in the face of such savagery. What really matters is that those responsible should be brought swiftly to justice. Can my right hon. and learned Friand assure me that he expects the full collaboration of the television authorities and everybody else in making the necessary evidence fully available to him?

Mr. Waddington: I certainly hope that they will do so. I agree entirely with my right hon. Friend that it is important that those who committed these wicked acts should be brought to justice as soon as possible.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): In his wide-ranging inquiry, will the Home Secretary take the trouble to contact the Strathclyde police? Will he compare the events in London with the peaceful rally that was held in Glasgow and remember that we in Scotland have been demonstrating peacefully against the poll tax for three years? I have been demonstrating in that city for 40 years, and Saturday's rally was the best and most peaceful that I have attended over that long period.

Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman compare and contrast the media coverage given to the events in London with that given to the peaceful rally in Glasgow and remember that we have suffered the poll tax for a year now—not in silence? Will he ask the Prime Minister, who is sitting beside him, who she has the stomach to fight, now that she is fighting her own Back-Benchers, her own Government and the people of Scotland? I will tell her, through the Home Secretary: we will not bend the knee to her poll tax; we will not bend the knee to her state-sponsored violence against the poorer sections of the population. We will demonstrate peacefully—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Briefly, please.

Mr. Douglas: I abhor attacks on the peace and I abhor violence. I have fought against violence all my life, but I have also fought against injustice to the poorer sections of the population.

Mr. Waddington: Obviously, the hon. Gentleman is entirely right that rallies and demonstrations can take place peacefully. One reason why sometimes rallies do not take place peacefully is the inflammatory language used by some people which is calculated to lead certain elements in society to use violence. That is why it is important that all those involved in such demonstrations should realise how irresponsible it is to urge people to defy the law. The hon. Gentleman is entirely right that there was little media coverage of a demonstration that passed off without incident, but it is hardly surprising, in view of the terrible events that took place in London, that the media focused on those events.

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): Will my right hon. and learned Friend mark the contrast between the wise and responsible words of the shadow Home Secretary this afternoon and the manifest failure of a large number of Labour Members to endorse those words?

Mr. Waddington: I endorse my hon. Friend's remarks. I only criticised the shadow Home Secretary when he asked us at this juncture of all junctures to start analysing the causes of crime. I certainly could not agree with that.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Is it not a fact that the vast majority of people on that demonstration were there to demonstrate peacefully and that the organisers were assured in their determination that the demonstration would be peaceful? Is it not also a fact that extremists on the street need extremists in government and that with the Prime Minister, who is sitting next to the Home Secretary, the extremists in our society have all the cause and justification that they need?

Mr. Waddington: That is just the sort of violent language that leads to violence in the streets.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that, in April 1981, in the Brixton disorders, 143 policemen were injured when 7,300 were deployed, while on Saturday 370 were injured when only 2,000 were employed? Does not that suggest that the low-profile policing which the march organisers wanted failed? Will he give an undertaking that never again will the capital city be subjected to under-policing on an occasion of such sensitivity?

Mr. Waddington: It is impossible to say that there was under-policing. A vast number of police officers were on duty and when the trouble broke out even more were called to the scene. The truth of the matter is that in a civilised society we expect the citizens of this country to behave in a civilised manner. On this occasion, it was not a few, but 3,000 or so, members of our society who behaved in a most disgraceful, criminal and uncivilised fashion.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have to take account of the subsequent business. We have another important statement after this and this is a day in which, even if I were to put a limit of five minutes on speeches, not every hon. Member would be called. I will allow three more questions from each side of the House and then we must move on.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Will the Home Secretary accept from me and on behalf of the All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation that arson and looting and the earlier provocation and violence of the anarchist elements are unreservedly and utterly condemned? However, will the Home Secretary's inquiry take evidence from those *News of the World* and *Mail on Sunday* journalists who were injured in police baton charges? Will it take evidence from Mr. Ian Katz of *The Sunday Correspondent* who described the tactics of senior officers in Whitehall as turning a fracas into a full-scale battle through their ill-considered charges?

Will it take evidence from the Secretary of State for the Environment who might explain why, on Monday last week, when we asked for that march to be redirected from Trafalgar square to Hyde Park because we knew there would be upwards of 100,000 people in London, we were told that that was impossible because we had not given seven days' written notice? Finally, will he tell his right hon. Friend sitting next to him—the Prime Minister—that if she and her Back-Benchers want to take demonstrations off the streets of London, they should call a general election and let the people decide on the poll tax?

Mr. Waddington: Here we go again—the same sort of weasel words as we heard at the time of Orgreave and Wapping. That was a condemnation of violence swiftly followed by a backhand way of excusing those who perpetrated the violence.

Mr. Teddy Taylor (Southend, East): I unreservedly welcome the message by the deputy Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook, (Mr. Hattersley), and the sincerity with which it was given on behalf of a great democratic party. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that the best message to give the people of Britain would be if all parties in the House would make it abundantly clear that they would eject from their membership any Member who advocated law-breaking or encouraged others to do so?

Mr. Waddington: We have been waiting for a long time for such a condemnation from the Leader of the Opposition, but no condemnation comes. He has in his ranks on the Opposition Benches 30 hon. Members who have been encouraging people to break the law. He should grow up and behave like a responsible citizen.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Does the Home Secretary accept that the organisers of the march, and I was there to witness it—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"]—did everything possible to ensure that there was a large and peaceful demonstration? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman reconsider his reply to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and call for an open public inquiry into all the events of last Saturday? If he does not do that, the question of who caused the violence and the policing tactics—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] I thought that the purpose of an inquiry was to try to find the causes of something. Conservative Members appear to have made up their minds already.

I ask the Home Secretary also to pass on to the Prime Minister and the Cabinet that the basic cause of the large

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

demonstration on Saturday and all the other demonstrations is the manifestly absurd, unjust and mediaeval tax known as the poll tax and that demonstrations—peaceful demonstrations—will continue. The issue will not go away until the poll tax is removed.

Mr. Waddington: I did not think that we would have to wait all that long for it—not a word of condemnation of the violence came from the hon. Gentleman, yet he must have seen the vicious scenes on television. When he talks about an unjust tax, he must realise that he is encouraging violence of that sort.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): The bigger the demonstration the easier it is for violent elements to infiltrate it and the greater the danger that peaceful bystanders and those thinking that they are taking part in a peaceful demonstration will get hurt. Will my right hon. and learned Friend now consider whether we should reintroduce into our law a provision similar to the Riot Act so that people who are caught up in such circumstances and are likely to get hurt will have proper notice that they will be participating in a criminal enterprise unless they depart immediately?

Mr. Waddington: I doubt very much whether attempting to read the Riot Act would have had any effect on the events on Saturday, when a section of the crowd seemed determined to cause trouble and certainly would not have heard a single word of the Riot Act if it had been read to them.

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Hillhead): I was a speaker at the rally in Trafalgar square on Saturday and an eye-witness to the appalling scenes that the House is now discussing. My views on those scenes were widely quoted in yesterday's newspapers. I hope that the Home Secretary will acknowledge that and that I need not repeat them today.

The Government would be doing themselves and the country an injustice if they attempted to steamroller the fundamental causes of the rising tide of anger in the country by hiding behind the wholly specious equation of someone peacefully withholding his tax with someone smashing masonry over a policeman's head. I inform the Home Secretary—I do not expect him publicly to acknowledge it, but I hope that the Government are privately taking it on board—that if the Government do not change course on the poll tax, it will be a long hot summer.

Mr. Waddington: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman is right to suggest that the organisers of the march were people who intended peacefully to withhold their tax. He knows perfectly well that the organisers of the march have been urging others to break the law, which is a very different matter. The hon. Gentleman's latter remarks do him no credit at all because they could easily be interpreted by people outside the House as an incitement to violence.

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that Londoners accept their long history of providing a venue for peaceful demonstration, but that when such demonstrations are manipulated out of control, it is London's police, London's hospitals, London's shops and London's citizens who suffer? Will he ensure that not only the people who were involved in the violence on the streets, but the inciters and godfathers who stand behind them, are brought to book?

Mr. Waddington: I assure my hon. Friend that the police will make every effort to do so.

Mr. Hattersley: I am sure that, on reflection, the Home Secretary will agree that Saturday's terrible events are best discussed in a spirit of calmness. In that mood and spirit, may I ask him what amounts to almost a technical question? I, at least, had not heard of the application to move the demonstration from Trafalgar square to Hyde park. Will one of the inquiries examine whether such an application was made, and if it was, will one of the inquiries examine why it was refused and whether it was wise to refuse it?

Mr. Waddington: I shall certainly look at that matter. The right hon. Gentleman will remember that he asked a very restrained question and that I answered in very temperate language. However, when other hon. Members make remarks that could be interpreted as an incitement to violence, I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman would not expect me to remain silent.

Mr. Speaker: We have a further statement. I call the Home Secretary.

Mr. Hattersley: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In the hope of conducting the debate in the responsible way that is my habit, I asked the Home Secretary a specific question and I believe that the House is entitled to a specific answer. It concerns the proposed movement of the venue from Trafalgar square to Hyde park. Will that or will that not be the subject of part of the inquiry?

Mr. Waddington: I thought that I had answered that, but if I did not, I am sorry. Obviously, I shall look into the matter. As I understand it, the organisers of the march agreed the venue and the route with the police.

Strangeways Prison

4.11 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Waddington): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the serious violence in Manchester prison.

At about 11 am yesterday, some 300 prisoners attending a service in the chapel attacked the staff present and took keys from them, and the staff were then forced to withdraw. The prisoners broke out of the roof of the chapel and gained access to the main prison, where a large number of inmates had been unlocked from cells to be served with their midday meal. These joined the chapel rioters, and violence spread quickly to the remand wing. Staff then had to be withdrawn from all the living areas in the prison, for their own safety. Some 120 prisoners in the hospital, who were taking exercise at the time, were, however, secured and took no part in the disturbance.

Meanwhile, prisoners in the living area began to destroy the roof and internal fittings. Staff were forced back away from the buildings by volleys of slates and other missiles, and fires were lit inside the prison. The emergency services were quickly in attendance and police were deployed outside the prison. No prisoners escaped. During the afternoon about 500 prisoners gave themselves up and during the evening and night more surrendered.

My latest information is that some 119 prisoners have yet to surrender, while 69 prisoners remain in the hospital and other parts of the prison, safe and under control. Prison officers regained control of the remand wings of the prison this morning. Some 1,363 prisoners have been sent to other prisons, and 95 are in police cells, as a result of most remarkable work by the prison service and the police.

There have been widespread but conflicting stories from surrendering prisoners about the violence which took place in the early afternoon and claims that a number of prisoners are dead. It has not been possible to confirm these stories and, to date, no bodies have been discovered, but the possibility that fatalities have occurred cannot be ruled out. The general picture is of prisoners indulging in violence on other prisoners, the full consequences of which remain to be discovered.

Nine of the surrendering prisoners claim to have been forcibly injected with drugs, and eight admit to having taken drugs voluntarily. Twenty-four prisoners are in outside hospitals, one with serious head injuries and one with a punctured lung. None is considered now to be in danger. I say again that those injuries seem to be the result of violence meted out by prisoner on prisoner. Twelve prison officers were injured and had to be taken to hospital. They have all been released.

I pay tribute to the commendable bravery shown by the prison officers, who were faced with a fierce and savage onslaught, and to the courageous leadership of the governor and his senior staff. I also express our gratitude to the police for their swift response and their help later in moving prisoners from the gaol. I thank also the fire service and the ambulance service for their help.

This is clearly a dreadful incident, all the more serious in the light of all that we have been trying to do to reduce the pressures on the prison system and to improve conditions.

The prison population nationally is now more than 2,100 lower than at the same time last year, and total expenditure on the prison service has risen by 20 per cent. in real terms in the past 12 months. As the House knows, we are engaged in a policy designed to keep out of prison those who do not need to be there, a programme of refurbishment of existing establishments, and a building programme, in which eight of the 28 prisons in the programme have already been completed. By 1992-93, we shall have provided more than 10,000 new prison places and, but for incidents like this, overcroding would have been a thing of the past.

Judge Stephen Tumim, Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons, wrote in his recent report on Manchester prison published last week:

> "life at Manchester is a great deal nearer what it should be, both for staff and inmates, than it was some two years ago",

and he commended the governor and staff for the improvements that they were achieving. He concluded his report by saying:

> "There was much more to praise than to decry in an establishment clearly going in the right direction and with an optimistic momentum".

Sadly, the short-term consequences of this incident will be to worsen conditions elsewhere just when real improvements were flowing from the combined effects of our policies on criminal justice and the prison building programme.

By a cruel irony, negotiations have only recently been concluded with Manchester city council for the purchase of land for a major redevelopment of the prison. A new hospital was opened last year and the first 28 cells have been fitted with integral sanitation as part of a rolling programme. The population of the prison has dropped significantly since mid-1988. Last year, the number of prisoners held three to a cell had fallen by over 300 to only 123 out of the total population of over 1,600.

Clearly, there will have to be a thorough inquiry into this extremely serious incident. Because the incident is not yet concluded, I do not believe that the precise nature of the inquiry or who should lead it should be determined now, but I will inform the House as soon as I have reached a decision.

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): May I first offer our sympathy to the prison officers, police officers and firemen who were injured during the Strangeways riot, and congratulate those public services on the invariable bravery and occasional heroism with which they discharged their duties yesterday?

It is our long-standing belief that the recurring crisis in our prisons is the consequence of overcrowding, which results from too many custodial sentences and too little punishment within the community. As the Government, in their criminal justice White Paper, belatedly accepted that view, I shall do no more than set out that principle as the mutually agreed background to the Strangeways disturbance. My detailed questions concern prison conditions, available manpower and preparedness—about none of which the Home Secretary thought it wise to inform the House in his statement.

Much was made at the weekend, and again today, of the chief inspector of prisons' report, which complimented the staff of Strangeways on their dedication. I am happy to repeat that compliment, but does the Home Secretary acknowledge that the same report notes that the treatment of prisoners

> "leaves much to be desired"

and describes the prison's buildings as "awful"?

[Mr. Roy Hattersley]

Eighty-two of the cells that the Victorians intended for single habitation are each occupied by three prisoners, and 296 single habitation cells are each occupied by two prisoners. Prisoners are confined to their cells for all but 11 hours each week, and are allowed only one shower and one change of clothing a week. On many occasions last year, not even that was possible. The cell blocks have no modern sanitation, and even men living three to a cell are required to slop out. If we treat men like animals, we ought not to be surprised if they behave like animals.

Will the Home Secretary confirm that there were 30 fewer prison officers on duty yesterday than would have been the case had new staffing levels not been imposed on prisons by the Home Office after the "fresh start" policy came into operation? How many officers were on duty yesterday? Does the Home Secretary regard that number, whatever it was, as adequate in the light of warnings of a disturbance that I understand the Home Office received?

Were messages passed to the governor warning that a major demonstration was likely to take place at the weekend? If so, what action was taken? Were demonstrators on the roof earlier last week? If so, did not the Home Office regard that a sign of trouble to come?

Were prisoners due to be taken to court on Tuesday kept in the prison because of the fear of disturbances? If so, why did not the Home Office regard that as an indication of possible future disturbances? Is it not a fact that the Home Office—not the governor or his staff—failed hopelessly in its management of the prison and neglected its duty to prepare for disturbances that it should have anticipated? Its failures are the direct responsibility of the Home Secretary and of his inadequate policies for staffing prisons and for the conditions within them.

Mr. Waddington: I do find it extraordinary that the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) addresses those remarks to me without including a word of condemnation of the prisoners who have done immense damage, and thereby set back the work of improving the prison estate, and who indulged in an orgy of violence against their fellow inmates. The right hon. Gentleman might have addressed his mind to those aspects just for one moment.

The right hon. Gentleman is right to congratulate prison officers on their bravery and to echo my own sentiments, but I am not sure that he is entitled to talk about prison overcrowding when the Government of which he was a member did not lift a finger to do anything about it. The right hon. Gentleman is way off the mark when he talks as though our criminal justice White Paper dealt only with new thinking and not with the development of ideas that had been put into practice in previous years.

The range of non-custodial sentences has greatly increased in recent years. As a consequence, we greatly increased also staffing of the probation service, which now has 1,200 more probation officers than in 1979. Our White Paper was the culmination, not the start, of a policy that has resulted in probably the best community service regimes in the world. Incidentally, it has helped to bring about a large reduction in the prison population in the past two years.

What absolute nonsense it is to talk about us addressing ourselves to the criminal justice system just now, when back in 1982 we put through the House the Criminal Justice Act, which had a dramatic effect on the number of young people given custodial sentences.

I agree that the prison leaves much to be desired. As the right hon. Gentleman well knows, much of our prison estate is composed of prisons built in the 19th century. I have already said that the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues never addressed that problem when they were in office.

There were 10 prison officers on duty that morning in the chapel, and I gather that that is the normal number of officers to be on duty. The right hon. Gentleman made remarks about the regime for prisoners in Strangeways. In recent times, that regime has been greatly improved. In the week ending 17 March, the average weekly hours of activity for inmates in Workers Educational Association courses, and physical education was 22·73 hours for convicted adults, 10·61 hours for remands and 12·35 hours for convicted young offenders. For the equivalent week a year ago, the figures were 12·79, 5·28 and 9·19 hours respectively.

It is nonsense to paint a picture of no progress being made in Strangeways. It is because progress has been made that Judge Tumim was able to make his remarks in his recent report.

I know of no warning given to the prison staff of trouble. Two prisoners went up on the roof during last week, but they were not accompanied or encouraged by any of the other inmates, and no doubt the judgment made was that it was a minor demonstration by two prisoners. That was the end of it.

Mr. Robert Litherland (Manchester, Central): But surely the Home Secretary and his predecessors must have been made aware by the Prison Officers Association that Strangeways prison was a powder keg that could explode at any time. After this bitter and tragic experience, does he now agree that the association has been proved right and that the Home Office is now accused of criminal negligence? The Government's policy on prisons, like Strangeways, is now in ruins.

Mr. Waddington: The trouble with the hon. Gentleman's remarks is that they simply to not fit the facts. They do not fit with the improvements in the regime at Strangeways during recent times. If the hon. Gentleman is addressing his remarks to the allocation of staffing, I should say that there has been no difficulty in posting sufficient staff to Manchester. All the framework agreement staff required for a reduction in prison officers' hours for the beginning of this month have already been posted to Manchester. Further staff are due to be posted in the next 12 months.

Sir Fergus Montgomery (Altrincham and Sale): Would not my right hon. and learned Friend agree that we really must do something about such Victorian prisons? Does he not feel that it is inhuman to keep three prisoners cooped up in a cell all day? Although I admit that the Government are doing a great deal, we must give an even higher priority to getting rid of those old prisons. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is very sad that such a tragic situation has arisen under a governor who has done so much in his three years of office?

Does my right hon. and learned Friend believe that there is any truth in the press reports that the scenes of violence we saw on Saturday, which must have been seen on the television screens in that prison, helped to spark off some of the violence there?

Mr. Waddington: I do not honestly know the answer to the last question, but it is certainly true that those who indulge in irresponsible violence may well encourage others to do so, particularly if what they do appears on television. I am sure that my hon. Friend knows that the Government have embarked on the largest prison building programme this century. Of a total of 28 prisons in the programme, eight are already open, 14 are at various stages of design and construction, and it is planned for building to commence on another two between 1991 and 1993. That leaves a balance of four prisons, the location and commencement date for construction of which has yet to be decided.

The sadness of it all is that last autumn we were able to announce some diversion of resources from new prison building to refurbishment. I attach the greatest importance to a programme to get rid of slopping out as soon as possible, but when such an event as this takes place, it makes it much more difficult to achieve that to which we have bent all our efforts.

It is an absolute tragedy that this should have occurred now, because we were getting rid of overcrowding, as a result of a combination of fewer people being sent to prison and more prisons being built. At the same time, we were embarked on a big programme of refurbishment. We shall now have to do some new thinking, but my hon. Friend can rest assured that we still attach a great deal of importance to improving this country's prison estate.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): How long does the Home Secretary expect the prison to be out of action, or largely out of action? What extra help is being given to the prisons to which prisoners from Strangeways have been evacuated? What is happening to those prisoners who were mentally ill and inappropriately accommodated at Strangeways? What additional help is going to the hospitals now trying to cope with those who were injured in the violence? When does the Home Secretary expect to make a further statement about the reports of deaths during this tragic and violent weekend?

Mr. Waddington: Obviously, I shall have to sum up the position when events develop. I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman would expect me to say more than that now. I said in my statement that the police and prison officers had worked valiantly overnight to move a large number of prisoners to different establishments up and down the country. I was amazed to see the scale of the task which they had set themselves and the amazing way in which they had achieved the movement of such a large number of people.

I cannot be expected to say now exactly where all the people are, whether they should remain there or whether they should be moved to other establishments once the emergency has been sorted out. The fairest thing I can suggest is for the right hon. Gentleman to write to me and, if particular cases worry him, I shall ensure that he is kept informed about them as much as possible.

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): As my constituency is only two miles up the road from Strangeways, may I say how appalled my constituents will be that, in this delicate and dangerous situation, the shadow Home Secretary should seek to make a political issue of the matter? I join my right hon. and learned Friend in paying tribute to the courage of the police and prison officers who have ensured that the matter has been kept entirely within the prison and not a single prisoner has escaped.

Mr. Waddigton: I am grateful to my hon. friend for his remarks. He is right to congratulate both the prison officers and the police on the work that they have done.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Does the Home Secretary accept that the answer which he gave his hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, suggesting that new thinking would be necessary, is right and welcome? Does he also accept that the brutalising vengengefulness displayed this weekend, and the suicidal despair in other prisons, shows that this event is part of a pattern of behaviour in Victorian prisons in inner cities, and that we simply must accelerate the penal reform to which he and his colleagues have set their minds? Does he also accept that he must undertake to move that reform into a higher gear?

Mr. Waddington: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman was accusing us, or could accuse us, of having done nothing. We inherited a dilapidated prison estate on which not a penny had been spent for many years, and we embarked on this massive prison-building programme. I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman about the importance of our criminal justice reforms. I hope that a Criminal Justice Bill may be in the programme for the next Session, but that is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House.

Mr. Alistair Burt (Bury, North): Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that, although my constituents have considerable sympathy for the working conditions of prison officers and for remand prisoners who may be held for lengthy periods while unconvicted, they have scant sympathy for convicted prisoners who are, by and large, in prison because of their own actions? Bearing in mind the improvements that we have made in the prison in recent years, will my right hon. and learned friend assure us that prisoners who are identified as having taken part in the riot will be properly punished and disciplined; and will he ensure that sympathy for the conditions will not outweigh proper condemnation of the prisoner's actions?

Mr. Waddington: I think it is important to condemn their action. That is why I took up this matter with the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley). This is not a case of prisoners going on the rampage and destroying their own property; it is a case of prisoners going on the rampage and attacking fellow prisoners. The full history of this matter has yet to be disclosed, but clearly, serious offences have been committed. I agree with my hon. Friend that they must all be investigated and that the guilty people must be brought to justice.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): While one recognises all the difficulties of yesterday, will the Home Secretary recognise the anguish of many of the families of people who were in the prison? A 17-year-old constituent of mine was in the prison, and his parents were unable to obtain any information about him. Can the Minister assure the House that all the families of people who have been moved will know where they have been moved to, and that every

[Mr. Peter L. Pike]

effort will be made to ensure that families are put out of their anguish, especially in view of the concern caused by the unconfirmed rumours of deaths in the prison?

Mr. Waddington: Obviously, the hon. Gentleman is right, in the sense that we do not want people to be unnecessarily anxious. We shall give as much information as we can as quickly as possible.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): My right hon. and learned Friend will no doubt appreciate Conservative Members' condemnation of the monstrous behaviour of the prisoners. Does he agree that one of the major problems in any prison is the segregation of sexual offenders from those who want to assault them and beat them up? Can he confirm this morning's press reports that many of the victims of the assault were sexual offenders who were under protection under rule 43?

Mr. Waddington: I cannot confirm that now.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): While recognising the great difficulties that there must have been arranging transfers to other prisons, may I ask the Home Secretary whether he is satisfied that a prison such as Armley in Leeds, which is already overcrowded and in which there have been many suicides in recent years, is equipped to receive the reported 100 prisoners who have been transferred there? Has he arranged for more prison officers to cope with the problem?

Mr. Waddington: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will realise that it has been quite difficult to keep up with events over the past 24 hours. I do not have an up-to-date list of where the prisoners who have been moved have gone. As I told the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike), we shall give as much information as we can as soon as possible, and we shall try to accommodate prisoners where there is room for them and make the best possible arrangements in the difficult circumstances that have arisen.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): My right hon. and learned Friend said in his opening remarks that this incident would worsen conditions elsewhere. We have an exceptionally well run prison in Lancaster with high morale. When I rang it this morning, I was told that it has had no prisoners sent from Strangeways. Will my right hon. and learned Friend do his best to ensure that this excellent prison is not disrupted and mayhem created by the transfer of prisoners from Strangeways, who would undo the work of decades?

Mr. Waddington: Obviously I do not want to see the work of any prison disrupted as a result of this, but accommodation has to be found for these prisoners. If my hon. Friend will keep in touch with me, I shall do my best to keep her up to date. I do not know how many prisoners, if any, have gone to Lancaster.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Again, I have to say to the House that we have a very heavy day ahead of us and as the Home Secretary has said, a further report will be made on this matter. I will allow three more questions from each side and then I am afraid we must move on.

Mr. Ken Eastham (Manchester, Blackley): May I draw the Home Secretary's attention to the main theme that seems to be coming through—that of overcrowding? He will know that, from time to time, we write to his Department about prisoners on remand who are often not guilty but awaiting trial. Some of them wait for weeks and sometimes months, and that is one of the reasons for the grave overcrowding. Will the Home Secretary do all in his power to bring about a speedier trials procedure?

We understand that millions of pounds' worth of damage has been caused to buildings, and that most of the prison will be out of commission for many months. The prison is located in the central area of Manchester, which is highly congested. Is it not time to reconsider relocating Strangeways away from that locality and getting rid once and for all of this Victorian pigsty?

Mr. Waddington: I have heard of the hon. Gentleman's last suggestion, but his language is rather exaggerated. One has only to read Judge Tumim's report to see the marvellous work carried out by the governor and staff, which over years has brought about significant improvements in Strangeways. I was a frequent visitor to Strangeways when I practised in Manchester, but I have not been there in the last few months.

The hon. Gentleman asked about remands in custody. He should bear in mind that in recent years there has rightly been a very big fall in the number of remands in custody. Advances such as bail information schemes have contributed to that. My right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General reminds me that there is now a time limit in Manchester, which results in people not having to wait as long as they used to for an appearance in court. There is a time limit of 112 days between committal and trial.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, from the moment our right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) became Prime Minister, we have had a most massive building programme for prisons? It was started by Lord Whitelaw and continued by successive Home Secretaries. *[Interruption.]* Well, at least the Prime Minister stayed through both statements, which is more than can be said of the Leader of the Opposition. Our Government have nothing to answer for in terms of prison building and improvements, and we take no lessons from the Opposition.

I congratulate the police service in Rochdale and Oldham on dispatching officers immediately. I was watching a police parade there at the time. The special constabulary covered for the officers who left. That was a good effort. I congratulate all the police officers, the prison officers and the members of the ambulance and fire services for their efforts.

Mr. Waddington: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his congratulations and I shall, of course, pass them on, together with those that have come from all parts of the House. Obviously he is right when he says that we have no lessons to learn from the Opposition about the state of our prisons.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): May I also express my concern about the possible implications of the situation at Strangeways for other prisons, such as Wakefield prison in my constituency, which has had major staffing difficulties since the introduction of the "fresh start" arrangement? Will the Home Secretary seek assurances as soon as possible that prisoners have not been transferred from Strangeways to other overcrowded establishments, and that prison officers from establishments such as that at Wakefield, which have staffing difficulties, have not been transferred to Strangeways?

Mr. Waddington: The hon. Gentleman will have to wait a day or two until we can see exactly how people have been distributed. I am sure that, if he rings my office, we will keep him in touch with events and give him as much information as we can.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): Will my right hon. and learned Friend assure the House that, when the inquiry that he has announced takes place, there will be a thorough investigation into the role of hard drugs in this disgraceful incident? Is it not an indictment of the present system that hard drugs are available? Will he undertake to introduce any measures to curb the availability of such drugs?

Mr. Waddington: I must make one thing absolutely plain to my hon. Friend. It is by no means clear that any of the drugs that were injected got into the prison illicitly. The dispensary was broken into, and we will of course have to investigate whether all the drugs used came from there. That may well be the case.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blythe Valley): Will the Home Secretary consider extending his inquiry into the prision riots to Durham gaol, where, over the past two years, four prisoners have committed suicide and I believe that one is the subject of a murder charge?

Mr. Waddington: Her Majesty's inspector of prisons is presently carrying out an inquiry into suicides in prison. This is an important matter, and if the hon. Gentleman wishes to make any submissions to me I shall see that they are passed to Judge Tumim.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry that it has not been possible to call all those who wish to ask questions, but I shall certainly bear them in mind when we return to this matter. I call Sir Geoffrey Howe——

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am on my feet. We have a Standing Order No. 20 application.

4.46 pm

Mr. Robert Litherland (Manchester, Central): I beg to seek leave to move the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the critical situation at Strangeways prison, Manchester."

For a long time, concern has been expressed by prison officers, Members of Parliament and many other interested groups that unless the conditions of overcrowding, undermanning, bad sanitation and boredom were not drastically dealt with, the prison could face a crisis which the prison officers could not contain. Time and again devoted officers have drawn attention to the matter by appealing to the Home Office to face the reality and take a realistic view of the immense pressures and stress endured at Strangeways prison.

Against their better judgment, prison officers took industrial action by refusing to allow further prisoners to enter Strangeways. That was an attempt to highlight the severe problems of overcrowding at that gaol. The prison has always had the full support and good will of those officers, who have been badly let down by the Home Office. One senior officer once told me that one day, possibly at a weekend when the prison is most vulnerable, the prisoners would come through the walls and the prison would be lost. Yesterday in the area of Strangeways prison, I saw that sad prediction becoming a reality. The prison was lost, perhaps for ever.

For the sake of every other outmoded and outdated prison in this country, let us learn from the serious events at Strangeways and recognise that, unless the elements of riot are eradicated, we may again see distressing scenes like those that we saw in Manchester yesterday.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Litherland) asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter which he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the riot at Her Majesty's prison, Strangeways."

I have listened with care to what the hon. Member said about this matter. As he knows, I have to decide whether his application comes within the Standing Order and, if so, whether I should give it precedence over the business set down for today or tomorrow. In this case I regret that the matter that he has raised does not fall within the requirements of the Standing Order and I therefore cannot submit his application to the House. Now I will take points of order.

Points of Order

4.49 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I invite you to recall questions that were asked earlier this afternoon on overseas development. My hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) asked about Vietnam. In response, the Minister for Overseas Development simply referred my hon. Friend to her reply to me at the last Question Time on overseas development. Do you not agree that that was a very unsatisfactory way to answer an oral question, especially since no notice was given to my hon. Friend? Will you accept it from me that, in view of the unsatisfactory nature of both replies, I shall be raising the matter on the Adjournment?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has made his point. Perhaps he will do as he suggests.

Ms. Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the series of earth tremors in Stoke-on-Trent, including the one today, which I understand measured between 4 and 5 on the Richter scale, will you please arrange for the Secretary of State for the Environment to come to the House and tell us about his proposals for the monitoring of earth tremors and about the equipment that can be made available to ensure that preventive measures are taken?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Lady raises a matter of which, I am afraid, I have no knowledge. However, I am sure what she has said about it will have been heard by those who are responsible for making statements.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Ordered,

That European Community Documents Nos. 5486/87, 5803/88, 4023/90 and 4024/90 on plant health be referred to a Standing Committee on European Community Documents.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

Orders of the Day

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Speaker: Before we begin this very important debate, I say again to the House that, because of the late start and the fact that a great number of right hon. and hon. Members wish to participate in it, I shall place a limit of 10 minutes on speeches between 7 and 9 o'clock. However, I hope that that limit will be borne in mind by those who are called to speak before then. There is great pressure to participate in the debate.

4.51 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill is, in my opinion, one of the most significant measures to be brought forward by a Government in the last 20 years. It is a complex and sensitive Bill that deals with matters that are fundamental to the well-being of our society. It proposes a new and detailed system of statutory regulation of certain types of infertility treatment. If the House agrees with the view taken in another place, that regulation would extend to research involving human embryos

On that matter, my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House proposes to give the House an opportunity to vote later this month on the Floor of the House on an issue which both the Government party and the other main parties in the House regard as a matter of individual conscience. Such matters will be raised several times during the debate on the Bill.

We all know that the subject matter of the Bill raises important legal and social issues. It also raises important scientific and medical issues. At the heart of the Bill, however, there are also important ethical questions. The House is divided as to the ethics, but in the end, it will have to make an ethical judgment on behalf of the community at large.

As the Bill is so unlike other measures that Governments usually introduce, I am sure that our debates on it will differ from our normal debates, and will cut across the ordinary party political lines. We are all aware of the fact that people outside Parliament are, more than is usually the case, looking to the House to debate the measure calmly. I am sure that the quality of the debate on these highly sensitive and controversial matters will live up to the strong feelings of the many people who regard these matters as of the deepest significance.

Those who have read the debates in another place will, I am sure, agree with me that they were of a high quality. I share in the tributes that have been paid to my right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor for the way in which he steered the debates through another place. Changes were made during those debates, which I shall describe during my speech.

The Bill is the end product of a long period of public debate and reflection. Some people have argued that the process has been over-long. I do not share that view. We can all see, with hindsight, that the Bill has benefited from the time that has elapsed. That can be seen from the fact that, at each stage of the discussion process, more common ground has opened up.

There are some exceptions, particularly on the subject of research involving the human embryo. Because of its very nature, there will never be a consensus on that subject, or a solution that is acceptable to all shades of opinion. There can be no doubt, however, that there is genuine agreement about the need for statutory regulation in this highly sensitive and fast developing area of science and medicine. Many of the Bill's provisions now command, I am confident, a broad measure of public support.

It may be helpful if I remind the House of the origins of the Bill and describe its main principles. The birth in Oldham in 1978 of the world's first baby born as a result of in vitro fertilisation, Louise Brown, ushered in a whole new era in the treatment of infertile couples. However, that birth has brought in its wake a series of complex legal and ethical issues which, it became apparent, would require to be addressed in legislation. It is not unknown for Governments of any complexion to shrink away from tackling difficult legislative problems, but this Government felt that it was a responsibility that we could not shirk.

In 1982, we set up a committee of inquiry, chaired by Mrs. Warnock, now Baroness Warnock, the distinguished philosopher, to study all the implications that the advent of the test-tube baby technique brought in its train, including that of research involving human embryos. As a Minister, I was answerable to the then Secretary of State for Health and Social Security, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) who set up the inquiry.

I should remind the House that, when the Government decided to ask Lady Warnock to head the committee, there was no wide public controversy or even wide public knowledge of the issues. Enoch Powell had not introduced his Bill and the newspapers had not drawn attention to the issues. The considered view of Ministers in this Government was that serious problems were arising that Parliament and the Government would have to address. We addressed the issues responsibly by asking Lady Warnock and her committee to advise. I believe that we have acted responsibly ever since.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the work of Lady Warnock's committee. It was not given an easy remit. It was asked to address the subject at large. The fact that the Bill reflects in many of its provisions the thinking of that inquiry is a commendation of its foresight and of the firmness with which it tackled its task.

The committee reported in 1984. There immediately followed an extensive round of public consultation. That brought in a number of responses—indeed, a scale of responses that was quite out of the ordinary for the kind of public consultation exercises that accompany many measures before they are brought before the House. We received views not just from organisations and lobbies and the leading medical scientific, legal and religious bodies, but also from many individual members of the public who feel deeply, on one side or the other, about the issues.

We quickly introduced the Surrogacy Arrangements Act 1985. That quickly and effectively quelled the prospect of the development of commercial surrogacy agencies in this country. There was unanimous agreement on that; the Bill was brought before the House and passed quickly. In the same year, 1985, I well remember, as one who took part in the debates, Enoch Powell's introduction of the Unborn Children (Protection) Bill, which sought to prohibit research involving human embryos. The Bill did not complete all its stages, but it focused public attention on this highly important and sensitive matter. In the next week or two, the House will finally return to the decisive debate on the issue and come to a decision one way or the other.

The Government issued a consultation document in 1986, the responses to which formed the basis for the White Paper entitled "Human Fertilisation and Embryology: A Framework for Legislation" which we published in November 1987. The White Paper was debated in this House and, shortly thereafter, in another place. The Bill that we introduced in another place last November closely follows the policy set out in the White Paper, except as regards a small number of points of detail.

I shall soon turn to a description of the main provisions of the Bill and will refer to the changes made to it during the debates in another place. First, however, I ought to make clear what will be the role throughout our debates of my hon. Friend the Minister for Health, my right hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General, who will be taking part in the Standing Committee debates, and also my role and that of other Ministers who may be called upon to speak from the Dispatch Box during the proceedings on the Bill.

For the most part, the Bill is presented to the House on the same basis as any other Government measure. Ministers will speak for the Government in their capacity as Ministers on the majority of issues and in the majority of debates. But I am conscious that in the embryo research debate and on some other matters that we know may arise in Committee, the normal rules of party discipline will not apply. The Government will certainly allow a free vote on these matters to all those who normally take our Whip and to members of the Government.

I have never made any secret of the fact that I am an enthusiastic supporter of properly regulated embryo research and, by coincidence, so is my hon. Friend the Minister for Health, but that does not mean that that is a Government position on the matter. When I speak on the merits of the case, I shall make it quite clear that I am not speaking with the authority of the Government behind me. Usually, outside the House, I talk about taking off my hat as Secretary of State for Health and putting on my hat as the Member for Parliament for Rushcliffe. That will be the case for all members of the Government and of my party. On some of the great issues of conscience, I have no doubt that members of the Government and the Conservative party will be found in both Division Lobbies, just as I confidently expect that the views of members of other major parties in the House will be divided.

In the debates on matters of conscience, our approach will be the same as that of Ministers who dealt with such issues in the past. We shall stress that the Government do not take a collective position. Any opinions on the merits of the case will be, strictly speaking, our own. However, as Ministers, regardless of our personal views, our role is to serve the House to the best of our abilities by providing factual information in as neutral and objective a way as possible, so that the full implications of proposals are set out, and by explaining the implications of particular amendments—in both cases using the range of expertise available to Government.

The other principal duty of Government is to ensure that the House produces legislation which has been so

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drafted that, whatever the decision of the House one way or the other on the great issues, the result is practicable and effective to administer and enforce, and can be applied by the courts.

Before turning to consider the Bill in detail, I should remind the House of one other background to the Bill—the considerable unhappiness and stress which childlessness can cause individual couples. One of the benefits that I hope will flow from the public attention given to those issues in recent years is a greater understanding and sympathy for their plight.

The numbers are far from insignificant. About one in 10 couples are thought to be infertile, and a greater number are estimated to seek specialist help at some stage in their desire to have a family. More than for most groups, it is sometimes hard for childless couples to draw public attention to their problems. Those of us who are lucky enough to have had children naturally should not forget the considerable stress and strain posed for childless couples. Obviously, it is a perfectly legitimate medical and scientific activity to enable them to satisfy the wholly worthy objective of having families of their own.

As far as I am aware, the Bill is the first comprehensive measure dealing with all the issues addressed by the Warnock committee concerning the legal, social and ethical implications of new methods of assisted reproduction attempted anywhere in the world. Some countries have enacted legislation dealing with some of the issues—for example, Spain and the state of Victoria in Australia. Others, such as Canada and West Germany, are actively considering legislation. In West Germany, legislation has already reached the Bundesrat.

I should like to refer hon. Members to the recently published research project funded by my Department. It was prepared by Dr. Jennifer Gunning, who, until last summer, was secretary to the interim licensing authority. As a result of her field visits and desk research, she has produced an up-to-date account of the legal framework of issues such as in vitro fertilisation, artificial insemination by donor embryo research, abortion and research involving the use of foetal tissue covering a broad range of north American and European countries, as well as Australia. Although it is not always possible to deduce the exact implications of a particular law, the House will find it a useful document to add to scientific, medical and ethical literature produced on the subject.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson (Newbury): What will be the effect if the Bill fails to receive a Second Reading? Am I right in believing that embryo research will continue as at present, or would the end of the Bill mean the end of that research?

Mr. Clarke: If the Bill fails to get a Second Reading, the law will remain as it is. As I hope most people in the House will agree, whatever our personal opinions on the merits or otherwise of research into the human embryo, the present law is totally unsatisfactory. Undoubtedly, we shall be divided on the contents of the legislation, but I believe that a broad range of opinion, including those in the medical and scientific community who carry out such research, accepts the need for legislation so that everyone knows exactly what is allowed and what is not allowed under British law.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Precisely what under present law is unsatisfactory in relation to embryo research? Many of us could guess what it is, but we should like to hear from the Secretary of State what the Department considers to be unsatisfactory.

Mr. Clarke: It will be left totally to the individual judgment of each researcher to decide at what stage of the development of the embryo they should be debarred from carrying out research. The Warnock committee concluded that research should be permitted up to 14 days, the reasons for which it set out. As there is no express legal prohibition of research, as things stand, it will be open to each researcher to make his or her personal judgment, first, about the stage of development at which he should cease the research and, secondly, about the purpose of that research.

Those carrying out the research at present are quite content with the 14-day limit, as that is a late enough stage at which plainly an individual person would emerge. Whatever views one has on the status of a human embryo, it should not be treated as just another piece of human tissue to be researched upon purely in the spirit of open scientific inquiry.

All responsible people feel that Parliament has a duty to set out precise limits and to establish a licensing authority, if it is the decision of both Houses of Parliament that research should be permitted.

The most controversial aspect of the Bill sets out the statutory framework of control for the treatment of infertility and the storage of gametes and embryos. I do not wish to anticipate debate, but I believe that the vast majority of right hon. and hon. Members would like there to be some statutory control.

The new statutory body, an independent body to be called the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, covers four main treatments to be licensed—artificial insemination by donor, in vitro fertilisation and egg and embryo donation. If the House agrees with the decision reached in another place, the authority will also license research involving human embryos.

When the Bill was introduced in another place, it contained a very significant drafting innovation. Clause 11 contained alternative provisions, as the Government had promised in the 1987 White Paper, one permitting such research and the other prohibiting it. The other House was invited to reject one or the other. In the event, the proposition permitting research was carried, and an amendment moved by Lord Jakobovits, with support from the Duke of Norfolk and the Bishops of London and Southwark, which sought to restrict such research to so-called spare embryos as a result of infertility treatment, was not accepted.

The Bill we are now debating contains, in clause 11 and related parts of schedule 2, provisions which, if enacted in their present form, would permit such research in specified circumstances. The Bill has returned to the House in the way in which the Lords preferred it, with authority for research contained in clause 11.

The Government are anxious to give the House precisely the same choice as was presented in another place. We are therefore arranging for amendments to be drafted by parliamentary counsel which would have the effect of deleting research from the functions of the new authority. The amendments will be tabled by my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord President in the interests of securing orderly debate. He will table them in his capacity as Leader of the House to offer hon. Members the same clear choice as noble Members in the other place had and not as an expression of his opinion or of Government policy. I do not know how he will exercise his vote, but he is best placed to put before the House the choice that was rightly put before Members in the other place.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Will my right hon. and learned Friend consider establishing a Special Standing Committee to consider these complex issues? People on both sides of the argument who are concerned about the issue should have the benefit of the detailed examination that that procedure provides. Furthermore, will he consider a free vote on provisions relating to regulations? Those provisions could become open-ended, because they could extend research beyond the point at which prohibition currently stands.

Mr. Clarke: I understand my hon. Friend's first suggestion. I recall that a Special Standing Committee was established to consider the Mental Health Act 1983. It was useful in helping members of the Committee to form views on issues that cut across party political lines and covered detailed ethical and other judgments. The Bill is before the House after one of the longest periods of consultation and discussion that I can recall. When we asked the Warnock committee to consider the subject in 1982, neither my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield nor anyone else believed that it would be 1990 before a Bill was being given its Second Reading.

Given all the private Members' Bills that have been before the House, hon. Members have had quite a few opportunities to debate the subject. It will be the general will of the House—this can be argued on the timetable motion—that key decisions should be taken on the Floor of the House before the Bill is considered by a Standing Committee.

In Committee, Ministers will seek to reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Cash) that they will not take to themselves open-ended, wide regulation-making powers. We shall be specific about the circumstances in which we contemplate such powers being used.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): The House will welcome the Secretary of State's remarks about key issues being discussed on the Floor of the House. Is he aware of the deep feeling in the country that the Department and the Secretary of State should be responsible for this complex issue? They should be answerable to hon. Members on these vital matters.

Mr. Clarke: I shall deal with the nature of the authority, but I think that I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman has made. It has been argued that, rather than having a completely independent authority, Ministers should be responsible for these matters. We decided against that, because it would place Ministers and the House in a permanently difficult position if, as a semi-political issue, it was said that Ministers should take this or that view on medical or scientific matters. The Secretary of State, who is answerable to the House, and having consulted ministerial colleagues, will appoint members of the authority. The code of practice of the authority will have to be submitted to the Secretary of State and laid before the House, but some independence, in medical and scientific matters is in the interests of Parliament and the Secretary of State.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the Secretary of State confirm that the proposals in the Bill are in conflict with two resolutions that were carried last year by the European Parliament?

Mr. Clarke: The proposals in the Bill will contain two options, and it will be for the House to decide how much weight to give the proposals of the European Parliament. I am aware of the reports from the European Commission, but they reach no clear or specific views. It is unwise for the European Parliament to reach conclusions intended to determine the policies of all member states. I am an extremely keen European, but I cannot conceive of a common European policy on this subject. The day that the states of Denmark, Spain, Italy and Britain reach a common view on abortion, embryo research and so on will be a considerable surprise to me and to many others.

Before continuing with the issue of embryo research, may I draw attention to one significant change made to the Bill in the other place that would significantly affect the scope of licensing arrangements for embryo research? On Report in the other place, the Government tabled amendments, principally to clause 1, to ensure that the licensing provisions of the Bill cover research, storage and treatment not only from the point where a two-cell zygote appears for the first time—a useful point of reference that can be observed clearly—but the period of up to 30 hours when the human egg is in the process of fertilisation after the mixing of sperm and eggs. That amendment commanded general support in the other place and is useful clarification of the scope of the new authority. I hope that the House will agree that it satisfactorily resolves an issue that has concerned many members of the public since the Bill was first presented.

I should draw attention to the clear and tight restrictions that will confine the use of embryos. Clause 3 makes it clear that no person shall bring about the creation of an embryo or use an embryo, except in pursuance of a treatment, storage or research licence issued by the new authority. I am confident that all hon. Members would like to prohibit certain activities, which include cloning or the creation of hybrids or other science fiction possibilities. There can be little doubt that infringing such prohibitions by attempting to create hybrids should attract the severe penalties provided in the Bill.

The arguments of both sides on embryo research will be most properly deployed if we accept the advice of my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House for a day's debate on the Floor of the House in the next few weeks.

The principal consideration of those who oppose embryo research is that any embryo, even the large percentage lost through natural processes during a woman's menstrual cycle, is a potential human being with the prospect of life. Any idea of research into an embryo at the early stages of life is repugnant to many of our constituents and to many hon. Members. They believe that the law should prohibit those activities because they affect the rights of a third party—the human embryo—whose existence should override other lesser rights. I do not share those views, but I look forward to listening to them with respect and attention when they are deployed. The

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arguments in favour of research are becoming well known to most hon. Members. There is broad consensus among medical and scientific opinion that such research should be permitted and that, if Parliament prohibits it, scientists will either turn to other avenues of study or go to countries where early research is allowed.

There are five main purposes for which it is argued that research involving human embryos is medically essential and ethically justified: first, to promote advances in the treatment of infertility; secondly, to increase knowledge about the causes of congenital disease; thirdly, to increase knowledge about the causes of miscarriage; fourthly, to develop more effective techniques of contraception; and, fifthly, to develop methods of detecting the presence of gene or chromosome abnormalities in embryos before implantation. Research in this country into pre-implantation diagnosis is well advanced, and I understand that the first pregnancies involving that method may soon come to term. This technique could take embryo research beyond the treatment of infertility and into the prevention of inherited genetic diseases such as muscular dystrophy and cystic fibrosis.

I suppose that on Second Reading I should do no more than set out as part of the framework the arguments on both sides which will be debated on the Floor of the House within the generous time scale proposed by my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House. I am sure that, when we make our decision, hon. Members will wish to consider all those arguments, both for and against, in considerably more detail, not just on their medical and scientific merits but on ethical grounds. It is important that each side respects the strongly held views of the other side. Neither can claim to have exclusive moral virtue on its side. Both profoundly believe that their judgment is ethically correct and will argue and vote with a clear conscience for the best solution and the legal framework that they think is best for our society.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): On the subject of laying the scientific facts objectively before the House, will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that no cures for any inherited genetic diseases have been found as a result of any experimentation? Does he accept that leading geneticists, such as Professor Hymie Gordon and Professor Ron Taylor, who holds the chair in obstetrics and gynaecology at St Thomas's hospital, have all confirmed that other primates on which this research can be conducted are available—not human beings?

Mr. Clarke: I am sure that those who are carrying out the research are all well motivated and responsible scientists who are doing that work only because they believe that they can alleviate human suffering and can discover much more about the nature of genetically inherited disease and therefore try to avoid it.

The hon. Gentleman's second point is a controversial one which, no doubt, will be raised in argument on the Floor of the House. There is no scientific agreement on this point. A broad body of scientific opinion is sure that experiments with human embryos are required. That is obviously a matter of judgment and of fact upon which scientific opinion is divided and about which we shall hear much more.

In the cause of our concern about research into embryology, we must not overlook the other important parts of the Bill. Under clause 8, the authority will have the important function of advising Ministers about new developments with infertility and embryology. Since the publication of the Warnock report, there have already been major advances in what is possible. I am sure that future Secretaries of State will take full opportunity of seeking the authority's advice on such matters. The authority will oversee a detailed scheme of licensing and a large portion of the Bill is given over to spelling this out in considerable detail.

There are provisions in clause 11 to 22 for the granting of licences by licence committees of the authority; for varying, suspending and revoking licences; and for appeals to be made to the full authority against decisions made by licence committees. The authority may also issue directions on matters such as the information to be recorded by licensed treatment centres where import or export of embryos or gametes is involved.

Clause 25 and 26 require the authority to produce a code of practice for the guidance of those seeking and holding licences. That code of practice will need to be agreed by Ministers and, once agreed, Ministers will place it before Parliament. Drawing up that code of practice will be one of the most important tasks for the authority in its initial phase. I envisage that it will cover matters such as the counselling of patients and donors, the confidentiality of records and the collection of data.

Clause 25 contains another important new provision, which was added to the Bill on Report in another place, on the welfare of children who might be born as a result of the treatments to be licensed by the Bill and any existing children. This arises from the question whether single women, for example, should be allowed to have infertility treatment. The consultant considering licensed treatment is required to take account of these welfare issues in deciding whether licensed treatment is suitable. The code of practice must offer him guidance in taking this decision. The addition of this requirement was greeted enthusiastically on all sides in another place, and I am sure that this improvement will significantly add to the legislation's effectiveness.

Schedule 1 deals in detail with the composition, powers and functions of the authority. It makes it clear that its chairman and deputy chairman must be lay people, in the sense of being neither doctors nor embryologists, nor should they be, or have been, directly involved in commissioning or conducting embryo research. Of the remaining membership, the majority, but no more than two thirds, should also be lay people. Together with other ministerial colleagues, I shall devote a great deal of attention to securing a careful balance in the membership of the new authority, which will have a United Kingdom remit.

The authority will have an important job of public service to carry out. Our objective is that, when the legislation is enacted, it should assume its full powers as soon as practicable, and we are working towards a target date of summer 1991. I hope that the new authority will begin to meet as soon as Royal Assent is given, as it will have much preparatory work to do. In the meantime, I very much hope that the interim licensing authority, sponsored by the Medical Research Council and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, can continue the work that it began at our request in 1985.

That interim body, as it is now called, has shown that an effective system of licensing embryo research and IVF can be maintained. Its members have found themselves facing a longer task than I am sure they first expected and their work load has grown. I pay tribute to their energy and determination in holding the fort and upholding standards until the time was right for the Government to introduce their own measure to create a statutory licensing system.

Clauses 27 to 29 deal with the status of children born as a result of treatments to be licensed by the Bill and carry forward the work which has already begun in the Family Law Reform Act 1987, which provides that an AID child born to a married woman is to be treated as the child of her husband. As a result of an amendment on Third Reading in another place, in the case of so-called social fathers—I know of no better description for the male partner where an unmarried couple are living together—of children born as a result of donation, where an unmarried couple are treated together, the man is to be treated as the father of the child.

Given the commitment of the House to the family, it is right that, where treatment is given to unmarried couples after consideration of the welfare of the children which I have described, social fathers should be required to undertake full responsibilities, especially that of maintaining the child to whose birth they were party.

Time does not allow me to deal with the Bill's many other provisions, which obviously will be carefully considered in Standing Committee, quite apart from the major issues that are to be considered on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Dalyell : Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman prepared to put it on record that there has been no complaint whatever about the licensing authority's interim work?

Mr. Clarke: As far as I am aware, that is a fact. The authority took on an extremely difficult task in this highly sensitive and controversial matter. No one has complained about the way in which it has carried out its responsibilities, given the position in which it was placed.

I remind the House why the Government consider it right—indeed essential—to introduce the Bill. At present, there is no statutory regulation of the treatments to be licensed under the Bill and no statutory regulation, even if Parliament decides that it should continue, of research involving human embryos. Whatever reservations or opposition some people may feel both about the treatments or, more usually, the research, there seems to be universal support for the need to provide a clear and comprehensive system of statutory control. After several unsuccessful private Members' measures, it is our duty to decide what the framework of law should be.

It is worth perhaps pausing to reflect on the size of the step that is being taken in relation to statutory regulation of medical treatment. There are only a few other examples of such control, including abortion, female circumcision and, following the legislation which we enacted last year, human organ donation. In none of those examples, however, is the treatment regulated. In that sense, what the Bill seeks to do is very much a first.

Few people would dispute the idea that it is normally wise to leave doctors entirely free to carry out their clinical tasks to the best of their ability without feeling the need always to look over their shoulder to see whether they are infringing some regulation or statutory provision. It is therefore a sign of the particular seriousness of the issues which arise from these new techniques that we have taken this unprecedented step.

The other main reason for introducing the Bill is the lack of any adequate statutory framework to cover the status and legal position of children born as a result of treatments licensed under the Bill. Whatever our views about the treatments, I am sure that all hon. Members will agree that it is wrong that there should be uncertainty about the position of children born as a result of them.

Everyone, of almost every opinion, believes that we need a Bill. The Second Reading of this Bill will pave the way for the detailed consideration of these matters and will enable the House to reach the decisions that must now be taken one way or the other so that everybody knows where we stand as a society.

The Government have already made it clear that we intend to help to secure that aim by proposing splitting and timetable motions for the orderly debate of any amendments that may be tabled. These are matters for my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord President of the Council, who will be speaking to the procedure motions later this evening. My earnest wish, which I believe is shared by all hon. Members, is that the House will take full advantage of the opportunity to reflect calmly and deeply on these important matters and come to a clear and sustainable conclusion one way or the other in the end. That is what is expected of us by those outside the House, and it is our duty to live up to that expectation.

5.30 pm

Ms. Jo Richardson (Barking): The Secretary of State said at the beginning of his speech that the Bill had taken some time to reach the House of Commons; he was right. Ever since the Warnock report, the first consultation paper and the White Paper, a great deal of pressure has been mounted, not only by those who want to prohibit research but by those of us who want research to be continued in a controlled, regulated and monitored way. I pay tribute to the work of Baroness Warnock, which has been most valuable and which has been the subject of great acclaim in this House and in the House of Lords. We owe Baroness Warnock and her committee a debt.

The long waiting period has, I believe, led us to a greater understanding of the issue—that is certainly true in my case—but it has been an anxious time for scientists and clinicians and especially for infertile couples who have had to wait to know their fate. I am sure that other hon. Members will have received a large number of letters from infertile couples or those anxious that their child may have a chance of excaping some hereditary abnormality, saying that they may at least stand a chance of having a healthy, happy baby.

We have received an enormous amount of material, too, from interest groups on both sides of the argument. I do not think that I can recall ever having seen such mountains of paper. I pay tribute to those bodies for sending us the material, which has been extremely useful. We have received material from distinguised scientists, from doctors and from prestigious organisations such as the royal colleges and the Royal Society. Theologians on

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both sides of the argument have also written to us. We should all put on record our thanks for all the help that we have had in trying to understand this complex issues.

Their Lordships have now completed their consideration of the Bill and many wise words have been said in the other place over the past four months. The Bill first reached the House of Lords in December and emerged only a couple of weeks ago, on 21 March. I am much heartened that their Lordships should have decided so positively—in a vote of almost three to one—in favour of continued research, and I hope that right hon. and hon. Members will have noted that response.

At last, then, the Bill has reached us. From the flavour of his speech, I judge that the Secretary of State shares my hope that we shall conduct our debate in the same measured way as their Lordships did, even though to many the issue is emotive. My position is clear: I hope that we shall vote decisively to allow research to continue under the strict rules of the new statutory licensing authority.

I do not propose to delve into the technical complexities of embryo research. We shall have an opportunity to do that when we come to debate clause 11 in more detail. Instead, I want to consider the overall issue without resorting to the detail. Research has been going on for more than 20 years. We sometimes forget that and think that it all started just before Baroness Warnock's committee was set up.

It is entirely right that a strong independent statutory licensing authority should be set up to supersede the interim licensing authority, sponsored by the Medical Research Council and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaelocologists, which came into being five years ago on a non-statutory, voluntary basis. That voluntary authority has done an excellent job in monitoring research, and its report on research, published last November, is a valuable document, which I commend to those hon. Members who have not read it.

I think that we should first dispose of the horror stories told by some who say that scientists are eager to engage in cloning and other unethical practices. Reproductive technology, like all technology, is open to abuse as well as use, and the prevention of abuse is a major purpose of the Bill. As I said , research has been taking place in Britain for 20 years with no real controls. It is the scientists and doctors involved—who, in my opinion, have behaved most responsibly—who have been calling for legislation that will control research, and that is what the Bill that has reached us from the House of Lords would achieve.

The Bill would outlaw genetic engineering and cross-species fertilisation, with the important exception of the hamster test—an important clinical technique used to assess male fertility, which was the subject of a debate in the House of Lords. The World Health Organisation warmly commends the test and it is accepted throughout the world as the most accurate test available. There is no possibility of the fertilisation having developmental potential because the human and animal cells are genetically incompatible. I hope that hon. Members will bear that in mind and put the horror stories that we so often hear out of their heads.

Outside the technicalities of research, I know that some people are worried about whether, from whatever ethical standpoint they have, any research should continue or whether, by allowing research to be carried out up to 14 days, they put into question their view that a human being exists from the moment of conception. The question whether an embryo of 14 days—or, for that matter, of one day—should be accorded the status of human being has exercised minds much more brilliant than mine. The board of social responsibility of the Synod of the Church of England said in its report as early as 1984:

> "We have already expressed our view that a fertilised ovum should be treated with respect, but that its life is not so sacrosanct that it should be accorded the same status as a human being".

I am sure that hon. Members will have read the interesting speech on this matter by the Archbishop of York.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Is the hon. Lady aware that 700 clergy have written to us to dissociate themselves from the views of the Archbishop of York, with which they totally disagree?

Ms. Richardson: I have never suggested that all the theologians are on the same side. I have simply quoted, from a Library research document, what the Anglican Church said through its Synod, in 1984. Of course, people have different views on both sides of the ethical and moral argument—if we want to call it that. Some people have changed their minds over the past few years.

While for some the issue presents a big dilemma, I must state that many millions of fertilised eggs die naturally every day. Taking the trouble to identify the fertilised egg with the most chance of being implanted and producing a much wanted baby is surely to be welcomed. Research that helps to identify that embryo holds out hope for the thousands of women—one in eight of the women in this country that we know of—who are infertile and want a child. The many women who have benefited from research so far have been able to achieve motherhood when it was denied them before.

As research progresses it can offer a choice to women who previously had no choice but to remain childless. Research also gives hope to the large number of women who have multiple miscarriages. They are perhaps even more stressed and pained than those who have not been able to conceive. Research into miscarriages is beginning to show that they can be helped to carry through to term.

Perhaps the most disputed and emotive part of embryo research is that which is working towards helping a woman to give birth to a healthy baby. No one questions the joy that many parents derive from caring for their handicapped children. I am president of an organisation in my constituency called the good neighbour unit scheme. That small organisation was set up by half a dozen parents of handicapped children who met from time to time to give each other support. Because of my close connection with that organisation, I have seen the depth of love that they give to their children.

However, we must not overlook the desperate strain that those parents face when caring for their disabled children and looking after their families, perhaps including the disabled child's brothers and sisters. I have talked to all those families, and not one of them would have preferred their handicapped child not to be born whole and healthy and free from pain and frustration. I do not question their caring or love for the child who was born to them. However, each of those families told me how much they would have preferred their Liza or Jenny to be born whole, happy and free of disease.

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): I am following the hon. Lady's argument with great care. Obviously the parents of those children would have liked them to have the great blessing of full physical health as most of us have in this place. Surely she is not saying that the parents of those children would rather not have them to look after.

Ms. Richardson: I hope that the hon. Lady will listen to me. I did not say that. I simply said that the parents of those children have told me that they wished that their children, whom they love, were healthier. Of course we all agree about that. We are trying to ensure that in future they have a choice and that children are free from pain and frustration.

We can all deplore the restrictions on funding for research to alleviate and perhaps cure the cruel suffering that many children face. However, it must be right that embryo research should continue with increasing understanding of the genetic defects that cause such cruel suffering. The aim of much of the research is to diagnose genetic disorders and to provide those at risk with an element of choice.

No patient is forced to participate. Those who want to take a chance are free to do so. After all, an amniocentesis test can take place later in pregnancy. I find it very difficult to understand those who deny the opportunity for tests at a much earlier stage. No one will prevent a woman from bearing a handicapped child if she and her partner are ready to undertake that burden. However, neither should anyone compel a woman to run the risk of having a handicapped child if she does not want that. Outlawing research would have that effect. We bear a heavy responsibility in reaching our decision.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone): Will the hon. Lady clear up a confusion on that point? The parents concerned are not being offered the choice of a child being born handicapped or healthy. They are merely being offered the choice of the child who might be born handicapped not being born at all. That is selective quality control of the human race. If the hon. Lady wants to defend that, we should be clear that that is what it is.

Ms. Richardson: I do not follow that line at all. Research offers the woman and her partner, who may perhaps already have a handicapped child, the opportunity to eliminate the hereditary gene or disorder and so enable the couple to have a whole and healthy child. We should allow the woman that opportunity and that choice.

I remind the House that the first thing that a doctor or midwife says when he or she sees the mother after the birth of a baby is, "Don't worry. The baby's okay. It's whole and healthy." So many women and their partners want to know immediately that they have a happy and healthy child even though a defect might become apparent later.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms. Richardson: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will allow me to make progress, and I know that he wants to speak later.

Before I discuss other points about the Bill, I want to refer to the dangers of allowing the separate subject of abortion to be included in this Bill. Those who are fervent in their desire to restrict women's choice by reducing the grounds for an abortion and the number of weeks beyond which a woman may be denied an abortion have had more than enough vehicles in the shape of private Members' legislation to argue their case. There have been many attempts over the past 20 years, and traditionally the House has kept that issue to Back-Bench opportunities for legislation.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms. Richardson: No. I am sorry, but I shall not give way at the moment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman), many others and I deplore the fact that the Government have apparently given in to pressure from the vociferous lobby that has already sought to add its personal prejudices and beliefs to a number of unsuitable Bills. Indeed, I wondered at one stage whether it was going to include its prejudices in the poll tax. The Government have allowed the Bill's long title to be extended to enable abortion to be considered.

Mrs. Winterton: Give way.

Ms. Richardson: I shall give way in a moment. Just be patient.

The Secretary of State for Health did not mention that point, but it is important that we should consider it. The subject of abortion is so far removed from the overall intention of the Bill, which is to control research, that amendments, to any of the clauses are impossible. There will have to be new clauses and new matter. To tack abortion on to the end of the Bill, which as it stands is a humanitarian step forward, will serve only to confuse the issue of research and increase emotions.

Mrs. Winterton: Is the hon. Lady aware that the Abortion Act 1967, which was introduced by the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), got on to the statute book only because the previous socialist Government gave time for a private Member's Bill?

Ms. Richardson: The hon. Lady is perfectly right. The Labour Government of the day allowed time for a private Member's Bill to go on to the statute book. It was not tacked onto the end of a public Bill. Please let us be clear about this matter. We have a public Bill. It could be about anything. It could be about electricity privatisation, or it could be the poll tax Bill. *[Interruption.]* I am not being flippant. It is a public Bill; it is not a private Member's Bill. It is now proposed that the long title should enable private Members' legislation to be tacked on to the end.

Miss Widdecombe *rose*——

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South) *rose*——

Ms. Richardson: I am not giving way again. The two subjects are not the same.

Mr. Alton: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms. Richardson: I am not giving way again. I have given way already, and I am taking up the time for Back-Bench Members.

On the difficulty of marrying the two pieces of legislation together, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill covers Northern Ireland, but the Abortion Act 1967 does not cover Northern Ireland. I do not know how we shall get around that.

[Ms. Richardson]

The House of Lords behaved sensibly and correctly. It took Lord Houghton's Bill alongside and not as part of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill, and debates were thus conducted in a sensible and comprehensive way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, South (Ms. Primarolo) has provided the House with a similar opportunity. She introduced a ten-minute Bill that is now before the House, and amendments on abortion would best be discussed under her Bill, quite separately from this one. Under her Bill, we could address the problems of late abortions, about which many hon. Members are concerned, we could talk about better access to pregnancy testing, we could examine more information to encourage women to come forward as soon as possible, we could examine the reduction of delays in referral and treatment once women come forward, and so on. But those are not matters for a Bill about human fertilisation and embryology—they are separate issues.

We learned from the press over the weekend that the Government may use the Houghton Bill as a means of facilitating debate. As it stands and as it was passed in the House of Lords, that Bill is a progressive measure and is worthy of consideration as an entirely different piece of legislation. If we take abortion—I have the feeling that I am up against the combined might of the Government and those who are fanatically determined to include it; and I am not necessarily including all members of the Government—there is no guarantee that the Bill will go through as Lord Houghton proposes. In itself, it is a progressive measure, but there will be nothing to stop Members of the House of Commons who are opposed to abortion, who want to bring down the upper limit on abortion from, say, 28 weeks to 18 weeks, from trying also to alter the grounds of Lord Houghton's private Member's Bill. Whatever the House decides, it is unlikely or could be unlikely that Lord Houghton's Bill will survive intact.

I hope that right hon. and hon. Members will not be deluded into believing that they will see the issue settled once and for all. The Government will have set a precedent that will encourage abortion amendments to future Government Bills. I appeal to the Government and to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and beyond you to Mr. Speaker, even at this stage not to allow the Bill to be confused and overshadowed by an unconnected issue.

Mr. Alton: Before the hon. Lady leaves that point——

Ms. Richardson: I have not finished yet. I want to make one further point about abortion.

The Labour party has long been on record as in support of the Abortion Act 1967. Although we acknowledged the right of conscience, successive annual conferences have been clearly on record in support of a woman's right to choose what to do with her own body. If we are faced with the abortion issue, I appeal to Opposition Members, at a time when there is greater understanding that women want to make choices for themselves, to heed conference decisions and not to ignore women's wishes.

Mr. A. E. P. Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Will my hon. Friend confirm that it has been a long-standing tradition of the Labour movement—perhaps its oldest tradition—that, on ethical questions of faith and morals, the conscience consideration comes first? From her acquaintance with her own party, does she not know that whatever party decisions are made, conscience considerations still weigh very heavily with some of her hon. Friends?

Ms. Richardson: I have said—and I mean it—that the conscience clause exists. We allow hon. Members to make up their own mind. We have a free vote. However, I remind hon. Members that there is a conference decision on this matter. Here in the House of Commons, it would be good if hon. Members considered the many people who, on a different wavelength, have thought about their attitude to abortion. I beg my hon. Friends to consider that women within the Labour party and outside it feel extremely strongly about a male-dominated House of Commons taking a view on that point.

Mr. Alton: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms. Richardson: I have given way many times. I ask the hon. Gentleman to let me finish my speech. *[Interruption.]* All hon. Members wish to speak—they can have a go later. I wish to refer to one or two other issues in the Bill that concern me.

The Bill needs careful examination in respect of the composition and fundings of the licensing authority. It is only right that those directly affected by research and treatment—that is, infertile people and those who carry genetic disorders—are represented on the authority. I hope that matter will be considered carefully in Committee. Women who are infertile and who want to ensure that their child will be free from a hereditary genetic disorder that they may pass on, as well as people from the National Association for the Childless, are entitled to be considered. They all have a view about this matter. They will want to be assured that their views are taken into account. Thirty-six organisations subscribe to the prestigious organisation, the Genetic Interest Group, including some that are concerned with a particular hereditary disease. They too, want an opportunity to contribute. I hope that the Secretary of State can give an undertaking that he will consider people in those groups as well as organisations such as Mencap.

Another point that I raise with the Secretary of State is the current proposal in the Bill that the licensing authority should raise funds from clinics. That seems to be quite wrong. The full costs should be met from the public purse. Inevitably, charges will be passed on to patients. There is a serious lack of provision within the National Health Service for infertility treatment, with only two NHS-funded IVF centres in the country. Many patients are forced to resort to the private sector. Such extra charges amount to discrimination against the infertile and, in effect, a tax on infertility. There is considerable anxiety that clinics may not be able to continue.

I am also concerned because the Bill does not include GIFT—gamete intra-fallopian transfer. In many ways, it is close to in vitro fertilisation, which is covered. The difference between the two techniques is that in GIFT, fertilisation takes place inside the woman, whereas in IVF, it takes place in the laboratory. GIFT has been under discussion for many reasons and many people feel that it should be included in the Bill and properly controlled. I believe that it would be dangerous to leave the technique out of the Bill. The clinicians involved in the treatment are concerned, and the interim licensing authority has made it clear that any such Bill should take GIFT into account.

Unless GIFT is included in the Bill, couples who are considering whether to undergo the procedure will not have the statutory right to counselling, for example. Such copies need help in considering the risk that the procedure may result in a multiple birth and the implications of that for them. I do not know why the Government have not included GIFT, but I hope that we shall have an explanation from them.

Finally, I reiterate how very much I welcome the Bill. It has been a long time coming and relates to something that causes a lot of emotion on both sides of the argument and will continue to do so. I hope that we shall consider it in Committee as clearly and in as measured a way as we can, in trying to reach a correct measure that is understandable to the general public. I hope that right hon. and hon. Members will give the Bill an unopposed Second Reading so that we can do just that. I profoundly hope that abortion amendments will not be tabled. If they are tabled, I hope that they will not be taken. When the time comes to discuss clause 11, on the contentious issue of allowing research to continue, I hope that hon. Members will vote as resoundingly as did their Lordships.

I repeat what I have reiterated so many times today: that controlled research will bring hope and perhaps the chance of fulfilment—I put it no higher than that—to infertile couples and to those who are carrying genetic disorders. Let us not deny them that hope.

6.2 pm

Sir Bernard Braine (Castle Point): Human embryo experimentation is an emotive and controversial issue, raising questions which, for many of us, strike at the very heart of our beliefs about human life. Therefore, I begin by congratulating the Government on giving us a free vote on whether to allow such experimentation or not. I congratulate them also on providing the Bill with a long title that will enable us to table amendments to make a decision at long last on the scandal of late abortions, on which issue the House has pronounced before. Because of the tricks of some people, and because we were dealing with private Members' legislation, our will was frustrated.

On both these issues, which were previously left to private Members' legislation, the majority in the House has been repeatedly frustrated. That must not happen again, and on that I should like to give the Government a mild warning. I hope that there is no truth in the press hints of the past few days that the Government will seek to table an amendment on the Houghton proposal on late abortion that would have the effect of allowing abortions up to birth. That would be totally unacceptable. The mere suggestion that it might happen—I hope that there is no truth in it—would cause immense anger in the country.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Government will not table any amendments on that subject that express a policy decision on behalf of the Government because the Government do not have a collective view on the Infant Life (Preservation) Act 1929, or its amendment. We must consider how we marshal the debate because, beyond doubt, hon. Members will want to discuss pro-Houghton, anti-Houghton, 26-week, 24-week, 22-week amendments and so on. The problem for my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House is how to ensure that we can have an ordered debate because, no doubt, the House will have many propositions on which to vote on a free vote.

Sir Bernard Braine: I am glad that I have drawn that assurance from my right hon. and learned Friend. We are all grateful, because what he has now said is clear. I should make it plain straight away that I am speaking not only for myself but for many of my hon. Friends who, on this issue, come from all parties, when I say that we shall not vote against the Bill on Second Reading. We shall reserve our position until we see how the votes proceed in Committee on the Floor of the House.

At long last, we have the Bill for which we in the all-party pro-life group have been calling since the publication of the Warnock report six years ago. As we know, the report recommended that experiments on human embryos should be allowed up to 14 days after fertilisation. However, what is often forgotten—it has not been mentioned so far this afternoon—is that the Warnock committee was not unanimous; there were sizeable dissenting voices. One of my advisers, who was a member of the Warnock committee, produced a minority report that came out against all destructive human embryo experimentation. Not surprisingly—as I was here at the time I can well remember this—the report was coolly received in both Houses of Parliament.

Let me come straight to the heart of the matter. What is the human embryo? Incidentally, the Warnock report refused to answer that question and skipped over it as though it did not really matter. As a consequence, much of the debate surrounding this issue has been concerned with the possible benefits of such research. However, for me and many others, that is the wrong starting point. Before talking about benefits, we must decide upon what or whom we are experimenting.

I ask myself two questions. First, is the embryo human? The answer is undoubtedly yes. It comes from a human sperm and a human egg, so what else could it be but human? Secondly, is it alive? Again, I have to answer yes. It is growing and developing at a tremendous rate. It has an orientation towards growth and is thus different from the previously inert sperm and egg. The simple fact is that the human embryo is a tiny human being, which has all the potential to become a foetus, a baby, a child and an adult, given a favourable environment and appropriate nutrients.

Having established what the human embryo is, I should like to make clear the position on experimentation and research of the all-party pro-life group, of which I have been chairman for some years. We are not against all experimentation on human embryos. We are not against scientific research. What is in question is not research as such, but destructive research. The distinction is important. We have no problem with therapeutic experimentation that will help a particular embryo to live and grow.

What is immoral, in our view, is experimentation that uses one embryo—that is, another human being—as a means to an end. We are not against experimentation on human subjects. If a scientist requires human cells, he takes a graft and cultivates the cells. Provided that consent has been given, we have no objection to that. Such an experiment would not be fatal. We object to experimentation that kills the patient.

That is not an extreme position, as it is sometimes portrayed. Rather, it is the only logical and responsible position to take. We are not seeking to place unreasonable restrictions on scientists. We are not saying, "No research." All that we are saying is that such scientists should abide by the same principles of medical ethics as

[Sir Bernard Braine]

apply to every other area of medicine. No other area of medical research demands the right to perform destructive research upon human subjects. No other area of research claims that progress cannot be made without the right to destroy. No other area of research comes to Parliament to ask us to suspend the usual rules of medical ethics for their benefit so that they can use human beings as they would use experimental animals.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): Tens of thousands of families have benefited from the pioneering research that has been carried out by Patrick Steptoe and Robert Edwards. Can my right hon. Friend name anyone who has suffered from such research?

Sir Bernard Braine: No, but my hon. Friend has not been listening to what I have been saying. His point has little to do with experimentation on the human embryo. I do not wish to detain the House for long, but I wish to set out clearly—beyond any doubt whatsoever—where the all-party pro-life group stands on this issue. We have been frustrated for six years. We have succeeded in obtaining majorities on the Benches of the House for our beliefs and for what we stand for, only to be frustrated. Therefore, I wish to be brief, sharp and to the point.

The Bill, as it has come to us from another place, proposes research up to 14 days. My first question is, 14 days after what? Something must have started 14 days previously to enable us to begin evaluating time. What was it that happened? The sperm fertilised the egg and a completely new entity was formed, directed towards its own growth and development. That was the beginning of a new human life. None of us claims that it is now fully formed. The only difference is one of size, not of humanity. Indeed, I would charge those who support embryo experimentation with improperly discriminating against another human being on the grounds of size.

What can be said of this proposed 14-day limit? If Parliament were to sanction 14 days, would that be the end of it? I think not. Already some leading experimenters tell us that they want to go further. For example, Professor Bob Williamson has said:

> "It should perhaps be noted here that organogenesis—(that is the development of the organs) . . . for the most part occurs at between 14 and 28 days of embryonic development. It is this area of research, which is central to the understanding of congenital malformation, which in my view would be most inhibited were a strict 14 day rule to be implemented."

In its paper on the development of the human conceptus, the Royal Society lists the possible benefits of research from day one to the end of the fourth week. That is well beyond 14 days. Why are such benefits listed when we are supposed to be dealing with a limit of 14 days? The answer is that Baroness Warnock herself stated on the day that her report was published in 1984 that 14 days

> "would do for a beginning."

That is what we are faced with here.

Therefore, the conclusion that I reach is that, far from a stringent control on experimentation, 14 days will be the thin end of the wedge. I cannot accept that the Bill constitutes strict guidelines. On the contrary, apart from cloning, genetic engineering and producing animal hybrids, the scientist will be able to do what he likes under the Bill. It is laudable that those extreme forms of human manipulation will be outlawed, but there is nothing at all to protect embryos from destructive procedures.

When one bases decision-making on the proposed benefits of a type of research, rather than its morality, one will always be under pressure to extend that limit when greater benefits are envisaged. That is no way to make law. The anticipated benefits of research seem compelling, but they are misleading. The case for permitting embryo research rests heavily on the benefits that it will allegedly bring in prevention of handicap.

Let us consider the word "prevention". The normal use of the word suggests that the person in question avoids a disease. However, the word as employed in this context has changed its meaning. Here it means eliminating the individual with the disease and in that way preventing it. We all want to see diseases and handicaps eliminated, but this is totally different from preventing the handicapped from living. That is what is involved in embryo research. It is the "search and destroy" mentality—searching out the imperfect and destroying them just because they do not match up to our ideas of perfection. On that basis, Beethoven would never have been born.

It is a fallacy, too, that without destructive research on the human embryo, research into genetic diseases will be brought to a halt. Great advances have been made in treatment of genetic and chromosomal diseases without the use of human embryos. Crucial developments in sickle cell anaemia, cystic fibrosis, muscular dystrophy and congenital adrenal hyperplasia have all been achieved without human embryo experimentation. Genuine help for sufferers and families will come from advances in treatment of the disorder, not from the destruction of those who are identified at the embryonic stage. The pro-research group Progress has admitted:

> "Research using human pre-embryos is not, and never has been, concerned with the treatment of genetic or chromosomal abnormalities".

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Bernard Braine: On the question of language I would point out another semantic difference that has entered this debate. That is the term "pre-embryo". It did not appear in the Warnock report. One would look for it in vain in any medical dictionary. The distinguished scientific journal *Nature* recommended the banning of the term and said:

> "Put simply, this usage is a cop-out, a way of pretending that the public conflict about IVF and other innovations in human embryology can be made to go away by means of an appropriate nomenclature."

The term "pre-embryo" was invented to confuse and baffle and to dehumanise the early embryo.

Let us also get rid of the fallacy that all doctors and scientists are in favour of destructive embryo research. I am advised by a distinguished group of scientists and doctors. I shall mention a few. Professor John Marshall is emeritus professor of clinical neurology at the university of London. He was a member of the Warnock committee and signed the expression of dissent. Another is Professor Erwin Chargaff, who is emeritus professor of biochemistry at Columbia university. He is probably one of the most distinguished figures in medicine in the United States. His work in the 1940s provided crucial information that was to lead to Watson and Crick's formulation of a model of DNA. Professor Sir John Dewhurst was president of the

Royal College of Obstretricians and Gynaecologists and is now emeritus professor at Queen Charlotte's hospital in London. I could keep the House here all night if I mentioned all the doctors who have written to me—and doubt to other hon. Members—in support of our position.

The media have created the impression that all scientists are in favour of destructive embryo research. That is a lie. I assert that here on the Floor of the House. They are not. Despite all our protests, the BBC in particular continues to peddle that line.

I am also perturbed by the proposal in the Bill to establish a statutory licensing authority. At present all the decision-making in this important area is given to a body which will be far from the reach of Parliament and the public. If I may adopt Winston Churchill's words, "Up with this we will not put."

Let us contrast the proposed procedure with the licensing of research work involving animals. In animal research, the Home Secretary has to grant a licence to the scientists involved and for each separate experimental project that they wish to conduct. That makes the Home Secretary directly responsible to the House for the licences that he issues. Even in this context the human embryo would have no more protection than the laboratory rat. The granting of licences for research involving human embryos should therefore be in the hands of the Secretary of State for Health, who in turn should be directly answerable to the House. The subject is so important that we would find no other arrangement acceptable.

May I remind the House of a few basic principles of medical ethics that have stood the test of time and are now in danger of being forgotten? I am sorry that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State did not refer to them or explain how the Bill fitted into what most people would regard as medical ethics. The Helsinki declaration states clearly:

> "In research on man the interests of science and society should never take precedence over consideration relating to the well-being of the subject."

A distinguished paediatrician, Dr. Anthony Cole wrote to me recently. He said:

> "On the question of human embryo experimentation the onus is upon those who support it to demonstrate that the interests of society and its values are not endangered."

I am not convinced that those who support such experimentation have done this or, can do so. Indeed, one leading pro-experimenter, Dr. Robert Edwards, has remarked blithely,

> "Scientists make ethics as they go along."

There is a short answer to such arrogance, and Parliament must give it. Although the issues may seem complex to the lay person, the question posed by the Bill is very simple. It is, do we favour the destruction of human life, or not?

6.19 pm

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): The members of my party, in common with those of other parties represented in this House, have a free vote on the Bill. I shall advance only my own views. I believe that they carry the support of the majority of my colleagues, but by no means all of them. In particular, I am conscious that my vocal hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) is anxious to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to put a very different point of view.

I welcome the tone of the opening speech of the Secretary of State for Health, and particularly the fact that the Bill is presented to the House with a timetable motion attached. Many right hon. and hon. Members have sat through the progress of legislation when clauses 1 and 2 have been exhaustively debated but the remainder rushed through under a guillotine, and we have long argued for such a sensible reform as the attaching of a timetable motion. If the House could proceed with more timetable motions on an agreed basis, the quality of our legislation would improve. Let us hope that the Bill sets a welcome precedent that will be followed in future.

I do not propose to speak on the arguments about abortion. The other place was sensible to keep the two issues separate. If that is not to be, and if the Government are determined to introduce a clause on the entirely different subject of abortion, I shall address myself to it at the appropriate time. Meanwhile, I shall confine my remarks to the Bill as it stands.

I read carefully and welcomed the Warnock report, which was lucidly and logically argued—but time has moved on since that report was published in 1984. I take up immediately a point made by the right hon. Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine), the Father of the House, because, unlike him, I believe that the phrase "pre-embryo" has a definitive and useful meaning that helps to clarify our debates. A paper submitted by the Medical Research Council makes this point:

> "In vitro fertilisation has made the early stages of development more important to scientists and as a consequence there is a need for a precise term to denote the conceptus in the first fourteen days after fertilisation prior to the appearance of the 'primitive streak' (the first sign of a human individual)."

The MRC also quotes the words of the Reverend Professor Dunstan:

> "For upwards of two thousand years the embryo has been used to denote growth of the organism in the womb from the time of the first formation of the body parts until their completion followed by the fetal stage in which the completed baby grows to viability. Now that science has revealed a vital pre-embryonic stage of cellular activity before organogenesis can begin an appropriate name should be given to it. Pre-embryo seems a proper name to describe this stage in development."

I agree, and the right hon. Member for Castle Point skipped over that point in his description of the development of the embryo.

I am in agreement also with the Archbishop of York and the majority of the bishops in the other place when they argue that, as the pre-embryo is, up to the 14th day, a cell over whose destiny no decision has yet been made as to whether it ever becomes a human being, or indeed, twins, or triplets, there is no sense in which it can be claimed that it can have an identity or a human personality, or that it can be treated as a human being in the way that the rhetoric of others attempts to suggest. Because the pre-embryo has no identity, it must have a special legal status, as set out in the Bill.

I am unable to accept some of the language used by certain organisations and lobbyists. I could even read across the Chamber a leaflet in the hands of the right hon. Member for Castle Point that used the words "human vivisection". That is a total misnomer when applied to the Bill before us.

Sir David Price (Eastleigh): Does not the hon. Gentleman make a distinction from the moment of implantation? To me, no such clear distinction has been made in any of the debates in another place. I believe that there is a distinction to be drawn between the fertilised egg

[Sir David Price]

before implantation and after implantation. Many of the problems that arise with twins, for example, occur at the earlier stage, not the latter.

Sir David Steel: The hon. Gentleman is probably perfectly correct. I do not claim any great wisdom in matters of medical science, and I acknowledge that there are different stages of development. It is quite wrong to pretend that it is one continuous, unaltering process from day one to the ninth month. The Bill attempts to draw a line at a particular recognised point.

In view of regular scientific developments and the strong views held by right hon. and hon. Members, it would be useful if the Government would accept an amendment to provide for an annual debate on, for example, a report from the licensing authority. I hope that the regulations may be altered to allow for that.

It is important that the public should be clear on the issues and not be misled as to what the Bill will and will not permit. It will not allow experiments on the foetus, cross-genetic breeding with other species, or destructive experimentation of a kind that the whole House would find repugnant. Those who argue against any research do so on the basis of establishing their own certainties—which they are perfectly entitled to do, but which they are not entitled to inflict on others.

At the time of the Warnock report, my brother, who is a research doctor, told me that an aspect of the opposition to its proposals that puzzled him was that one of the purposes of such research is to discover the reason why certain women suffer repeated, spontaneous miscarriages. I thought that those who value life, in the sense that they use the word, would also be concerned to stop the waste of life that is represented by repeated miscarriages.

I do not deny that individual scientists, doctors and clergymen, as well as right hon. and hon. Members, oppose the Bill, but we should acknowledge also that the organisations who support it include the National Association for the Childless, the Cystic Fibrosis Research Trust, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaeocologists, the Royal Society, the Medical Research Council, and the Genetic Interest Group, which comprises no fewer than 36 organisations dealing mainly with the disabled. They all urge the House to support embryonic research and its legalisation.

I conclude by quoting a letter that I received from the father of four severely handicapped children—one of whom died:

> "In many of these illnesses, our own among them, there is every hope that the couple in question can produce healthy children at subsequent pregnancies. In our case, the probability of any given pregnancy resulting in a genetically damaged child is 50 per cent. The statistical chance is the same at each subsequent pregnancy. We were just very unlucky that all four of our children were born with Von Hippel-Lindau syndrome."

He adds:

> "For our condition there is no cure, but prediction and prevention may very soon be possible. Genetic research is on the point of a breakthrough into techniques which will enable doctors to advise young parents about the future of any children as yet unborn."

He concludes:

> "This progress, and our hope for our families, is threatened by people who oppose genetic research without reservation, or much reason. Frequently their argument is based on emotion, rather than logic. I accept their right to hold those views, but I do not accept their right to impose them on others. Members of our families are having to undergo laser treatment to their eyes, kidney operations, spine operations, and brain operations. In spite of these treatments some of us go blind, and a few of us die. It is against this background that I am writing to ask for your support."

6.28 pm

Sir Charles Morrison (Devizes): Just as I agree whole-heartedly with the speech of the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), equally I whole-heartedly disagree with the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine). I regret that, not only because my right hon. Friend is an old and valued colleague, but because he speaks with the authority of Father of the House.

I want to take up two points made by my right hon. Friend. He spoke with considerable scepticism about the research that has already occurred. In comparison with my right hon. Friend, I have been in the House for a relatively short time only, but just over 20 years ago I visited a hospital in my constituency for the mentally subnormal. I was taken round by the doctor in charge and I remember passing a door to a ward through which the doctor did not lead me. I asked what was in there, but the doctor told me that we were not going into that particular ward.

I persisted with my questioning and I was told that it was a children's ward. I said that I should like to visit that ward, but the doctor told me that I would not. I persisted in my desire to see it and the doctor told me that, if I insisted, I should take a grip of myself. he was right to give me that advice, because when I went into that ward I saw human beings, none of them over the age of 10, who were virtually unrecognisable as such. Nowadays, that ward does not exist because of research undertaken in the past.

My right hon. Friend also said that, as a result of the Bill, a scientist would be able to do what he wanted. I do not believe that that is so. In future, any scientist who undertakes research will do so only under the provisions of clause 11 and schedule 2. According to my reading, the Bill certainly does not allow a scientist to do what he wants.

Mr. Cash: Does my hon. Friend agree that much of the research takes place under the aegis of self-regulation? It is precisely because the therapeutic benefit of what is done is decided by the scientists and the doctors that my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) was entirely justified in his claim—they will have the right to determine the question.

Sir Charles Morrison: I disagree with my hon. Friend. Until now, we have lived in a completely self-regulatory world, but, in future, that will not be so. It is clear that there is a disagreement about the meaning of the Bill in this respect.

The Bill is only before us because of advances in scientific and medical knowledge and because of the continuing potential for research, as well as for the application of existing or future knowledge and its consequences. There is nothing new about such research, but it has advanced so far and its application is growing to such an extent that legislation is necessary not only to regulate research on embryos and to protect the integrity of reproductive medicine, as well as the legal position of the scientist or clinician, but to take account of social and ethical considerations.

Mr. Mallon: The hon. Gentleman is making a valid point, but does he accept that, at some future date, some other people will be sitting here debating whether the advances made by experimentation mean that the 14-day stage stated in the Bill is inadequate? What type of moral dilemma will face those who must decide at what stage such experimentation becomes what some of us would regard as the killing of a human being? By discussing the Bill as it is framed, we are postponing the time when such a decision will be made.

If the experts in experimentation were to tell us today that experiments on an embryo of 17 days could well result in a cure for one of the genetic diseases, what would we then do?

Sir Charles Morrison: I wish that I could foresee what might happen about any issue. With all respect, the hon. Gentleman is making a hypothetical point. I do not know what will happen in the future, except that, if the Parliament of the day is presented with the type of question the hon. Gentleman posed, it will pass judgment upon it, just as we are being asked to pass judgment on the questions contained in the Bill. It is impossible to foresee what might happen.

Given the present stage of research and development, a recognised need for legislation has arisen. I do not believe that there is any logic in legislating to bring such research to an end. I recognise, of course, that the House must strike a balance between what is ethically acceptable and what it might be possible to achieve or attempt to achieve through research.

As a result of the Bill, the House must consider the status of human beings and their ability to reproduce their own species, as well as the status of the means by which that is achieved. It is our good fortune that the Bill has already been considered in another place. As a result, I believe that it is in pretty good order, but three matters will need further attention in Committee.

First, the cost of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority should be borne totally by the public purse. That authority will act for all people, so its costs should not be borne by a charge on the infertile, as clause 43(7) implies. Secondly, concern has been expressed to me about the authority's register of information and the anonymity of donors. The Committee will have to consider that issue carefully. Thirdly, it is important to consider GIFT—gamete intra-fallopian transfer. Although it is similar to in vitro fertilisation, IVF, it is not currently within the remit of the authority. On the basis of what I have been told, however, it should be, and there is need for regulation on this as there is in other areas.

Overall I whole-heartedly accept the need for the Bill, for an authority and for regulation. Against the background of control, there is a continuing need for research, notably on the matters mentioned by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State when he introduced the Bill.

First, it is important to improve the success rate of IVF above the present level of between 10 and 15 per cent. Secondly, improved knowledge of pre-implantation diagnosis could reduce the annual number of abortions by about 1,500. That would be welcome, since those abortions take place as a result of the detection of abnormalities at up to 16 weeks. If abnormalities stemming from genetic disorders could be detected through identifying the affected embryos, all the trauma of a late abortion could be avoided.

Thirdly, it amazes me that, even now in the 1990s, one in five pregnancies end in miscarriage. Surely more research is needed on that. Fourthly, research would also help infertility, which affects about one in 10 couples in the United Kingdom. Fifthly, research could also aid contraception, which could be of major help to family planning.

In all five of those sectors, research is being undertaken at present under the control of the interim licensing authority. I was glad that the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) drew attention to the fact that, as far as we know, no decision made by that authority has been questioned. That shows that the self-governing work which has so far been undertaken has been carried out with the greatest possible responsibility. I am convinced that research presently being undertaken must continue.

I do not believe that the Bill is a suitable vehicle for further consideration of abortion. However, if there is to be an abortion amendment, I hope that, ultimately, the House will decide to accept and agree with the provisions of the Bill introduced in another place by Lord Houghton.

Praise and the greatest possible respect are given to parents of handicapped children, which must be absolutely right. One must understand that some of those parents are opposed to research, and I am sure that this is because of the happiness brought into their lives by their children. However, with the greatest humility, I suggest that those who are even better qualified than the parents to pass judgment about research are the handicapped people themselves. What would their answer be to the question, "If you were to have a child, would you want it to be free of the affliction from which you have suffered?"

If research were to be banned in the United Kingdom, surely the benefits from such research undertaken elsewhere should also be banned from use in this country. To do otherwise would be a major hypocrisy.

Although I have two Roman Catholic grandchildren, for better or worse I am not a member of that Church, and thus its disciplines are not imposed on me. I have the luxury of being a part of the lesser certainty that exists in the Church of England. In discussions about human fertilisation and embryology, I find it impossible to conclude that there are any certainties or absolutes. However, as a Christian, I believe that benefits for mankind stem, in origin, from divine intervention. I cannot be certain about that, but that is my belief. Therefore, when research can be undertaken which may produce benefit, but also gives rise to other ethical considerations, balance and moderation are needed. I believe that the Bill provides those qualities.

6.43 pm

Mr. A. E. P. Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): I subscribe entirely to the recent statement by the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster that nothing demonstrates more dramatically the collapse of moral consensus in Britain today than the prolonged and, at times, bitter debate over issues of love, life, marriage and the family. Equally important are the profoundly moral arguments about the origin of life, the status of the embryo and the freedom to experiment, and then destroy, human life in its first 14 days.

[Mr. A. E. P. Duffy]

The phrase "medical ethics" is now a contradiction in terms. From the time of Hippocrates until the early post-war period, doctors took the oath. They no longer do so because it has become a farce, as the oath contained an explicit undertaking not to cause harm to a child in the womb. Until quite recently, medical dictionaries and textbooks made it plain that human life began at the moment of conception, but no longer. Recent editions are evasive, not because of any advance in medical science, but because specious, ex post facto justification is sought for abortion and, now, for experimentation on little children. That is why those two subjects need to be taken together in the Bill.

Mr. Tredinnick: Will the hon. Gentleman explain how the experiments on little children which he has just mentioned will take place? I do not understand.

Mr. Duffy: I am coming to that. One of the worries about allowing research on embryos within the first 14 days is that it could lead to wider forms of research than are intended by Parliament. As an example of how the abandoning in law of a basic medical ethic can lead to unforeseen consequences, we need look no further than the Abortion Act 1967. I need look no further than my city of Sheffield, where the percentage of terminations of pregnancy continues to be considerably higher than the average for England and Wales. Section 4 of the Act, which relates to handicapped children, is invoked for less than 1 per cent. of all those terminations.

There is nothing illogical about combining legislation on abortion and embryonic research, despite the objections voiced in one of the opening speeches, because a human embryo is a human embryo whether it is in a test tube or in utero. A rose is a rose not only by any other name, but no matter where it is or at what stage of its development. Therefore, it is not illogical to view the human embryo as something that should neither be killed in some circumstances or used for certain research purposes.

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is totally incongruous that today, in National Health Service and other hospitals, there are doctors fighting to save the lives of children born at 22 weeks for parents who desperately need them, while further down the corridor, doctors are doing exactly the opposite for a child of 26 to 28 weeks?

Mr. Duffy: It is more than incongruous, it is downright immoral. *[Interruption.]* I hope that I did not hear someone on the Front Bench sniggering at the mention of the word "moral" because it will be heard a good deal more before I sit down. Morals cannot be confined to individuals and do not arise from individual preferences. They are not based on utilitarian consequences. I suggest that my hon. Friends on the Front Bench should consult a dictionary about the meaning of the word.

The vital decisions that we reach on human fertilisation and embryology, and subsequently on pregnancy termination, must affect how we regard the status of each individual, his or her human rights, the treatment of the handicapped, and the fate of the senile and the terminally ill. How we treat human life at any of its stages is of the highest moral significance. Once we are convinced that we have the right to determine when life becomes human and when it ceases to be so, we stand in danger of creating a society that is potentially self-destructive.

Therefore, we need to proceed with the greatest care. Embryo research is complex, and involves a spectrum of medical, scientific, ethical and moral issues. It also abounds in myths and partial truths. The first is the notion that freedom to experiment on human embryos is necessary to help infertile couples. But is that so? A recent article and correspondence in the *Lancet* on the benefits of in vitro fertilisation raised important questions about the cost of IVF, its benefits and the ratio of cost to benefit. Other critics of IVF point to its experimental status, its uncertainty, its as yet unappraised risk factors and the divergent rates of success. That doubt was raised in a report of the World Health Organisation's regional office for Europe, entitled "Are In Vitro Fertilisation and Embryo Transfer of Benefit to All?"

There is a remarkable lack of scientifically based assessment of worldwide rates of success, and that has inevitably led to doubt about what the real success rates are. There is also growing doubt about whether further embryo research is the best way forward, and there is even increased recognition that assisting fertility does not depend on IVF alone. For example, microsurgery for women, the growth of services for male infertility and new techniques of molecular biology show that the lack of destructive experimentation would not, ipso facto, impede improvements in the treatment of fertility. We are assured that other methods are coming along—as good as, and increasingly better than, such experimentation, provided that they are not starved of financial, human and material resources because of the IVF programme. We all invoke and welcome the results of the IVF programme, whenever we meet them. I am godparent to an adorable child who was conceived using this method and I know what great joy he has brought to his family and to many of his parents' friends.

The second myth is that embryo experimentation is necessary in the fight against inherited genetic disease. Yet it now seems clear from a booklet issued by the pro-research group, Progress, entitled, "Freedom to Choose", that research on the embryo with respect to genetic diseases is directed not a cure but at prevention. The public have been misled into thinking that embryo research will produce cures for diseases such as cystic fibrosis and Down's syndrome, as most hon. Members must know from their post bags. Will those in favour of human embryo research give the House one example of what has been discovered in research into genetic diseases that could not have been discovered in another way?

It is a matter of the highest priority that research should continue into improving the lives of handicapped people. One of the more consoling aspects of our present dark age is that we now give much more attention to the mentally and physically handicapped than we did even 25 or 30 years ago. On all sides we are aware of the enormous love and care that a mother and father will exhibit towards a handicapped child. So I hope that we shall not make heavy weather of this point during the rest of this debate.

No one who saw "Songs of Praise", broadcast a week ago from St. Mary's cathedral, Middlesbrough, can fail to have been touched by the spirit of Dominic, who has Down's syndrome, or inspired by the devotion of his mother, Mrs. Norah Jones, for whom Dominic is, as she said, all the more precious. She went on:

"In the company of handicapped children you [illegible] you're as near to Heaven as you'll ever get on this earth."

The third and probably most mistaken and dangerous notion is that the medical and scientific establishment is not violating the sanctity of human life but is taking welcome advantage of the new-found possibilities of research into fertilised cells before they attain human status. A unique biological event occurs with the conjunction of egg and sperm, as I am sure we all agree. The contribution of modern genetics has shown, however, that the genetic code is a fundamental organising principle and that there is radical unity long before the 14-day stage.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) will not mind my quoting her remarks in a recent issue of "The House Magazine". She said that, at this stage, the embryo

"consists of a few cells the size of a pin head and it would clearly be absurd to place its welfare on the same footing with that of so many other human beings whose hopes and needs might benefit from the research."

My hon. Friend is not alone in that view: it was quoted often enough in the recent debate in another place, so she is in good company.

At some stage of our lives all of us in the Chamber were indistinguishable little globules made of a few cells. Who could have predicted how or why those globules would turn into the different individuals that we are, or which one would turn into which person?

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): Does my hon. Friend, and do other hon. Members who have campaigned with him on this issue, agree that ultimately the arguments are about the balance of morality, and that one must balance the theological view that he has just put against the potential benefit to people who, in the absence of further embryo research, would end up being disabled for the rest of their lives, or to the children who will not be born because of their parents' infertility?

Mr. Duffy: A calculation about morality is a contradiction in terms; my hon. Friend does not understand the meaning of morality. Secondly, there is no lack of concern in the House about the handicapped or about improving their lot. Nor is there any lack of appreciation of the lot of the parents of handicapped children, or any lack of admiration for them.

The status of the human embryo and its dignity and rights under the law should be determined by the human life that it undoubtedly has from the beginning. It is recognition that it undoubtedly has from the beginning. It is recognition of that continuous human development that compels me to oppose on principle any proposal to treat this human life in the same way as experimental tissue.

There is no evidence that scientists need human embryos for any worthwhile research, yet we are in serious danger of crossing the fine line that separates science from the eugenics of a brave new world—and we may be alone, for more and more countries are examining this practice and becoming increasingly concerned about its ethical considerations. It has been forbidden in Denmark, Ireland, Norway, Portugal and parts of Australia. It will soon be forbidden in West Germany, and the European Council of Ministers has recommended the same course of action.

It is interesting that the German Government should be taking so strong a line. Memories of the recent shameful abuse of human life by German doctors and scientists are still fresh and have alerted people to the evil potential of test tube biotechnology. Yet the German Bill has been criticised by the SPD and the Green party on the grounds that it does not go far enough in protecting the embryo or controlling the enthusiasm of doctors and researchers. The Germans have had experience of this sort of thing, and we are only just beginning.

We need to remind ourselves continually that the end does not justify the means; that men and women are more than a bundle of cells; and that they have incomparable potential. Let us then stop playing God with the lives of unborn children—we are not sexing chickens. We have a duty to uphold respect for human dignity.

6.58 pm

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): I realise that this debate will be dominated by discussion, such as that in the speech of the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy), of the possibility of experimentation on embryos, but I want to confine almost all my speech to another problem that the Bill raises. I refer to clause 27 and the meaning of "the mother".

However, to fall in line with everyone else, I want first to say a brief word about experiments. I have listened extremely carefully to many of my constituents and to many people outside this House, but I have always found it very had to agree with those who claim that an embryo or foetus that cannot yet exist in a free state should be able to demand the same protection under the law as that same entity should demand after it is able to exist in a free state.

That is why I shall vote, if I have the opportunity, to reduce the stage of a pregnancy by which an abortion can take place from the present 28 weeks, and it is why I agree with a large majority in another place, and with the Secretary of State, that strictly controlled experiments on embryos up to 14 days should be allowed. Many children and families could be saved enormous distress over infertility or disease by this move. The example quoted by the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) was of a constituent of mine who had written to the right hon. Gentleman. I am conscious of the case that he quoted to the House.

Clause 27 follows the Warnock recommendations by defining the mother as the woman who carries the child, having had either an embryo or sperm and eggs placed in her. I do not disagree with that judgment because it is right in almost all circumstances. My speech and those of other hon. Members seem to revolve on our constituents. I have a most important case in my constituency which should make the House and the Government think again about the operation of clause 27.

That case involves a couple. The wife has no uterus and is quite incapable of bearing children. However, she has ovaries and ovulates normally, and some time ago ova flushed from her body were fertilised in a laboratory by her husband's sperm. These fertilised ova led to what I shall call embryos, which were placed in the uterus of a lady who agreed to carry the growing embryos. I am assured that she did so without fees. In due time, the lady gave birth to twins and gladly handed them over to their genetic parents, my constituents. The House can imagine the enormous joy of my constituents when at last they were able to have children who were entirely their own. They are

[Mr. Michael Jopling]

smashing children and I have met them. They are very young. They were united with their genetic parents with the full support of the surrogate mother.

All went well. The authorities who look after such things were entirely happy for my constituents to have the children. The rub was that the authorities said that as they understood the law the couple would have to adopt the children. My constituents said, "Certainly not, they are our children. It is like buying one's own possessions back." Ultimately the case will go to the courts. It was referred to in *The Times* of 28 February by the solicitor concerned, and I do not propose to say any more about that case.

I think that I am right in saying that my constituents are the first example of such a thing happening in this country. No doubt more will follow in the years ahead, although I do not suppose that there will be many. I want the Secretary of State to think hard about this case. It is hard to argue that my constituents are not the father and mother of the twins. It should be quite simple for us to deal with such a situation. It will not happen often, but it should be dealt with during the progress of the Bill.

We should consider amending clause 27 so that in cases of the sort that I have described, a judge in the family division of the High Court could make an order relating to the children, granting parental responsibility or awarding care and control of the children to their genetic mother either on her own or with another. In such cases, the genetic mother should for all purposes be treated as the mother of the child. That would be a sensible change in the Bill and I hope that the Committee will consider it.

If that amendment or something like it were to be made, it would apply only when the identity of the genetic mother had been positively ascertained through genetic fingerprinting, which can be done nowadays. Secondly, it would happen only when the surrogate mother, as in the case I have quoted, had no reservations about the judgment and whose emotional attachment to the child did not cause any serious objections to that judgment.

As I have said, this would happen rarely. I cannot believe that an amendment of the sort that I have proposed would in itself encourage surrogacy, which I do not particularly want to do. It would add common sense to an unusual, unsatisfactory and unfair situation, as my constituents have found to their cost. They have met enormous difficulty in connection with the case that they will have to take to the courts in the next few months.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): I remind hon. Members that we are now into the 10-minute limit on speeches and that it will apply until 9 o'clock.

7.6 pm

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): The right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) has highlighted the need for this legislation. Changes have taken place because of developments in medicine and science, and opportunities for families exist now that did not exist a generation ago. We have to face the questions that those matters raise in the same way as the Warnock committee faced them. I support the Bill and strongly support the provision brought in by the Lords for research to be allowed. I realise that this is a contentious issue and that it will be fiercely debated at later stages in the progress of the Bill.

I should declare a family interest. We lost two boys, Alun and Geraint, in late 1984, early 1985, within three months of each other. They suffered from a severe genetic disability which caused mental and physical handicap. We have two other children, Eluned and Hywel who, mercifully, are free from that condition. The problems that we faced were no different from the problems faced by thousands of other people in these islands. Millions are at risk from conditions such as muscular dystrophy and cystic fibrosis and from about 1,000 genetic disorders.

Every one of us probably carries two or three gene defects, and it is a matter of luck that we do not meet another person who carries the same defects and produce offspring with handicaps. It is a matter of luck that other hon. Members do not meet the problem of genetic handicap within their own families. Some hon. Members may have children who are carriers of one or more of the common types of genetic defect and who may marry someone who is also a carrier.

Some hon. Members may become grandparents and, totally without warning or explanation, will have to watch helplessly as their grandchildren suffer the effects of a severe genetic disorder, sometimes in excruciating pain. They will have to watch helplessly as their grandchildren die a slow death. Some genetic conditions create self-mutilation among babies, and grandparents have to watch that, too. They may have to share the agony of their children having to face a decision about whether to try for another child, having lost one who had a physical disability.

As has been said, the chances of the disability appearing in a subsequent child may be 1:2 or 1:4. Perhaps the parents will hope that it will not happen again and that all will be well. However, many do not try again because they are unwilling to bring into the world a baby who will face the same suffering that they have seen already. That could happen to any one of us and it is happening to dozens of our constituents.

How can such suffering be avoided? If it is diagnosed early enough in pregnancy, can anything be done to put the defect right? The Bill has massive implications for families at risk from genetic disorders. In its present form it will allow vital research to continue within strict guidelines. I congratulate the House of Lords on its massive majority in favour of research. For that reason I shall support the Bill. As the Father of the House, the right hon. Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) said, if the restrictive clause were built in at a later stage of the Bill, I, like the right hon. Gentleman, would review my position because that consideration is very important.

I draw to the attention of the House comments that were made in *New Scientist* on 4 November under the title "Why experiment on human embryos?" It says:

> "Politicians will decide whether to make illegal what is now a thriving area of progress in our understanding of human reproduction and early development . . . It would prevent the diagnosis of severe genetic disorders in embryos, which recent research has shown to be feasible. It would hinder the development of new forms of contraception, such as vaccines. And it would prevent any significant improvement in the treatment of infertility."

I draw attention also to comments that I believe have been forwarded to hon. Members by the Royal Society. They were published at the same time as the White Paper. It says:

> "The Royal Society believes it is essential that research, under proper control, should be allowed to continue. Much embryological research, including that related to in vitro

> fertilisation, is carried out with animals. However, one cannot extrapolate safety the results of studies in animals to the human context . . . It would be irresponsible and clinically unacceptable to replace in the womb fertilized human eggs that have been subjected to novel procedures or tests."

On genetic disease, the Royal Society said:

> "Currently, the only way of preventing the transmission of genetic disease is to test fetuses at 8-16 weeks gestation and to abort those that are affected. Research on human embryology has offered the prospect of testing developing eggs at an early stage to indentify those that will be affected by, or those that carry, serious genetic disease, such as Duchenne musclular dystrophy or cystic fibrosis, and of replacing in the womb only those found free from such defective genes . . . Legislation prohibiting further research on human embryological material would, at worst, altogether prevent certain advances in medical treatment of great potential benefit to the infertile or those carrying serious genetic disorders. At best, it would suspend such advances before their full development . . . The Royal Society therefore strongly supports the continuation of research under the conditions specified".

That is important.

The Muscular Dystrophy Group of Great Britain has also implored us to allow such research to continue. Its director, Paul Walker, a practising Roman Catholic, believes that that is vital for those who suffer from muscular dystrophy. Mencap implores us to allow the research to continue, as does the Cystic Fibrosis Research Trust, the Genetic Interest Group, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the Medical Research Council. Research is supported by a proportion of the clergy, although I accept that among the clergy, as among the medical profession, opinion is divided.

The Bill has vital implications for 250,000 couples who cannot have children. The IVF programme has helped families in Britain to have children; there are over 1,000 such children. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy) referred to the pride that he takes in his godchild who was brought into the world by means of that technique. Had there been restrictive sections in the legislation a generation ago, those who are now happily running round would not be here. We cannot have it both ways. We need acceptable research. A restrictive clause would stop research into improving contraception, thus avoiding later abortions of unwanted pregnancies. I join those who regret the fact that the Government intend to introduce an amendment that will allow abortion to be linked with that question.

As for research that has led to exciting breakthroughs in recent months and years, may I refer to muscular dystrophy? The gene that causes muscular dystrophy has been identified. Within the next two or three years, we shall be able to select pre-embryos that do not have the defective gene. That will allow healthy boys and girls to be born to those at risk. That is a tremendous move forward.

I quote from Professor Bobrow, one of the country's leading authorities on the clinical genetics of muscular dystrophy:

> "I believe that pre-embryo biopsy for the detection of Duchenne muscular dystrophy will be possible within two to three years. The genetic techniques will be developed by then; what will be needed is time to validate the safety of embryo biopsy."

A large number of people suffer from cystic fibrosis. Those of us who are in touch with the Cystic Fibrosis Research Trust and receive its newsletter will have seen that the March newsletter is headed, in red, "At last we've found the gene!" It says:

> "I am sure that as a supporter of the Cystic Fibrosis Research Trust you were delighted with the news that at last we have found the gene . . . Now at last we can embark upon the next stage in our quest to understand and finally conquer Cystic Fibrosis."

The trust's newspaper carries similar exciting prospects.

In those circumstances, where hope is being offered to families who otherwise would not have it, how can we take on ourselves the responsibility of shutting the door of hope when we are so close to seeing progress being made? Can the House, in all conscience, even contemplate a legal ban on such marvellous pioneering work? How can we ban essential research of his type? Are we so certain that we are absolutely correct? Are we to say to our constituents, "Our children are all right. We are sorry that yours are suffering from a crippling disablement, but we are prepared to legislate to reduce your hope of being helped by the medical profession." I realise that all the answers may not be immediately forthcoming. Some may take years. Surely, however, the message is:

> "Seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

7.15 pm

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone): I intend to concentrate on the ethical aspects of the debate. When the alternative clauses are debated—and subsequently, I hope, the abortion clauses—detailed arguments will be put forward. We shall then hear that opinion is not unanimous among the medical, scientific or theological interest groups. There is disunity among embryologists as to whether the further destructive use of embryos will improve in vitro fertilisation or whether it will make a material contribution towards finding a cure.

The Father of the House, my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine), was right to point not to the words of the pro-life movement, or to those of the Roman Catholic Church, or to those of the major interest groups on our side of the argument, but to the words of the pro-research scientists themselves in a document that they circulated to right hon. and hon. Members in an effort to persuade us to support research.

The document said that research on embryos is not and never has been concerned with pure research, or with the treatment of chromosomal disorders. What worries me is what I regard as the cruel deceit—probably accidental but nevertheless thoroughly perpetrated on the parents of children who suffer from highly distressing disorders and diseases—that this research will come up with a cure for their children. If that is case, the pro-research scientists should retract what they have said and show us how such a cure is to be achieved.

Another cruel deceit that is being perpetrated is that those who oppose embryo research would ban IVF treatment. We never have and never will.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): My wife and I had a serious fertility problem, as a result of which we went through a successful IVF process. There is considerable evidence that the IVF success rate does not depend on destructive experimentation. Statistics in this country and evidence from IVF clinics in South Australia, where experimentation is illegal, point to the fact that it is the number of times that the procedure has been carried out that is the key factor determining the success rate, not destructive experimentation.

Miss Widdecombe: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend. That demonstrates something else: that there is no

[Miss Widdecombe]

unanimity of opinion among infertile couples as to whether the research is acceptable, or even among the handicapped or the parents of the handicapped.

I now refer to the ethical issues dominating the debate and the use of language. We are told that a child of 22 weeks' gestation fighting for life in an incubator with all the resources of medical science being poured in to save it is a baby, but a child of identical age and development in the womb where we cannot see it is a foetus. The difference between what we call a baby and what we call a foetus is that we can see one and we cannot see the other, and if we inflicted pain on one, we could see it.

The same use of language is applied to the earliest stages of human existence. How right my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point was when he said that not once in all the Warnock deliberations was the word "pre-embryo" mentioned. It is a sanitising term to cover up what we are doing.

When the Bill was debated in the other place, we heard endless terms to describe human life—two-cell zygote, a conceptus. The Archbishop of York chose the term conceptus because, he said, it is buried in the obscurity of the Latin language. The Archbishop of York is rather sexist—why not a concepta? Perhaps we can get over the problem in the traditional way favoured by many Opposition Members—we could call it a conceptus person because it is a person.

While we are on the subject of personhood, the Archbishop said that all life was a continuous process from fertilisation to death and that we are all processes. It makes one wonder what the advent lessons must be like in York minster. Perhaps they would go something like this: "And Mary, when the angel had departed from her, found she was with process, and her cousin said unto her, 'Lo, the process in my womb leaped with joy when I heard thy voice'". Are we now getting down to such silly language?

If we take the Archbishop at face value and agree that we are all processes and that there is no single voice as to when life starts, we cannot say that personhood occurs here or the soul enters there. We cannot say any of those things if life is a process. Is not the best reason of all for not interfering at any point the fact that we do not know when personhood begins? Did not the Archbishop score a spectacular own goal?

Another misuse of language was exemplified in the speech about handicap by the hon. Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson). Of course all parents want their children to be born without a handicap, but there is all the difference in the world between saying that we want children to be born without handicap and that we do not want the handicapped child to be born. What most distresses me is that, when we were considering the Bill presented by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), and at any stage during the passage of the Bill that we are discussing, a handicapped person could switch on the radio or television and hear politicians glibly discussing whether he had the right to be born.

We would not insult any racial or religious group in that way, so how dare we treat handicapped people as a race apart and single them out for insult? The most profoundly difficult experience that I had during the passage of the Bill unsuccessfully introduced by the hon. Member for Mossley Hill was explaining to handicapped people why we had made an exemption for severe handicap and why we had agreed that they should be treated as second-class citizens. We shall go through that again when we table our abortion amendments, because, to meet the fears of many right hon. and hon. Members, we have agreed to exempt handicap from any restrictions.

I congratulate the Government on their great courage in at long last providing an opportunity to resolve the abortion issue. We are talking about life before birth, life up to 14 days and after 14 days. It is a ludicrous law that says that personhood occurs at 14 days and human life needs protection, but that from the 15th day to the 28th week abortion is perfectly all right. We need to examine that muddled law, and when, as the Government have courageously decided, the House debates abortion, we shall at long last apply the will of the majority of the House, which has never yet been defeated but which has frequently been frustrated.

We all heard what the hon. Member for Barking said. She did not say that she hoped that the abortion clauses would be defeated—she knows that they will not be defeated, so she said that she hoped that they would not be taken. That is the last dying hope of a minority that has persistently misused the tactics and the procedures of the House to frustrate the majority.

7.25 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) referred to the other place and the concept of a process. There were some outside the House who wondered whether the experiments on primates to find out the validity of life and humanity might begin in the upper House.

The right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) said that there should not be the same protection for a human being who has been born as for one in the womb. In that maligned book, the Old Testament, where we are told the laws are cruel, there is clear protection for the unborn; rather interestingly it is given in the context of the restrictive law of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. We heard those arguments deployed tonight and it is amazing how we run away from what will happen.

The pre-embryo or conceptus who has been discovered to have a defective gene would automatically be disposed of because there is no way that it can be brought to term. Therefore, I join in giving the Bill a guarded welcome. Using the ecclesiastical terminology that has already occurred in the debate, like the curate's egg, it is good in parts. I am not too sure how we are going to separate the bad parts from the good ones without making it a completely different Bill. I pledge my support for those who seek to improve the Bill by providing guidelines for the nation.

It is good that the Bill applies to Northern Ireland, as it allows representatives from Northern Ireland to take a full part in debating it. I believe that I reflect a general view throughout Northern Ireland, irrespective of political parties and religious persuasion. We ask for the legislation to show respect for life.

I take up a point which may have been missed. We have heard quotations from scientific bodies that support the concept of research and experimentation. Recently I spoke to a doctor who told me about an experiment in psychology which may be being conducted on us. It is certainly applied in places such as Oxford street by street traders who are accompanied by people who put up their hands to buy straight away so that the others who are gathered round will also buy. The people around do not realise that the trader is with an accomplice. If they see a policeman they disappear; if no policeman turns up, the accomplice returns the goods that he has bought for the salesman to peddle again.

That approach is used to convince people to do something that they would not do normally. Let us take the example of a product being sold. I have been told of people being shown a film in which someone appeared wearing a blue sweater. At the end of the film they were asked, "What colour sweater was the person wearing?" A number of people who were secretly involved said, "It was red." When the first half dozen people said "Red", the others became doubtful and said "Red" although they had perceived it as blue. I am not trying to make a political point by using those two colours.

Over the past months, the media have been bombarding the nation and the House with facts and statistics, but rarely have they featured a scientist, a politician or a disabled person to convince the House and the nation of a view which, in their heart of hearts, they do not wish us to hold.

In that context, I was interested by some figures from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the Royal Society. The statistics from those two bodies on the incidence of disorders in newborn babies is about the same. The Royal Society claims that it is one in 20 and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists said that it is 5 per cent. That works out at 50 per 1,000, which all hon. Members will agree is a horrifying figure. When I checked the figures I discovered that both organisations were exaggerating. One must ask why. I believe that it is to hype the argument in favour of passing the Bill and to allow experimentation.

It is said that research will help to prevent genetic disorders, but the figures given by the Royal Society and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists are for congenital diseases. If one examines their figures carefully, one discovers that they are exaggerated I have them here, and Professor Hubert Campbell, who for many years was the medical statistician representing England and Wales at the World Health Organisation, has checked them for me. Rather than the 50 per cent. suggested by those two bodies, 15 per cent., and at the outside 20 per cent., of deaths are due to genetic diseases; that figure conforms with a report by the Royal College of Physicians, which shows that of children born with congenital abnormalities 15 to 20 per cent. suffer from genetic disorders. There are difficulties in obtaining accurate figures because a high percentage of those deaths are from cardiovascular problems.

Why should the professional bodies exaggerate the figures? I am not suggesting that they have a vested financial interest, because many of them are genuinely concerned and want to do the best for patients and others. Many years ago I asked about experimentation and the sale of organs, but time and again I received bland answers from Departments saying that they had no statistics and that such things were not going on. One answer that I received was, "Customs and Excise do not come across this because they are not asked to look for it."

I stand where I stood with my right hon. Friend Enoch Powell, not against experimentation but for the experiments being on an embryo for a particular person's own good and that there should not be blanket research.

Ian Donald drew attention to the fact that, like the rest of us, embryos develop differently. It might take between 13 and 16 days for an embryo to develop, but if there is such confusion at that stage, how do we differentiate? We all know that, once the Bill is enacted, its supporters will press for an extension of the time limit.

7.34 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): The speeches that have most impressed me so far were those born of a little humility. That includes the fine and balanced speech made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State, on which I congratulate him.

For others, the debate has been about the nature of certainty. As a teacher, I suggested to my pupils that if someone said, "with respect", they meant exactly the opposite; that if someone said, "Of course I am not prejudiced, but", it was usually a preface to a whopping lump of dogma; and that, similarly, those who proclaimed what the truth is mean that they believe it to be so. People on both sides of this issue feel passionately about it. I hope that, as the Bill progresses through the House, both sides will maintain respect.

I declare my interest and credentials for taking part in the debate and for supporting the Government's proposals. First, I am the parent of three strapping children. The most important thing to me is my family life. Our first son was born with lethal disorders, the result of a chromosome abnormality. He lived for only a few days, but long enough to be loved and to be baptised. I owe it to Jamie to support this legislation, from which much good will come.

My second credential is as a Christian. It is quite clear that there is no definitive Christian viewpoint or imperative in this debate. It is a matter of difficult personal judgment. I sought the advice of the Bishop of Salisbury, and I am grateful to him for it. Without claiming that he supports what I believe to be right, he told me that, if he were faced with voting on this issue, the arguments that would weigh most strongly with him were those on embryo selection. He points out that, when nature spontaneously aborts a good many embryos, it is hard to believe that to do so deliberately for good reason is contrary to God's mind.

Miss Widdecombe: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Key: I will not stop: I have only 10 minutes to make my speech.

We cannot duck the issue that some people feel that we are saying that it would be better if disabled people had not been born. The Archdeacon of Sarum advises me that the argument is a deliberate muddying of the waters. He says that one could equally say that any attempt to discourage illegitimacy is an insult to those born out of wedlock. The fact is that, if we could launch a life with or without handicaps, it seems morally better to choose the latter. The Bishop of Salisbury said to me: "Many parents must pray for a disease-free child. When we are given the power to bring that about ourselves, what does it say about our prayer if we refuse to use that power?"

[Mr. Key]

Clearly, rejection of an embryo earlier than 14 days is preferable to aborting a foetus much later on. If uncontrolled, that could be used to justify abortion and embryo selection, which, as the Bishop of Salisbury told me, was one mark of Nazism and would be profoundly repugnant to Christian tradition. But the Bill is all about control, and it recognises that such activities are unacceptable.

After much thought and inquiry, I have reached the conclusion that it is not possible for me to accept that human life begins at the moment of conception—for two reasons. First, I regard the egg and the sperm as human and part of the continuum of creation. Individual lives begin with chemistry and reach their fulfilment in mystery. My second reason is the chemistry of the matter. If we believe in life starting at an instant called conception, we ignore man's growing understanding of molecular biology and genetics and all that goes on not only at a human biological level but at a sub-species level in the building blocks of life.

I shall return to that, but my third credential is that I am a member of the Medical Research Council. I am not a scientist but am one of the lay members whose job is to ensure that the feet of the distinguished scientists are in occasional contact with the ground. The MRC's reasons for suppporting research on pre-implementation embryos are well rehearsed: to improve in vitro fertilisation techniques; to help reduce the number of abortions in those who are at risk of passing on serious genetic diseases to children; to help us understand and prevent miscarriages; and to assist in the development of simpler, safer and more effective contraception. I have listened to the contrary arguments, and will continue to do so, but I remain unconvinced by them.

The Bill is also about freedom of conscience. It does not seek to impose sanctions on those who think that research is wrong. It goes to great lengths to define consent. As Lord Hailsham put it in another place, those who would impose an absolute prohibition should ask themselves, what kind of right, in a free and liberal democracy, do they think that they have to say no to a highly responsible group of people working for the benefit of humanity and subject to the authority of Parliament? Scientists and clinicians are not pro-death—nor am I, nor is any one who supports the Bill. Who hijacked this term "pro-life", anyway? I take the view that we cannot undo enlightenment.

I have a word of warning for the scientific community: they do not realise how far ahead they are of the rest of us. There is so much that we do not know about the human brain and problems such as schizophrenia, Alzheimer's disease and slow viruses such as bovine spongiform ecephalopathy and Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease. There is so much that we are beginning to understand, and the rate of that understanding is increasing rapidly. The scientists must not leave us behind. There is a massive job of education to be done.

I have referred to the amazing growth of understanding of the molecular basis of life. We must come to terms with the inevitable scientific progress. There is no absolute right or absolute wrong—we must make a judgment. I urge the House to judge that we should not turn our backs on scientists in Britain. Make no mistake—the work will go on in other countries, with or without us, and it will be without the controls that Parliament is seeking to exercise in this country. If we wash our hands of this issue, we will make it harder next time we are asked to make judgments about scientific issues, and they will probably be concerned with genetics. Personally, the more I see and understand the way that science serves mankind, the stronger grows my Christian faith.

Salisbury has sent Members of Parliament to Westminster since 1275—we take a long-term view of things. When Parliaments or rulers have sought to impose bans on science or to legislate against progress, they have always come to grief. To vote against the Bill tonight would be to marginalise Parliament, at a time when we have never needed Parliament more. We would trumpet our timidity and lack of vision with a penny whistle. I urge the House to give the Bill a Second Reading.

7.43 pm

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): Like other hon. Members, I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. I have good news for Members—I do not intend to go into the technicalities of pre-implantation embryos or pro-life. I want to talk about the issues as I see them and, equally important, as my constituents see them.

When the Bill was first discussed, I made a conscious decision as a Member of Parliament because of my experience when I became a Member in 1987 when the abortion issue was raised. I knew from that experience how contentious it was. Some politicians may tend to go to ground when such issues are discussed, but I decided to take this one up front. I called two special three-hour surgeries in my constituency on two consecutive days to take representations from my constituents. It was an enjoyable and enlightening experience.

I met 54 constituents who had come to lobby me either for or against. Many Christian groups on both sides of the argument lobbied me. We must put something to rest: one is not a better Christian if one is for or against the Bill. No one should be able to kidnap the issue and say that he is a better Christian because he takes a particular point of view. I am envious of the faith of other Christians. My experience in life leads me to believe that a person should be judged on his Christianity by the way in which he lives his life, cares for his neighbour and behaves towards his fellow men and women. That is a better yardstick by which to judge whether someone is a Christian.

I should like to thank many of the individuals who came to see me. I had the excellent experience of meeting the local branch of a national Christian group, CARE—Christian Action Research and Education. Through those surgeries, I was able to develop a relationship with the groups that I had not hitherto been able to develop. Although we did not necessarily agree on the issues that we debated, we had mutual respect and there was understanding of each side of the argument. I hope that other hon. Members will have that experience. Politicians should not drop this contentious issue.

My hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson) sought support from Opposition Members. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy) pointed out that there would be a free vote, and so it should be. I have been active in Labour politics for a considerable number of years—sometimes it seems longer. This has always been an issue of personal conscience and I have always believed that that is what it should be.

When I am asked to vote against embryo research, I must take on board some of the issues that are put to me to consider—for example, the sanctity of life, the rights of a 14-day embryo and morality. Like the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) I tend to duck when I hear people starting from a moral standpoint, because usually what follows is not as moral as they would have us believe. We have been told that the legislation will lead to uncontrolled research. References have been made to the Nazis during the war and their horrific activities, but that tends to overstate the case.

We hear also about strong Christian faith. I shall tell the House of an experience that I had in my constituency involving an elder of a local church, who said, "Please, Mr. Hood, support the Bill. I have a daughter whose ovaries will not develop because of a disease. Her only chance of a normal life is to benefit from this research by having an implant." He then said something that has struck me ever since: "I am a Christian. My faith in God is such that if He does not mean it to happen, it will not and if He does mean it to happen, it will." I mulled over those words by a chap whom one would walk past in the street. Such was his Christian faith that he could make that strong commitment.

Within minutes, a minister in a church in my constituency came to me and said, "Mr. Hood, I am a Christian and you will expect me to be against the Bill." I said that I did not expect him to be against the Bill because he was a Christian and told him of my experience a few minutes earlier with the elder of a different church. The minister was dumbstuck, as I had been, when I threw it back at him. I told him about the elder whose faith in God was such that he believed that, if something was not meant to happen, it would not happen. The minister was taken aback. I am sure that what I told him did not influence his view, but it was well worth saying nevertheless.

I do not think that there are any easy options. There is no ducking the issue of abortion, either, and I hope that I shall not try. I must be objective. I must accept that I live not in the world as we all want it to be but in the real world. I hear people talking about what we should do to help the handicapped, the disadvantaged and the disabled, and such objectives are perfectly legitimate and honourable. But whether their chance is one in 10 or one in 100, what should we say to an infertile couple when they come to us and say, "Mr. Hood, please give us a chance to enjoy the happiness and warmth that a child in our family will give us"? When given the choice, I do not have the courage to deny them that chance.

7.50 pm

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Egbaston): In case the impression begins to take hold in this debate that if one has had the misfortune to have a blighted child and to have lost it, one must be in favour of the Bill, I will mention at the outset that I had two such children and lost two such children, but that I remain strongly opposed to experimentation on human beings at any stage in their development. That is certainly not because I have no feelings or understanding for the couple desperate to have a child. I have every sympathy for couples who find themselves in that position.

I would argue, however, that experimentation is certainly not the only way to find out about infertility. It is still most questionable whether experimentation on human embyros can tell us anything at all about infertility. How can an embyro that is totally unrelated to a man and a women tell us anything at all about why that man and that woman cannot conceive? I find that an odd proposition. I suppose that someone will say, "Ah, but it could be the couple's embyro." I do not think that it can, because if they have produced an embyro, they are not infertile. The argument does not stand up.

I warmly commend the idea of all possible help being given to couples who desperately want a child, but if IVF is not very successful and can lead to ovarian cysts, answers should be sought where they can be found and that is certainly not by experimentation on unborn babies at the first stage of development. Surely it is true, and all of us must recognise, that the only way in which people can explain experimentation away or accept it is by saying, "We are talking about the first stages of development."

The hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) mentioned the curate's egg. There is also such a thing as the housemaid's baby, which was "only a small one". The argument that is being used in this case is similar. People say, "It is ony a small embryo, in the first stage of development, so let us not worry about it." Nevertheless, it is a serious proposition that we should use a human being for experimentation at any stage in his or her development. I hope that the House will accept that. Then does not the House at least have the duty to be sure that embryo experimentation is necessary? If it is a serious matter, let us a least have proof that it is necessary.

A great deal of information has been sent to hon. Members from doctors on both sides of the argument. If 99 per cent. of the doctors had said: "We must do this: it is the only way," the House might have been in a different position, but that has not happened. The medical profession seems to me to be divided more or less equally. One erudite professor wrote to me:

> "The claims that experimentation on human embryos will contribute importantly to a knowledge of human reproduction, the prevention of infertility and congenital handicap are false."

Certainly there are things that we need to know about preventable infertility. There is such a thing as a blocked tube, for instance. A woman may suffer from pelvic inflammatory disease, and there are many other complaints that may be to blame, but none of their causes can be discovered by experimentation on the embryo. So many of the arguments of would-be experimenters collapse when we put them under the microscope. They say that an embryo is not a human being at that stage in its development. If it is not a human being, how can it give answers to problems facing the human race? Either it is a human being or it is not. They say that embryo experimentation is the only way forward, but genetic research has been going on for years without using embryos and it will continue whether we give or withhold permission to use them.

The would-be experimenters argue that nature wastes so many embryos; it is always flinging them around like bits of confetti, so what does it matter? But nature wastes a whole lot: it wastes children, teenagers and more mature people. Thousands and thousands of people all over the world die prematurely for one reason or another. If it is argued that because nature wastes, we are entitled to use

[Dame Jill Knight]

what it wastes for experimentation, why should we stop at embryos? If we are dealing with what nature wastes, there is a lot more going than an embryo or two here or there. If one believes that because nature, fate or God wastes human beings by bringing them an early death, we can put them to use for experimentation, we are on a very slippery slope indeed.

If Parliament gives its blessing to experiments up to 14 days, the scientists will not stop there. Already many authorities, from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists through to geneticists such as Professor Robert Edwards, Professor Williamson, and the Council for Science and Society, have said that they would not be satisfied with 14 days. Once the principle is established, embryos will continue to be used, because it is perfectly obvious that the older an unborn child is, the more useful it will be to the scientists.

If the principle is breached, there is no escaping the consequences. Once one accepts that a human being, at whatever stage in its development, can be used for scientific experiment, the rubicon has been crossed and there is no going back. It will be 20 days, then 50 days, and then six months. Then we shall include wasted born babies who are mentally or physically handicapped, who will be considered no use and a drag on society. Did not someone once call them unproductive mouths? Once we say that it is perfectly feasible to allow human beings to finish up on a slab, being experimented on by scientists, there is no end to it.

How will the present proposed limit of 14 days be enforced? Will an inspector go into a laboratory and say, "Stop. Wait a minute. You have had 13 days, 23 hours and 59 minutes. You will never finish that in one minute, so you must not do it." How do we seriously suggest that such a rule will be policed? How will we ensure that nowhere in any laboratory does experimentation take place beyond 14 days?

Many medical men are against what is proposed. Many handicapped people—never mind the parents of handicapped children—are against it. The hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) advocated how sad it is to be handicapped and that it is much better that such people are not born. I cannot support that.

Mr. Wigley: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dame Jill Knight: I have only about a minute left.

Mr. Wigley: I bet.

Dame Jill Knight: Well, the hon. Gentleman had better be quick.

Mr. Wigley: I did not say what the hon. Lady said I said. She should know that I love my boys with their handicap and all. No one can take that away from me. She should be ashamed of herself for suggesting that.

Dame Jill Knight: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should be ashamed of himself for suggesting that I said that. I did not. I said that his words amounted to him saying how much better it would be to find a handicapped foetus at an early stage and get rid of it. That is exactly what he said. That does not mean to say that he does not love his children. It means that he thinks that it is much better to get rid of a handicapped foetus. I cannot agree with that.

Even Church leaders have spoken out against that, although the Church is so divided these days that half the churchmen believe one thing and half the other. Perhaps we should not take too much notice of what the Church says. In the end, it comes down to an ethical and moral belief that human life is sacred, that none of us has the right to destroy a human being and that permitting experiments on embryos that are judged unwanted is the severest threat to human life and values since the passage of the Abortion Act 1967.

8 pm

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in this debate. There have been many fine and eloquent contributions today, based on science and morality, and I thought that perhaps I should keep away from those subjects because I am not as competent as others to deal with them.

My attitude to the Bill is probably simplistic, as it is based on human dignity. That is a simple phrase, but it is difficult to define. Where the Bill enhances the prospects for human dignity, I support it. However, where it denigrates human dignity, I withdraw my support from it.

The Bill has two elements—fertilisation and experiments on embryos. I put those elements to the test of human dignity, and I found that one element complemented it and the other was diametrically opposed to it. When we talk about human dignity, we are talking about human life and all its attributes. I do not care whether that human life is 80 years old, eight years old, or eight days old. It is still human life with the dignity that I want to attribute to all human life.

I support with great compassion the in vitro fertilisation of any childless couple because that makes a contribution to human dignity—the dignity of the parents and no doubt of the child which will be loved all the more for its rarity and specialness. However, when considering the part of the Bill dealing with embryology and experimentation, it does not matter whether that life is 80 years, eight years or eight days old. The same human dignity and the same precious concept applies that I was taught to apply to my fellow man and to my neighbour, whatever age he may be. According to that principle, I am totally opposed to experimentation.

Although I am opposed to that experimentation, I have the greatest sympathy for many of the arguments in its favour, which the exponents hope in some way will expedite the day when mental and physical disability will be wiped out. We all look forward to that day and we all support that concept. However, we are concerned about the way in which we achieve that end. That is the only point on which we will differ.

In all the scientific arguments that have been made this afternoon for experimentation and the analysis of the human embryo, no one has said that research should not take place. We are saying that research into the human embryo is not the only way forward, and that it is one of the most dangerous ways forward in terms of human dignity.

Many benefits can be obtained from other methods of research, as is clear from much of the propaganda that has been sent to hon. Members from both sides of the argument. In those circumstances, we must tread warily. Having listened to the arguments today, I cast my mind back to the debates on abortion. I appreciate that we have been exhorted not to confuse the two issues, but how can I not do so? On the one hand, I am told that we must stop experiments at 14 days, because there is something sancrosanct about that embryo. However, we can kill that embryo months later. There is no logic, morality or science in that argument. There is certainly no human dignity there either.

On that basis, I ask hon. Members to consider the pro-life argument—well, pro-life may not be the right phrase; perhaps pro-human dignity would be better. We must learn from history, whether we like it or not. On every occasion in history when human dignity was denied, catastrophe followed for the society concerned.

This afternoon, people have been accused of being emotive in their approach to the subject. An emotive phrase continues to occure to me. There is a daily massacre of the innocents in this country. If I were to say the holy innocents, I would be accused of being religious so I left out the adjective. However, I believe that there is a total contradiction between killing a babe in the mother's womb at 22 weeks and doing all in one's power to preserve it in an incubator at the same age. That is the contradiction in the scientific approach.

We all know that once the floodgates are opened—I do not mean that in an emotive way, because there will not be a sudden gushing outwards—there will be a steady trickle from 14 days to 15, to 16 and to 20. There will be no way of controlling it, and in that sense I oppose completely the idea of the so-called committee of control. I support those hon. Members who have said that the committee of control must be directly and immediately accountable to the representatives of the people of this country in this House and not by way of a self-regulating quango that can distance itself and its responsibility from the Minister, who must presumably answer to the House.

I am not speaking today for the sake of the record. I am representing my constituents, in the hope of persuading and converting, and in the hope of having a logical argument so that people will accept that the Bill is not the way forward to prevent mental or physical disability or to prevent infertility. All the arguments this afternoon have been negative. They have sought to increase the efficiency of abortion and to terminate unwanted and disabled embryos. They were all negative, not positive. I hope that I have represented as fairly as I can the people who elected me to this place. I certainly represent the broad viewpont of my party.

8.9 pm

Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes (Wimbledon): About 14 months have passed since I spoke in a similar debate on this subject. In the meantime, work has obviously continued in in vitro fertilisation and embryology. I get the impression from today's debate that, whatever our different viewpoints and whatever the charm of having less legislation in this place, we want to make a non-partisan decision.

As a physician and a barrister, I have tried to assess the implications of an issue that is daunting in all respects. We all know the strength of feeling in the country, and it is all the more so in a constituency such as mine in Wimbledon, where the Christian tradition is very much alive and the attendance at churches of all denominations is unusually and agreeably high. I have thus consulted widely on an ecumenical basis, and a useful exchange of views has resulted.

I am well aware that, when one talks to people who are much better qualified than oneself on these profound theological and ethical issues, one feels the humbler for that. Having never worked directly in embryology, I have also consulted medical colleagues and have visited several units in which such work has been carried out under the guidelines set by the voluntary licensing authority, now the interim licensing authority. I pay tribute to a uniform standard of excellence and responsibility that reflects the very best of medical tradition in this country. As far as I know—it is confirmed by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State—following the Warnock report there have been no breaches of the rules, which have been followed voluntarily.

That leads to the question whether we need the legislation. A senior Roman Catholic in my constituency, who certainly would not agree with many of my views, said:

> "I am not necessarily against research as such, but the public needs reassurance."

I cannot improve on those wise words. The need for reassurance, both generally and to prevent such practices that have been mentioned today, such as cloning, genetic manipulation or the inappropriate use of spare embryos, becomes all the more acute as science continues to push the frontiers of knowledge.

To me, such advances are progress, but they have obviously caused unease historically, particularly when work has been carried out in connection with human life. Indeed, those who are most uneasy—and I do not belittle their feelings—tend to use the word "experimentation" rather than the neutral word "research", which is less emotive. The law must recognise changed circumstances and get the right balance.

What are the two principal issues that we are debating? The first is assistance to sub-fertile couples to have children. Surely few would object to medical science offering help to the 10 per cent. or so couples falling within that category. Although the success rate has improved markedly, there is still an enormous way to go, and such advances will be halted if the House so decides. I accept that current procedures could continue even if research could not, but why reduce the hopes of such couples for their future happiness?

It was put to me by a priest in my constituency that couples do not necessarily have the right to have children. I have a certain sympathy with that viewpoint. The assumption that we have rights in all sorts of matters has become subject to justifiable criticism. Certainly, the 25 per cent. of parents in 1988—the figures were published last week—who had children outside marriage, compared with the 10 per cent. 10 years earlier, had not exercised their responsibilities. However, the vast majority of sub-fertile couples could not, by a process of self-selection monitored by the medical profession, be better motivated and more worthy of any help that medical science can offer.

The second issue is the early detection of profound mental and physical handicaps in children. I use the word "detection" rather than "prevention". First, I accept the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) that there is no cure as yet—and I emphasis the word "yet." Secondly, I would not presume to judge the happiness that is given and received by parents

[Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes]

of handicapped children. We are all aware of the amazing achievements of many handicapped children against all the odds. I am not an advocate of eugenics per se. Parents should be consulted if they so wish, and thereafter it is their choice whether to seek further information and to decide whether a pregnancy should continue.

I cannot help wondering how many parents would decide to proceed if they knew that their child would be born handicapped. Some diagnoses can now be made as early as within 48 hours of fertilisation, and assessment can continue while the fertilised ovum is frozen. Placental biopsies and amniocenteses which are more traumatic and are carried out late in pregnancy, will decrease in importance, and the incidence of late abortions, at whatever date the House subsequently decides, will decrease, to universal relief. Further safeguards in ILA guidelines have reduced the incidence of multiple births, which clearly threaten a safe birth by the mother and also the viability of under-sized babies.

I refer now to a question that I cannot answer but wh[illegible] all hon. Members will have to attempt to answer, as some have already tried: when does life start? On one side of the spectrum there are those who say that, in itself, the sperm or ovum has life. More commonly, it is asserted that the moment of fertilisation is the start of life. Even the definition of fertilisation is inexact. Is it the time of the penetration of the ovum by the sperm or, to be pedantic, is it to be the two-cell stage when the two genetic materials mix properly for the first time?

Other faiths, in my constituency and elsewhere, date life from the time of implantation. I was going to venture into a concept that I am not even certain is produced in the English dictionary—ensoulment. I shall desist from discussing that matter tonight, but I leave the House with the thought that identical twins presumably have different souls. We do not know when souls enter identical twins —it is a complex theory—but it can logically be argued that one cannot have a soul until the 14th day, which is the day on which the first neurological tissue is laid down. *[Interruption.]* I recognise that I shall not carry the House with me.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Has my hon. Friend identical twins? I have.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: I suggest that they do not have identical souls.

The House should bear it in mind that no fertilised egg has yet been cultured in vitro beyond nine days. Whether or not the House likes it—I suspect that many people do not—there is also a long legal precedent for productions of conception receiving relative degrees of protection. That is a long-established principle of British law.

I have sought to show that there are few if any absolutes in this contentious issue. If reassurance is in the air, Warnock provides it. We cannot turn the clock back, but we could stop it and, by stopping it, stop the legitimate aspirations of those couples who wish to develop their own happiness within the context of the family. With further research into sub-fertility—male or female—and genetic disorders, many more people will benefit from advances made as costs decrease and accessibility, which at the moment is very limited, increases. I recognise that there will be wide differences in hon. Members' standpoints, but I trust that we will respect each others views and will vote to replace semantics and scruples with science and sense.

8.18 pm

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): I do not wish to detain the House for too long. I welcome the Bill and the debate, which is about a fundamental issue. For many years we have debated the science of embryology and how it can or cannot help people. For most of us, science in this century, and even in this decade, has moved ahead by leaps and bounds. It cannot be right that science should move on in industry and not in other aspects of our lives. As we know that science can both create and destroy, we must ensure at all times that it is regulated and controlled.

The Bill is about very fundamental issues: at stake is the right to make decisions about parenthood. I believe that it is only through controlled pre-embryo research that choices will be extended to those who are infertile or who carry a gene disorder.

We must all know or have met a constituent or have a colleague, friend or family member whose life has been scarred because they are unable to have children. We may also know those who have been fortunate enough to have been the recipient of treatment that has resulted in a much-wanted child: treatment that would never have been available to them without pre-embryo research. Some hon. Members have questioned whether that has been of benefit to people. I find that incredible. Since the first birth as a result of in vitro fertilisation—Louise Brown in Oldham in 1978—thousands of children have been born to people in this and many other countries who would otherwise never have had the opportunity of parenthood.

But in vitro fertilisation is still successful in only 10 to 15 per cent. of treatments. For the sake of the estimated 275,000 sufferers of infertility who could benefit from IVF, it is vital that further research is conducted that will improve the present programmes. There are many known causes of infertility in men and women, and there are many that are at present unknown. Only 10 per cent. of infertile men can currently be helped either by surgery or hormone treatment, yet infertility is as common in men as in women. This is not just a women's issue, although women Members will have both opened and closed the debate for the Opposition.

One in five pregnancies ends in miscarriage. Although we cannot stop miscarriages occurring, controlled science has meant that miscarriages are better understood. However, without research little hope of a solution to these problems can be offered. Among the many organisations that have sent us their views on this Bill I, like all hon. Members, have received correspondence from the National Association for the Childless. The testimony of such people is one of the most powerful reasons to support licensed experimentation on pre-embryos.

However, it is not only the infertile who will benefit from the continuation of the research. Although we cannot say that we have had great success in sorting out the problems of hereditary genetic disorders in families in the past five years, I am sure that in time it will be possible to screen pre-embryos from those who are at risk of passing on a genetic disease. It will enable those people to establish pregnancies that are not affected by the disease, rather than have to make the agonising decision of whether to have an abortion after weeks of pregnancy.

The case for this research to continue was made to me most effectively by a couple in my constituency whom I have contacted again and who have allowed me to share with the House their experience. They wrote:

> "We are the parents of two sufferers of Retinitis Pigmentosa, one of over 4,000 disorders that are genetically transmitted. RP is a disease of the retina of the eye. It can, in the worst cases lead to total loss of sight in youth and is the second greatest cause of blindness in the country. 25,000 families are affected. There is no treatment, no cure and no way of preventing its transmission from one generation to another . . .
>
> Scientists have recently begun to identify some of the genes that carry RP. In a year or two it should be possible for parents who are known to be at risk of having an affected child to fertilise embryos in vitro, test for the genetic defect, and have inserted in to the mother's womb only a defect-free embryo. This procedure would provide, for couples who want to use it, a means of ensuring that they can have children in the certainty that they will not risk passing on a hereditary disease, a dread which haunts everybody who suffers from one."

That couple then comment specifically on a clause on which hon. Members will have to take a decision on the Floor of the House if the rest of the business goes through. They state:

> "The version of the clause that would ban all research into pre-embryos would render impossible the kind of procedure described above. It would be a terrible blow to those of us who have come to hope that it might be feasible to end the transmission of the condition that so malignly affects us. Can it conceivably be right for the nation, as represented in Parliament, to deprive so many of its citizens of one of the main avenues of progress on a matter so fundamental"

I said at the beginning of my speech that the legislation involves fundamental issues. I am a proud father of three healthy children and, since the Bill was given its Second Reading in another place, I have become a grandfather. I deeply believe that it would be wrong to deny people the right to have children. We need controlled science to help in that.

8.25 pm

Mr. W. Benyon (Milton Keynes): I, too, welcome the Bill. The last time such legislation was discussed in the House, I urged my hon. Friend's predecessor, my right hon. Friend the present Secretary of State for Social Services, to speed up such legislation. The Government have been as good as their word.

One reason why I feel so strongly about the Bill is that the present position is untenable. My hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Sir M. McNair-Wilson) was right to draw attention to that in his intervention in the speech of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State. I also welcome the timetable arrangements which, I hope, we shall pass at the end of the debate. I wish that such arrangements were in force for many other pieces of legislation.

Try as I might, I cannot find any logical alternative to conception being the start of life. I have a great pile of literature on my desk from organisations and people who are trying to prove the contrary. As a drowning man clings to a log of wood when he is in the water, I stick to that definition because I cannot find any other reasonable criteria with which to deal with this important Bill. If one departs from that idea, where does one end up? What is the difference in law, in logic, in morality or in science between 14 days, 20, 30 or 40 days? My hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) clearly identified the fact that on the one hand it is said that the experimentation must stop at 14 days, whereas at 15 days—or after that—we are quite prepared to abort the foetus.

I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) is no longer in his place, because I wish to take issue with the advice that he received from some clerics in the Salisbury diocese. Despite what was said, Christianity has never been in any doubt about the fact that human life starts with conception and ends with death. Some scientists and doctors try to chip away at each end, but it is Parliament's duty to hold the ring and to ensure that we arrive at the right answer.

I read the reports of the debates in the other place carefully. Some of their Lordships seemed to be saying that they were not in favour of experimentation, but that they felt that they could not take that view into law. In a democracy, that seems a counsel of despair. All social legislation has involved great controversy, but we have had to consider and decide those measures with our votes. This is no exception.

Crucial to our discussion on this part of the Bill is the question whether, by banning research, we are stopping or delaying progress with either IVF or the elimination of genetic diseases. I am sure that many hon. Members will make up their minds on that issue alone, and that it will be a decisive factor.

The debate is far too short to go deeply into the arguments that have been placed before us by various people in the medical and scientific professions. One thing is clear. Even in the relatively short time since Warnock, we have far greater knowledge than that Committee had. Things are moving fast, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Mr. Goodson-Wickes) said. The harsh light of publicity has shone on the matter since Warnock. As a result, we have been shown research methods and findings which were not available then.

I am not against research. All that I am against is research that destroys the embryo, as the Father of the House said so eloquently earlier. The problem with IVF is not fertilisation but the implantation of the fertilised embryo. There is no need to use embryos for research into this. We also know that genetic abornamalities are evident in the sperm or in the ovum. Therefore, there is no need to use the live embryo for such research. It can be carried out without doing that. Therefore, we must think carefully about these points and consider the technical evidence that has been put before the House.

George Orwell talked about 1984. I submit to the House that if we follow the example of the other place, we shall be only six years late.

8.31 pm

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): To reinforce what the hon. Member for Milton Keynes (Mr. Benyon) has just said. If the people who pitted themselves against slavery in this Parliament 200 years ago had listened to the utilitarians of their day and accepted that it was merely a matter of private morality, the slavery laws would still be on the statute book. I do not accept that this is merely a matter of private morality. It is an issue on which everyone in the Chamber has a right to a view. It goes to the very heart of how we perceive humanity.

Lady Warnock has always emphasised the distinction between fact and opinion. I agree with her. In 1985 at

[Mr. David Alton]

Newcastle, she said that only a fool would now say that life does not begin at conception. Her committee, which drew up the Warnock report, said:

> "Once the process has begun, there is no particular part of the development process which is more important than another . . . However, we agreed that this was an area in which some precise decision must be taken in order to allay public anxiety."

Lady Warnock and her committee hit on the aptly named primitive streak. As the hon. Member for Maidstone (Ms. Widdecombe) said earlier, she never once used the term pre-embryo. That was a later invention. Surely a debate which may make lawful destructive experiments on human embryos requires the clearest of language. The word "embryo" comes from the Greek and is defined as the rudimentary, initial or earliest stage of development. The word "foetus" means little one. Those code words from ancient language hide the truth that our generation seeks to deny.

Our opponents in the debate say that the embryo is just a collection of cells. That may be, but it is still a unique human being. One could say that every human being, of whatever age or size, is just a collection of cells. Just because an embryo is small, it does not mean that it is morally inferior. Others say that it is merely potential life. Not true. It is human life with the potential, in favourable circumstances, to develop fully to human maturity. In many ways, the 14-day argument concedes that. After all, as the right hon. Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine) said, it must be 14 days after something. Fertilisation is the only event to which everyone of us here can point and say, "That is when I began and I have been me ever since."

The appearance of the primitive streak is a landmark, not a watershed. It is an incident in a life that has already begun. Fertilisation determines the colour of our eyes and the colour of our skin, our sex and our uniqueness—not 14 days. The conclusions that we reach about the tiny, vulnerable, powerless human embryo will later shape how we regard the status of every individual and how we perceive his or her human rights. It will determine our attitude towards disabled people, the senile, the incurably sick and the terminally ill.

This supreme human rights issue is of the highest moral significance. Those who justify destructive experiments use the classic utilitarian argument that means justify ends, that benefits outweigh costs and that it is my right to choose, even to take another human life, because it is all for the common good. We heard the word "enlightenment" earlier. Dr. Michael Hall, who was quoted in *The Guardian* in 1987, said on the subject of scientists' intentions in research and IVF:

> "It would mean we could manipulate at will the genetic pool, produce super-races, modify ethnic traits, excise socially unacceptable habits—in fact produce people to order."

If they had the unfettered right, unhampered and unhindered by Parliament, some of our scientists would pursue nothing less than that. Their thinking is summed up by the Oxford philosopher, Jonathon Glover, who said:

> "For a utilitarian killing is in no way intrinsically wrong, but is only wrong because of its implications for happiness and misery."

Scientists say, "Allow us to experiment and there will be no more handicap and no more infertility." The supporters of experimentation have been constantly challenged, and I challenge the Secretary of State again today, to name a single human disease in which embryo research has led to significant cures or advances in treatment. Lord Walton of Detchant, the scientist—who favours experimentation—admitted in the debate in another place:

> "I agree that as yet there are none."

Cures are not achieved. What is achieved is detection. One hon. Member described it as culling the handicapped. Lord Rea also told the House of Lords:

> "We should also consider society's need to reduce by every means possible the proportion of handicapped children."—[*Official Report, House of Lords,* 8 February 1990, c. 958.]

The House should note the phraseology. He referred to the elimination not merely of handicap, but of handicapped children, by every means possible.

Care and kill can never be used as synonyms. Quality controls and perfection tests on life are repugnant. They are defeatist. There are alternatives. Professor Hymie Gordon, Professor Jerome Lejeune, Professor John Marshall and Professor Ron Taylor, whom I mentioned earlier in an intervention, are four of the leading academics in the field. Professor Gordon said:

> "Everything we need to learn can be learnt by studying genetic diseases in non-human primates and other animals."

Much valuable work is also being done in treating genetic conditions. That does not involve embryos; it involves research on blood or other tissues taken from adult patients. In the longer term there is also the prospect of gene therapy. I support strongly non-lifetaking research and unconditional help for disabled people and their families.

As the child enters the valley of decision, it is worth pondering for a moment where our failure to follow the maker's instructions have taken us. Within the past two weeks, there have been two graphic illustrations of our anti-life ethics. In my city of Liverpool, a court came to a verdict after a drunken driver mowed down an eight-month pregnant mum on a pedestrian crossing. The baby died, but the court was told that the unborn child did not count. The driver was given a three-month sentence and a £1 fine.

There was also the case of the King's college baby, stabbed to death through the wall of the womb with potassium chloride at 27 and a half weeks gestation. One of a pair of twins, the baby had a chromosomal defect that would have left it impotent. A letter in *The Lancet* suggested that such selective reduction should be called pregnancy enhancement as a more endearing description of what we authorise under British law.

We were told 23 years ago that abortion rights would not lead to abortion on demand. Today, one in five pregnancies ends in abortion—3 million since 1967. It is a cruel paradox that this Bill says that personhood begins at 14 days and after that it would be a crime to violate the embryo. However, it will remain perfectly legal to kill a foetus in an abortion for the next 26 weeks. It will also be legal deliberately to create so-called spare human embryos, merely for the purpose of experimentation. If we treated foxes, seals or beagles in that way, there would be a public outcry.

Like the abortion laws, there will be no end to what we are asked to sanction. Like the abortion laws, once the principle has been agreed, it will be difficult to turn back. The popular perception is that, once Parliament has legalised something, it must be right.

Our legislation allows abortions later than anywhere else in the world. Last year, women from 100 countries—from Mongolia to South Africa—came to the United

Kingdom for late abortions. Denmark, Ireland, parts of Australia, Norway, Portugal, and soon West Germany all forbid experiments in their countries, and the House must ask itself whether it really wants Britain to be the centre of that trade.

Concern for the human embryo is part of a seamless garment. That garment is woven together by a common thread. Here is a concern for life, justice, care and worth. When one considers the degradation of life today, destruction of family life, collapse of communities and of good neighbourliness, contamination and plunder of creation, and indifference to the world's hungry and poor, one can see how that seamless garment has become a tatter of rags. That is what happens when society ceases to believe that each person is unique, sculpted in the image of his maker, and not to be treated as expendable raw material.

The Bill represents a crossroads every bit as important as that which we faced in 1967, and concerns an issue of fundamental human rights. I hope that the House agrees that to embark on the use of the tiniest human being as the subject of destructive experimentation is a dangerous departure from civilised ways. I say in conclusion to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), who said "Knock and the door will be opened":

> "In as much as ye have done it to the least of these my brethren, ye have done it to me."

8.41 pm

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I congratulate the Government on an excellent Bill, on a subject that is not easy to tackle. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health and the other Ministers concerned have done well. The Bill had a good passage through the other place. I congratulate their Lordships and the Archbishop of York on their debate on clause 11 in particular, and on sending the Bill to this House in a form that we would like to consider.

We should congratulate also this country's doctors and scientists on giving us a world lead through a combination of excellence in medical science and in moral science. Philosophers such as the Reverend Professor Dunstan, a former Queen's chaplain, deserves great credit for his work in sustaining the philosophy behind the work of Edwards and Steptoe.

I refer briefly to the subject of handicaps, in which I have a personal interest as the adoptive parent of a handicapped child. Research offers the chance of a breakthrough in helping parents who risk producing children with genetic disorders to avoid doing so. I ask any right hon. or hon. Member who is doubtful about how to vote, to vote in favour of the Bill, for the hope that such research offers prospective parents. Handicaps afflict too many people in our country, and we do not look after them properly.

I remind the House that there are 5,500 handicapped children in institutional care because their parents are unable to look after them. I know of families in my constituency who make desperate attempts to look after their children, but who find it difficult to do so. We should not seek to stop research that can offer families the chance of healthy children.

Handicapped children are often sent from pillar to post and lead a miserable life not only because of their handicap but on account of the breakdown in the family relationship that stems from it. Handicapped children surely deserve the love and care of a family even more than healthy children. I call upon right hon. and hon. Members who oppose research to do more to provide family homes for handicapped children.

I opposed Enoch Powell's Bill, and have played my part in the five-year campaign against the thinking behind his Bill. I also helped to form the campaign group Progress, which has helped to counter propaganda against the Bill and has been well supported by medical charities. The work done by the Medical Research Council and the Association of Medical Research Charities also illustrates the broad base of scientific support for the Bill. Only a small minority of scientists are opposed to the research in question. I look forward to the debate on clause 11, and to the vote on it, and I hope that I may play a part in its Committee stage.

8.44 pm

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): I address my remarks to members of my own party, not so much to other right hon. and hon. Members. I do not intend to pronounce on questions of morality, ethics, or pre-embryo research. Instead, I refer to the position taken generally by people on the left, not only in the United Kingdom but throughout the European Community. I do so because I believe that the debate has to some extent been hijacked by a permissive lobby which, unfortunately, often sways many of my right hon. and hon. Friends, without them giving due consideration to the implications of the issues involved.

My hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson) was right to spell out Labour party policy.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: It was conference policy.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: It was a decision of the Labour party conference that the opportunities for women to have the right to choose should be maximised. That policy affects this debate as much as that on abortion.

My hon. Friend the Member for Barking made it clear that Labour Members are free to vote as they wish. When they do so, I know that they will take into account the decision taken at Labour's national conference, where millions of votes were cast in favour of a policy that we must acknowledge.

Many members of the public following this debate, and perhaps reading of it in the press, might be led to believe that Labour is dominated by people who say that it is in favour of embryo research and of a fairly permissive regime in respect of abortion. That is not the case. The Labour party's membership holds varied views on such matters. It has within it the Labour Life Group, a national organisation affiliated to the Labour party with branches throughout the United Kingdom. It holds an annual meeting, which was staged last year on 13 June at the Conway hall in London, and holds meetings at Labour's national conference. I draw attention to that organisation to demonstrate that the debate in the Labour party is far wider than it might appear at first glimpse.

Two interesting votes took place last year in the European Parliament. A vote on 16 March concerned a report on artificial in vivo and in vitro fertilisation. It emphasised the dignity of every human being from the moment of conception, the right of the child to life, and in particular the right of a child to a family. In that context, family meant the genetic mother and the genetic father.

[Mr. Campbell-Savours]

The creation of surplus embryos during in vitro fertilisation should, according to one of the report's recommendations, be prohibited. A second report dealt with the same subject from a different viewpoint.

That report was lost by only three votes—at least in respect of socialists in the European Parliament. Discarding the Conservative vote, voting among socialist Members of that Parliament was 39 votes against and 36 in favour. In terms of the number of people in the European left who cast their votes in the European Parliament, there was a clear division, with almost half the Labour group, the socialist group of the European Parliament, voting in favour of the recommendations.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Did the vote take place on the floor of the Parliament or in a Labour committee? If that vote took place during a plenary session, the figures are extraordinary.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I am not sure about that, but I understand that a total of 150 votes were cast. Given that the hon. Lady was once a Member of the European Parliament, she will be aware of the significance of my remarks.

It is also worth considering what has happened in other European Parliaments. I understand that socialists in Norway voted for a total prohibition and that socialists in Denmark voted for a moratorium. Socialists in France are so divided that the Bill currently before the French Parliament may have to be abandoned, while socialists in Germany overwhelmingly voted to ban research on embryos.

When we debate such matters in the United Kingdom, we should do so in the context of what is happening in the rest of Europe. It is important to remember the division among socialists in the European Parliament and the socialist groups in various Parliaments throughout the Community, which form a strong part of those Parliaments.

My hon. Friends should also note the stance of radical socialist feminists. They represent a huge international movement, which has been completely ignored by the British Labour party in the context of this debate. We should consider what those feminists have said. In July 1985 an important meeting took place in Vellinge in Sweden, at which 16 countries were represented. An organisation called Feminist International Network of Resistance to Reproductive and Genetic Engineering, FINRRAGE, was formed as a result of that meeting. That organisation has thousands of members from around 35 countries.

Before anyone shouts that it must be a Catholic organisation, I must tell the House that that is not so. It is a pro-abortion organisation, but it is opposed to research into the embryo. There is no contradiction in terms. When I asked members of that organisation about that, they explained the nature of the consistency in their argument.

As a result of the 1985 conference, FINRRAGE passed a resolution to resist the development and application globally of the technologies derived from embryo research. FINRRAGE has claimed that those technologies destroy women's physical integrity, exploit women's procreativity, undermine women's struggle for control of reproduction and are generally harmful to the interests of all women.

A document produced by that organisation for its 1989 conference states:

> "The position of FINRRAGE is unique. The challenge in responding to these technologies from a women-centred perspective is to reorient the ethical and political discussion so that it takes account of what these technologies do to women, the primary subjects of medical and scientific experimentation in the area of new technologies. None of the dominating 'official' discussions have taken these issues into account."

That organisation is complaining that the international discussion that is taking place about such research completely disregards and dismisses the contribution that radical women can make.

The second international FINRRAGE conference took place in Dhaka, Bangladesh in March 1989. There are now women in 35 countries on all continents participating in the network. The FINRRAGE document produced for that conference states:

> "This conference focused on issues affecting women from the North, South, East and West and how we can work together to resist reproductive and genetic engineering. The Comilla Declaration adopted by the conference provides a basis for our work worldwide."

Those women, who regard themselves as "critical feminists," are exploring three areas—the link between genetic engineering and reproductive technologies, the different meaning of the new productive technologies for Third and First-world women and what the application of such reproductive and genetic engineering will mean for women in the future, as well as now.

That radical women's organisation is based in all the major countries. It meets regularly and it has branches in various parts of the United Kingdom. It is highly organised in western Europe, and its representatives believe that the debate on embryo research disregards their position. We cannot disregard the views of those women. They form part of the European left and they have a voice to be heard.

8.55 pm

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): I should like to begin by quoting from a document published earlier in the session by the pro-research organisation, Progress, which is entitled "Freedom to Choose". The quotation has already been used in the debate, but it is worth repeating; those advocating human embryo research state:

> "Research using human pre-embryos is not, and never has been, concerned with treatment of genetic disorders, or chromosomal abnormalities."

Those who pretend that that is not the case are playing coldly, cruelly and callously upon the quite understandable fears, hopes and frustrations of those who suffer from genetic disease and those who care for and love them.

What some scientists are seeking is the right to perform destructive research upon perfectly normal, healthy human embryos, for the sole purpose of perfecting techniques for seeking out and destroying other handicapped embryos.

The ban on destructive human embryo research that we propose would not prevent a woman with a history of genetic disease from declining to have implanted within her an embryo created though the in vitro fertilisation programme that had been found to be defective or deformed. To that extent, those who mistakenly believe that such pre-implantation screening holds any real hope of eliminating handicap would still be able to follow the process. What they would not be able to do is to destroy other perfectly healthy embryos in developing new techniques for destroying handicapped ones.

It should be remembered, incidentally, that the Royal College of Physicians had some wise words in its report entitled "Prenatal Diagnosis and Screening" published in September 1989. It said:

> "Most infants with congenital malformations and chromosomal disorders are born to health young women with no previously identifiable risk factors. It seems unlikely that these sporadic disorders can be prevented."

A ban on human embryo research would not prevent improvements and developments in the IVF programme. Many of us who support that ban are not opposed to IVF. A friend of mine is currently undergoing IVF and I naturally very much hope that she and her husband will be able to conceive and to bring forth a healthy baby.

I realise only too well that this is often the last hope for many couples, and I would not wish to see the IVF programme stopped. We also understand the problems faced by infertile couples and believe in research on the causes of infertility and to help in the treatment of those who are infertile. I would not like anyone to run away with the idea that we do not have compassion for those who cannot conceive easily.

We need research into dead embryos which fail to implant. As another colleague said, no living embryo will show why a particular embryo cannot implant. Specialists need to garner the dead embryos and experiment on them to find out why they have not implanted and to carry out other research for the woman.

We must ask, "What is the purpose of research?" I have come to the conclusion that it is not to prevent handicap. The only way in which research can prevent handicap is by seeking out and killing the handicapped embryo. We also know that there is a hidden agenda behind that research and those experiments—to develop new abortifacients and contraceptives for the Third world. We all know that a vast amount of money is involved in developing those new drugs, and we must face that fact.

Even as we speak, progress is being made without the use of human embryo experimentation. I shall mention two of the exciting developments in molecular biology, which have arisen in the short time since the Government introduced the Bill to Parliament. The first one involves muscular dystrophy. *The Times* of 11 January stated that scientists in Oxford had identified a minigene in muscular dystrophy which prevented serious disability and

> "could be used in the future for treating severe cases of muscular dystrophy by gene therapy."

The second example involved cystic fibrosis, in which I have an interest because one of my godsons has the condition. The identification and isolation of the cystic fibrosis gene allows detailed study of the function of the protein involved. That will lead to specific pharmacological and gene therapy for cystic fibrosis. In *The New England Journal of Medicine* of 1 February this year, the rhetorical question is posed:

> "Moreover if the current studies of the molecular pathophysiology of cystic fibrosis yield, as anticipated, novel therapies that extent the quality and span of life for those with cystic fibrosis to the age of 40 or 50 years from the current median of 20 years, will elective abortion of an affected fetus be justified?"

Genuine help for society will come from advances in the treatment of those disorders, not in the destruction of the few which can be identified at the embryonic stage.

In my comments, I have dealt almost exclusively with the new, bankrupt arguments peddled by those who wish, for reasons of their own, to promote research on human embryos as the panacea for all the ills in our society. They are perpetrating a cruel hoax, which I hope the House will reject.

In future debates, I intend to table a number of amendments to the Bill to seek to curb the worst abuses of the artificial insemination by donor services. That matter was raised by many peers during recent debates in the other place. The Government's response was to include in the Bill a new subsection in clause 13 which states:

> "A woman shall not be provided with treatment services unless account has been taken of the welfare of any child who may be born as a result of the treatment, and of any other child who may be affected by the birth."

I welcome the new wording, which acknowledges the welfare of children as a priority, but it does not go far enough and is far too weak and woolly. I strongly believe that, in the best interests of the child born, treatment should be given only to married couples or to a man and woman living together in a stable relationship. The child so born should have the right to know its genetic background at the age of 18, and there should be an automatic right for the child to know how it was conceived. There is nothing to be ashamed of, so I would have thought that society would not want to hide the way in which the child was conceived.

There should also be safeguards on the number of donated eggs or sperm, to cut down on unwitting incest. Most importantly, the name of the social or non-genetic father of the child should not appear on the birth certificate under the heading of "father", but the phrase "by donation" should be used. It is quite wrong for a new life to begin with a lie that will last the length of that life. We should surely encourage honesty and truth and acknowledge that new techniques are being used to help parenthood, that those new techniques should be recognised in law, and that the children resulting from them should have their rights protected by the law.

It is essential that the Secretary of State be responsible to the House and the people of this country for the work of the licensing authority. I served on the Standing Committee examining the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Bill, which was an excellent piece of legislation. It makes no sense to treat human beings worse than we would treat animals. It is vital that that concept be reintroduced during subsequent stages of the Bill, which we shall debate with a great deal of interest.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. The House will wish to know that the winding-up speeches are expected to begin at 9.30 pm. Many hon. Members who have sat here most of the day still want to speak, so I appeal for short speeches to continue.

9.6 pm

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): This Bill is entitled the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill, thus encompassing a huge, delicate and controversial topic. The House would have enough on its plate dealing with only that subject.

I want to mention some aspects that will get in the way of proper consideration of the embryology part of the Bill. The long title of the Bill says that the Act will

[Mrs. Audrey Wise]

"make provision in connection with human embryos and any subsequent development of such embryos",

which is a strange and rather sweeping statement. We are all, after all, the subsequent development of embryos. I wondered how far this matter might go. I realised that if certain hon. Members were determined to extend the scope of the Bill to take account of the interests of the foetus, I should be prepared to enter into an argument about that.

However, we now learn that new clauses relating only to the termination of pregnancy will be accepted. If we are to deal with foetuses in the Bill, why cannot we deal with, for example, the proper nourishment of expectant mothers, so that their foetuses can develop properly? Why cannot we deal with the fact that many pregnant women are so poor that they cannot eat properly, thereby prejudicing the chances of their foetuses? Why cannot we deal with the fact that young girls have particular problems that lead to damage to the development of the foetus, resulting in a much higher incidence of perinatal mortality?

Why cannot I table amendments to deal with social security matters to put those problems right? If we are concerned about the subsequent development of the foetus, I should have the right to do that. Why allow the Bill to be hijacked by those whose only interest in the foetus is abortion?

Mrs. Ann Winterton *rose*——

Mrs. Wise: No explanation has reached my ears during this debate, and I have listened to all of it. I strongly disapprove of the fact that the interests of pregnant women and their foetuses are being excluded from a Bill that is supposed to be being extended to deal with foetuses. Certain hon. Members are interested only in abortion, not in the unborn child or its development after birth. If the House were so interested in the welfare of children, many women would not feel the desperation that drives them to seek abortions.

The hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) did the House a service in drawing attention to the fact that many handicapped children have miserable lives that could be made less miserable if there were any intention on the part of the House or society to do so. I should have welcomed a non-partisan approach to such questions and problems. I do not welcome a myopic concentration on the subject of abortion.

We have been told about the importance of language, and I agree that it is important. I have listened intently while we were accused by implication of being pro-slavery. It has been said that the likes of us would not have wanted to see an end to the slave trade. We have been accused of being in favour of experiments on little children, and a picture has been painted of the massacre of the innocents taking place in our country. It follows that, if there is a massacre of innocents, people are massacring them. Sometimes I do not feel very optimistic when I look around our society, but I am not so pessimistic as to think that I am surrounded by people who massacre innocents. I am often surrounded by women who have enormous problems and desperate feelings about them. I should like to see the House reduce the causes of that desperation.

The hon. Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) told us that even the moment of fertilisation is somewhat moveable. Leaving that aside, we have been told that from the moment of fertilisation there is a human being and not a potential human being. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) specifically objects to that phrase. He says that, from the moment of fertilisation, there is a human being with potential.

With respect, the hon. Gentleman is talking nonsense. It is a potential human being and, if the circumstances are right, the fertilised egg may develop into a human being. It has been said that many do not and that, if nature if so profligate, perhaps it is not so sinful to agree that it would be proper for good reason to use those embryos to improve the lives of children who will be born. I do not object to that reasonable proposition. The embryo is not a human being. In an ectopic pregnancy the embryo cannot develop into a human being, but it is a fertilised egg, an embryo.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Wise: I shall not give way in a 10-minute speech. An ectopic pregnancy cannot result in the development of a baby.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: It could kill the mother.

Mrs. Wise: Exactly, so it is not in itself a human being, cannot be regarded as such, and cannot develop into a human being.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Wise: The hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) should respect the rules of the House and keep her silence unless she is on her feet.

Those who say that they have an absolute concept of life do not in practice follow their own advice.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Rubbish.

Mrs. Wise: No hon. Member, with hand on heart, could say that he or she has a total respect for life, in all circumstances——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Wise: —otherwise there would be no vote for capital punishment, no money would be spent by our society on weapons of war——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Wise: —there would be no export of armaments from this country, which encourages people to think that they should earn their living by exporting armaments. They are instruments of death——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Wise: —yet some hon. Members say that they accept the absolute concept of life from the moment of conception. There has been a good deal of hypocrisy in this debate. There have been some good, thoughtful speeches, but I side with those who say——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Wise: —that hon. Members ought to show some humility. I hope that hon. Members will exercise their conscience in the Division Lobbies, but I hope, too, that they will remember that they represent people with an equal right to exercise their own judgment and conscience.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Rubbish.

Mrs. Wise: I am surprised that the hon. Member for Lancaster calls out, "Rubbish."

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I ask the hon. Lady to give me a chance by giving way.

Hon. Members: Give way.

Mrs. Wise: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for an hon. Member to harass another hon. Member? It is not often that I crave the protection of the Chair, but in this case I think that that protection has been noticeably missing.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Time is extremely short. I thought that the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) was perfectly capable of protecting herself; otherwise, I should have intervened earlier.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) keeps referring to me, yet she will not give way when I rise courteously to my feet to ask a question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Points of order are prolonging the length of this speech.

Mrs. Wise: I regret that my speech may inadvertently have been lengthened by the disorderly conduct of the hon. Member for Lancaster.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: No. The hon. Lady would not give way.

Mrs. Wise: I am pleased, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you considered me to be capable of taking care of myself. I shall always endeavour to do so. I should be sorry if my point about the importance of our conscience, and of the conscience of those whom we represent, was overlooked because some hon. Members believe that only they are the guardians of morality and conscience.

9.17 pm

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): This has been a long debate. Strong feelings have been expressed —perhaps a little more strongly in the last few moments. Our constituents also have strong feelings about the subject. We, as Members of Parliament, listen to the arguments, but many people misunderstand the subject.

I have always been totally against embryo research at any stage. I, together with many people, wish the time limit for abortions to be reduced. This is an ideal measure to discuss the matter. Many people are not against abortion per se. I am not against abortion. Nevertheless, the time at which some abortions take place has become a national scandal. When we debated the matter some time ago I said that the figures suggested that we were becoming the foetel dustbin of Europe. The problem is growing worse, not better.

We need legislation and I hope that the House, in its wisdom, will decide not to allow research on human embryos. If it does, we shall be on a slippery slope that will take us to where the scientists think we should stop. Scientists will wish to push back the frontiers of science if they can decide whether they should stop. The House should not give scientists the opportunity to do that because we will be saying in future, "God help us. Why on earth did Parliament allow that to happen?"

Many people oppose the use of embryos for research purposes on moral, Christian and other grounds. Many of us reached that view after considerable thought and after many discussions with people on both sides of the debate. We all have sympathy for people who cannot have children. We are not legislating that they should not be given the opportunity, but we should also consider that no person has a God-given right to expect to have a child, although we hope that medical technology can help many couples and make them into a complete family, if that is what they wish.

Many people in Britain with handicapped children do not want future generations to gain from experiments on human embryos, and they have made that clear to me in many discussions. They have a right to that view and we should take it into account.

It would be difficult to allow research on human embryos up to some arbitary cut-off point, as such legislation would be difficult to enforce. I had hoped to discuss various parts of the Bill that I consider would lead to a free-for-all, but time is limited. I hope that we will return to the issue later.

How many researchers would jeopardise future funding or professional reputations which could be established by one or two extra days' experimentation on a human embryo? Who will say, "The 14 days are up; no more experiments"? Who will have the knowledge to take such a decision? All embryos do not look the same. As some may look 12, 13, 16 or 18 days old at 14 days, it will be very difficult for any licensing body to police the legislation.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to reach a rational view about the overall impact of the legislation when so much of it will be dealt with by statutory instruments. I urge Ministers to ensure that the House has plenty of time to discuss those regulations and statutory instruments, and that they will not be whistled through late on Thursday nights when some Members may not be present. We need to discuss those regulations extremely carefully.

There is much concern about the membership of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority. It is proposed that the majority of the research licensing committee be made up of researchers. That would be rather like employing child molesters in a nursery school. We do not want such legislation being sanctioned by the House. It is such an important issue that we may not get the opportunity to discuss it in full again for perhaps another decade or possibly two, so we must ensure that when the Bill finally reaches the statute book after completing its Committee stage, we have in place exactly what right hon. and hon. Members believe should be there. There must be no comeback other than on the regulations laid down by the Government.

9.24 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy) will understand that some of us were pained and distressed by his speech. He talked about the eugenics of a brave new world. What can that mean other than that cross-species fertilisation, as allowed in the Bill, will lead, he thinks, to the creation of human and animal hybrids? Therefore, I should like to ask some direct questions of the Department and the Minister.

Will the Minister confirm that fusion between human sperm and the egg of an animal is allowed under the Bill in only specific and tightly controlled circumstances? Will she confirm that that involves the procedure normally known as the "hamster" test, whereby human sperm is mixed with specially prepared hamster eggs to test the sperm's ability to fuse with an egg membrane? Will she confirm that the coating of the hamster's egg is dissolved chemically to allow the penetration of sperms from another species? Will she confirm that, without the removal of that coating, fusion with human sperms would be impossible?

After three hours' incubation, the eggs are removed and inspected for evidence of fusion between the sperm and the egg plasma membrane. The hamster eggs, which in any event are non-viable, are then discarded. The hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), with his membership of the Medical Research Council, knows how critical a factual statement is on those points.

The hamster test is used in the development of male contraceptive agents and in the study of chromosomal abnormalities of human spermatozoa. Will the Minister confirm that there is absolutely no possibility of hybridisation between human and hamster cells?

The genetic constitution of the cells is completely incompatible, and even if the period of incubation were extended the hamster eggs would degenerate spontaneously because they have no developmental potential following fusion with human sperm. Without its outer covering, would not the egg of any species, fertilised or not, quickly lose its viability? All sorts of fanciful stories have been put around about hybridisation. The sooner they are out of the way the better.

I turn to the more common argument that has been used in the debate, and it was put most strongly by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight). What is the point of pre-embryo research, which has not produced a cure or treatment for genetic disease or chromosomal abnormality?

There is some confusion about the aims and potential of pre-embryo research. It has never been claimed by serious people in Edinburgh or anywhere else that this research is carried out that it will produce a cure for genetic disease or that it will be used as a general method of screening genetic diseases. Rather, it has been claimed that it will be able to prevent the passing on of such disease for couples who are at substantial risk.

Once a couple have borne a child with a genetic disease, or are known to carry a deleterious gene that is highly likely to be passed on to their offspring, they may opt in the next pregnancy for the genetic testing of the conceptus antenatally. At present, that is done by taking some of the waters that surround the foetus at about 16 weeks of pregnancy or by taking a small sample of the placenta at about 10 weeks.

In either case, the diagnosis of an affected pregnancy leaves the woman with the distressing choice of whether to proceed to an abortion.

I shall stick scrupulously to the time available to me. For 23 years, I have been a weekly columnist for the *New Scientist*. My colleagues will understand that, as such, I am a receptacle for many letters. There have been pained letters from people who strongly feel that embryo research should not go ahead, but there have also been many long, serious, pained letters from those who are carrying out the research and who feel that they should have a voice in the House of Commons debate and that they are helping humankind by the work that they do, often in extremely distressing circumstances.

There is emotion on both sides of the argument. Some of us strongly believe that the researchers are doing their work in good faith and using their skills for the benefit of mankind and that they should have a voice in future debates.

9.30 pm

Ms. Harriet Harman (Peckham): Two strongly held opposing views have been put forward in the debate, which has ranged across moral, ethical, conscience and science questions. It has not been a debate between those who have a moral conscience and strongly held moral convictions and those who do not or, as the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) said, a debate between moralists and utilitarians—rather, it has been a debate between those whose moral convictions would have them ban research and those, like me, whose moral convictions lead us to support the continuation of research. It is not a debate between those who have a conscience and those who do not. My hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) put this well in her speech—it is a debate between Members whose conscience would lead them to different conclusions.

Mr. Alton: That is not quite what I said. I said that there were utilitarians on one side of the argument and, on the other, those who reject the utilitarian point of view. I do not think that there is a monopoly on morality, but we have to have at the centre of our debate a concern for life. Does the hon. Lady accept that those of us who support research do so based on the precondition that that research does not lead to experiments that destroy life?

Ms. Harman: Those of us who support embryo research also believe that we support life. If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, perhaps I may develop my arguments, which show why my moral convictions and conscience lead me to support embryo research up to 14 days.

There are deeply held views on both sides of the argument, which have sprung from a decision to protect and enhance human life and a sense of religious conviction. There are many different views on the beginning of life, and it was helpful to hear from the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), who gave the most lucid explanation of the pre-embryo stage of development. His words echoed those of the Archbishop of York in another place who, in effect, said that there was no doubt of the wonder of the moral world and the religious significance of personhood, but that the transitions on the way to it were not clear, clean-cut and decisive, despite the tremendous significance that some people would give to the moment of fertilisation. The hon. Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes) pointed out that the precise moment of fertilisation was being brought in question the more we know about that process.

I support the view that there is a valid place for research but that special safeguards are needed. Fourteen days appears to represent in the process of development an identifiable biological transition. It is right that there should be no research beyond 14 days. It is easy for those of us who do not need the research perhaps to overlook or undervalue its benefits. We should listen with humility to those men and women whom this research is designed to help.

Those of us who have never struggled with the misery of infertility, those of us who have not had repeated miscarriages and those of us who are blessed with healthy children are indeed fortunate. But there are thousands of couples in Britain who are not so fortunate. We must listen to their voices when they ask us to allow the research to go ahead.

One couple in eight suffers from infertility. To some, that figure is unbelievably high but it is the interim licensing authority's own estimate. The figure is higher than we realise because of the sense of shame and the stigma that still attach to infertility. Men feel ashamed to admit that they cannot make their wives pregnant and feel that it somehow reflects on their manhood. There are women who believe that they are not real women if they cannot do what other women seem to take so easily for granted.

Whatever the causes of infertility, its result is plain: thousands of people's lives are blighted by their inability to have a child. It does not matter how happy someone's marriage or how satisfying his or her work is; infertility can leave a terrible gap in the lives of people who want a family.

The shadow of infertility has reached down through the centuries, but medical research, including embryo research, is beginning to lift that shadow little by little and now the diagnosis of infertility can be the beginning and not just the end of hope. Microsurgery to clear blocked tubes, drug treatment to encourage ovulation, conception outside the womb by in vitro fertilisation and artificial insemination—whether by donor or by husband—have led to many thousands of babies being born.

But although we have made tremendous strides, there is still a long way to go and many scientists believe that we can improve the success rate of IVF. At present, the treatment succeeds with only between 10 and 15 per cent. of couples who try it. Let us speak plainly about this: we cannot realistically increase the success rate of IVF without further research. Those who would ban embryo research say that they want IVF to continue. The only reason why we know how to perform IVF is that we have undertaken research and it would be wrong to end that research before it makes a breakthrough.

Mr. Brazier: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms. Harman: I know what the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) will say. He is fortunate because his IVF treatment was successful. Let me remind him, however, that 90 per cent. of the couples who go through the treatment that he and his wife went through do not succeed. I hope that he will vote with me to give them the chance that he has had.

Mr. Brazier: The evidence based on the voluntary licensing authority's figures is that the success factor in IVF is not the presence of destructive embryo experimentation but the number of IVF procedures that the clinic has carried out. That is why the large, long-established clinics are the successful ones. Moreover, the second most successful clinic in Australia is in an area where experimentation is illegal.

Ms. Harman: I have to accept the view of the Association of Medical Research Charities, the Medical Research Council and the Royal Society, which take a different view. They feel that the success rate of IVF will increase, but only with further embryo research.

At least 275,000 couples in the United Kingdom could benefit from IVF, so an increase in the success rate is important. I pay tribute to the important work of the assisted conception unit at King's College hospital in my constituency. Not only does the research need to improve: we need increased services. It is wrong that if one suffers from infertility that is amenable to treatment, one's ability to get that treatment will depend on whether one has the money to pay for it in the private sector or whether by chance one lives in one of the few places where it is available on the National Health Service. We need more services as well as more research.

Many couples are never able to find out why they cannot have a baby. About 40,000 suffer from unexplained infertility. Further research is needed for them, too. Perhaps the people to whom we should be listening most carefully are people such as the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), who have had a child with a genetic abnormality. Every year in the United Kingdom, 14,000 babies are born with genetic defects passed on by their parents. Some of those defects are so serious that there is no hope for the child, who suffers terribly and dies after a few weeks or months.

I want to refer to a specific case. When Clare was born she seemed perfectly normal, but a small area of peeling skin developed into blistering and bleeding. She was diagnosed as having epidermolysis bullosa, which is a genetic disease that results in blistering and sheering of the skin if it is so much as touched. The blistering destroys the outer skin layers and can affect the body linings, leaving the sufferer unable to eat. Clare suffered raw sores from the middle of her back to the top of her leg so she could lie only on her front. Her parents continually bathed her and changed her dressings, but they could not cuddle her. Just to touch her made her skin peel.

Clare suffered terrible pain and her short life ended at the age of 83 days. Parents like Clare's face a terrible choice once they discover that they carry a genetic abnormality. For most it is unthinkable to have another child only to stand by helplessly while it suffers or dies. The alternative is to have ante-natal screening and to face the difficult decision of aborting a much-wanted pregnancy.

Embryo research offers those parents the prospect of testing the embryo outside the womb and of re-implanting into the mother only an embryo that is clear of the gene that she or her husband carries. No one is arguing that screening should be compulsory. It would be up to the parents. However, it is clear that people whose children have died as a result of genetic defects want the chance of a healthy baby. If embryo research was banned, they would be denied that choice.

[Ms. Harman]

To lose a baby through miscarriage is terrible. About 75,000 women in the United Kingdom this year will miscarry. However, many suffer the misery of repeated miscarriage. Further research offers them the hope of understanding the cause of repeated miscarriage and a chance to treat it.

Embryo research also offers the prospect of developing better contraception. People have talked about the importance of devoloping contraception because of the Third world. However, women in this country will testify that the search for safe and effective contraception is far from won.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy) said that there is a lamentably high level of abortions in his city. He is right. There are 200,000 unplanned and regretted pregnancies in this country every year. Contraception is still difficult, and threatens the health of many women. The possibility of developing a contraceptive vaccine that imitates the natural condition of infertility would give much hope to women in the Third world as well as to women in this country.

Of course embryo research must be carefully monitored and controlled. The Bill would outlaw research that was carried out simply to satisfy scientific curiosity. It would outlaw research unless it was carried out under licences granted, renewed and reviewed by the statutory licensing authority. Under the Bill, experiments to cross animal cells with human cells or cloning would be illegal. My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) was right. The allegations about the thin end of the wedge have no foundation. We are talking about legislation and making law. The Bill would give a criminal limit of 14 days. The idea of slipping past 14 days is sloppy talk and not worthy of this House.

The continuation of embryo research is a matter of conscience. Of course there are two sides to every moral question. However, my conscience makes me listen to the voices of people who cannot have children and to the voices of those who have watched their children die. I hope that the House will vote for the continuation of embryo research as a chance to end their suffering.

9.44 pm

The Minister for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): The debate has been characterised by authoritative speeches about subjects on which there are strong feelings in the House. We have had a range of speeches in which hon. Members have spoken from individual experience and according to their strongly held views about the ethical, scientific and medical issues involved. Many hon. Members have referred to the great number of briefings that they have received from outside organisations. We know quite well that all who are involved in this vital subject are deeply concerned to ensure that careful thought is given to the proposals for legislation. There is overwhelming agreement that the time has come for a strong statutory framework to control these important matters.

It is invidious to pick out particular speeches from the many that we have heard, but I must refer to the speech by the Father of the House, my right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine), who spoke with great feeling about the respect to be afforded the embryo; the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), who spoke with her customary fluency and passion about abortion matters; and the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight), who spoke about her fear that 14 days might be the thin end of the wedge.

On the other side of the argument, we heard the eloquence of the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), the moving speech by the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), who spoke with great dignity born of personal experience, and the thoughtful remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Sir C. Morrison). Many of the issues that they raised were mentioned in another place, and I am sure that we shall return to them when clause 11 and schedule 2 are debated in Committee. At this stage, I should simply say that they are complex issues, and it is important that we give them our considered, thoughtful and clear deliberation.

No one has questioned the profound significance of these matters. I urge hon. Members to study the debates on human embryo research in another place which attracted an especially high level of argument and clarity and were informed by mutual understanding of deeply felt and sincerely held views. I hope that we can rise to the challenge in this House when the time comes. These matters are of the greatest significance, and the Government will achieve one of their main objectives if the legislation that we enact is framed with as much sensitivity to opposing views as is practicable. When the time comes for hon. Members to cast their votes on amendments, they must decide each for himself or herself, in as calm and dispassionate a way as possible, what the right course should be.

I do not think that it is necessary for me to add to what my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State said about human embryo research, as there will be ample opportunity to do so when clause 11 and schedule 2 are debated—if the House agrees to the splitting and timetable motions in the name of my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House. However, it would be appropriate for me to say a word or two about abortion, as all hon. Members must now be expecting that subject to be debated.

Mr. Tam Dalyell: On the subject of embryo research, will the Minister confirm that the answer to all the questions that I have asked her is yes?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am extremely happy to confirm the answer in the affirmative to all the important points made by the hon. Gentleman, who speaks with knowledge and expertise on scientific matters.

Miss Widdecombe: No, he does not.

Mrs. Bottomley: My hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone always has an authoritative comment on all subjects that are debated in the House. I hope that she may be able to join us in Standing Committee so that we may benefit from her further advice and guidance on this important subject.

My hon. Friend recognised that we were anticipating that abortion would come within the scope of the Bill. As on previous occasions when abortion has been debated in the House, hon. Members have expressed strong, deeply held and widely differing views on the matter of conscience. Some hon. Members have already made up their minds on this question, but many of us are undecided and will want to weigh up the conflicting views before we, too, reach a decision. If, as seems likely, abortion amendments are debated on the Floor of the House, each hon. Member will have to decide for him or herself how he or she should vote.

The House needs no reminder from me that this Government, like predecessor Governments of both main political parties, are neutral on the ethical question of abortion. Like individual hon. Members, members of the Government hold divergent views on the matter. The Government can therefore have no collective view of the merits of any abortion issues that the House may decide to debate.

One of the main responsibilities of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, which will be set up by the Bill, will be the task of licensing centres that undertake such activities. It might be helpful if I take this opportunity of reminding the House of the range of infertility treatments that the Bill seeks to regulate. They include in vitro fertilisation, commonly known as IVF; donor insemination, often referred to as artificial insemination by donor or AID; egg donation; and embryo donation.

The hon. Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes were also concerned about whether GIFT—gamete intra-fertilisation transfer—should also be regulated by the Bill. Two principles govern policy in the Bill about the treatments that are to be licensed. The first is that they involve donated gametes or embryos and the second is that they involve the creation of an embryo outside the body. Those principles have been developed because in each case there are questions about the embryo's legal status or statutory controls about what should happen to it. Neither principle applies in the case of GIFT.

The Government are firmly committed to setting up this statutory authority. It is thanks to the interim licensing authority, led by its chairman, Dame Mary Donaldson, that although there has been no formal legislative control, since 1985 that task has been carried out in a most competent way.

But the Government consider that the time is now right to fill this legislative vacuum and put this control on a statutory basis—to give the authority the clearer powers currently lacking, and perhaps, but more importantly, to provide the public with the certainty and confidence which only statutory control can provide in this very fast-changing and technically innovative field of science and medicine. I believe that that meets the agreement of the whole House.

We have chosen to set up an independent statutory authority to remove the day-to-day detailed consideration of these very sensitive matters from the political arena. I know that this decision, which has been mentioned by several hon. Members, is a disappointment to some who would have preferred direct ministerial control of the licensing system. This decision was, however, taken only after the most careful consideration. During our consultations before the publication of the 1987 White Paper, a number of options were put forward. The support for an independent body was overwhelming.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edgbaston asked about how the controls would be enforced and how the system would be policed. The Bill gives the new authority detailed licensing powers over the centres that it licences—to make directions about general and specific matters and to give guidance to centres through its code of practice. Where necessary, it has the powers to revoke, suspend or vary licences. Its staff will be required to inspect the premises at least annually and, should any significant breach of the licensing conditions be discovered, the authority will have the power to take quick and effective action against the centre. In addition, clause 37 contains an armoury of penalties if offences are committed.

Sir Bernard Braine: How often will the House have the opportunity of surveying or debating the activities of that body?

Mrs. Bottomley: My right hon. Friend is aware that an amendment was accepted in another place that envisaged that the new authority should report to the Secretary of State not every other year, but every year. That report will, of course, be available for the scrutiny of hon. Members.

My hon. Friend the Member for Devizes and the hon. Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson) questioned the use of the licence fee in this area. Increasingly, the standard practice is for licensing systems to be largely self-financing. There are many examples of that, including the registration of nursing homes, planning applications and licences under the Medicines Act 1971. The portion of the centre's licence fee directly attributable to the patient's treatment is likely to be small and should be regarded as part of the running costs of the centre.

The Bill places on the authority a duty to maintain a code of practice giving guidance to centres about the proper conduct of activities licensed under the Bill. As I have said, that guidance will be published. I have no doubt that the authority will be sensitive to public and parliamentary opinion in deciding its contents. The code will provide guidelines on a range of issues including, not least, guidance for those providing treatment on how to take account of the welfare of any child born as a result of treatment covered by the Bill and of any existing children.

All hon. Members will agree that the inclusion of the recognition of the welfare of children—a point that was important to my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton)—which was agreed in another place, is an important improvement in the Bill.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) referred to surrogacy and to a constituency case. The status of genetic parents if children are born to surrogate mothers under the present law may soon be determined by the courts. It would serve no useful purpose for me to speculate further on the position under the present law. The House will be aware that the Government's policy is that legislation should not encourage surrogacy arranged privately or on a non-commercial basis. The Bill provides that surrogacy arrangements will be unenforceable. I am sure that the Committee will come back to the points made by my right hon. Friend's constituents and to their experience.

The Bill covers an area in which there is currently no statutory control. I recognise that there are and will remain, strongly and sincerely held differing views about these complex and sensitive issues. We all agree that they are of great importance to the society in which we live. The Government believe that there should be a comprehensive legislative framework to cover the new procedures and to

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provide for the legal status of children born as a result of them. Clearly, that must be in the public interest and the interest of the individuals involved.

We are committed to ensuring that the legislation provides a coherent framework which is properly understood, commands full public confidence and serves the needs of our society. I hope and believe that all right hon. and hon. Members share that aim.

In his opening speech, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State emphasised that the Bill is the result of a lengthy process of widespread consultation, discussion and debate. Some preliminary views have been expressed about several central issues such as embryo research. The Government are anxious that Parliament should decide on these complex and often controversial questions in the light of as much information as possible. It is important that we have all had time fully to consider and reflect on the views put forward. We wanted a mature judgment to be made on the matter—mature because the opportunity was provided for a full assessment of the facts and a sustained debate on the ethical, scientific, legal and social questions.

The speeches that we have heard today putting the arguments on both sides of the main issues, particularly for and against research, have been evenly divided, especially among Back Benchers. They demonstrated the authority and views of many people.

The Government believe that it is essential that a statutory framework of control should be established and that the time is right for a decision to be made on what those controls should be on the matters of conscience in the Bill. That decision should reflect the individual views of each right hon. and hon. Member. My right hon. and learned Friend has made clear the position in respect of Ministers. The Bill provides the mechanism for those decisions, and on that basis I ask the House to give the Bill a Second Reading.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill *[Lords]* (Committal)

9.59 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Sir Geoffrey Howe): I beg to move,

That

(a) Clause 11 and Schedule 2, and

(b) any new Clauses or new Schedules appearing on the Order Paper not later than 20th April and relating to the termination of pregnancy by registered medical practitioners,

be committed to a Committee of the whole House;

That the remainder of the Bill be committed to a Standing Committee;

That, when the provisions of the Bill considered, respectively, by the Committee of the whole House and by the Standing Committee have been reported to the House, the Bill be proceeded with as if the Bill had been reported as a whole to the House from the Standing Committee.

As the House already appreciates, the Bill is not only important but unusual in many respects. That can be judged from the fact that the House must consider tonight not one but two motions about the way in which the Bill should be handled at Committee stage. I propose to keep distinct the separate reasons for the two motions. I shall deal first with that which I have just moved. Its purpose is to ensure that major aspects arising from the Bill that are plainly matters of individual conscience will be dealt with by a Committee of the whole House.

The arrangements for splitting a Bill between a Standing Committee and a Committee of the whole House are well known to us all from the proceedings on the Finance Bill. The reason for proposing arrangements of that kind for the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill are equally clear.

On major matters of conscience of the kind with which the Bill is concerned, it would be almost impossible for debates and votes in Standing Committee to reflect adequately the range and balance of opinions in the House as a whole. For that reason, it is right to have a Committee stage that can take account of those special factors. Hence the special motion.

The fundamental issue of conscience in the Bill relates to whether embryo research should be allowed within closely defined limits or prohibited altogether. That topic has occupied most of the time of the House on Second Reading. For that reason, the motion provides that clause 11 and schedule 2, which deal with that aspect, will be considered by a Committee of the whole House.

An equally difficult issue, touched on earlier today, is the medical termination of pregnancy. I am advised that it falls within the scope of the Bill, although it does not appear on the face of the Bill at present. Given recent parliamentary history on that subject, as well as remarks made on Second Reading, it is realistic to assume that amendments will be moved in relation to that topic. It would be virtually impossible to make meaningful progress in a Standing Committee selected in the ordinary way after Second Reading. For that reason, on that aspect as well we need a clear view of the whole House. My motion will make that possible.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for his consultations with all interested parties. Will he confirm that, following separate debates on the Floor of the House, it is unlikely that those topics will be returned to? Will the decisions made on the Floor of the House in that respect remain more or less binding and be unaffected by the remaining Committee or Report stages? Can the Leader of the House also confirm that the membership of the Standing Committees will not be selected until the debates on the Floor of the House have taken place, so that the results of the two Divisions will be known before the Standing Committee is constituted?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's latter question is certainly yes. The composition of the Standing Committee will be decided after the House as a whole has reached a decision on the two matters in question, and it should therefore reflect the outcome of those two debates. The intention is that the topics covered by those two days of debate on the Floor of the House will not recur in Standing Committee upstairs —although it would be possible to return to them on Report.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): A moment ago, the Leader of the House said that the question of abortion does not occur in the long title of the Bill. Is he proposing that the long title should be changed to accommodate that? In what way would that be done, given that it would be an extremely unusual procedure?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am not proposing any change in the long title, as I am advised that, as presently drafted, it would allow for amendments on that topic to be tabled. It is on that basis that the topic of abortion, the medical termination of pregnancy, might also come before the House.

In addition, in order to ensure orderly proceedings, the House will see that my motion specifies the date by which amendments to clause 11 and schedule 2 and to any new clauses or new schedules are put down for consideration by the whole House. Once the two key debates have been held in a Committee of the whole House, I believe that the rest of the Bill can and should be considered in a Standing Committee whose composition can reflect, as far as possible, the decisions taken by the House as a whole.

The remaining clauses and schedules are concerned, often in considerable detail, with introducing a licensing system and making clear the legal status of certain children. I believe that there is general agreement that those provisions are needed, although there may be real debate on exactly how they should be achieved.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I am grateful to the Leader of the House for outlining the reasons for a Committee of the whole House. There might be a reason connected with that for limiting such consideration to two days, as on the motion now arising. In another motion that he is proposing to move, can he tell us why there should be another innovation, in the shape of the limitation of time in Committee? Is this not a separate innovation? Why is he proposing that in addition to the timetable motion for consideration on the Floor?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I shall deal with that when I deal with the timetable motion, but, in so far as it is an innovation, it is a combined set of arrangements to enable the Bill to be considered first of all with a sensible allocation of time downstairs and a further sensible period upstairs before it comes back to the Floor of the House. In a way, that suggestion is responding to the recommendations made by the Select Committee on Procedure for a whole timetable to be contemplated at the outset of a Bill.

Mr. Spearing: Ah.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am glad to have the enthusiastic support of the hon. Gentleman for such a revolutionary proposal.

All such matters are properly matters for the Standing Committee, but there will be an opportunity for the whole House to review the results of that on Report.

As Leader of the House, I emphasise that my main concern is to allow an orderly discussion of the issues in the Bill, including those that raise matters of conscience. I have explained the general arrangements I have proposed to that end. To assist the House further, I intend to take two additional steps on the embryo research and abortion issues.

On embryo research, I propose to table, in my name as Leader of the House, a set of amendments designed to provide the House with an exactly similar choice on whether to allow embryo research under controlled conditions as the choice that was before another place. The House will recall that the Bill arrived in another place with two alternative clauses. The other place decided in favour of embryo research under specified conditions. The amendments I shall table will allow this House, if it so wishes, either to reverse that choice or, if it prefers, to uphold it, while preserving the other elements in the Bill.

I emphasise, as did my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State when he opened the debate, that the amendments are not designed to reflect my personal view, still less the view of the Government. The Government continue to remain neutral on the embryo research question. When the time comes, the amendments will be moved briefly and neutrally. It will be for the House, on a free vote, to decide the fate of those amendments. The House will exercise the same choice as was exercised in another place.

Having reflected further on the details of abortion in the light of today's debate, I shall bring forward a new clause on the time limits for abortion, designed to provide a sound basis for subsequent debate and amendment. I shall do that, not on the Government's behalf or representing my own view, but in my position as Leader of the House. The new clause will not reflect the Government's view on abortion, but will be designed purely to help the House to discuss and resolve that difficult issue. I shall wish to reflect on today's debate before deciding the contents of the new clause.

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): In that passage, the Leader of the House has drawn a clear distinction between embryo research and the termination of pregnancy. In the Bill's long title, there are many references to embryo research. Will he guide the House to the line in the long title which has led him to the view that it would be proper to debate the termination of pregnancy within the terms of the long title or the context of the Bill?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The first two lines—essentially the second—of the long title, I am advised, represents the foundation of that debate. That advice is well founded and the object of the exercise is to enable the House to exercise

[Sir Geoffrey Howe]

a sensible choice on that matter as the second main item of the Committee stage on the Floor of the House. I shall table the new clauses as soon as I can.

I hope that the House will agree that the motion, handled in the way that I have described—and which represents the result of widespread discussion in all parts of the House—will provide a sensible and necessary organisation of the way the House may think through the principal, ethical questions which arise, or are likely to arise, from the Bill. On that basis, I ask the House to agree with my motion.

10.12 pm

Ms. Jo Richardson (Barking): I am aware that the Leader of the House has done his best to tackle the procedural difficulties which, I fear, the Government have heaped on themselves by introducing new words into the long title to allow abortion to be debated. I am aware that he has tried to consult widely and sort out that procedural point, but I oppose the procedure motion and I shall ask my hon. Friends to vote against it.

I shall do so not because I believe that clause 11 should be taken in Committee. I agree that the first part of the procedure motion would be handled more tidily and cleanly on the Floor of the House, and that that would underline the Government's commitment to give all hon. Members an opportunity to participate. If it is taken upstairs, it will cloud other issues in the Bill—which, I repeat, are important and should be considered. The Minister was kind enough to refer to other parts of the Bill.

The second part of the motion, which has already been referred to, is very worrying:

"(b) any new Clauses or new Schedules appearing on the Order paper not later than 20th April and relating to the termination of pregnancy by registered medical practitioners"

should be part of the procedure motion and be taken on the Floor of the House. This is where I profoundly disagree, as, I think, will many of my hon. Friends.

My hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) has already referred to a number of matters that she might have raised if there had been a wider and separate discussion about abortion. We can all say that. In my opening speech, I spelled out why I did not believe that abortion should be spatchcocked into a Bill about an entirely different matter. I shall not go over those arguments again. Suffice it to say that there is no place in what I believe is a humanitarian piece of legislation—despite the extension of the long title—for amendments on a wholly different subject.

Many people outside have been confused and diverted from the main points of the Bill by their opposition to abortion being included in it. So I shall vote against the procedural motion and I hope that my hon. Friends will join me in the Lobby. That is our only opportunity to register our extreme disapproval of the inclusion of abortion. We should like the Bill, as happened in the Lords, to stand on its own without being confused by this other issue.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. There are only two people who can give advice—that was the word that he used—to the Leader of the House. You are one; the other is the Clerk of the House—or one of his senior colleagues. Did you give the Leader of the House the advice that he claims to have had? I credit you and the Clerk with too much wisdom to have confused the words "embryo" and "foetus". The title of the Bill says nothing about foetuses. Where does the right hon. and learned Gentleman get his advice from? Some of us think that, linguistically, medically and scientifically, it is bad advice, whoever gave it.

Mr. Speaker: I was not consulted on that matter. I must now put the committal motion——

Mr. Dalyell: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. If you were not consulted, where did the Leader of the House get his advice? If he did not get it from you, he had better take personal responsibility for it.

Mr. Speaker: I think that I heard the Leader of the House state that he had himself taken advice on the matter.

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).*

The House divided: Ayes 273, Noes 135.

Division No. 152] **[10.16 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Alton, David
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cran, James
Crowther, Stan
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dixon, Don
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fearn, Ronald
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Derek
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Galloway, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal

Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hind, Kenneth
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McAvoy, Thomas
McCrindle, Robert
Macdonald, Calum A.
McGrady, Eddie
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
McNamara, Kevin
Malins, Humfrey
Mallon, Seamus
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*

Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
O'Brien, William
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paisley, Rev Ian
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pendry, Tom
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Reid, Dr John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Robertson, George
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaz, Keith
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*

Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Woodcock, Dr. Mike

Worthington, Tony
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Irvine Patnick.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Margaret
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Buchan, Norman
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*

Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McCartney, Ian
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Neale, Gerrard
Nellist, Dave
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Richardson, Jo
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Turner, Dennis
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Ms. Hilary Armstrong.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Ordered,

That

(a) Clause 11 and Schedule 2, and

(b) any new Clauses or new Schedules appearing on the Order Paper not later than 20th April and relating to the termination of pregnancy by registered medical practitioners,

be committed to a Committee of the whole House;

That the remainder of the Bill be committed to a Standing Committee;

That, when the provisions of the Bill considered, respectively, by the Committee of the whole House and by the Standing Committee have been reported to the House, the Bill be proceeded with as if the Bill had been reported as a whole to the House from the Standing Committee.

Committee tomorrow.—[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will forgive us for being inquisitive about the advice given by the Leader of the House. Will you confirm that the Clerks —both here and in the other place—gave advice on the matter? If they did, is it not stretching the English language a bit far to say that the foetus could be covered by any subsequent development of the embryo? Such an extension could cover any aspect of human activity. What advice was the Leader of the House given? I think that the House is entitled to know.

Mr. Speaker: What I said to the hon. Gentleman was that my advice had not been sought. I have no doubt, however, that the Leader of the House took advice, and the same advice is available to every hon. Member.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. The advice was exactly as anticipated, from the Clerk to both Houses in both places.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at this day's sitting, the Allocation of Time Motion relating to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill *[Lords]* may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

HUMAN FERTILISATION AND EMBRYOLOGY BILL *[Lords] [Money]*

Queen's Recommendation having been thus signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any sums required for payments by the Secretary of State towards the expenses of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority established by the Act.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill *[Lords]* (Allocation of Time)

10.34 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Sir Geoffrey Howe): I beg to move,

That the following provisions shall apply to the remaining proceedings on the Bill:—

Time For Committee

1.(1) The Proceedings in Committee of the whole House on the matters in respect of which the Bill is committed there shall be completed in two allotted days and shall be brought to a conclusion at Eleven o'clock on the second of those days.

(2) The Business Committee shall report to the House its Resolutions as to those proceedings not later than 19th April.

(3) When the Order of the Day is read for the House to resolve itself into a Committee on the Bill, Mr. Speaker shall leave the Chair without putting any question whether or not notice of an instruction has been given.

(4) The Standing Committee to which the Bill is allocated shall report the Bill to the House, except the matters in respect of which the Bill is committed to a Committee of the whole House, on or before 22nd May.

(5) Proceedings on the Bill at a sitting of the Standing Committee on 22nd May may continue until Eleven o'clock, whether or not the House is adjourned before that time, and if the House is adjourned before proceedings have been brought to a conclusion the Standing Committee shall report the Bill to the House on 23rd May.

Time for Report and Third Reading

2.—(1) The proceedings on consideration and Third Reading of the Bill shall be completed in two allotted days and shall be brought to a conclusion at Eleven o'clock on the second of those days.

(2) The Business Committee shall report to the House its Resolutions as to the proceedings on consideration of the Bill, and as to the allocation of time between those proceedings and proceedings on Third Reading, not later than 6th June.

Business Committee

3.—(1) For the purposes of Standing Order No. 80 (Business Committee) this Order shall be taken to allot to the proceedings in Committee of the whole House and on consideration such part of the allotted days as the Resolution of the Business Committee may determine.

(2) The Resolutions in any Report made under Standing Order No. 80 may be varied by a further Report so made, whether or not within the time specified in paragraph 1(2) or 2(2) of this Order, and whether or not the Resolutions have been agreed to by the House.

(3) No Motion shall be made as to the order in which the Bill or any new Clauses or new Schedules are to be considered in Committee of the whole House or on consideration, but the Resolutions of the Business Committee may include alterations in that order.

Procedure in Standing Committee

4.—(1) At a sitting of the Standing Committee at which any proceedings on the Bill are to be brought to a conclusion under a Resolution of the Business Sub-Committee the Chairman shall not adjourn the Committee under any order relating to the sittings of the Committee until the proceedings have been brought to a conclusion.

(2) No motion shall be made in the Standing Committee relating to the sitting of the Committee except by a Minister of the Crown, and the Chairman shall permit a brief explanatory statement from the Member who moves, and from a member who opposes, the Motion, and shall then put the Question thereon.

(3) No Motion shall be made as to the order in which the Bill or any new Clauses or new Schedules are to be considered in Standing Committee, but the Resolutions of the Business Sub-Committee may include alterations in that order.

Report of proceedings in Committee

5. On the conclusion of the proceedings in any Committee on the Bill, the Chairman shall report such of the Bill's provisions as were committed (or recommitted) to that Committee to the House without putting any Question.

Dilatory Motions

6. No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of proceedings on, the Bill shall be made in the Standing Committee or on an allotted day except by a Minister of the Crown, and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

Extra time on allotted days

7.-(1) On an allotted day paragraph (1) of Standing Order No.14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings on the Bill for one hour after Ten o'clock.

(2) Any period during which proceedings on the Bill may be proceeded with after Ten o'clock under paragraph (7) of Standing Order No.20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) shall be in addition to the said period of one hour.

(3) If an allotted day is one to which a motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No.20 stands over from an earlier day, a period of time equal to the duration of the proceedings upon that Motion shall be added to the said period of one hour.

Private business

8. Any private business which has been set down for consideration at Seven o'clock on an allotted day shall, instead of being considered as provided by Standing Orders, be considered at the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill on that day, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No.14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the private business for a period of three hours from the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill or, if those proceedings are concluded before Ten o'clock, for a period equal to the time elapsing between Seven o'clock and the conclusion of those proceedings.

Procedure at time for Conclusion of proceedings

9. For the purpose of bringing to a conclusion any proceedings, other than proceedings in Committee of the whole House on any new Clauses or new Schedules relating to the termination of pregnancy by registered medical practitioners, which are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee or the Business Sub-Committee and which have not previously been brought to a conclusion, the Chairman or Mr. Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others)—

- (a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;
- (b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed (including, in the case of a new Clause or new Schedule which has been read a second time, whether before the time so appointed or in pursuance of paragraph (a), the Question that the Clause or Schedule, or the Clause or Schedule as amended, be added to the Bill);
- (c) the Question on any amendment or Motion standing on the Order Paper, whether in the name of a Minister of the Crown or not, which is moved or made by a Minister of the Crown;
- (d) any other question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded;

and on a motion so made for a new Clause or new Schedule, the Chairman or Mr. Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

10.—(1) For the purpose of bringing to a conclusion any proceedings in Committee of the whole House on any new Clauses or new Schedules relating to the termination of pregnancy by registered medical practitioners which are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee and which have not previously been brought to a conclusion, the Chairman shall forthwith put the following Questions (but no others)—

- (a) any Question already proposed from the Chair:
- (b) in the case of a new Clause or new Schedule which has been read a second time, whether before the time so appointed or in pursuance of paragraph (a)—
  - (i) the Questions on any amendments selected by the Chairman, being amendments moved to the Clause or Schedule or moved to amendments to the Clause or Schedule;
  - (ii) the Question that the Clause or Schedule, or the Clause or Schedule as amended, be added to the Bill;
- (c) in the case of any other new Clause or new Schedule selected by the Chairman, being a Clause or Schedule for which a motion is made—
  - (i) the Question that the Clause or Schedule be read a second time;
  - (ii) the Questions on any amendments selected by the Chairman, being amendments moved to the Clause or Schedule or moved to amendments to the Clause or Schedule;
  - (iii) the Question that the Clause or Schedule, or the Clause or Schedule as amended, be added to the Bill.

(2) Sub-paragraph (1) does not require the Question on any Motion or amendment to be put unless the Chairman considers it appropriate to do so or the Question has already been proposed from the Chair.

11.—(1) Proceedings under paragraph 9 or 10 of this order shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sitting of the House.

(2) if an allotted day is one on which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration) would, apart from this Order, stand over to Seven o'clock—

- (a) that Motion shall stand over until the conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee, are to be brought to a conclusion at or before that time;
- (b) the bringing of a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which, under this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee, are to be brought to a conclusion after that time shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedins on that Motion.

(3) If an allotted day is one on which a Motion for the adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 stands over from an earlier day, the bringing to a conclusion of any proceedings on the Bill which under this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee are to be brought to a conclusion on that day shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

Supplemental orders

12.—(1) The proceedings on any Motion made in the House by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order (including anything which might have been the subject of a report of the Business Committee or Business Sub-Committee) shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after they have been commenced, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings.

(2) if on an allotted day on which any proceedings on the Bill are to be brought to a conclusion at a time appointed by this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before that time no notice shall be required of a Motion made at the next sitting by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

Saving

13. Nothing in this Order or a Resolution of the Business Committee or Business Sub-Committee shall—

- (a) prevent any proceedings to which the Order or Resolution applies from being taken or completed earlier than is required by the Order or Resolution; or
- (b) prevent any business (whether on the bill or not) from being proceeded with on any day after the completion of all such proceedings on the Bill as are to be taken on that day.

Recommittal

14.—(1) References in this Order to proceedings on consideration or proceedings on Third Reading include references to proceedings at those stages respectively, for, on or in consequence of, recommittal.

(2) On an allotted day no debate shall be permitted on any Motion to recommit the Bill (whether as a whole or

[Sir Geoffrey Howe]

otherwise), and Mr. Speaker shall put forthwith any Question necessary to dispose of the Motion, including the Question on any amendment moved to the Question.

Interpretation

15. In this Order—

"allotted day" means any day (other than a Friday) on which the Bill is put down as first Government Order of the day, provided that a Motion for allotting time to the proceedings on the Bill to be taken on that day either has been agreed on a previous day, or is set down for consideration on that day;

"the Bill" means the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill *[Lords]*;

"Resolution of the Business Sub-Committee" means a Resolution of the Business Sub-Committee as agreed to by the Standing Committee;

"Resolution of the Business Committee" means a Resolution of the Business Committee as agreed to by the House.

This is an unusual step to be taking, but that is because this is an unusual Bill. The motion has not been tabled because of the slow rate of progress in Committee, as is often the case, but at the outset of detailed consideration of the Bill.

It is designed—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the hon. Members below the Gangway either to leave the Chamber or to listen to the Leader of the House.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The motion is designed to enable the House to debate the Bill in a structured and reasonable way. In no sense is it designed to curtail debate. It therefore should not be described as a guillotine motion. In the best sense of the word, it is a timetable motion. On that basis, I venture to hope that it is not only an unusual motion but one that will command general if not universal assent.

There is a strong Government commitment to carry through the Bill. It deals with an aspect of life that has been radically changed by medical and scientific advance in recent times. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health said, at present there is a legislative vacuum that needs to be filled. The Bill and the debates that it is calculated to provide are designed to achieve that objective.

The House has just agreed that consideration of the Bill in Committee should be split. The allocation of time motion is the next logical step. We wish to ensure, in Standing Committee and in particular in Committee of the whole House, that we can achieve adequate consideration of the Bill's provisions and of amendments that may be tabled to alter or to add to them.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): As hon. Members have experienced use of the English language which, to say the least, was slightly unusual, will the Leader of the House give an undertaking that the motion will not be used to curtail other aspects of the Bill? Many hon. Members will be unhappy that debate on a Bill that clearly is about embryology should be expanded. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is advocating an unusual form of timetabling, but I hope that he will understand that it does not meet with universal approval.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The approach that I am commending has been the subject of wide consultation. A substantial amount of time will be allocated for consideration in Standing Committee. We wish to ensure that the House is able to reach conclusions on the issues involved.

It is very much in the interests of all hon. Members, on difficult matters of conscience such as this, that they should try to reach clear and orderly conclusions. The debates need to be full, although they need not be drawn out to interminable length. If the motion is accepted by the House, it will achieve those objectives.

The motion allows two days in a Committee of the whole House, to be brought to a conclusion at 11 pm on each day. The Business Committee will decide, in the usual way, the allocation of available time on the Floor, but the Government intend the first day to be devoted to discussion on clause 11 and consequential amendments to schedule 2. We propose that the second day should be allocated to discussion of any amendments on the medical termination of pregnancy.

I should re-emphasise that, like their predecessors, the Government take no collective stance on these moral questions and have made it clear that any amendments will be the subject, among Conservative Members, of a free vote. The arrangements that I propose do not reflect a Government view. They are entirely designed to enable the House to reach orderly decisions.

Dealing thoroughly with those two topics in advance of consideration of the rest of the Bill will, I hope, have other advantages. The selection of the Standing Committee is likely to be less difficult once the House has expressed its mind on the key questions, and the substance of the debate will give the Committee a useful steer, which will help to keep it generally in line with the views of the House.

The motion then proposes that the debates in Standing Committee should be completed by 22 May. I believe that that will allow sufficient time for a discussion of amendments on the parts of the Bill which are not to be considered by the Committee of the whole House. The Business Sub-Committee will ensure that the various parts of the Bill are given a reasonable share of the time available so that the main points at issue can be thoroughly debated and determined. The motion then provides for two full days in the House for Report and Third Reading. As the main issues of conscience will already have been voted on by the whole House in Committee, once again that should allow ample time.

The Bill raises some complex and difficult issues, but it cannot be regarded as one of exceptional length or complexity. The timetable motion will enable the House and the Standing Committee to give full and orderly consideration to an important measure. It should enable us to reach clear conclusions on the difficult ethical issues involved and on the ways in which these new medical and scientific developments should be treated in detail. I have no doubt that this is the right course for the House to adopt. On that basis, I commend it to the House.

10.40 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I do not want to delay the House too long, although I should say that—perhaps unknown to many hon. Members—this timetable motion is not just unusual but, as far as I know, unique and could in future be used as a precedent. Before it is passed, we should carefully consider the implications.

There is a well-known difference of view in the House, which has persisted for some years, about the effectiveness of debate in Committee. There are those who believe that the Government should get their business through and that the best means of achieving the Government's aim and orderly consideration of a Bill in Committee is by the House determining a timetable before it refers the Bill to Committee. I respect that view. It is expressed in the Procedure Select Committee's report, but the House has neither debated it comprehensively nor come to a decision.

There are, however, those who believe that such a practice is contrary to the best interests of Parliament, that it deprives any Opposition, of whatever colour, of one of their major weapons and that, if members of a Committee are sensible, it does not mean that proper consideration cannot be given to a Bill. I therefore submit that the merits of timetabling Bills in general has not yet been determined, because there has not been that necessary consideration.

I do not think that we should debate that matter tonight. I am questioning the necessity for a timetable for Standing Committee to be introduced as part of this timetable. We know why the Leader of the House has moved a motion for the major controversial issues to be dealt with by a Committee of the whole House—I would not dissent from that. It has been a long-established practice in Finance Bills that the major matters should be debated on the Floor of the House and then the Standing Committee deals with consequential matters. I would not necessarily dissent from the timetabling of such consideration and any amendments that may be taken. There is a very good reason why that would appear to be a sensible procedure for this Bill.

I question whether, on Second Reading, the House, even before hon. Members have discussed matters that will be raised on the Floor, should decide the date on which the Bill should be reported to the House. The Leader of the House has fully admitted that that is an innovation, but he has given no indication whether it will set a precedent or of the consequences of such a decision.

I calculate that, if the Standing Committee met on Tuesdays and Thursdays, the timetable would allow eight or nine sittings for the consideration of the supposedly non-controversial matters in the Bill. I put it to the House, however, that even matters that are not controversial are often complex and that a judgment on them may require consultation with outside bodies. The Committee may discover unexpected features of such matters during its deliberations. They may not be connected with the views on the major matters in the Bill or with amendments debated and decided on the Floor of the House. Matters relating to the efficacy of implementation are a case in point. I have given a pledge to my constituents that I shall watch carefully the machinery for the implementation of this Bill and the efficacy of its implementation. Those matters are important and are dealt with in the so-called non-controversial parts of the Bill.

I submit that it would be procedurally inadvisable for the House to take such a decision now for two reasons. The first is the one that I have given in relation to this Bill and the second is that such a decision may be used as a precedent in respect of the general argument about the timetabling of Bills. We have not yet had that argument or decided upon it. Let me give an example. Some of my hon. Friends are upset that matters relating to the termination of pregnancy are dealt with in a Bill introduced to deal with embryo research. It is most unfortuate that the Leader of the House has attached to the Bill a timetable in respect of a big question that is not directly related to the Bill.

I am well aware that the Government want to secure the Bill's passage through Parliament. We all want that, regardless of our point of view, because at the moment there is a legal vacuum that must be filled; the whole House wants the Bill. If, as a result of a decision in Committee, one subsidiary school of thought or another wishes to delay the proceedings because it has lost the debate on the important question in Committee of the whole House, I can well understand that the Leader of the House will want the Bill to come out of Committee.

But there are many standing Committees in which such circumstances pertain. What happens? If there is tarrying in Committee and if the Committee stage appears not to be progressing at the rate that the House would wish, a simple solution can be applied. The Leader of the House can introduce a timetable motion and say, "We want to timetable the Committee stage because the whole House wants the Bill and we want it out of Committee." That is surely the solution and the safeguard that the Leader of the House seeks tonight. In other words, his fear about progress in Committee may be well founded but I suggest that his solution is wrong, for the two reasons that I have given.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was present when I spoke on Second Reading. I made the point that the course that he advocates destroys the legislative process because it means that the opening clauses of a Bill are discussed exhaustively and the remaining clauses not at all. Many of us believe that the timetable motion is a welcome innovation, provided—as appears to have happened in this case—that a consensus is reached on what constitutes a reasonable time for the consideration of the Bill. I have so far heard no argument to suggest that the timing proposed by the Leader of the House is unreasonable.

Mr. Spearing: I am glad that the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) intervened, because he has illustrated the very point that I was making earlier. There are general views about the timetabling of Committees. The right hon. Gentleman has views about that, to which he is fully entitled. I do not want to enter into an argument with him, but I question his phrase "reasonable time". Who is to decide what is a reasonable time in Committee when complex matters, perhaps involving scientific or medical issues in which hon. Members are not necessarily expert, may arise? If the right hon. Gentleman wants the Bill to be dealt with properly in Standing Committee—something that we all want—it does not help matters to say that the Bill should be out of Committee by 22 May.

Although I did not hear the earlier remarks of the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale, I suspect that they verged on the main debate about timetabling instead of being of relevance to the Bill.

The motion seeks to put a time limit on days in Committee which may mean that the Committee will decide to meet more often than on Tuesdays and Thursdays and sit late into the night to conclude its business—and that is not always the best way to deal with Committee matters. It also limits us to two days for Report

[Mr. Spearing]

and Third Reading. Matters other than the controversial issues relating to the working of the Bill may need more time on consideration and Third Reading.

Timetabling consideration of the Bill on the Floor of the House is going too far. If the Bill is obstructed, the remedy lies with the Leader of the House, and perhaps even I would agree with that remedy. However, it is not clear that that remedy is necessary, and the motion is premature. I ask hon. Members who believe in parliamentary democracy and the freedom of this House to discuss matters, unless and until a case is made for truncating debate, to vote against this timetabling motion.

10.51 pm

Sir David Price (Eastleigh): I want to make a short, but I hope pertinent, point that should appeal to the hon. Members for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) and for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) who intervened on points of order. I do not understand how we can meaningfully discuss any part of the Bill, and particularly clause 11 and schedule 2, without discussing clause 1 first, as that defines the terms that are used.

Clause 1 is headed "Principal terms used". I will not deploy the arguments that I would deploy if we were discussing the definition of "embryo". However, my point is pertinent to discussing the remainder of the Bill. I do not believe that we can pluck out certain bits and discuss them until we have settled what we mean by the terms. It is clear that there is already confusion about that.

In relation to clause 11, my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House referred to putting conscience into the law. However, if conscience is to be meaningful in law, it must be concise. Will my right hon. and learned Friend amend the arrangements so that we may refer to and amend clause 1 if necessary? That should be the business of the whole House. Before the Committee discusses the remainder of the Bill in detail, hon. Members should know what they are talking about. That is a matter of definition. Given that my right hon. and learned Friend had a classical and scientific education, he will know the need for precision in construe.

10.53 pm

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am flattered by the reference of my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price) to my classical and scientific education. However, even that did not convince me of his point.

The Bill is relatively unusual, and in the modern style, in having its definition clause at the beginning rather than at the end. In most Bills that have been debated in the House over many years, it has been a matter of routine for the House to debate the definition clauses after it has debated everything else. If that happens in this case, it will not be unusual or earth-shattering. The House will certainly be able to do it in that way.

Sir David Price: Do I gather that my right hon. and learned Friend will allow hon. Members to discuss clause 1 and that there would be greater virtue in putting the definition at the beginning of the Bill? As I understand it, we shall discuss clause 11 and schedule 2—schedule 2 will be very detailed—before we discuss clause 1.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: As I said, that will be in accordance with the normal practice on many Bills over many years. The definition clause is normally at the end of a Bill. I have often argued for definition clauses to be at the beginning of Bills, and this change is welcome, but there is no reason to be worried about it.

As for the more general points on the timetable motion, I was glad that the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) acknowledged that my fears were well-founded and that it was sensible to look ahead pre-emptively at the management of the Bill. I was grateful for the intervention by the former leader of the Liberal party, the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel), who said that my purpose was legitimate. However, I emphasise that I have not introduced the motion out of some whimsical fantasy of my own. I have introduced it after widespread consultation with people on behalf of all parties.

Mrs. Dunwoody: It is a free vote.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Of course it is a free vote on the substance, but for the free vote on the substance to take place I have canvassed very widely to determine the best way of doing it.

I was asked how long the process will take and who will decide how long it will take. I have done my best to ascertain how long it should reasonably take. I am offering that view to the House, and the House will decide. The House should be willing to respond favourably to my suggestion, which is based on a widespread canvassing of opinion that has not been challenged in any way.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Surely the point is simple. It is to be a free vote. Every individual hon. Member should have the right to decide according to his or her own conscience and his or her own information. It is useless to say that there has been wide consultation when each individual must be responsible for his or her own vote. The Leader of the House has not consulted, because he has used what is known as the usual machinery, which, frankly, does not always consult hon. Members who want to have a say.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: With respect, the hon. Lady misses the point. Of course the votes on the matters of substance will be free votes, but the vote now is how we set a framework for those votes to be taken. I have canvassed opinion, not just through the usual channels, whom the hon. Lady chooses to regard as disreputable and inaccurate. I have not canvassed all 650 hon. Members, but I have canvassed a wide range of opinion and I have come to the conclusion that I now place before the House. There is now an opportunity for hon. Members to vote on the proposal that I now leave before the House.

Mr. Spearing: I agree with the Leader of the House that, on the general difficulties of bifurcation and bringing a Bill into a Committee of the whole House for two days, even for a timetable of two days, he may have consulted to some extent. On balance, that is probably the right solution. Can he assure the House that he carried out equal consultation on the specific features that I referred to in my speech? Could not potential difficulties be better dealt with by a post-Second Reading timetable motion, if it were necessary? That knowledge would surely be in the minds of hon. Members on the Committee.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: This is a post-Second Reading timetable motion. The essential difference in what I am now proposing and what is more often the case was identified by the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale. The normal way of arriving at a timetable motion is for the House or the Committee to grind slowly through the first clause—take days and weeks doing that—and then find itself hurrying like mad to consider the rest of the Bill. The Procedure Committee recommended a different approach to avoid that.

In the light of that advice and in the light of the conclusions that I have arrived at, having talked to several people about it, I see no reason why one should not attempt a common sense way of dealing with this Bill. I am grateful for taking the hon. Member for Newham, South as far as I have in agreeing with me. I commend my motion to the House as the most sensible way to proceed.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 218, Noes 62.

Division No. 153] **[11 pm**

AYES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Alton, David
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cran, James
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Stephen
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fearn, Ronald
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Foster, Derek
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hannam, John
Hardy, Peter
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hind, Kenneth
Home Robertson, John
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knowles, Michael
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McAvoy, Thomas
McCrindle, Robert
Macdonald, Calum A.
Maclean, David
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
McNamara, Kevin
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marlow, Tony
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Paisley, Rev Ian
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Robertson, George
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wigley, Dafydd
Winterton, Mrs Ann

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Greg Knight and
Mr. Irvine Patnick.

NOES

Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Margaret
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bradley, Keith
Buchan, Norman
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Bob
Dalyell, Tam
Dixon, Don
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Fyfe, Maria
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Henderson, Doug
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Doug
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Leighton, Ron
Loyden, Eddie
McCartney, Ian
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris

O'Neill, Martin
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Richardson, Jo
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Sedgemore, Brian
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Strang, Gavin
Turner, Dennis
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody
and Ms. Hilary Armstrong.

Question accordingly agreed to.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

That the draft Transport (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1990, which was laid before this House on 13th March, be approved.—*[Mr. Goodlad.]*

Question agreed to.

Immunisation

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Goodlad.]*

11.10 pm

Mr. John Hannam (Exeter): This Adjournment debate gives me the opportunity to draw attention to a matter of extreme importance in the context of the health of our nation. Vaccinations against serious diseases have been part of our lives for many years, and the worldwide campaign against smallpox, polio and diphtheria has resulted in the near eradication of those awful illnesses.

However, when it comes to other diseases such as whooping cough, measles and rubella, the picture is not as rosy, and I shall explain why the Department of Health should go further in promoting greater take-up of immunisation.

In 1940, before the vaccination programme got under way in England and Wales, 857 children died of measles and 678 of whooping cough. Many more were left disabled and ill. In the 1970s, when the whooping cough vaccine scare peaked as a consequence of the widespread publicity given to the vaccine damage compensation campaign, vaccination rates dropped to 30 per cent. at one point. and the old cycle of whooping cough epidemics began to return.

As recently as 1986, there were 36,500 notifications of whooping cough, which probably represented some 40 per cent. of the actual number of cases. That year, there were more cases of whooping cough in the United Kingdom than in the United States of America. Since then, matters have improved and immunisation rates have increased—although it is difficult to measure the effectiveness of national immunisation policy year after year without relevant records of the number of deaths or cases of disablement caused through non-vaccination. I ask my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health to provide those figures, so that a benchmark can be established for years to come.

I confirm from my own discussions with constituents in recent days that families whose children were not given the whooping cough vaccine in the 1970s because of the scare campaign report without exception that there is among their children a high incidence of asthma following earlier attacks of whooping cough. I hope that my hon. Friend is aware of the longer-term effects of such diseases, even if they are not fatal. I certainly want to avoid a long-drawn-out public battle for compensation for those very few who suffered possible reaction to the earlier vaccines, but it must make sense to provide adequate compensation and to ensure the efficacy of the whole immunisation programme.

I am pleased to note that figures published recently by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary show a further improvement in uptake rates in England and Wales, to 80 per cent. for measles vaccination, although that still means that one child in five remains unprotected, and to 75 per cent. for whooping cough, though with one child in four left unprotected.

The World Health Organisation's target for Europe in 1990 is 90 per cent., so Britain still falls well short. Worse still, the averages conceal substantial variations from district to district, with take-up in inner-city areas such as Hackney and Newham in London as low as 51 per cent., and in the low 60s in Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester and Blackburn. For some groups, particularly ethnic ones and those in inner cities, this means that one in two children in such areas are not being vaccinated. Is my hon. Friend aware that the reason given for non-vaccination is usually apathy rather than resistance to it? The result in human terms is tragic if children die or suffer disability from preventable diseases.

It was because of a growing concern among many people working in medical research that Action Research for the Crippled child, on whose council I sit, last year commissioned an in-depth study by Professor Catherine Peckham into the factors influencing immunisation uptake in childhood. Her excellent report was published in April 1989. My purpose in seeking this debate tonight is to re-acquaint the Department of Health with the key recommendations in the Peckham report and to seek my hon. Friend's assurance that they are being given the most urgent consideration with a view to achieving and, more importantly, sustaining total protection from the preventable, infectious diseases of childhood. It is ironic that we spend millions of pounds researching new vaccines when we are not utilising the ones that we already have to full effect.

The Peckham study was based in 16 different district health authorities and random samples from general practitioners, consultant paediatricians, health visitors and clinical medical officers working in child health were taken. Some 2,071 health professionals were contacted and 86 per cent. responded. In addition, from each district, a sample of two-year-old children was drawn from six randomly selected general practices. That age group was chosen because the children should have completed their primary course of immunisation and the parents would have recent memory of it. Of 3,871 parents approached, 87 per cent. responded.

The Peckham report has effectively pointed the way for us to go if we really intend to translate a 99 per cent. parental consent for their child to be included in the immunisation system into achieving the World Health Organisation target of 90 per cent. actual uptake by next year.

The principal findings of the study were clear. First, health professionals demonstrated uncertainty about the contra-indications to measles and whooping cough immunisation. Their responses indicated inconsistency in the interpretation of contra-indications within and between professional groups. That has two important consequences—an unacceptable proportion of children are being denied immunisation for invalid reasons, and parents are being given conflicting advice.

Secondly, parents' attitudes had a marked effect on measles and pertussis vaccine uptake. A parent who thought measles was a serious disease and that the vaccine was safe and effective was much more likely to have his child immunised than the one who thought otherwise. Perceptions of the safety of pertussis vaccine was shown to be particularly important in determining uptake of it.

Family factors found to be associated with lower uptake included a large family, the presence of a chronically ill child and lower social class. The individual perception of a disease is important and, as immunisation rates increase and the disease becomes less common, the public forget the seriousness of it and may regard it as rare and trivial.

[Mr. John Hannam]

Measles is frequently viewed as a trivial childhood illness, yet it is associated with significant morbidity and even death. It is the most common cause of death in children in remission from leukaemia.

As the study was carried out on a large randomly selected population with a very high response rate from parents and health professionals, the results can be generalised to apply to the entire country. Overall, health professionals had a positive attitude to immunisation and said that they encouraged it. One of the main obstacles to a child being immunised was the general practitioners' misconceptions about contra-indications to immunisation. It is estimated that only 1 per cent. of children have valid contra-indications to the measles vaccine and 3·5 per cent. to the pertussis vaccine. It is clear that many children are being deprived of immunisation because health professionals inappropriately consider certain conditions or circumstances to be contra-indications.

Unless there are genuine contra-indications to vaccination—and there are few—it is irresponsible to fail to protect a child from a potentially damaging infection. The decision to withhold vaccination should be taken only after serious consideration of the consequences for the child and the community. It is partly the responsibility of practitioners to ensure that their knowledge of vaccination is up to date, but they cannot be held totally responsible for their uncertainty. Official guidelines have tended to be complicated and to leave excessive margins of doubt. I believe that the Depa tment is intent on improving those guidelines, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will confirm that tonight.

My hon. Friend will be aware that there is a wealth of additional detail provided by the Peckham report, which I have neglected in the interests of brevity. I conclude my references to the report by drawing attention to the summary of recommendations in the letter of the director general of Action Research for the Crippled Child on 11 July 1989, which pointed specifically to two or three fundamental requirements confirmed when the report was first subjected to professional scrutiny during a workshop convened by the Prince of Wales advisory group on disability last June.

It received unequivocal support from the Prince of Wales, when he said of the workshop's conclusions:

> "What seems to emerge clearly (from the Peckham Report and the discussion of it) is that our performance will only improve sufficiently—and be maintained—by introducing certain basic changes to the current system."

Earlier, I mentioned the high take-up rate in the United States. There, laws require proof of immunity as a condition of school entry. The result is that, whereas the United Kingdom has 80,000 to 100,000 notifications of measles each year, the United States averaged about 1,500 to 6,000 cases each year between 1981 and 1987. In the south-west of England, in my area, in 1986 we had more cases than in the whole of the United States. It is on the basis of a proven system, linked to school entry, that this country must proceed if it is to achieve the 90 or 95 per cent. measles immunisation rate.

The policy being advocated is not compulsion but one which, at the very least, puts parents in the position of having to make a definite decision about immunising their child. That would ensure that only those children who should not be vaccinated for sound medical reasons, or those whose parents objected strongly for other reasons, were excluded from the protection which should be their right. It is evident from the strength of parent input to the report that responsibility for immunisation shared with the parent would be welcomed.

Standard parent-held records would be necessary to achieve that and would provide the mechanism for reviewing immunisation status at regular intervals during early childhood. Children should certainly be immunised at the earliest possible age, but for those who might otherwise fall through the net, a requirement to present the immunisation record before enrolment to day care, nursery school or secondary school, would ensure review of their immunisation status. Those children found not to be immunised should be vaccinated, provided that there are no valid contra-objections or parental objections.

It is my contention, and the strongly held view of the all-party disablement group, that the linchpin in a future immunisation system will be the introduction of a health record for every child, issued on registration of birth and related only to immunisation status, perhaps not dissimilar to the international certificate of vaccination issued as a requirement for entry to many countries when smallpox was still a threat. I still have my old certificate of vaccination in my passport in case I have to produce it on a visit to some part of the world.

Once high levels of immunisation uptake have been achieved, it is essential to maintain them. One cannot rely on repeated campaigns to effect that, and we should act responsibly to ensure a mechanism for the certain protection of future generations.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on the pilot study carried out by a number of health authorities and also on the accelerated schedule of primary immunisations at two, three and four months. However, I hope that he does not reply tonight that the Department is about to launch another publicity campaign. If we are to protect future generations from unnecessary death and disability, we need a straightforward policy of guidance for the practitioners and health record cards for the parents. Action Research for the Crippled Child and Catherine Peckham have shown the way, and I hope that my hon. Friend will follow their path.

11.23 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Roger Freeman): The House owes a debt of gratitude to my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) for his clear presentation of this subject. The House knows of his work with the all-party disablement group, which gives him a special expertise in this matter. I know that he is concerned not only for his constituents in Exeter, but for the children of the whole population. I agree with the basic thrust of his remarks, that parents should have their children immunised. The risks that he identified, especially in relation to pertussis, are modest indeed compared with the great benefits that flow from immunisation.

I should like to give my hon. Friend the most up-to-date statistics, for which he asked. Over recent years, immunisation uptake rates have been rising and the most recently available figures—for England for the year 1988-89—show that the uptake for polio, diphtheria and tetanus vaccines is now 87 per cent., measles vaccine uptake is 80 per cent. and that for pertussis vaccine, for whooping cough, 75 per cent.

Given the rate of rise of these figures, and the fact that the measles uptake figure precedes the introduction of measles, mumps and rubella vaccine, which my hon. Friend will recall is now being offered to children just about to enter school, as well as to youngsters, we now have real prospects of reaching the 90 per cent. 1990 uptake targets set by the European region of the World Health Organisation—targets that are important milestones on the road to the elimination of these diseases, which is targeted for the year 2000. We have already achieved the elimination of poliomyelitis from this country and I am pleased to report that this success is recognised by the World Health Organisation, which lists us among the category A countries in which this disease no longer exists. Some other European countries have some way to go before they achieve that recognition.

In October 1988, we launched a new combined measles, mumps and rubella vaccine with the objective of improving measles uptake, eliminating mumps and the congenital rubella syndrome, a serious consequence of maternal rubella infection, which leaves babies who may be born blind or deaf with congenital heart disease or mentally handicapped. Although it is too early to measure the impact of this initiative on immunisation uptake, there are other measures available to us that give us reason to consider this initiative a considerable success.

The new vaccine has been recommended for the priority groups of children—those aged 12 to 15 months—in place of the previous measles vaccine, and for those aged four to five years coming for their pre-school booster immunisations. If every such child was to be immunised, we would have needed 1·5 million doses for the period October 1988 to January 1990. I am pleased to be able to tell the House that, over that same period, we distributed in excess of 3 million doses—more than twice the required amount. This enthusiastic use of vaccine suggests that it has been given not only to the priority children but to many others, and this will interrupt transmission of measles, mumps and rubella even sooner than we predicted.

Immunisation uptake provides a sensitive indicator for performance of the provision of immunisation services, but it measures the route through which our goals will be reached. Notification of diseases, and indeed their absence, provide the outcome measures that we seek to achieve. It gives me pleasure, therefore, to be able to report how our efforts to promote immunisation are producing very encouraging results for outcomes. Since the introduction of MMR vaccine, notifications of measles have been at the lowest levels ever. When 1990 is compared with 1988 and 1986—these are the appropriate years for comparison because of the cycle of the affliction—we find that notifications for the appropriate months are about 90 per cent. fewer than four years ago—a remarkable achievement. Every week there are significantly fewer children suffering the frequently underestimated and potentially very serious complications of measles.

We can see similar successes in the notifications for whooping cough. On the basis of previous epidemics, it could have been thought likely that there would be a whooping cough upsurge over the winter of 1989-90. Although notifications did rise last year, they reached their peak in the same months as the 1985 epidemic, but there were 70 per cent. fewer notifications, again suggesting that the successful promotion of immunisation has led to so many more children being protected from serious diseases.

My hon. Friend may be interested to know that the new contract for doctors came into force today. This is the first working day of that new contract and he will be aware that incentive payments for immunisation are built into it. I know that he supports that principle.

The incentive payments in the contract cover only three immunisations: whooping cough, diphtheria-tetanus and polio; these vaccinations tend to run together, in that they are given at the same time. DT and polio is the second and measles is the third. We use measles as a proxy for the MMR vaccination. We take whooping cough, DT, polio and measles and for children aged two on a doctor's list, we make a calculation every quarter day by averaging the doctor's success with those three lines, using the completing dose.

My hon. Friend will know that there are three doses for DT, polio and whooping cough, and we make a payment on each quarter day. If the doctor achieves a 70 per cent. target figure, a quarterly payment, which over the year adds up to £579, is made. If a 90 per cent. target figure is reached for the averages of all three, a quarterly payment, which in the coming financial year will be £1,737 for the year, will be made.

There is a second target for five-year-olds, where we measure success in relation to the second diphtheria vaccination—the booster—and also tetanus and polio. A 70 per cent. success rate brings a payment of £193 over a year, and a 90 per cent. uptake results in a payment of £579. That information may be helpful, because I do not think that we have put it on the record as clearly as I hope I have outlined.

My hon. Friend spoke about the Peckham report. Although, as I have said, uptake figures are rising, in some areas they remain too low. I think that my hon. Friend cited some inner-city areas in Liverpool and London. The Department of Health undertook careful investigation last year into the reasons for poor performance and, along with other measures, commissioned a study of the management of the immunisation programme in every health authority.

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation consists of clinical professionals and is a multi-disciplinary group advising the four territorial departments of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. That committee carefully considered the reasons that lay behind the difficulties preventing higher uptake and has recommended that the schedule of primary immunisations be changed to an accelerated schedule used in all health authorities. This new schedule will start from May. The benefits that it will offer will be the likelihood of higher acceptance rates, earlier protection against whooping cough, fewer opportunities for immunisation to be postponed because of minor illnesses and greater convenience for parents as the immunisations will be given over the period when infants are brought regularly to clinics and before mothers return to work.

From memory, I am referring now to immunisations at two, three and four months after birth, as opposed to the longer period which currently exists and which can range up to 11 months or more. Professor Peckham has welcomed that change. After Easter, the Department of Health will issue a new edition of the memorandum "Immunisation against Infectious Disease". That is a green document which I am sure my hon. Friend has read. It provides details of the new schedule along with authoritative guidance on contra-indications, both

[Mr. Roger Freeman]

genuine and false, and adverse events associated with immunisation. I shall send a copy of this document to my hon. Friend and also place a copy in the Library. I hope that, when he sees it, he will feel that I have answered his questions about greater guidance being given on contra-indications, which simply means medical reasons for children not being able to receive appropriate vaccinations.

In the autumn, there will be a national advertising campaign, promoted by the Department of Health and the Health Education Authority, to promote immunisation as the safest way to protect one's child. The campaign, which is being piloted in the Granada Television region, will use television advertising, along with material in newspapers and magazines.

Last year, Action Research for the Crippled Child published a valuable report on immunisation. Professor Catherine Peckham carried out the inquiry on its behalf. The report confirmed previous research that identified poor knowledge of immunisation contra-indications, undue fears over adverse effects, especially associated with pertussis vaccine for whooping cough, and lack of consistency of immunisation advice.

The Peckham report made recommendations, some of which relate to matters at health authority level that the Department of Health would support. The forthcoming change of the immunisation schedule will result in all children being given their immunisations according to an agreed national timetable—one of the report's main recommendations.

The report also recommends the availability of parent-held records of child health that would document the immunisation that a child has received. My hon. Friend's arguments were very persuasive. I am grateful to him for underlining the value that he believes a parent-held record card would provide. I am persuaded by his arguments. Such cards are on trial. My Department will be most interested in the outcome of the trials. I shall follow the results of those trials with a close personal interest. Furthermore, the Department of Health will shortly be issuing new immunisation record cards for all family practitioners to ensure that they are able to keep accurate immunisation records on all their patients.

Although the Peckham report does not recommend legal compulsion or school exclusion of unimmunised children—it recommends that, before school entry, the immunisation records of all children should be checked and that unimmunised children should be offered immunisation, a process facilitated by parent-held records —there are countries such as the United States where immunisation is, in effect, compulsory. Yet there are, equally, countries such as Holland and the Scandinavian countries where the uptake rates are exceptionally high without any form of compulsion. Moreover, those high rates are achieved before the age of two—that is, before the transmission of the appropriate diseases.

Although the United States policy initially led to dramatic reductions in measles, mumps and rubella notification, the United States is presently experiencing the worst outbreak of measles for many years. Many of these cases are occurring in children below the age of school entry, whose parents have delayed immunisation until it is compulsory. The lesson, perhaps, of the problem is that school entry measures may be too late to interrupt measles transmission and that the greatest successes will come from the attainment of the highest levels of uptake as early in life as possible—preferably without compulsion, but with the full support of doctors and parents alike.

My hon. Friend referred to the problem in the inner cities, where the uptake rate is undeniably low. The new contract which runs from today provides for much higher allowances—the so-called deprivation allowances—to be paid to the general practitioner for having a patient list in such areas. They amount to £8·50 a head, which can provide up to £17,000 a year for a doctor with an average patient list. That is a real additional resource to enable doctors to fight hard to increase the uptake of immunisation and cervical screening.

I understand my hon. Friend's views on publicity and campaigning. However, I believe that they have a part to play, in addition to the national campaign in the autumn, to which I referred. I assure my hon. Friend that I shall reflect carefully on whether we need to take specific measures in relation to the ethnic minority community, particularly Asian mothers who, in some parts of the country, may need to be persuaded about the value of immunising their children. Some success has been achieved, but more needs to be done.

I join my hon. Friend in underlining the central message that, for a safe childhood, parents must, for heaven's sake, immunise their children.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-one minutes to Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 3 April 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

HEATHROW EXPRESS RAILWAY BILL *[Lords]*
Order for Second Reading read.
To be read a Second time on Thursday 19 April.

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

Foxhunter Radar

1. **Mr. Haynes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Foxhunter radar is currently performing according to its original specifications.

The Minister of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Alan Clark): The Foxhunter programme is proceeding by way of staged improvements under a firm price contract. Radars to an agreed interim standard are already being fitted to the Tornado air defence variant. All radars will be brought up to the full technical standard, beginning next year.

Mr. Haynes: I do not know what this lot are messing about at. They have been at it for a number of years and have spent millions of pounds, yet we do not have the proper radar for the defence of this nation. They should be here at the Bar, and Ministers should be charged with complicity.

Mr. Clark: The hon. Gentleman did not ask a question. In so far as his statement meant anything, he was wholly incorrect. We are at great pains to ensure that the proper radar is regularly upgraded. The agreed interim standard radars have been fitted and radars to the full technical standard will start next year.

Mr. Bill Walker: Does my hon. Friend agree that the air defence version of the Tornado, even equipped with its present radar, is a formidable piece of defence equipment and that when the radar is made to function properly, it will be the finest of its type anywhere?

Mr. Clark: Of course, it is. The system in service, even with radar to the agreed interim standard, is enjoying a successful export demand.

Tain Bombing Range

2. **Mr. Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress towards a noise evaluation survey in the vicinity of Tain bombing range, Ross-shire.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement (Mr. Michael Neubert): The noise survey at RAF Tain is scheduled to begin on 7 May and will continue for two weeks. A meeting has been arranged between officials of my Department and Ross and Cromarty district council to discuss the survey in detail and to select the location of measurement sites.

Mr. Kennedy: I thank the Minister for that reply. I must express some concern over the letter to me from the Minister of State for the Armed Forces some months ago. He said that this welcome and long overdue noise evaluation survey would take place, but I am concerned about the time scale that the Department seems to envisage. The Minister said that there will be a meeting. Is there now a revised time scale that may lead to decisions and, I hope, to grants for noise insulation being made earlier to the community? A recent example of the problem is Inver primary school in a village over which much low flying takes place. The infant pupils are housed in a Portakabin that has no sound-proofing, so the pupils suffer significant disruption from low-flying military jets. That has a detrimental educational effect and it terrifies the children.

Mr. Neubert: The survey at Tain is being given a high priority amid an extensive programme to survey 40 military airfields. The proposal for the first survey in May should lead to a report being made in about spring next year. It takes time to evaluate the data accumulated by such surveys. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the survey will be prosecuted as fast as possible, although it depends, of course, on good flying weather.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will my hon. Friend say something about the general attitude of the Ministry of Defence to compensating people in the vicinity of bombing and gunnery ranges? There are sites all round the country, including Lulworth gunnery range in my constituency. The people understand the need for noise and explosions, but they are always concerned about damage to their property and about compensation from the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Neubert: Limited resources of staff and equipment are available to undertake surveys. The decision to undertake such a survey at Tain shows the Ministry's wish to relieve the impact of noise on local communities and, where appropriate, to pay compensation.

Services (Premature Discharge)

3. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many individuals have applied for premature discharge from each of the services in the last six months.

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Archie Hamilton): In the six months from August 1989 to January 1990 a total of 1,947 personnel from the Royal Navy and Royal Marines, 2,461 Army personnel and 2,974 Royal Air Force personnel applied to leave prematurely.

Mr. Hardy: Does the Minister accept that two steps need to be taken urgently? First, to deal with the uncertainty in the services, we should embark on a serious and thorough defence review; secondly, we should recognise that the anger and anxiety about pay has been exacerbated by the odious poll tax, as service men realise that the private and the general will pay the same.

Mr. Hamilton: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but we already survey the reasons why people leave early or have applied to do so. The main reasons are the effect on family life, the lack of job satisfaction and the expected prospects outside the services—the latter being all to do with the flourishing economy in which we live.

Sir John Stokes: Will my hon. Friend arrange for commanding officers of the units in the forces to tell those serving under their command that there is still a worthwhile and vital job to be done in the armed service of the Crown, now and for many years hereafter?

Mr. Hamilton: I shall certainly make sure that my hon. Friend's sentiments are transmitted to the officers in command of the services. A great effort is made, when service men say that they want to leave, to talk to them and find out their reasons for leaving, and to do all that we can to persuade them to stay.

Mr. O'Neill: Does the Minister of State appreciate that when *The Daily Telegraph*, the day after the publication of the Defence White Paper, chooses as the subject of its leader the inescapable reality of the dissatisfaction in the ranks, there must be something seriously wrong with the morale, pay and conditions of the people who serve us? Can he do something about that quickly, provide decent pay and conditions and improve the morale of the forces on whom we depend?

Mr. Hamilton: It is clearly accepted by the armed forces that we are dealing with the problems of the future; they know that we shall come forward with plans before long. One question that I am often asked when I visit the armed forces is whether there is a chance of a Labour Government coming to power, because they know that that would have a much more dramatic effect on their future than anything else.

Sir William Clark: Will the review include the provision of, and help with, housing for service men who leave the service?

Mr. Hamilton: As my hon. Friend knows, much work has been done on housing for service men. We have introduced a scheme under which houses will be put into a housing association, which will in turn make them available. Progress is being made on the scheme and I hope that we can build on it.

SGL Defence Ltd.

4. **Mr. Douglas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information his Department has available in relation to SGL Defence Ltd.; what is the number of meetings which he has had with representatives of this company; and what were the topics discussed.

Mr. Alan Clark: I understand that SGL Defence Ltd. is a recently formed public relations company which intends to specialise in defence. Neither I nor my right hon. Friend have had meetings with anyone representing the company.

Mr. Douglas: I am grateful for that reply, but is the Minister aware that the Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence is a consultant to that company? Although he may not be transgressing any of the House's arrangements, may I take it that every time the Select Committee has met since January, the Chairman has declared an interest in SGL Defence Ltd. to Front-Bench spokesmen and to the Department? If not, how should I take the letter sent to me today by the Minister in which he says that the public interest is being well served? If Ministers have not been aware of this association, how is the public interest being protected? Are Ministers being circumspect in the evidence that they give to the Select Committee and in the information that they give to the individual concerned?

Mr. Clark: It is not for me to pass judgment on the conduct of the Chairman of the Committee or on the extent to which he is revealing or inadvertently concealing any interest. That is purely a matter for the House of Commons. All that I can tell the hon. Gentleman and the House is that at no time in any of the meetings that I and my right hon. Friend have had with the Chairman of the Committee has he lobbied or proselytised for anyone.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is the Minister aware that the brochure for SGL Defence Ltd. says:

> "Our experience will greatly improve a company's capacity to influence operational requirements to win contracts in the face of national and international competition"?

As it is wrong for a company that can make that statement to hire a Member of Parliament as a consultant, why does not the Minister condemn it now from the Dispatch Box?

Mr. Clark: Such companies tend to overrate their ability to persuade Ministers. Decisions on defence procurement matters are taken primarily on the basis of value for money. I am always prepared to listen to hon. Members about their constituency interests, but I would not pay the slightest attention to an hon. Member, however distinguished and however distinguished his position in the House, in any other context.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As these questions are House of Commons matters, is not it a matter for the Select Committee on Members' Interests, of which I am Chairman?

Mr. Speaker: Absolutely so. I hope that when attacks of this nature are made on hon. Members, they are given notice.

Mr. Douglas: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: What is the point of order?

Mr. Douglas: With great respect, you, Mr. Speaker, above all others are well aware that I have pursued this matter through letters to you, to the Select Committee on Members' Interests and to the Committee of Selection. I gave notice to the hon. Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates). The reason why he is not here is that he is spending £15,000 of public money on a trip abroad.

F15E Aircraft

5. **Mr. Flannery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what decisions have been taken on basing the F15E aircraft in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None, Sir.

Mr. Flannery: Despite that monosyllabic, negative answer, is not it a fact that the United States has surveyed RAF Bentwaters between Sizewell and Bradwell and that work will begin in June? Is not the F15E—a new nuclear strike bomber—being planned at a time when east-west tension is falling and defence cuts are occurring in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union? Why do we need another bomber of that nature after all this time and when tension is decreasing? Who is ordering it and why?

Mr. Hamilton: The United States air force may have surveyed the site with the intention of putting a simulator there. No decision has been taken to build the simulator and work will not start in June. That report is incorrect. Consideration is being given to the deployment of F15Es at that site because we are looking to reallocate our resources in the light of flexible response, which has served us well in the past and, I am sure, will continue to do so.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend notice a degree of hypocrisy in calls for value for money from well-known tax-dodgers in the Opposition?

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is for the Minister to answer, but such questions do not lead to good relations in the Chamber.

Mr. Hamilton: I do not wish to follow that sentiment too far, but hypocrisy is a problem that we have always found with Opposition Members.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister must withdraw that allegation.

Mr. Hamilton: I withdraw it at once.

German Unification

6. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions took place at the Anglo-German summit on 30 March on the effect of German reunification on British defence policy especially in terms of *(a)* land-based short-range nuclear missiles and *(b)* air-launched nuclear missiles.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Tom King) *rose —[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let us settle down.

Mr. King: Our discussions confirm that there was full agreement between the British and Federal German Governments on the following: that a united Germany should remain in NATO; that allied forces should remain in Germany; and that NATO nuclear weapons should continue to be based there. Chancellor Kohl made clear at the press conference his belief in the need for the full protection of NATO for the territory of Germany.

Mr. Wigley: As the range of the Lance missile is 110 km and as, at its narrowest point, East Germany is 160 km wide, does the Secretary of State accept that those weapons, if they remained in West German territory, could be trained only on East Germany or Czechoslovakia? They would be of use further eastwards only if they were based in East German territory. Will the right hon. Gentleman comment on the report in *The Guardian* that the Government are now not insisting on renewing those weapons? Can he give an undertaking that they will be brought into the negotiations on removing nuclear missiles in Europe?

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman could not have heard the end of my reply. At the press conference following the Anglo-German summit Chancellor Kohl and the Prime Minister reaffirmed the need for nuclear weapons. In my answer I said that nuclear weapons should continue to be based in Germany. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that that matter was covered by the comprehensive concept agreed by the alliance in May 1989. Those matters do not need to be reviewed until 1992 and that is a sensible arrangement. Obviously these things must be worked out, but Chancellor Kohl has made it absolutely clear that he does not want Germany to be singularised in this respect. I have already quoted his belief in the need for the

"full protection of NATO for the territory of Germany."

Mr. Brazier: Does my right hon. Friend agree that those weapons play a particularly important political stabilising role vis-a-vis the unease on the other side of the iron curtain? As long as those weapons exist it will never be in anyone's interest to start a conventional war. It is no accident that we have had 45 years of peace in Europe while they have been around.

Mr. King: In one sense, we have had 45 years of confrontation, which looks as though it is coming to an end. It is hoped that there will be a much more sensible and constructive relationship between east and west. If that is achieved and the more evil aspects of communism are defeated, as they have been throughout east European countries, one must ask why that will have happened without a shot being fired and without the millions of casualties that marked the two previous world wars. It must be because we stood by the policy of nuclear deterrence and flexible response which have proved triumphantly successful.

Mr. Foot: Talking of defence prospects generally, as I suppose Ministers did at the summit, is the right hon. Gentleman aware that he has just achieved the astonishing feat, in 1990, of producing a defence White Paper which, as far as I can discover, does not make a single reference to the non-proliferation treaty and the Government's obligations under it? Does that mean that the Government have given up any duty to carry out the obligations that the country undertook when making that treaty?

Mr. King: The right hon. Gentleman may wish to reflect on what he has said and consider in particular the matters that we included in the White Paper, well before the events at Heathrow last week. We warned specifically of the current dangers posed by some signatories to the non-proliferation treaty, who appear to have embarked on an attempt to achieve nuclear technology, and of the dangers of expansion of missile capability among no fewer than 11 developing countries. The right hon. Gentleman's response to all such dangers is that we should give up our defences for a start.

Mr. Conway: Where does my right hon. Friend suppose that the nuclear missiles situated in Warsaw pact countries are pointed?

Mr. King: It is significant that in the past year—Mr. Gorbachev's fifth year of office—the Soviet Union has deployed 450 new nuclear missiles. Although I believe that that is not a new policy, but an old one which has not yet been corrected and stopped, the missile threat is greater than it has ever been. We hope and believe strongly that the intention to use them is the least that it has ever been, but those weapons are a powerful reminder of the dangers from the present hardware of the Soviet Union.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: Does the Minister accept that the rationale for short-range nuclear weapons is that the west might be willing to indulge in nuclear war fighting? In the light of the changes in eastern Europe, will the Minister explain the circumstances in which he thinks that might be possible? Is not it time to recognise the political reality —that by 1992 there will be no political will to accept the deployment of a follow-on to Lance in Germany—and should not the Government's policy be based on that?

Mr. King: As I tried to make clear to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), that is covered in the comprehensive concept and now needs to be worked out in conjunction with our allies in NATO. I hope that the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell) will at least support me on that. That is what we shall now do. Contrary to all the press preamble that there would be a great breakdown and strong division of views, the press reports of the Anglo-German summit on Friday were correct: there was an understanding between the United Kingdom Government and the Federal Republic about the right way forward on defence and related issues.

Mr. Dunn: Is not it time that Opposition Members were reminded that it is entirely because of the defence policies of this country and of our allies that changes in the east are occurring? But we should not make commitments to reduce our offensive and defensive capability until there is stability, political growth and freedom in the eastern bloc.

Mr. King: I have great sympathy with my hon. Friend. The right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) fails to recognise that the position that he adopted, quite honourably, has been proved fundamentally wrong. We have been proved absolutely right in standing for strong defence, the nuclear deterrent and flexible response. The NATO Alliance policy has brought the chance of freedom and hope to millions of people. We should celebrate that fact today.

Defence Procurement

7. **Mr. Duffy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes he is undertaking in defence procurement policy in the light of recent reports by the Public Accounts Committee and National Audit Office.

Mr. Alan Clark: I am satisfied that the existing policy of competition and a taut commercial approach to contracting will continue to give us value for money.

Mr. Duffy: Despite the Minister's satisfaction, will he confirm that the development of new weapons has brought about overspending of nearly £2 billion and that nine contracts worth £4 billion will be delivered up to five years' late? Yet the Secretary of State for Defence assured the House in paragraph 302 of the "Statement on the Defence Estimates" that the policy pursued in recent years to provide for defence procurement on a cost-effective basis will be continued.

Mr. Clark: Many wild figures are circulating and the £2 billion which the hon. Gentleman quoted was the figure given in an article by a Mr. David Hencke in *The Guardian*. Mr. Hencke formerly styled himself as social affairs correspondent, so I suppose that we should make allowances for any difficulties he may get into when he treads in the more complex world of defence procurement. However, there is no justification for throwing around figures of that size which do not make allowance for inflation.

The report of the Comptroller and Auditor General stated:

> "None of the projects entering the statement for the first time in 1988 showed a variation in projected spend of 10 per cent. or more . . . The detrimental effects of older contracts would continue to be felt for some time".

However, the Comptroller and Auditor General said that he expected to see the benefits of the Department's current procurement practice clearly reflected in future major project statements.

Mr. Batiste: Does my hon. Friend agree that the changes which the Government have introduced in defence procurement over many years have resulted in better equipment, better value for money and better export potential? In that context, will he confirm that Vickers has now submitted the details of the second milestone test for the Challenger 2 tank? When will he be able to make an announcement about that?

Mr. Clark: I shall be going to Vickers in the near future, and I expect that we shall have all the data we need to bring it forward in September.

Mr. Rogers: The Minister is grossly unfair in his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Duffy). The newspaper reporter did not concoct the figures in the article—they came from information provided by the National Audit Office and the Public Accounts Committee.

The Government have been in office for almost 11 years and they like to promote an image of efficiency and good management, yet one after another the procurement disasters continue to occur—Foxhunter, DROPS, ALARM, Tucano—with billions of pounds wasted. When will the Government acknowledge their incompetence and sack the chief of the Procurement Executive?

Mr. Clark: I understand why the hon. Gentleman fails to mention any programmes that are effective and efficient and which run to time and to cost—Warrior and Skyguard are good examples. The hon. Gentleman will know, as will the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr Duffy), with his ministerial experience—that cost overruns are endemic to major weapons procurement, for the very good reason that throughout the development and production stages we have to take account of changes and progress in enemy systems and in counter-measures. It is not like a contract for a million pairs of boots; it is a race in which the parameters are constantly moving as technology advances.

West Germany

8. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Government's policy towards the enhancement of short-range nuclear missiles in West Germany.

Mr. Tom King: The Government are committed to the comprehensive concept agreed last May, when NATO reaffirmed the continued need for an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional forces which need to be kept up to date as necessary.

Mr. Townsend: Like my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, I supported the concept of enhancement a year ago. Following the recent dramatic political events in eastern Europe, however, is it not perfectly obvious that such an approach is now finally and firmly finished? Would not my right hon. Friend be wise to take the advice of former Secretary-General of NATO, Lord Carrington, who said in November, "This chapter is over"?

Mr. King: I do not think that I can add to what I have said in answer to earlier questions. My hon. Friend knows that the matter is well contained in the agreement with our allies in the comprehensive concept and agreed by Chancellor Kohl and the Prime Minister. The matter will have to be worked out in conjunction with our allies in NATO.

Mr. John Evans: If the British Government insist that NATO should maintain short-range nuclear weapons in West Germany, what arguments will they use to deny the Soviet Union the right to have similar missiles in East Germany?

Mr. King: One of the biggest mistakes is to compare the position of NATO, whose forces are in western Europe by the invitation of the sovereign nations concerned, with that of the Warsaw pact where the unwelcomeness of Soviet troops is becoming increasingly apparent in every one of the countries involved.

Service Personnel

9. **Mr. Moss:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures his Department is taking to retain trained service personnel.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We have introduced a wide range of measures to improve retention. We are looking particularly at ways in which disruption of family life can be reduced and at increasing job satisfaction through contracting out more mundane tasks. In addition, bonus schemes are to be introduced for certain groups of personnel from January 1991.

Mr. Moss: Does the Minister agree that to retain trained personnel it is critically important to reassure them that they have a continuing and necessary role to play in the defence of our country? Would not their morale slump dramatically if we were ever to adopt the defence policy advocated by the Labour party?

Mr. Hamilton: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. As I indicated in answer to earlier questions, there is a deep apprehension among the armed forces about the implications of Labour's defence policy—or what we have seen of it so far.

Mr. Cryer: Would not it be a fillip for our armed forces if they were told that the Government's policy of mass extermination through the use of nuclear weapons was to be completely abandoned because, for once, Government had decided to support the United Nations nuclear non-proliferation treaty by cancelling Trident and supporting the 137 non-nuclear nations which also support the treaty on the basis that nuclear powers such as the United Kingdom will be getting rid of their nuclear weapons—a promise which the Government have continually betrayed?

Mr. Hamilton: I know that the hon. Gentleman has held that view for a long time, in the teeth of the opposition of an almost overwhelming majority of people. In general, our service men are mindful of the fact that the Soviet Union remains a major nuclear power, and they are glad that Britain also has a nuclear deterrent. I am sure that they share my alarm at the fact that, despite the successes of the non-proliferation treaty, some countries are developing a nuclear capability. They, like me, would hate to face a future in which certain Third world countries had nuclear weapons while Britain had none.

Mr. Allason: Members of the defence study group yesterday attended a long meeting on board HMS Norfolk. Some of us were struck by the number of chief petty officers who intended to leave that ship, despite the fact that it is the newest contribution to our naval defence forces. What steps does my hon. Friend intend to take to retain those very experienced men, who have some 15 years' experience behind them and who are the backbone of the Royal Navy?

Mr. Hamilton: I have had similar reactions from senior naval petty officers. We are addressing a number of issues —for example, the review of allowances did not go down very well with the Royal Navy, and some of the worst aspects are now being reconsidered. We are also considering a number of other measures. We are mindful of the whole question of overstretch and the fact that people are working very hard and we are considering whether that could be wound down also.

Defence Review

10. **Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the additional resources required to undertake a defence review.

Mr. Tom King: As I told the House last month, we are examining options for change in the structure and deployment of our armed forces which will enable us to support and preserve the key elements of our defence provision in the light of changing international circumstances.

Mr. Thompson: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the White Paper published this week gives no sign of any changes in defence policy? Does he agree that the Government need to catch up with a changing world in relation to defence issues and that the White Paper does nothing to restore confidence in the Government among military personnel and the defence industry?

Mr. King: As I made clear in my main answer, we are considering options for change to determine where there may be opportunities for improvement and for adjusting to the new position. In my introduction to the White Paper, I said that it was a time of great hope but also of great uncertainty. As I stand here today, the Soviet Union has just closed the border between Lithuania and Poland. It is only a week since certain equipment, clearly intended for nuclear weapons, was removed from an aircraft at Heathrow. I do not think that the House needs any reminding of the dangers and uncertainties that still exist.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the defence White Paper and I welcome his announcement of an inquiry into the various options which might be open to us, depending on a number of difficult factors—notably the outcome of the CFE talks in Vienna. Is he aware that there is no mention in the White Paper of what we believe to be a growing need for helicopters in the Army? Can he reassure the House that the Ministry of Defence has not lost interest in that? I also congratulate my right hon. Friend on the White Paper's photographic embellishments, which we attribute to his skills.

Mr. King: Obviously, the provision of helicopters is a matter which we are dealing with in our options for change. I thank my hon. Friend for his remarks about our approach. We hope that there will be considerable scope for economies. We hope that there will also be an opportunity for what I would call a services dividend to help to improve the conditions and alleviate some of the problems of service personnel. I make no apology to the House for our approach, which is not to announce, as the Labour party did, a £5 billion slash in defence expenditure across the board, but seriously to consider our future commitments and the threats that we might face. We wish to ensure that the defence of Britain is properly secured at all times.

Mr. O'Neill: Does the Secretary of State appreciate that if we are to give him any credit for his review of options we are surely entitled to know what options are being reviewed? Do they cover troop reductions and, if so, what form do these take? What is the status of forward defence when the right hon. Gentleman seems not to know what the forward orders ought to be? Can he tell us what he means by a review of options in respect of flexible response when there are virtually no longer any weapons below strategic nuclear weapons available for such a doctrine? Lastly, can he assure the House that when the review of options has been completed, there will be a supplementary White Paper to give us the true picture of the Government's intentions with regard to the defence of this country?

Mr. King: I should make it clear that I do not associate the hon. Gentleman with the Labour party motion to cut defence expenditure. Although it was carried by a two to one majority by his party, I know that it was carried in the face of his opposition at that time. The points that the hon. Gentleman makes are perfectly fair. I wish to see how we can have a wider discussion of these options. I am giving thought to that, but I cannot say what the actual form or timing will be.

Mr. Jack: Can my right hon. Friend confirm that it is still the policy and intention of his Department to purchase the European fighter aircraft for the RAF at the conclusion of the aircraft's development phase?

Mr. King: I can confirm that to my hon. Friend—the German Defence Minister, Dr. Stoltenberg, and I issued precisely such a statement at our previous meeting before the Anglo-German summit on Friday.

Maritime Measures

11. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has considered any proposals on maritime confidence-building measures.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The greatest threat to stability in Europe comes from land-based forces. NATO's substantial proposals, tabled in Vienna in March 1989, have therefore concentrated on those.

Mrs. Fyfe: Does the Minister realise that this grudging response to the widespread concern about the lack of safety with regard to nuclear weapons at sea will concern the British public? Surely he realises that nuclear weapons at sea could cause a nuclear war, and when will he do something about it?

Mr. Hamilton: The hon. Lady must realise that the Madrid mandate applied to maritime activities in terms which covered amphibious activities but did not cover other maritime activities.

Mr. Boyes: Does the Minister recall that it had been argued by Ministers previously that the major obstacle to naval arms reduction talks was the growing Soviet submarine threat? To support that view, in the Defence Estimates 1988 we were told that the Soviets were producing a new submarine every six weeks; yet in yesterday's White Paper, at figure 2, we find that the number of Warsaw pact nuclear-powered submarines is now 85—four fewer than last year's estimate of 89. Now is undoubtedly an excellent time, in consultation with our NATO allies, to take up naval arms talks with a view to reducing naval forces, and the Secretary of State should press that view vigorously.

Mr. Hamilton: The reduction in the number of Soviet submarines had more to do with the fact that redundant ones are being replaced by more modern ones in terms of capability. I doubt whether it means a reduction. As the hon. Gentleman well knows, it is not right to compare our naval forces with those of the Soviet Union because we depend on our naval forces in the Atlantic for reinforcements, while the Soviets can reinforce over land. So we are not comparing like with like.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Last Thursday the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham) drew attention to discussions and undue noise just prior to Prime Minister's Question Time. This is very apparent today. I ask the House to listen to the Questions Time.

East Germany

12. **Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for United Kingdom defence policy of the result of the East German election.

Mr. Tom King: We warmly welcome the holding of democratic elections in East Germany and hope that the changes there will enhance the security of all European nations. The United Kingdom will continue to maintain its commitment to NATO, which provides the best guarantee of peace and security in Europe.

Mr. Steinberg: As a result of the election in East Germany, does the Minister agree that it is inconceivable that Germans would nuke fellow Germans? In that respect, will he make certain that British policy is to reject the Lance and not to improve it any further?

Mr. King: I am not sure whether the hon. Member was in the Chamber for the earlier questions on precisely this issue. He may be totally ignorant of the fact that we had the Anglo-German summit, when we had the pleasure of welcoming Chancellor Kohl who played such a signal part in the success of the centre right in the elections in East Germany, and in which my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Chancellor reached such a clear agreement with him on these issues.

European Fighter Aircraft

13. **Mr. Stern:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement on the progress of the European fighter aircraft.

Mr. Alan Clark: Development is proceeding satisfactorily. More than 85 per cent. of the contracts for the development phase have already been let.

Mr. Stern: Will the Minister take this opportunity to reaffirm the Government's faith in this project, the engines for which are built in my constituency? Did he notice the start of a campaign of denigration against the project, which was apparent among the Opposition in the last Parliament, and has he noticed that a similar attempt to unsettle the work force is already starting?

Mr. Clark: I deplore that. The Government are completely behind the project. That was confirmed as recently as last Friday when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met the German Defence Minister. We have no doubt whatever that the European fighter aircraft will be the dominant air superiority fighter in the year 2000.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr Viggers:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 3 April.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I shall attend a state banquet in honour of the President of India.

Mr. Viggers: I thank the Prime Minister for that reply. In the light of recent shocking acts of violence, does my right hon. Friend agree it is the duty of all responsible political leaders not only to express words but to take all actions open to them to influence others to obey the law in every respect?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend. No one is above the law. We must all obey it. That is what the rule of law is. All responsible leaders should encourage every other person to obey the law and take the requisite action to do so.

Mr. Kinnock: Is it not obvious to anyone who has observed the Prime Minister in recent days that she was rightly horrified by the injuries done to the public, the police and property last Saturday? Is it not equally clear, however, that she can barely conceal her delight at the diversion and uproar provided—*[Interruption.]* When it comes to extremists, the difference is that I fight them whereas the Prime Minister needs them.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is talking nonsense on both counts. Yes, I was deeply concerned at the scenes. I am deeply concerned that it is not the first time that the police have been injured in upholding the rights of ordinary citizens. During the coal dispute, 1,392 police were injured and at Wapping, 572 police were injured. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman would remember, before he makes such accusations, the scenes outside Grunwick, at the *Stockport Messenger*, at Warwick, at Wapping and the scenes we saw last week and which we all condemn.

Mr. Kinnock: The Prime Minister exposes herself even more. By dredging through all those past acts, she demonstrates exactly the truth of what I said earlier. Those who affect to despise her policies most give the greatest comfort to the right hon. Lady, but she derides that comfort and encourages further uproar.

The Prime Minister: Nonsense—the right hon. Gentleman is trying far too hard and not succeeding. Does he condemn the 28 or 30 Members on his own side who seek to break the law? What does he say to people who throughout the years in the Labour party have not always said that it was necessary to obey the law? The hon. member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), speaking about rate capping, said:

> "In the local authority situation do you obey the law or not obey the law? We don't have any firm principles in the party"—

The Labour party—

> "of how we might deal with the problem".

Mr. Soames: Would my right hon. Friend find time today to send a message to Mr. Mugabe to congratulate him on his re-election and on the considerable progress made in Zimbabwe in the past 10 years? Will she also express to Mr. Mugabe the great concern of a number of people in this country at the prospect of Zimbabwe sliding into a one-party state? Will she urge him to readopt the principles of the Lancaster house agreement which have so honourably served Zimbabwe in the past 10 years?

The Prime Minister: Yes, of course we congratulate President Mugabe. As my hon. Friend points out, the principles on which the election were fought were very different from the principles in the Lancaster house constitutional agreement, but Mr. Mugabe upheld that during the appointed time for the entrenched clauses. I agree with my hon. Friend. It is very different when one has a one-party state. Obviously, those are the things that he is thinking of. May I also point out we help considerably in Zimbabwe as our armed forces train the Zimbabwe armed forces and the Mozambique armed forces to fight terrorism in that country.

Q2. **Mr. Patchett:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 3 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Patchett: We hope that the right hon. Lady is better briefed today than she was last Thursday. Can she now explain to the House why 42,000 student nurses on low incomes should be subject to the full rate of poll tax?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman refers to 42,000 student nurses who are training and who receive a salary. Other student nurses who go on to Project 2000 —which will very shortly be most student nurses—will receive a considerable bursary. Once they receive that bursary they will be treated as students and they will receive a rebate of 80 per cent. of the community charge. When nurses receive a salary during the course of their training they will be treated in exactly the same way as other young people who receive a salary in the course of their training. The hon. Gentleman might not like it, but that is the answer.

Q3. **Mr. Speller:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 3 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Speller: Does my right hon. Friend agree that because of the unexpected and unplanned size of the community charge throughout the country the most logical way to assist everyone of every type and class might be to transfer one large chunk of Government-sponsored money such as education or teachers' salaries from the community charge to the income tax budget?

The Prime Minister: If we were to do that we might put a great deal of extra expenditure on to the taxpayer. Teachers' salaries might put 5p extra on to income tax without any guarantee of a reduction in the community charge because some local authorities would increase their expenditure and we would finish up with much higher income tax and the same community charge. First we must consider how to restrict extravagant spending by local authorities.

Mr. Ashdown: Does the Prime Minister realise that on the crucial question of Britain's full membership of the European monetary system she now risks the same deadly uncertainty over Government policy which cost her a Chancellor of the Exchequer and Britain a plummeting pound and high inflation only a few months ago? Does she disagree with the Governor of the Bank of England and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, both of whom have recently said that the only obstacle that prevents Britain joining the exchange rate mechanism will be removed once high inflation is curbed?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has made it clear that we stand by the Madrid conditions—which the hon. Gentleman can read as they have been given in Parliament many times—that first, there is no hindrance to the free movement of capital around the Community—some hindrances still remain; Italy has not removed all controls —also that we should have clear freedom of movement for financial services and, further, that we carry out stage one of the Delors report and that we get inflation down to the middle of the European Community. When those conditions are fulfilled we shall join. Considerable progress has been made as other members of the Community are now following our example by getting rid of many of the controls on the movement of capital—a process which we completed years ago.

Q4. **Mr. Butterfill:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 3 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Butterfill: Will my right hon. Friend join me in condemning the statement by Mr. Andy Murphy on BBC television that as leader of the punk anarchist group Class War he thought that those who attacked the police on Saturday were justified in so doing and that they are working class heroes? Does my right hon. Friend share my concern that Mr. Murphy is apparently employed by the London borough of Hackney as a finance officer? Does she not think that he should be dismissed?

The Prime Minister: All decent people find any such remarks utterly repugnant and support the police in their arduous task in the front line. Anyone who makes such a remark should have nothing to do with the democratic process because they must be flatly against it.

Q6. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 3 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Skinner: Is the Prime Minister aware that in 1979 the cost to the taxpayer of running Downing street was £1¼ million and that 10 years later that cost has soared by more than 400 per cent.—a bigger percentage increase in expenditure than any local authority in Britain—and that that does not even include the cost of the gates? Is not the fortress of Madam Ceausescu therefore a suitable case for poll tax capping?

The Prime Minister: I thought that the hon. Gentleman was better at mathematics. If he will make his comparisons on the same basis, he will find that our running costs compare very favourably both with central Government and with local authorities. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman would have preferred Downing street, which is an historic house, to be attacked and greatly damaged. Its repair would have cost much more than the gates.

Mr. Atkinson: With regard to the situation in Lithuania, and now Estonia, does my right hon. Friend agree that the secret protocol of 1939 makes the Baltic states a very special case and that it would be both immoral and illegal to ignore their continued appeals for self-determination and independence? Will not the CSCE summit later this year be the appropriate forum in which to resolve that matter?

The Prime Minister: I have indicated before in the House that this country never recognised the legality of the annexation of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia into the Soviet Union. Thus, we have never had any representation in those states and we do not recognise the legality of their annexation now. The Helsinki accord recognised the boundaries in fact but not in law. Two countries have made clear their views about self-determination.

Nevertheless, it will be very wise to urge politicians in both Lithuania and Estonia, as well as in Moscow, to resolve their differences by dialogue and discussion. I am sure that that is in the interests of the countries concerned and ourselves.

Q6. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 3 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Home Robertson: Is the Prime Minister aware that one year's experience of the poll tax in Scotland makes it abundantly clear that no amount of time can heal the running sore of a tax which robs the poor to pay the rich? Does the right hon. Lady recall telling me in a parliamentary answer this time last year that I should donate my unwanted and ill-gotten poll tax gains to charity? What does the right hon. Lady intend to do with the £1,500 that she will gain at the expense of the long-suffering people of London?

The Prime Minister: I now pay community charge in two places. The hon. Gentleman may take it from me that I shall continue to be generous with the money that I have —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is unfair to others in the House.

The Prime Minister: Like the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson), I shall continue to be generous to the charities which I believe in and support with the moneys that I have, whether or not they are allowed for tax.

Community Charge Capping

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Chris Patten): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about community charge capping in England.

Local authorities have now set their budgets and charges for 1990-91. Authorities' budgets total £35·8 billion. This is a 16 per cent. increase on 1989-90 and 9 per cent. above the figure for total standard spending of £32·8 billion which we provided in our settlement. Overall, charge payers are being asked to contribute about 30 per cent. more than domestic ratepayers in 1989-90, despite the fact that we increased central support to local authorities by 8·5 per cent.

It is deplorable that local authorities have chosen to budget at these levels, putting an unacceptable burden on local people. There is no justification for the level of charges which many authorities have in practice set. The average charge is £363 in England, ranging from a horrendous £573 in Labour-controlled Haringey to £148 in Conservative-controlled Wandsworth. It is little wonder that strong feelings have been expressed up and down the country about the level of many charges, and I can understand the feelings of outrage of a number of my hon. Friends when faced with the burdens that some authorities have chosen to impose on local people.

The simple fact is that high charges are the direct result of authorities' own budget decisions over the years. In time, I believe that the ballot box will bring greater prudence and realism—*[Interruption.]*——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Patten: —to local spending decisions. That is the local accountability which is central to our new system of local government finance.

But Parliament has given me powers in the Local Government Finance Act 1988 to cap those authorities whose budgets are excessive and to require them to reduce their excessive plans. We have always recognised that in the early years of the new system the new accountability pressures would not be fully effective, and there may be a greater need for capping. After having carefully examined all the information available to me about local authorities' budgets, I have to tell the House that I have decided to exercise my capping powers for 1990-91.

Under the 1988 Act I can select authorities for charge capping if, in my opinion, their budgets are either excessive or represent an excessive increase over the previous year. I am not empowered to select any authority whose budget is below the statutory threshold of £15 million. For 1990-91, I have decided to select authorities whose budgets are in my opinion excessive in absolute terms.

Selection of authorities for capping has to be on the basis of general principles—*[Laughter.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr. Patten: I cannot pick and choose. I can adopt different principles for different classes of authority, but the principles should apply equally to all authorities within the same class. I have decided for 1990-91 to apply the same principles to all the classes of authority in the Act, except that, for inner London boroughs, I have decided to make a special allowance for overspending inherited from the Inner London education authority.

The best measure of the excessiveness of an authority's budget is an assessment of its overspend against its standard spending assessment. That overspend represents the sum by which its budget exceeds the amount that we consider it appropriate for the authority to spend to provide a standard level of service consistent with total standard spending of £32·8 billion. That is similar to the approach that we adopted when selecting authorities for rate capping, when we used the benchmark of overspend against grant-related expenditure.

The principles that I am adopting are as follows. First, for the purposes of capping I judge an authority's budget to be excessive if it exceeds its SSA by at least 12·5 per cent. and by at least £75 per adult. Secondly, an authority is designated for capping only where its overspend per adult above the 12·5 per cent. £75 per adult benchmark for excessiveness is at least £26 per adult. That is a £26 per adult de minimis provision to avoid requiring authorities to reduce their budgets for the sake of only a small reduction in the burden on their charge payers.

The special allowance that I am making for inherited ILEA overspend means that for inner-London boroughs I have deducted from each borough's budget, for the purposes of comparison with the SSA, the amount of its inner London education grant entitlement as set out in the special grant report approved by the House on 18 January —*[Laughter.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think this a matter for hilarity.

Mr. Patten: By applying those principles to authorities' budgets for 1990-91, I am designating 20 authorities for capping. These are, in alphabetical order: Avon, Barnsley, Basildon—[HON. MEMBERS: "Labour."]—Brent—[HON. MEMBERS: "Labour."] That is not very surprising—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that we have a busy day ahead of us. This is a long statement with a great deal of detail. I ask the House to listen to it.

Mr. Patten: I will tell Opposition Members why it is not very surprising: I would have almost to reach No. 60 before I came to a Conservative authority. In alphabetical order, the authorities are: Avon, Barnsley, Basildon, Brent, Bristol, Calderdale, Camden——

Hon. Members: We cannot hear!

Mr. Speaker: Order. How can the House possibly hear what is going on——

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Sit down, please. I ask the House to give the Secretary of State a hearing. When there is so much baying going on, how can anyone hear?

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. When the Secretary of State read out the list for the first time, he did not read out the word Barnsley. When he read it the second time, Barnsley was included.

Mr. Speaker: Order. So much baying was going on that the list was difficult for any hon. Member to hear. I suggest that, for the good order of the House, the Secretary of State should read out the list of local authorities again. I ask the House to listen to him in silence.

Mr. Patten: I shall give the House the list again: Avon —[HON. MEMBERS: "Labour."]; Barnsley—[HON. MEMBERS: "Labour."]; Basildon—[HON. MEMBERS: "Labour."]; Brent—[HON. MEMBERS: "Labour."]; Bristol —[HON. MEMBERS: "Labour."]; Calderdale—[HON. MEMBERS: "Labour."]; Camden—[HON. MEMBERS: "Labour."]; Derbyshire—[HON. MEMBERS: "Labour."]; Doncaster—[HON. MEMBERS: "Labour."]; Greenwich—[HON. MEMBERS: "Labour."]; Hammersmith and Fulham —[HON. MEMBERS: "Labour."]; Haringey—[HON. MEMBERS: "Labour."]; Hillingdon—[HON. MEMBERS: "Labour."]; Islington—[HON. MEMBERS: "Labour."]; North Tyneside—[HON. MEMBERS: "Labour."]; Rochdale —[HON. MEMBERS: "Labour."]; Rotherham—[HON. MEMBERS: "Labour."]; St. Helens—[HON. MEMBERS: "Labour."]; Southwark—[HON. MEMBERS: "Labour."]; and Wigan—[HON. MEMBERS: "Labour."].

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House to settle down. I must say again that we are under a timetable today and this is a long statement.

Mr. Patten: All those authorities are budgeting significantly in excess of their SSAs, both relative to the SSAs themselves and in terms of pounds per adult. For the information of the House, I am laying in the Library tables showing for all authorities how their budgets compare with their SSAs. Copies are available in the Vote Office.

I am not today designating Lambeth. That must give a great deal of pleasure to the Opposition. That council set a budget of over £305 million early in March. I understand that last Thursday, about three weeks after making that budget, it changed its mind, and set a new lower budget and a charge of £548. Under the statute, the council has seven days from then to supply me with the information that I need to take my decisions in relation to that authority. To date, it has not done so. When I receive the information, I shall apply the principles that I have determined for inner London boroughs to Lambeth's budget. If its budget is more than £284·2 million, on this basis, Lambeth would be capped.

Some of the overspends are spectacular by any standards. For Basildon, for example, it is 194 per cent. and £154 per adult above SSA. For Greenwich, it is 32 per cent. and £314 per adult above SSA, even after allowing for inner London education grant.

For each of the 20 authorities designated on the basis of my general principles, I am also proposing caps—that is, the levels to which we propose authorities should reduce their budgets. I have made available in the Vote Office and shall be printing in the *Official Report* a table showing for each designated authority the cap that I am proposing and the budget cuts implied by it. In each case, I am satisfied on the basis of all the information available to me that my proposals are reasonable and appropriate in all the circumstances of the individual authorities concerned. The reductions in the charge which would be implied by the caps range from around £100 in the case of Hammersmith and Fulham to about £30 in the case of St. Helens.

As required by statute, I am today notifying each authority that it has been designated for capping, the principles on the basis of which it has been designated and the amount of the cap that I propose. The authorities then have 28 days in which to tell me, if they wish, whether they accept the amount proposed. If they do not, they must suggest an alternative figure together with the reasons for it. In such circumstances, it is open to me to set the final cap at a higher, lower or, indeed, the same level as the one I proposed. If an authority does not accept my proposed cap, I have to set the cap by order, a draft of which must be approved by the House.

Once the final caps have been set, the authorities concerned have to set new, lower budgets reflecting their caps. These then feed through to new, lower charges for the charge payer. How long the process takes depends in part on how authorities react to the caps that I am proposing today, but I expect all authorities to have set new budgets by June or July, with new charges for charge payers following as soon as possible thereafter.

I must say this to the House: I would much rather not have had to use my capping powers. But Parliament has provided them to protect the charge payer against excessive spending, and it is clearly right that I should use them. I am satisfied that the authorities that I have selected are in this position and that their budgets should be reduced. My proposals will do just this to the benefit of over 4 million charge payers.

Mr. Bryan Gould (Dagenham): Does the Secretary of State recognise that his statement is a final admission of the failure of the poll tax? Has he not fatally undermined and discredited the only virtues ever claimed for the poll tax—that it would somehow be simple and would improve accountability? If accountability is the key, why could he not wait for the voters to pass judgment on 3 May?

The right hon. Gentleman's statement means that accountability has gone out of the window; all that we are left with is a search for scapegoats. Is it not a remarkable achievement—not to say a suspect achievement—to have concocted a list that miraculously excludes every single Tory authority? Have not the criteria been carefully, not to say tortuously, selected to produce a predetermined political outcome?

If the object really was to relieve hard-pressed poll tax payers, why are Tory councils such as Dartford and Leominster, in which bills have risen by 73 per cent., not on the list, while Haringey, at only 6 per cent., is included? Why is Tory Windsor and Maidenhead, with a poll tax bill of £449, excluded while Calderdale, at only £297, is caught? Why, if increased spending is the criterion, is Tory Berkshire, with an increase of 20·6 per cent., left out, while Brent, at 1·4 per cent., is on the list?

If the Secretary of State is really concerned to reduce excessively high poll tax bills, why does he not accept that bills right across the country are, on average, £85 above Government estimates; that there is no significant difference between Tory and Labour councils on that score; and that the problem arises from the serious miscalculations made by the Secretary of State, to which charge capping can be only a marginal and partisan response?

What estimate has the right hon. Gentleman made of the extra costs of sending out revised bills and recalculating rebates? What estimate has he made of the losses of income that charge-capped authorities will suffer through the impact on cash flow? What estimate has he made of the cuts that will be needed, not just to meet charge cap levels but to cover the extra costs and losses that charge capping will impose?

[Mr. Bryan Gould]

How does the right hon. Gentleman explain that five authorities—Brent, Calderdale, Hammersmith, Haringey and Hillingdon—have been charge-capped to a point below their assumed charge? Why are councils that contribute to the safety net, such as Brent, Camden, Islington and Basildon, charge-capped, in some cases in circumstances in which they contribute more to the safety net than the margin by which they are charge-capped?

Does the Secretary of State accept that his statement and his charge capping will be universally regarded as a political fix, as a rigged list drawn up in a cynical and desperate last throw to salvage something from the wreckage? Is he not revealing just how disreputable the Government's current aims are? They have given up trying to make the poll tax work. They have given up trying to help the oppressed poll tax payers. Their sole and squalid aim now is to shift the blame for the whole poll tax fiasco for which they alone are responsible.

Mr. Patten: Perhaps in view of the stress that the hon. Gentleman placed on the selection of the criteria, I should take him and the House through the arguments for the criteria. I take it that the House will want me to do so reasonably patiently so that it knows exactly why we chose these criteria—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Brian Sedgemore (Hackney, South and Shoreditch:) Get the fraud squad in.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State was asked detailed questions and he must have a chance to answer them.

Mr. Patten: First, we had to take account, as the hon. Gentleman will be aware, of sections 100 to 102 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988. Secondly, we had to take account of legal precedents and the way in which rate capping was applied in the past. On that basis, we decided on the criteria that I announced. Just as in the past we used the grant distribution formula—the GRE—as the basis for rate capping, so it seemed perfectly reasonable to take the SSA as the basis for charge capping, since it is expenditure and bills above the SSA which represent excessive spending and charging.

There is a political point—*[Laughter]*—which the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) would do well to take into account. Labour shire counties are setting precepts about £82 over SSA while Conservative shire counties are setting precepts £25 above SSA. Labour shire districts are setting charges £47 above SSA while Conservative districts are setting charges £8 above SSA. Labour metropolitan districts are setting charges £94 above SSA while Conservative metropolitan districts are setting charges £21 above SSA. Labour London boroughs are setting charges £216 a head above SSA while Conservative boroughs are setting charges £3 above SSA. If the hon. Gentleman seeks an explanation of why there are no Conservative authorities on the list, it is in those figures.

The hon. Gentleman referred to several specific authorities and in doing so showed that he is not very familiar with local government finance. Dartford and Leominster cannot be included in the criteria because they have budgets below £15 million and are specifically excluded by the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

The hon. Gentleman also failed to take account of Conservative authorities that are making contributions into the safety net and Labour authorities that are taking money out of the safety net. That makes rather a lot of difference to the figures that the hon. Gentleman used.

Let me come to costs. We reckon that the costs per authority will be about £200,000 per charging authority and that the total costs will be between £6 million and £7 million for all the authorities that we are charge-capping. I wish that the local authorities that set excessive spending levels had thought about that disruption before they set out on a course that penalises their charge payers.

I shall deal with the principle of accountability, to which the hon. Gentleman referred. On the "Today" programme last week—I am not sure whether the Leader of the Opposition or his hon. Friends are aware of this —the hon. Gentleman said:

"There must always be in extremis a reserve power to cap."

In the hon. Gentleman's view, there is no argument about principle. It is right that there should be a reserve power to cap. What I ask the hon. Gentleman——

Hon. Members: You should be answering.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members should not carry on conversations or point, across the Chamber; that is very disorderly.

Mr. Patten: I take it that Opposition Members do not want me to make this point, because they have no answer to it.

What are the circumstances in which the reserve powers would be used? Would they be used in the case of Basildon which has spent 194 per cent. over SSA, or £154 per head? Is that in extremis? Would they be used in Greenwich, which has spent 31·8 per cent. over SSA, which is equivalent to £314 a head? Let the hon. Member for Dagenham tell us that those are circumstances in which he would use those reserve powers.

The hon. Member for Dagenham has once again forgotten that the purpose of my proposals is not to penalise councils, but to protect charge payers.

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there will be widespread agreement that, in the circumstances of this year, the decision to cap a number of local authorities was inevitable and correct? Does he accept that the decision to limit that to a lower number of authorities than previously circulated is also wise? The response of the Labour party to my right hon. Friend's statement, its derision and humour, will be different from that of people living in the districts and council areas concerned. They will whole-heartedly welcome the relief that he has announced today to many community charge payers.

Mr. Patten: We hear a good deal about the alleged concern of Opposition Members about the impact on the charge payer. I imagine that they will be delighted that my proposals will, for example, help some pensioner households to the tune of £200 in some local authorities.

I accept what my hon. Friend said and I repeat the argument that I advanced earlier. If we had produced a list of nearly 60 local authorities, we might have caught a Conservative one, but the reason why Labour local authorities are on the list is that it is principally Labour local authorities which overspend and set excessive charges.

Mrs. Rosie Barnes (Greenwich): Bearing in mind the fact that the Government have always maintained that one of the major benefits of the community charge is an increase in local accountability, does the Secretary of State agree that his statement makes a mockery of that, particularly as many of the areas listed will hold elections in the near future when people can make their views known in the usual way?

Mr. Patten: I could not, as I am sure the hon. Lady will accept, have different criteria according to whether some local authorities had elections this year.

I am sure that the hon. Lady will have noticed that her borough of Greenwich is spending 31·8 per cent. over SSA, or £314 per adult. In circumstances in which the Association of London Authorities, a Labour organisation, is suggesting that Labour authorities should discuss whether they can get away with the highest possible charge, I believe that it is reasonable for us to use our powers this year.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Does my right hon. Friend accept that his statement is very welcome in Derbyshire? I speak for my hon. Friends the Members for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) and for Derbyshire, West (Mr. McLoughlin) as well. Is my right hon. Friend aware that, in Derbyshire, school meals charges have not been increased since 1981 and home help services are completely free to everyone? Whether that is Labour party policy or not, it is sheer foolishness. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it should be possible to reduce net budgets in Derbyshire without damaging the central services?

Mr. Patten: I believe that my hon. Friend is entirely right in making that argument, and I have chosen the cap for Derbyshire with that very much in mind. I am aware, as is my hon. Friend, that Derbyshire is spending 25 per cent. over SSA or £157 per adult and that is causing considerable expense to my hon. Friend's constituents.

Mr. Martin Redmond (Don Valley): That statement was the most stupid, irresponsible one that we have ever heard. The Secretary of State may not be aware that the financial year for local authorities has already started. Will he confirm that he has had documentation from every authority on budgetary matters? Will he tell the authorities that he has capped, which schools, teachers and services they will lose?

Mr. Patten: I have no doubt that in the next few weeks there will be a parade of bleeding stumps in a number of local authorities. I believe strongly that the caps that I have proposed will enable local authorities to run their services at a reasonable level. I repeat the point which I made in my statement so that all local authorities and all hon. Members are aware of it: Labour or other authorities which disagree with the cap that I have proposed can, if they wish, make alternative suggestions. I then have to consider them, and we shall come back to the House to debate the issue here.

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there will be widespread rejoicing in my constituency at his decision to cap our charge and give interim protection against the worst excesses of socialist overspending? He is the toast of Basildon. Does my right hon. Friend agree that with the local council being 194 per cent. over standard spending assessment it could easily make savings without affecting essential or sensible local services?

Mr. Patten: The whole House will be aware that Basildon's idea of prudent financing has meant that it has been capped in 1985-86, 1986-87, 1987-88 and 1988-89. Last year, Basildon proposed an increase in local rates of 57 per cent. It is budgeting at 194·3 per cent. over SSA or £154 per adult, which is wholly deplorable.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): It would appear that £10 million is to be taken away from Barnsley. Does the Secretary of State realise that, of that £10 million, £1·8 million is the extra cost of running the poll tax, £3 million is the extra cost of the police and fire services which were not previously there, and £5 million is the extra cost of grants? The local authority now has the choice of sacking teachers or doing away with all non-statutory education facilities. Does the Secretary of State realise that he has stopped the council trying to regenerate an area with 14·1 per cent. unemployment? Does he realise that this despised tax should be disposed of, rather than the people of that area being penalised? Does he realise that not only are the people groaning in despair at the poll tax but that they will now have to suffer the further consequences as the Government try to justify something about which they have made a terrible mistake?

Mr. Patten: I point out to the hon. Gentleman that a large number of his constituents will be pleased that their community charge will be reduced by £60—that is, more than £2 per week—for a pensioner household. Even——

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): That is wrong—the Secretary of State should do his arithmetic.

Mr. Patten: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will keep quiet. I said that for a pensioner couple it would be more than £2 per week.

Mr. McNamara: The Secretary of State did not say pensioner, he said household.

Mr. Patten: I have not changed what I said, and I think that——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It does not help if we have a dialogue between the Front Bench and Ministers. The Secretary of State is answering questions from a Back-Bench Member.

Mr. Patten: Even with the proposals that I have made, the cap would still mean that Barnsley was spending 17·7 per cent., or £118 per adult, more than SSA. Its original plans would have meant a 19·2 per cent. increase over the rescaled GRE—the former formula. It is worth bearing that in mind.

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his statement today will be received with rapture by all my constituents, no matter what their party affiliation? To underline the extent of the relief that he has given to Bristol and Avon, since he has capped two councils that affect my constituency, will he tell the House how much reduction he proposes for the citizens of Bristol and other parts of Avon?

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend's constituents will be pleased to know that, as a result of our capping the

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expenditure proposals of Avon and Bristol, they will save £64: that is—I emphasise the point for the sake of the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing)—over £120 for a pensioner couple.

Mr. Ronnie Fearn (Southport): Is it not a fact that because of this late announcement and the short time that they will have to produce the new billing caused by rate capping, many authorities will face a considerable extra cost on top of the poll tax itself? Many bills have already been drafted and will now have to be altered. Is it not also true that the Conservative Government have underestimated the power of the people and that the power of the people will come back to them at the next election?

Could not the Secretary of State have thought of a better system, such as local income tax based on the ability to pay—a system already proven in Sweden, Canada and other countries? Would not this have been a better system than the present shambles?

Mr. Patten: I think that I answered the question about costs fully in response to the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) when I said that we reckoned that the cost for each charging authority would be about £200,000 and that the total cost for all those which had been capped would be between £6 million and £7 million. That has been taken account of in my proposals on caps.

As for the hon. Gentleman's proposals on local government finance, I applaud him because at least his party has proposals on the future of local government finance; the proposals seem not to have acted like a magnet in attracting people to the party, but I commend the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues for their honesty. I note that we still await with interest and enthusiasm the proposals on local government finance from the official Opposition.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): I congratulate the Secretary of State on his statement. Earlier, the House will have heard the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) refer to Dartford as a Conservative authority which in his view should be charge-capped. I resent his attack upon the people of Dartford. The only person who speaks for Dartford in this House is me. I also point out that there were wrong assumptions in the statement of the hon. Member for Dagenham: his figures are wrong and Dartford, because it falls below the threshold of £15 million, is ineligible for charge capping. I hope that the hon. Member for Dagenham will withdraw his slur on the people of Dartford.

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend has put the record straight. I tried to do so myself in responding to the hon. Member for Dagenham who was unaware, when he put the question, of the provisions of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Is the Secretary of State aware that the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) will be £1,331 better off under the poll tax arrangements, even before the new capping arrangements come into force? This is a further windfall for her. Should we not have had something different—not the formula that we now have, which is gobbledegook, but a change in the original formula which messed up the grant in many areas, depending on their nature? If the area was mixed in class terms, if it was both a rural and an urban area, and if it had people moving in and out of it, it lost grant all along the line. That is what affected Derbyshire, not the nonsense talked by the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South.

Mr. Patten: Since, as I understand it, the hon. Gentleman has said that he will not pay the community charge, I am somewhat reluctant to answer his question —[HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] If he carries out his decision, it will mean that, as a militant freeloader, he will oblige his constituents to pay higher bills. That does not seem to me to be very egalitarian, but perhaps it is what passes for socialism these days.

Mr. Matthew Carrington (Fulham): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the citizens of Hammersmith and Fulham will be extremely grateful for his protection from their gambling, grossly overspending and immensely inefficient council? My right hon. Friend knows that the council has already potentially lost some £200 million on the money markets through its inefficiency. However, he may not know that that has pushed up its expenditure by 80 per cent. since 1986, even allowing for education. It has employed 1,000 additional people in the town hall, and that is before it takes on responsibility for education services. We are extremely grateful for my right hon. Friend's protection, which I trust will continue through future years.

Mr. Patten: I am sure that my hon. Friend's constituents will be pleased that their individual charges will go down by about £100. Even in the Labour party, Hammersmith and Fulham borough council is not a by-word for fiscal prudence. As my hon. Friend suggested, its spending plans were intended to rise by more than 21 per cent. on top of SSA, or £239 per charge payer.

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): Is the Secretary of State aware that the metropolitan borough of Wigan is not a profligate or irresponsible authority? That was acknowledged—it is on the record—by the Under-Secretary of State when I led a delegation to meet him a couple of months ago. The right hon. Gentleman knows that Wigan has already lost £22 million in grant this year and is having a difficult time trying to run its services. Will he acknowledge that the poll tax that it has had to levy is necessary to sustain the level of services for which the councillors were elected? Is he aware that more than 100,000 letters have already been sent, and that the borough treasurer estimates that it will cost at least £500,000 to re-bill poll tax payers in the borough? Will he say—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Briefly, please——

Mr. Stott: Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are under a time-pressure today.

Mr. Stott: I am aware of that.

Will the Secretary of State answer the question posed by my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) about authorities that are rate-capped and find it difficult to raise money on the money markets, but have to do so at very high interest rates? Can the right hon. Gentleman——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is unfair to the hon. Gentleman's colleagues as I shall not be able to call all of them.

Mr. Stott: I very rarely ask questions in the House——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That does not matter. The hon. Gentleman is on equal footing with everyone else in the House. He must be fair to his colleagues.

Mr. Stott: I shall try to be fair to my colleagues, but I am raising an important matter.

What services in the metropolitan borough of Wigan will have to be cut when the budget is reduced by £10 million? How many teachers, how many housing associations, how many meals-on-wheels, how many social services will have to be cut?

Mr. Patten: I realise why the hon. Gentleman wants to put those points about his constituency so vigorously. However, I must point out to him that, as I understand it, Wigan council had reserves of almost £11·5 million at 1 April, of which it was planning to use £4 million in 1990-91. Against that background, and against some other figures that I shall give to the hon. Gentleman, I do not regard our proposed cap as unreasonable.

Wigan council was proposing to spend 13·1 per cent. over its 1989-90 budget. Our reduction in the charge of around £43 will, I think, be popular with his constituents. The total external finance which is going into Wigan in the coming year is £121·9 million. That represents £527 per adult. I repeat that, against that background, I have put forward proposals which are reasonable. But again I say that, if Wigan council wishes to make proposals for a different cap, we will listen to them and consider them and then we shall have to come back to the House and give it our views.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. In fairness to all, I ask for single questions, please. That will be equally fair to hon. Members on all sides of the House.

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): Is my right hon. Friend aware that Hillingdon is not a Labour-controlled council, as Opposition Front-Bench Members seem to think, but a hung council? Will he tell the House by how much that council exceeds its SSA, what that means in terms of each individual and what the cap will be?

Mr. Patten: Hillingdon council was proposing to spend £151 million. That represented 20 per cent. over SSA, or £143 per adult over SSA. We are proposing a reduction of £9·3 million, with a cap, therefore, of £141·7 million. That would mean that charges would go down by around £53 a head.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is the Secretary of State aware that, last May, the people of Derbyshire, who know a great deal more about their own needs that he does, overwhelmingly re-elected the Labour majority there?

Mrs. Currie: And now they are regretting it.

Mr. Benn: And the hon. Lady has benefited greatly by the poll tax, as has been said.

Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the poll tax, and now the capping, combined with the destruction of the Inner London education authority that began on the morning of 1 April, represent a far greater and more sustained threat to democracy in Britain than what occurred in Whitehall and the west end on Saturday?

Mr. Patten: I think that the right hon. Gentleman's observations and his casuistry on the question whether citizens should obey the law have gone well beyond even his own distant bounds. I think that many people in the House, observing the right hon. Gentleman's career, wish that he had followed the example that he so often suggests and chained himself to railings far distant long ago.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Will my right hon. Friend accept that, while the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) may be well able to afford to pay the massive community charge levied by Derbyshire county council, many of my constituents who are above the rebate level are completely unable to pay the charge at the level at which it was to be levied, and that this announcement today that the council is to be charge-capped will give them at least some comfort? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the county council will not have to cut a single teacher or policeman in order to meet these new spending figures?

Mr. Patten: I agree with my hon. Friend that the proposals that I have made should enable the Derbyshire county council to run its services at a reasonable level without disruption, as I said earlier. Derbyshire county council was proposing a 19·5 per cent. increase over its 1989-90 budget. The cap that I have proposed will reduce the community charge by around £56 a head. I think that that will be welcomed by my hon. Friend's constituents and by many other people in Derbyshire.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Will the Secretary of State concede that the whole of this capping exercise is on the basis that he got the SSAs correct? If he has made a mistake in that respect, is he prepared to admit that mistake subsequently and undo the damage that he has done today? Secondly, can he explain to the House why in St. Helens, where the overall expenditure this year has risen by only just over 7 per cent.—less than inflation—we should suddenly find that we are to be charge-capped to the tune of £30 a head? Could it just be that the SSAs are completely wrong in St. Helens, and that this whole matter is a complete disgrace?

Mr. Patten: The actual increase in spending in the coming year in St. Helens——

Mr. Bermingham: Answer the question.

Mr. Patten: The hon. Gentleman does not have the figures quite right. The figures are substantially in excess of that—[HON. MEMBERS: "What are they?"]—16·1 per cent. —*[Interruption.]* If the St. Helens council has different figures or wishes to appeal against the figures that we have proposed, there is provision in the law for it to do so.

Even if one took not SSAs but GREs, the former system, all the local authorities that we have capped today would have been spending, to take the mean figure for all of them, 26 per cent. above the rescaled GREs.

Mr. Donald Thompson (Calder Valley): Will my right hon. Friend accept that ordinary citizens and businesses and industrial and manufacturing companies will be delighted—*[Interruption.]*—that for the first time, local authorities are having to put up with the same restraints

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and constraints that those people and businesses have had to put up with through the imposition year after year of rates and community charges well above inflation?

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend is wholly correct. Calderdale was planning to spend 20·9 per cent., or £160 per adult, over SSA. It is receiving in total external finance next year £81·9 million, which is £570 per adult. As a result of the decision that I have made today, charges in Calderdale will be cut by £52 or thereabouts.

Mr. Stan Crowther (Rotherham): Is the Minister aware that the only true criterion by which to judge the expenditure of any local authority is whether it is providing a service that meets the needs of the people it represents? How can the right hon. Gentleman, sitting in his office in Marsham street and drooling over his SSAs, claim to know more about that than the people who have been elected to do the job? It is hypocritical for the right hon. Gentleman to talk in the same statement about the ballot box and accountability and then personally to destroy the most basic principle of democracy.

Mr. Patten: The hon. Gentleman has not taken on board the point that the Labour party has no objection in principle to charge capping—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) said on the "Today" radio programme last week—and he repeated the statement—that the Labour party accepted that there was a case for charge capping. So the only issue is where one charge-caps, and I believe that for the hon. Gentleman's constituency and the other 19 authorities, we have taken a sensible decision, which in his constituency will save charge payers £39 each.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): Will my right hon. Friend accept that the euphoria of many of my hon. Friends whose authorities have been capped will not be reflected in Cleveland, where my long-suffering constituents in Middlesbrough do not meet the criteria—*[Interruption.]*—which is not surprising, because the whole basis of the SSA is flawed and without any meaning whatever? Until the Government get the SSA right, they will not get capping right. The answer must be not capping but annual elections, so that people vote for the money that is to be spent.

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend has a strong point. If there had been county elections this spring, I do not believe that some county budgets would have been as large as some of them are likely to be. On my hon. Friend's point about SSAs, even under the GREs—had we used the past criteria —I am not sure that we would have caught the overspending in his authority, but I shall let him have a detailed reply on that point.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): The Secretary of State will be aware that the poll tax payers of Islington are being forced by him and by the Government to pay £42 each into the so-called safety net. That is more than he is proposing to remove by means of charge capping. What sort of crazy system is it that makes the Secretary of State charge-cap with one hand and force the poll tax up with the other?

Mr. Patten: The safety net contribution results from the fact that the hon. Gentleman's constituents each receive £1,150 in total external finance. That safety net contribution will end at the end of this year. I hope that the hon. Gentleman's constituents will get that money back.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that those local authorities which he has today announced will be charge-capped will have to make some cuts in their budgets? For instance, many of them will have to cut out women's committees; some will have to stop monitoring the police and interfering in what they are doing; many will have to cut the excessive number of staff that they employ; some will have to cut back on waste, and—what is perhaps worse for Opposition Members—some will have to stop giving grants to politically motivated local bodies. If local authorities choose to make cuts in services are they not making a political decision and not a decision in favour of local people?

Mr. Patten: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right and that it will have gratified him, as it did me, that many local authorities will have been able to reduce their budgets without harm to charge payers, thanks to the democratic decision taken in Nicaragua.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): Is the Secretary of State not struck by the double irony that capping breaches the principle of accountability and that there is no evidence from capping in the past that there is any political advantage in it to the Conservative party? Is he aware that, in Lambeth, we already have great difficulties in working out and paying housing benefit and rebates, and that, if demands go up in June, many people will be disqualified from obtaining rebates because they will not realise that it is necessary to apply for them before it is too late? Therefore, will he amend the law to allow rebates to be backdated to 1 April this year?

Mr. Patten: If we had to amend the law to take account of the administrative capacity of Lambeth, we would have to do a lot of legislating. I put forward arguments about Lambeth in my statement. I hope that Lambeth will take advantage of the arguments that I put forward and will now propose a budget that does not require it to be charge-capped.

Mr. Jerry Hayes (Harlow): While I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, does he not accept that there is one glaring omission—the Labour-controlled district council of Harlow, which happens to be the highest spending council per head in the whole of the United Kingdom? It has been spending ratepayers' money with the gay abandon of a drunken sailor. Is it not a fact that it has reduced the charge to a still staggering £425 by eating into reserves, and selling the family silver? [AN HON. MEMBER: It is not excessive.] Someone says that it is not excessive. It is to my constituents. Is it because Harlow is below the £15 million ceiling, and if that is so, is it not time that the ceiling was reformed so that we could help my constituents and my ratepayers?

Mr. Patten: In Harlow, the budget next year will represent a figure 115·4 per cent. above the SSA, which is £113 a head. I know that my hon. Friend understands and regrets that, since the Harlow budget is under £15 million, we cannot introduce any proposals. Under the Local

Government Finance Act 1988, I can increase the threshold, but I understand why my hon. Friend wants me to move in the other direction.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): Does the Secretary of State accept that, over the past 11 years, Minister after Minister has visited Rotherham and acknowledged that it is an extremely efficient local authority? It has never been rate-capped or criticised, and despite facing enormous problems, its level of poll tax is about £30 below the national average. Given the problems confronting Rotherham, which the Secretary of State and many of his colleagues have witnessed over the past five or six years, does not the right hon. Gentleman agree that reducing Rotherham's capacity to work its way out of the crisis in which it has been placed by the Government will put it in an impossible position and one which will be seen as preposterous, unfair and, malicious by virtually every reasonable and intelligent citizen of our borough?

Mr. Patten: No. I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's observations. I repeat: we are prepared to consider alternative proposals from Rotherham. If Rotherham can make a convincing case, we will take account of it and bring it down to the House of Commons. Even with the proposals I have announced and with the application of the cap, Rotherham will still be spending 13·7 per cent., or £95 per adult, over SSA.

Mr. Speaker: Mrs. Gorman.

Several Hon. Members: What about us?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Lady speaks as the Member of Parliament for a constituency in which an authority is being rate-capped.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on behalf—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Three of them in a row.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Apart from anything else, let us have some chivalry.

Mrs. Gorman: I thank my right hon. Friend on behalf of my constituency for cutting Basildon's expenditure. Among that authority's extravagances in a £27 million budget—*[Interruption.]*—is a recently built theatre costing £12 million, which will have to be subsidised to the extent of £1 million per year. My constituents will be endlessly grateful to my right hon. Friend for his sensible measures.

Mr. Patten: I am grateful for what I think my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) said, although I could not hear very much of her remarks. She will be aware that Basildon proposes a 30 per cent. increase in the coming year over its 1989-90 budget. It intends to spend 194 per cent. over SSA, or £154 per adult. That is a powerful argument for the decisions I announced today.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Is the Secretary of State aware that his reputation as an enlightened Minister has taken an enormous battering this afternoon? His predecessor, the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewksbury (Mr. Ridley), told the House last year, "We will have no more complicated formulae or muddled assessments. Everything will be straightforward, principled, and easy to understand." Can the Secretary of State pretend that that is the case? One week he sets standard spending assessments, the next he poll tax-caps at a different figure. One day he adopts local authority figures according to a principle used for setting rates last year, the next he changes them and implements total arbitrary figures for this year. Southwark's figure has been reduced by a greater amount than any other authority in the country, by £86 per person—even though many other authorities have considerably higher budgets.

Mr. Patten: My right hon. and hon. Friends—like the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), no doubt—will be interested to learn that Southwark is receiving in external finance, in support through grant and contributions from the business rate, the sum of £173·9 million, which is equivalent to £1,053 per adult. That, put very simply—or in as enlightened a way as I can manage—is a lot of money. There is one very simple formula in Southwark which I think will please many of the hon. Gentleman's constituents: that is, that, thanks to the decisions which I have announced today, they will be saved £86 per head.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): Although, under Labour control, Cleveland county council has always increased its rates considerably in excess of inflation, although for this year its Government grant has gone up by 21·7 per cent. and although it is now well over £75 per person in excess of the community charge which the Government forecast, Cleveland has not been capped. If the cap fits Labour-controlled Cleveland, why cannot Cleveland wear it?

Mr. Patten: The figures which my hon. Friend gave were correct. As he said, Cleveland has received a substantial amount of assistance from the Government. On the other hand, Cleveland does not come within the criteria which we set and which are very similar to those which were applied to rate capping, which we have had to take account of, because Cleveland's spending over SSA, large though it is, is only 10·4 per cent., or £85 per head. Both on percentage terms and because of the £26 de minimis provision, which is sensible, Cleveland has not come within the criteria. I can well understand my hon. Friend's concern about spending decisions taken by Cleveland and about the implications of those decisions for his constituents.

Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe (Leigh): Will the Minister accept that it is absolute nonsense and a total myth to describe Wigan metropolitan borough as a high-spending authority? Its average spending is 5 per cent. less on more services, with the exception of secondary education, than every other metropolitan district. How does he reconcile the fact that spending in Wigan may be only £805 per head with the fact that it will be £1,436 for the Westminster woollies? Does he not realise that inadequate grants, inflation and Government decisions have put £170 per head on every Wigan poll tax payer? Does not he realise that the people of Wigan metropolitan district and Leigh will see this as another crude exercise in trickery and deception?

Mr. Patten: As I explained to the hon. Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott) earlier, there is an important point about reserves in Wigan which we have had to take account of in the decision on capping. Secondly, I should point out to the hon. Gentleman that Wigan proposes next

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year to spend 13·1 per cent. over its adjusted 1989-90 budget. Thirdly, even with capping, spending will still be 15·1 per cent. or £108 per adult over SSA.

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): Will my right hon. Friend accept that there will be considerable disappointment in Leeds that no rate capping will occur on a community charge of £348, which is substantially in excess of the £297 set in Calderdale district? What does he propose to do about it?

Mr. Patten: I can understand my hon. Friend's concern that the local authority to which he has referred does not come within the criteria that I mentioned earlier. One of the considerations that I have to take into account is not only the present law but precedent and what has happened in the past. I believe that the criteria that I have announced are the most robust legally. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] Of course. That is an important point to take account of. We have taken account of it before and I am sure—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): The Secretary of State is already aware that Barnsley metropolitan district council has complained of the indicators that have been used to assess its standard spending assessment. We are due to meet members of that authority with his right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities in May. Therefore, it seems rather premature to announce a devastating cap on Barnsley now. Surely the Secretary of State realises that those indicators in an area such as Barnsley—which still suffers from high unemployment and industrial problems because of the decline of the mining industry—are having a devastating effect. Is he not aware that six of the authorities listed in his schedule are in mining areas? Will he reconsider the indicators that he has used for areas such as Barnsley, which has a low population and low rateable values, because the effect of that cap will be——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Please be brief.

Mr. Patten: I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are prepared to consider any alternative proposals from Barnsley or other local authorities. As the hon. Gentleman's question was primarily about the grant distribution formula, I should point out to him that Barnsley was proposing to spend, even under the old formula—the rescaled grant-related expenditure—19·2 per cent. above target.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must have regard for the subsequent business. *[Interruption.]* Order. I know the importance of this statement to all hon. Members, but I must balance that against the business on the Order Paper. I will allow questions to continue until 5 pm. I hope to be able by then to call everyone in that time, but I cannot do so if we have—as it were—Adjournment debates rather than questions.

Mr. David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that it would be perfectly possible to change the law between now and May 1991 to allow shire councils such as Bedfordshire to have elections for some of their county councillors? Otherwise—because we are a hung county council—there will be yet another year of overspending and a very high community charge. In order to give people the chance to use the ballot box, could we please have an early change in the law?

Mr. Patten: I understand my hon. Friend's argument. I know of his concern about spending decisions that have been taken in Bedfordshire, where the county is proposing to spend 9·1 per cent.—£64 per head—over standard spending assessment. It is also proposing a substantial year-on-year increase in its budget. That is of concern not only to my hon. Friend, but also to many of his constituents.

When examining the cyclical pattern of county council expenditure, many hon. Members will have seen the strong argument for annual elections. I am sure that that proposition will feature prominently in our subsequent debates on local government.

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): Is the Secretary of State aware that his announcement today will cause chaos in the efficiently run metropolitan borough of St. Helens? Will he confirm that, when he met St. Helens councillors yesterday, he could not point to any item of overspending in their budget? Will he now accept that St. Helens councillors should be allowed to come to London to put their case to him? Can he point out to me now any item of excessive spending in their budget that he has discovered in the past 24 hours?

Mr. Patten: I did have a civil meeting with councillors in the hon. Gentleman's borough yesterday. It was mostly to discuss urban programme expenditure and other developments, such as the application for city grant for one project in St. Helens. At the end of my discussion, as we were examining the proposals for a technology park, the councillors gave me some figures for St. Helens, which I considered before my statement today. It will of course be entirely appropriate for St. Helens to make proposals, if it wishes to propose a different cap or a different level of expenditure.

Mr. Evans: Will you meet them?

Mr. Patten: They will certainly be met by one of the Department of the Environment Ministers.

Let me make another point that is relevant to the consideration of St. Helens' financial position: the council had financial reserves of £11 million at 1 April 1990, of which it plans to use £3 million in 1991. Therefore, there is £8 million still available. I was proposing a reduction of £3·9 million against that £8 million.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Does my right hon. Friend appreciate that there will be consternation in Labour-controlled Ealing that Ealing council has not been rate-capped, bearing in mind the historic rates increases and community charge increases in recent years? There was a 65 per cent. rate increase in 1987, a 32 per cent. increase last year and now what amounts in some cases to an equivalent of a 55 per cent. increase in rates this year. Will he re-examine his list to see if he cannot put Ealing council in it?

Mr. Patten: I am glad, in the light of what my hon. Friend has said, that I am not a charge payer or still a resident in Ealing, because I understand the financial implications of Ealing's own distinctive management style for those who live in that borough. Ealing will spend 11·9 per cent. over SSA in the coming year—£115 over SSA per head. I am afraid that that means that the authority does not come within the criteria that I have announced, which I believe are reasonable and legally robust. I am afraid that on this occasion I must disappoint my hon. Friend.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): The Secretary of State has told my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy), and my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. Crowther), who represents Rotherham borough council, that he is prepared to consider alternative proposals. Rotherham borough council has never had its expenditure capped before by the Government. The decision to limit its expenditure programmes and to cut on non-statutory services already represents alternative proposals—alternatives to what the council really wanted to do.

To take £7·9 million from that authority—as the right hon. Gentleman has done by his decision this afternoon —is to attack an already impoverished area that has no alternative but to rely for much of the time on non-statutory services from the local authority. For months, the Government have argued that the point of the tax was that the people who would have to pay it would decide whether a local authority was providing the services or not. Why are we not listening to the people?

Mr. Patten: As I was not able to point out earlier in response to another question about Rotherham, Rotherham is proposing to spend 12·9 per cent. over its adjusted 1989-90 budget. That is a substantial figure, and is one of the arguments for limiting its expenditure in the coming year. Even with the cap, it will still be spending 13·7 per cent.—£95 per adult—over SSA.

Let me add—not in response to the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron)—that it is extraordinary that, after all the fury and fuss from the hon. Member for Dagenham, he has not had the courtesy to stay here until the end of these exchanges.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): My right hon. Friend talked about deplorably high expenditure and unjustified charges, but that does not apply only to authorities whose spending is massively higher than the SSA? It also applies to a number of authorities that have spent well over 12·5 per cent. more than last year. In my area, the charge is about £90 over the recommended Government figure. Will he appeal to county councils of that nature to re-examine their expenditure and see whether they could give a rebate —which they can do legally—halfway through the year to those hard-pressed community charge payers?

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend's suggestion is extremely sensible. His county is seeking to increase its spending in the coming year by almost 15 per cent., and is seeking to raise its total income by more than 18 per cent. Those are figures that it will have to justify to its voters and charge payers in due course. I would have the greatest difficulty in justifying figures of that size.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): Will the Secretary of State accept that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State recently admitted that Wigan gave better value for money in services, pound for pound, than Wandsworth borough council? Is it not a disgrace that Wigan's spending this year has increased by 6 per cent. when inflation is at 8 per cent., yet the Government have decided to poll-cap Wigan and to reduce an already beleaguered budget by £10 million? The Secretary of State owes it to Wigan council to offer it a meeting to advise it in which areas of services it is overspending and in which areas cuts should be made. It is outrageous that the Secretary of State should have made this crooked statement today. All the Secretary of State has been doing is part of a smear campaign against caring Labour local authorities which provide services for the people.

Mr. Patten: I have already referred to the position of Wigan's reserves and to the increase in spending that it has proposed for the coming year over the last year. The hon. Gentleman's constituents could do with much of the financial competence and prudence which have ensured that, in Wandsworth, the community charge is as low as it is.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): All sensible people will rejoice that my right hon. Friend has capped most of the robber barons who are in charge of Labour local authorities. Unfortunately, he has failed to cap the robber barons of Lancashire, who are spending £123 million more this year, which is 11·4 per cent. more than they should be spending and the equivalent of an additional £80·92 per person. Why do we not get them out of the woodwork and cap them to curb their expenditure?

Mr. Patten: Lancashire county council has decided to spend 11·4 per cent. over its SSA and £81 per adult. Lancashire falls—I can understand my hon. Friend's concern about this point—just outside the criteria. Nevertheless, I am sure that local people will wish to ask the county why it has chosen to spend at those high figures. Lancashire's spending is extremely high, and puts a substantial burden on community charge payers. In other districts, the local councils are sensible and more prudent. Lancashire county council has a great deal to answer for.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Is the Secretary of State aware that the SSAs he has announced are in utterly cynical manipulation designed to allow him to punish inner-city authorities which are desperately trying to provide services? How would he justify to the people of my borough of Islington that on top of all the cuts in central Government spending towards that borough in the past 10 years, there should now be a further cut of £3·7 million? Will he tell me, so that I can pass on the information to Islington, exactly which element of social services, education or housing he would personally propose to take away from the people of a hard-pressed inner-city area?

Mrs. Gorman: Tell that to Wandsworth.

Mr. Patten: What is particularly cynical is affecting concern about the impact on charge payers of spending decisions while declining to say that one will pay the community charge, and therefore putting a larger bill on charge payers. That is really cynical. The hon. Gentleman's constituents will be receiving total external support of £1,150 a head. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be interested to know that £108 of the charge in Islington can be attributed to the unwinding of past creative accounting devices.

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): In his statement, my right hon. Friend made great play of the atrocious overspending by Basildon district council. Is he aware that, in the

[Mr. Tim Janman]

neighbouring socialist republic of Thurrock, the Labour-controlled council is overspending by 85·4 per cent. and is overcharging my constituents by more than 350 per cent.? Does he agree that the £15 million floor level for council revenue budgets should be removed and that the excellent principles which my right hon. Friend has put into practice today in his statement should apply to local authorities with a revenue budget of less than £15 million? My local council could then come in for the same treatment that he has correctly administered to those councils he has announced today.

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend's constituents are having to pay large bills. The charge set is £417, which is a result of the council spending 85·4 per cent. over SSA or £75. As my hon. Friend said, the council does not come within our criteria because its budget is less than £15 million. That threshold was set because the House felt that to have a lower threshold would mean that very small sums were involved in extra contributions per head. The House had obviously not thought very much about the impact of councils such as Thurrock on the charge payers' pockets. I am sure that we shall have an opportunity to return to this issue on a future occasion.

Miss Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): I know that the Secretary of State is deeply unhappy today because he has been unable to poll-cap Lambeth council. I know that he is also unhappy that Lambeth's budget is well below the wild figures thrown around by him and by the Prime Minister. Is the Secretary of State aware that just yesterday, the London borough of Lambeth was given leave to appeal for a judicial review on the £7 million extra which it will have to bear for the revaluation of county hall, which has nothing to do with the individual poll tax payers who live in the borough? Will he tell us today that he will not consider Lambeth for any poll capping until we have had the result of that judicial review?

Mr. Patten: I know that a delegation from Lambeth council came to see my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities and that he made the position on that issue perfectly clear. The point came up in a debate a couple of months ago in the House. I have observed that, as we have talked about charge capping in the past few weeks, Lambeth's budget has come down and down, and as the media have pointed to the difference between the original proposals in Lambeth and what other local authorities in London have been able to do, the figure in Lambeth has come down and down. I very much hope that, now that Lambeth knows what it has to do to avoid my criteria, it will do that and come in with a budget that does not involve charge capping.

Mrs. Maureen Hicks (Wolverhampton, North-East): Would not my right hon. Friend agree that rate increases of up to 57 per cent. over the past 10 years and a present excessive community charge figure of £418, which is £150 over the Government's assessment for Wolverhampton, is the figure with which my long-suffering constituents have had to live? Is my right hon. Friend aware of the bitter disappointment that will be felt by my constituents today that he has not managed to come to their rescue—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Hicks: The answers will be in the ballot box in time, but meanwhile, the bills drop through the doors and my constituents must find the money. Who will protect them?

Mr. Patten: I do understand the sense of bitterness that many of my hon. Friend's constituents will feel about the decisions taken by Wolverhampton council. Wolverhampton has increased its budget by 19·5 per cent. above the equivalent figure for 1989-90. The result is that there will be a charge of £395, which is the third highest increase of all the metropolitan districts. It is an outrageously high figure. I am sorry that, because of the criteria that we felt were most sensible, we have not been able to come to the help of my hon. Friend's constituents in the way that she would have liked. I very much hope that they will take the appropriate measure through the ballot bax.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Does the Secretary of State realise that the cuts in jobs and services —in schools, in old people's homes, in meals on wheels and in home helps—which are the real targets of today's announcement will drive hundreds of thousands of trade unionists who provide those services and local people who rely on them towards active opposition to the poll tax? Is he finally aware that given his acceptance of the poisoned chalice of his present job, he is living proof of the old adage, that those whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad?

Mr. Patten: I had not imagined that the hon. Gentleman would descend to cliché—or "clitch" as Ernie Bevin called it—in quite such a spectacular way. If the services to which he referred are so important, I am rather shocked that he has decided not to help pay for them.

Mr. Chris Butler (Warrington, South): Does my right hon. Friend accept that scandalous overspending means that, in Warrington, we face a community charge that translates into a 52 per cent. increase in rates? There are no county council elections in Cheshire until 1993. What protection will my right hon. Friend afford the citizens of Warrington?

Mr. Patten: I know that my hon. Friend is extremely upset about the consequences of spending decisions taken by his county council. I understand his concern, and I know that he has made vigorous representations on behalf of his constituents. No one could have argued more strongly for a reasonable deal for his constituents than my hon. Friend. Nevertheless, I am sorry that we have had to disappoint him today and that the criteria do not cover his local authority, or take account of its considerable overspending. I hope that, in due course, my hon. Friend's constituents will vote for Conservative councillors, who will make more sensible spending decisions.

Mr. David Blunkett (Sheffield, Brightside): I should like to give the Secretary of State the opportunity to withdraw a remark that he made earlier this afternoon. Replying to questions about the impact on children's education and the care of the elderly, he said that in the next few weeks there would be

"a parade of bleeding stumps."

Not only those in the hard-pressed coalfield communities of south Yorkshire but people across the country will object to language and imagery of that sort.

The right hon. Gentleman, the Prime Minister and the chairman of the Conservative party have all accepted that the basis of this afternoon's statement—the standard spending assessments—are wholly discredited. He knows that they are flawed and he said so, and he promised his own Back Benchers, as he did in the House on 18 January, that they would be changed.

As a result of these spending assessments, however, councils are facing capping and cuts and, ridiculously, Calderdale is having enforced on it a poll tax of £242, £100 below the poll tax in the Prime Minister's Barnet constituency, £150 below that in the constituency of the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), and £200 below the poll tax in Epsom and Ewell and in Windsor and Maidenhead. Anyone with the slightest intelligence can see that all that has come out of this shoddy completion of 11 years of central muddle and interference are increased administrative chaos, increased costs, increased cuts and a total capitulation by an honourable man to the Prime Minister's will.

Mr. Patten: I should tell the hon. Gentleman, who has stayed until the end of these exchanges——

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): That is cheap. My hon. Friend told you, Mr. Speaker, that he had to go.

Mr. Patten: The hon. Gentleman might know why, but if the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) had to go, he was not able to convey that information to me—*[Interruption.]* It is actually known that one can get messages to people on the Front Bench. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Dagenham could not stay.

The point that I made earlier, and I repeat it now, is that I believe that it should be perfectly possible for local authorities to run a reasonable level of effective services under the proposals that I have made this afternoon. But I anticipate a lot of scare stories; they have already started in my constituency, thus predating this afternoon's statement. They have nothing to do with sensible local government finance and everything to do with political scare tactics, of which we shall see a good deal in the coming weeks.

On the question of SSAs and GREs and the distribution formula, I have made it clear—the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) would have criticised me strongly had I not—that we are prepared to consider fresh evidence on SSAs and the formula. But, even in the context of the GREs and the spending proposals made by the local authorities that I have decided to cap, the mean figure for the increase over rescaled GREs among the authorities that I have mentioned was 26 per cent., so by any standards those authorities have been substantial overspenders.

When referring to a number of local authorities, the hon. Member for Brightside knows perfectly well—because he knows and understands a good deal about local government finance—[HON. MEMBERS: "More than you do."] It just goes to show that one should never try to be courteous or civil in the Chamber on an afternoon like this. As I was saying, the hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that there are a number of authorities that are making substantial contributions to the safety net and to areas in which there are low rateable values, and other local authorities are taking money out of the safety net——

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Like Wandsworth.

Mr. Patten: That is why absolute levels of charge would have been an inadequate way of deciding on charge capping and would have led to considerable criticism by the Opposition——

Mr. Banks: It is a fiddle and you know it.

Mr. Patten: The hon. Member, from whom I am sorry not to have been able to hear this afternoon——

Mr. Banks: So am I.

Mr. Patten: —refers to Wandsworth, about which he has something of an obsession. He will therefore know that Wandsworth receives one of the lowest levels of grant in inner London, yet can still set a charge of £148.

Lastly, I must tell the hon. Member for Brightside, who understands the provisions of the law and what the process amounts to, that if local authorities do not accept the charge caps we have proposed, they can make their own proposals, which we must then statutorily consider. We shall carefully consider any alternative proposals put to us by local authorities.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry not to have been able to call all hon. Members who want to ask a question. I shall certainly bear them in mind when we next debate this matter or have questions on it.

Following is the table:

Local Authority demands and precepts 1990-91 compared with SSAs

Notes

The attached table shows the comparison between the demands and precepts set by local authorities in 1990-91 and their Standard Spending Assessments (SSAs). For charging authorities, the comparison is with the demand on the collection fund, ie it does not include parish precepts. For the precepting authorities shown, the comparison is with the aggregate of precepts issued by the authority.

Column 1: shows the SSA for each authority for 1990-91, calculated in accordance with the Distribution Report.

Column 2: shows the percentage by which the demand or the aggregate of precepts exceeds the SSA (column 1).

Column 3: shows the amount by which the demand or the aggregate of precepts exceeds the SSA (column 1) in £s per adult (using relevant population, as calculated in accordance with the Population Report).

No adjustment has been made in this table to budgets reported to the Department where the Secretary of State believes that they have not been calculated in accordance with section 95(4) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

The figures for demands and precepts used in this table are the latest reported by the authorities to the Secretary of State.

Local authority demands and precepts 1990-91 compared with SSAs

Authority	*Standard spending assessment £ million 1*	*Overspend on SSA Percentage 2*	*Overspend on SSA £/adult 3*
SHIRE COUNTIES			
Avon	450·7	18·4	117
Bedfordshire	277·3	9·1	64
Berkshire	376·8	9·1	62
Buckinghamshire	325·0	5·7	39
Cambridgeshire	317·8	3·2	21
Cheshire	474·7	12·5	83
Cleveland	337·0	10·4	85

Authority	*Standard spending assessment £ million 1*	*Overspend on SSA Percentage 2*	*Overspend on SSA £/adult 3*
Cornwall	235·4	6·2	42
Cumbria	246·5	16·0	103
Derbyshire	448·6	25·0	157
Devon	486·1	7·8	50
Dorset	290·3	4·0	23
Durham	303·7	6·9	46
East Sussex	325·1	3·7	22
Essex	761·2	2·1	13
Gloucestershire	251·6	8·9	56
Hampshire	755·5	2·0	13
Hereford and Worcester	317·8	0·8	5
Hertfordshire	477·5	6·2	40
Humberside	465·8	11·7	83
Isle of Wight	63·0	11·9	76
Kent	769·1	−1·2	−8
Lancashire	743·0	11·4	81
Leicestershire	458·8	7·9	55
Lincolnshire	295·2	0·0	0
Norfolk	352·7	4·8	30
North Yorkshire	332·9	3·8	24
Northamptonshire	297·0	5·7	40
Northumberland	142·0	16·5	102
Nottinghamshire	514·9	11·5	78
Oxfordshire	252·0	15·5	96
Shropshire	208·7	5·4	37
Somerset	224·7	11·2	72
Staffordshire	498·5	5·5	35
Suffolk	295·5	7·8	49
Surrey	446·6	7·9	45
Warwickshire	226·4	10·3	64
West Sussex	323·5	−3·3	−20
Wiltshire	268·7	5·0	32

Local authority demands and precepts 1990-91 compared with SSAs

Authority	*Standard spending assessment £ million 1*	*Overspend on SSA Percentage 2*	*Overspend on SSA £/adult 3*
SHIRE DISTRICTS			
Avon			
Bath	6·6	0·0	0
Bristol	32·7	96·3	108
Kingswood	5·1	−1·1	−1
Northavon	7·4	3·0	2
Wansdyke	4·2	−0·3	0
Woodspring	10·9	0·8	1
Bedfordshire			
Luton	17·1	−7·4	−10
Mid Bedfordshire	6·1	−13·2	−10
North Bedfordshire	10·4	−4·2	−4
South Bedfordshire	6·6	−2·3	−2
Berkshire			
Bracknell	6·2	−6·3	−6
Newbury	8·2	−20·8	−16
Reading	12·3	37·4	45
Slough	12·3	−43·3	−69
Windsor and Maidenhead	7·8	37·1	29
Wokingham	7·3	9·1	7
Buckinghamshire			
Aylesbury Vale	9·6	−34·5	−30
Chiltern	4·2	−2·6	−2
Milton Keynes	13·9	37·8	42
South Bucks	3·1	−20·9	−14
Wycombe	9·5	19·2	15
Cambridgeshire			
Cambridge	8·3	50·0	56
East Cambridgeshire	3·7	−15·5	−13
Fenland	5·3	−5·7	−5
Huntingdonshire	9·0	−55·5	−49
Peterborough	11·2	33·5	34
South Cambridgeshire	6·7	−47·4	−36
Cheshire			
Chester	8·2	4·5	4
Congleton	4·2	14·1	10
Crewe and Nantwich	6·9	39·1	35
Ellesmere Port and Neston	5·5	30·3	28
Halton	8·7	17·4	17
Macclesfield	8·4	0·0	0
Vale Royal	6·4	10·0	8
Warrington	11·9	15·0	13

Local authority demands and precepts 1990-91 compared with SSAs

Authority	*Standard spending assessment £ million 1*	*Overspend on SSA Percentage 2*	*Overspend on SSA £/adult 3*
Cleveland			
Hartlepool	7·8	46·9	55
Langbaurgh-on-Tees	9·4	85·6	72
Middlesborough	13·6	63·6	84
Stockton-on-Tees	12·2	53·9	50
Cornwall			
Caradon	4·4	3·8	3
Carrick	5·5	9·8	9
Kerrier	6·0	9·3	8
North Cornwall	5·0	−10·4	−9
Penwith	4·5	−15·0	−14
Restormel	5·5	−4·1	−3
Cumbria			
Allerdale	6·2	2·4	2
Barrow in Furness	4·9	83·6	71
Carlisle	7·7	17·1	17
Copeland	4·5	55·2	45
Eden	3·1	−18·7	−17
South Lakeland	6·2	−3·3	−3
Derbyshire			
Amber Valley	5·9	5·4	4
Bolsover	3·8	22·9	16
Chesterfield	5·9	37·1	28
Derby	19·0	−1·6	−2
Derbyshire Dales	4·2	−0·6	0
Erewash	6·3	22·0	17
High Peak	5·2	7·6	6
North East Derbyshire	4·5	36·5	22
South Derbyshire	4·1	9·9	7
Devon			
East Devon	6·9	−1·9	−1
Exeter	7·7	10·9	11
Mid Devon	4·2	20·6	18
North Devon	5·8	4·0	4
Plymouth	23·0	0·0	0
South Hams	4·8	−8·1	−7
Teignbridge	6·8	31·4	26
Torbay	8·1	85·1	74
Torridge	3·5	9·0	8
West Devon	2·9	−5·4	−5

Local authority demands and precepts 1990-91 compared with SSAs

Authority	*Standard spending assessment £ million 1*	*Overspend on SSA Percentage 2*	*Overspend on SSA £/adult 3*
Dorset			
Bournemouth	13·9	19·5	23
Christchurch	2·3	9·9	7
East Dorset	3·5	25·4	14
North Dorset	3·4	−37·0	−32
Poole	7·4	0·0	0
Purbeck	2·8	−30·0	−26
West Dorset	5·4	−6·0	−5
Weymouth and Portland	4·2	42·5	38
Durham			
Chester-le-Street	2·7	69·4	45
Darlington	7·8	39·5	41
Derwentside	5·2	140·4	111
Durham	5·1	54·7	45
Easington	6·0	45·2	36
Sedgefield	5·4	56·2	45
Teesdale	1·8	−12·5	−11
Wear Valley	4·6	102·2	96
East Sussex			
Brighton	14·4	39·3	52
Eastbourne	6·2	62·1	57
Hastings	7·9	42·4	54
Hove	9·3	−7·5	−10
Lewes	4·8	0·9	1
Rother	5·4	17·2	14
Wealden	7·6	3·8	3
Essex			
Basildon	9·5	194·3	154
Braintree	7·0	13·6	11
Brentwood	3·6	108·5	72
Castle Point	4·6	54·6	38
Chelmsford	8·6	41·8	32
Colchester	9·4	0·0	0
Epping Forest	6·7	10·1	7
Harlow	5·5	115·4	113
Maldon	3·1	−4·1	−3
Rochford	3·8	38·7	26
Southend-on-Sea	14·0	39·3	45
Tendring	8·3	26·0	22
Thurrock	8·1	85·4	75
Uttlesford	3·8	−15·8	−12

Local authority demands and precepts 1990-91 compared with SSAs

Authority	*Standard spending assessment £ million 1*	*Overspend on SSA Percentage 2*	*Overspend on SSA £/adult 3*
Gloucestershire			
Cheltenham	6·7	10·7	10
Cotswold	4·7	17·7	15
Forest of Dean	4·7	−9·8	−3
Gloucester	7·1	8·6	9
—Stroud	6·1	46·5	35
Tewkesbury	4·7	−29·6	−21
Hampshire			
Basingstoke and Deane	8·9	−10·7	−9
East Hampshire	5·7	22·2	17
Eastleigh	5·0	47·3	31
Fareham	5·1	17·6	12
Gosport	5·0	20·8	18
Hart	4·3	38·8	27
Havant	8·0	5·5	5
New Forest	9·9	−0·7	−1
Portsmouth	19·1	4·1	6
Rushmoor	5·7	6·6	7
Southampton	18·1	14·2	16
Test Valley	5·8	−11·2	−8
Winchester	5·7	7·3	6
Hereford and Worcester			
Bromsgrove	4·5	7·4	5
Hereford	3·2	−7·4	−6
Leominister	3·0	−15·4	−15
Malvern Hills	5·3	21·2	17
Redditch	5·1	46·4	42
South Herefordshire	3·5	−30·3	−28
Worcester	5·4	29·0	26
Wychavon	5·7	0·6	0
Wyre Forest	5·5	45·6	35
Hertfordshire			
Broxbourne	4·8	8·5	6
Dacorum	8·3	0·0	0
East Hertfordshire	6·5	9·0	7
Hertsmere	5·3	51·1	42
North Hertfordshire	7·0	13·4	11
St Albans	7·8	−2·3	−2
Stevenage	4·8	94·1	79
Three Rivers	4·3	26·7	20
Watford	6·9	22·7	28
Welwyn Hatfield	5·6	81·9	65

Local authority demands and precepts 1990-91 compared with SSAs

Authority	*Standard spending assessment £ million 1*	*Overspend on SSA Percentage 2*	*Overspend on SSA £/adult 3*
Humberside			
Beverley	5·6	9·9	6
Boothferry	4·7	−6·6	−6
Cleethorpes	4·6	50·4	45
East Yorkshire	5·1	43·0	33
Glanford	4·9	15·7	14
Great Grimsby	7·0	49·2	52
Holderness	3·0	33·3	25
Kingston upon Hull	25·1	26·8	35
Scunthorpe	4·4	58·3	56
Isle of Wight			
Medina	5·4	−15·0	−14
South Wight	3·7	14·1	12
Kent			
Ashford	6·3	2·1	2
Canterbury	8·8	26·7	25
Dartford	5·3	64·8	54
Dover	7·4	25·7	24
Gillingham	7·0	2·1	2
Gravesham	6·4	−5·2	−5
Maidstone	9·1	31·2	27
Rochester upon Medway	11·7	−42·6	−45
Sevenoaks	6·0	9·5	7
Shepway	6·5	65·1	61
Swale	7·7	41·9	38
Thanet	10·2	12·2	13
Tonbridge and Malling	5·8	50·1	38
Tunbridge Wells	6·6	10·8	9
Lancashire			
Blackburn	15·2	24·9	40
Blackpool	13·4	36·3	41
Burnley	8·0	29·9	35
Chorley	5·5	−0·8	−1
Fylde	4·3	9·1	7
Hyndburn	6·3	29·3	31

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Authority	*Standard spending assessment £ million 1*	*Overspend on SSA Percentage 2*	*Overspend on SSA £/adult 3*
Lancaster	9·4	31·5	31
Pendle	6·7	40·7	44
Preston	13·2	8·1	11
Ribble Valley	2·8	6·6	5
Rossendale	4·3	66·3	59
South Ribble	5·2	16·1	11
West Lancashire	6·4	−0·1	0
Wyre	6·4	10·7	9

Local authority demands and precepts 1990-91 compared with SSAs

Authority	*Standard spending assessment £ million 1*	*Overspend on SSA Percentage 2*	*Overspend on SSA £/adult 3*
Leicestershire			
Blaby	4·0	−44·1	−28
Charnwood	7·9	−12·8	−10
Harborough	3·4	−5·3	−4
Hinckley and Bosworth	4·8	−6·0	−4
Leicester	36·6	38·3	69
Melton	2·4	−6·8	−5
North West Leicestershire	4·5	24·2	18
Oadby and Wigston	2·7	18·9	13
Rutland	2·1	−8·3	−7
Lincolnshire			
Boston	3·9	2·0	2
East Lindsey	9·7	−5·6	−6
Lincoln	6·7	0·0	0
North Kesteven	4·8	−8·3	−6
South Holland	4·9	16·8	16
South Kesteven	6·9	−3·9	−3
West Lindsey	5·0	0·4	0
Norfolk			
Breckland	6·5	−14·1	−11
Broadland	5·2	−16·9	−11
Great Yarmouth	6·6	45·4	43
King's Lynn and West Norfolk	9·7	−19·1	−19
North Norfolk	6·6	−9·1	−8
Norwich	10·3	45·5	50
South Norfolk	5·6	−15·1	−11
Northamptonshire			
Corby	4·0	16·3	16
Daventry	3·7	−10·6	−9
East Northamptonshire	4·0	−29·7	−24
Kettering	5·1	−4·0	−4
Northampton	13·9	14·0	15
South Northamptonshire	3·6	−33·0	−24
Wellingborough	4·5	−48·6	−44
Northumberland			
Alnwick	2·1	11·1	10
Berwick-upon-Tweed	1·7	17·3	14
Blyth Valley	4·5	104·1	79
Castle Morpeth	2·9	30·1	23
Tynedale	3·4	25·2	20
Wansbeck	3·7	94·6	74

Local authority demands and precepts 1990-91 compared with SSAs

Authority	*Standard spending assessment £ million 1*	*Overspend on SSA Percentage 2*	*Overspend on SSA £/adult 3*
North Yorkshire			
Craven	3·1	−3·5	−3
Hambleton	4·6	−3·7	−3
Harrogate	3·7	69·0	56
Richmondshire	3·3	−14·2	−14
Ryedale	4·9	10·5	7
Scarborough	7·4	31·2	29
Selby	6·0	−8·7	−8
York	8·0	24·0	24
Nottinghamshire			
Ashfield	5·6	18·6	13
Bassetlaw	6·7	18·9	16
Broxtowe	5·8	3·8	3
Gedling	6·5	−0·4	0
Mansfield	6·0	55·2	43
Newark and Sherwood	7·1	−9·3	−8
Nottingham	29·4	11·1	16
Rushcliffe	5·4	−11·0	−8
Oxfordshire			
Cherwell	7·6	−45·2	−41
Oxford	11·7	14·7	23
South Oxfordshire	7·4	−2·8	−2
Vale of White Horse	6·0	−47·3	−35
West Oxfordshire	5·8	−36·0	−31
Shropshire			
Bridgnorth	3·1	−22·7	−18
North Shropshire	3·5	−11·8	−10
Oswestry	2·0	24·2	19
Shrewsbury and Atcham	5·3	9·7	7
South Shropshire	2·8	−7·2	−7
Wrekin	8·8	50·1	45
Somerset			
Mendip	5·8	−3·2	−3
Sedgemoor	6·1	−0·3	0
South Somerset	8·7	5·3	4
Taunton Deane	5·9	−15·2	−12
West Somerset	2·3	−6·2	−6

Local authority demands and precepts 1990-91 compared with SSAs

Authority	*Standard spending assessment £ million 1*	*Overspend on SSA Percentage 2*	*Overspend on SSA £/adult 3*
Staffordshire			
Cannock Chase	5·6	39·3	33
East Staffordshire	7·2	5·0	5
Lichfield	5·0	−26·5	−19
Newcastle-under-Lyme	6·7	42·1	30
South Staffordshire	5·5	−38·5	−27
Stafford	7·1	−3·2	−3
Staffordshire Moorlands	5·7	7·6	6
Stoke-on-Trent	19·2	24·4	25
Tamworth	3·9	3·6	3
Suffolk			
Babergh	4·9	−11·7	−10
Forest Heath	3·4	−12·7	−13
Ipswich	9·1	96·3	97
Mid Suffolk	5·0	−2·7	−2
St. Edmundsbury	5·6	−12·0	−10
Suffolk Coastal	6·8	31·8	28
Waveney	7·1	21·3	19
Surrey			
Elmbridge	5·8	56·9	39

Authority	*Standard spending assessment £ million 1*	*Overspend on SSA Percentage 2*	*Overspend on SSA £/adult 3*
Epsom and Ewell	4·0	81·6	64
Guildford	8·1	−5·6	−5
Mole Valley	3·9	28·9	19
Reigate and Banstead	6·7	80·4	56
Runnymede	5·6	−67·7	−67
Spelthorne	5·2	13·5	10
Surrey Heath	4·5	10·8	8
Tandridge	4·3	37·4	28
Waverley	6·2	13·8	10
Woking	5·8	−17·3	−15
Warwickshire			
North Warwickshire	3·3	66·7	48
Nuneaton and Bedworth	6·9	57·4	45
Rugby	5·8	−1·6	−1
Stratford on Avon	6·1	−3·7	−3
Warwick	7·5	−3·5	−3
West Sussex			
Adur	3·1	106·4	72
Arun	8·0	30·3	25
Chichester	6·6	−0·1	0
Crawley	6·0	87·2	78
Horsham	6·4	−0·8	−1
Mid Sussex	6·3	17·9	12
Worthing	7·1	22·4	20
Wiltshire			
Kennet	4·2	−26·9	−22
North Wiltshire	6·8	−9·3	−8
Salisbury	6·5	−17·7	−15
Thamesdown	11·8	18·8	17
West Wiltshire	5·9	22·6	17
Isles of Scilly			
Isles of Scilly	2·0	−4·6	−60

Local authority demands and precepts 1990-91 compared with SSAs

Authority	*Standard spending assessment £ million 1*	*Overspend on SSA Percentage 2*	*Overspend on SSA £/adult 3*
Police and Fire Authorities			
Metropolitan Police	632·1	−1·0	−1
London Fire and CD Authority	191·7	4·5	2
Greater Manchester PA	114·1	5·5	3
Merseyside PA	76·8	5·7	4
South Yorkshire PA	48·9	2·6	1
Northumbria PA	58·1	6·6	4
West Midlands PA	112·3	2·4	1
West Yorkshire PA	86·5	9·9	6
Greater Manchester FCDA	54·3	2·3	1
Merseyside FCDA	36·5	3·5	1
South Yorkshire FCDA	22·6	23·7	5
Tyne and Wear FCDA	24·7	10·0	3
West Midlands FCDA	53·5	2·0	1
West Yorkshire FCDA	37·8	25·6	6

Local authority demands and precepts 1990-91 compared with SSAs

Authority	*Standard spending assessment £ million 1*	*Overspend on SSA Percentage 2*	*Overspend on SSA £/adult 3*
LONDON			
Inner London			
City of London	41·6	63·1	10,130
Camden	151·3	19·9	232
Greenwich	153·0	39·2	387
Hackney	205·5	14·8	233
Hammersmith and Fulham	132·4	26·6	297
Islington	158·2	19·8	251
Kensington and Chelsea	98·6	11·1	132
Lambeth	240·2	27·0	376
Lewisham	174·3	19·2	196
Southwark	193·2	24·8	290
Tower Hamlets	179·6	16·5	262
Wandsworth	202·7	3·8	38
Westminster	172·2	−7·4	−94
Outer London			
Barking and Dagenham	89·1	11·6	95
Barnet	160·0	−1·9	−14
Bexley	116·3	1·6	11
Brent	214·8	16·1	178
Bromley	141·6	0·2	1
Croydon	190·1	−6·0	−48
Ealing	202·5	11·9	115
Enfield	159·7	2·5	21
Haringey	166·9	29·8	351
Harrow	115·8	−0·5	−4
Havering	117·3	8·9	59
Hillingdon	125·9	20·0	143
Hounslow	124·9	13·3	108
Kingston-upon-Thames	72·9	8·8	63
Merton	97·6	−4·0	−30
Newham	195·3	10·6	130
Redbridge	129·1	1·7	13
Richmond-upon-Thames	76·0	8·8	54
Sutton	88·2	12·4	85
Waltham Forest	160·7	11·5	115

Note: Arrangements to reflect the status of the City of London as a special authority mean that only part of the difference between its SSA and demand falls on chargepayers. No adjustment has been made to the demands of the City of London and Inner London boroughs for the overspend inherited from ILEA.

Local authority demands and precepts 1990-91 compared with SSAs

Authority	*Standard spending assessment £ million 1*	*Overspend on SSA Percentage 2*	*Overspend on SSA £/adult 3*
METROPOLITAN DISTRICTS			
Greater Manchester			
Bolton	157·9	5·9	48
Bury	91·7	12·4	85
Manchester	340·6	3·9	46
Oldham	139·2	9·2	81
Rochdale	128·0	18·8	152
Salford	146·7	9·3	80
Stockport	148·2	13·7	93
Tameside	124·8	13·8	101
Trafford	121·9	−2·6	−20
Wigan	165·6	21·1	151
Merseyside			
Knowsley	113·0	5·0	51
Liverpool	349·6	10·0	107
Sefton	158·0	11·4	82
St. Helens	109·1	16·2	130
Wirral	197·1	4·1	33

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Authority	*Standard spending assessment £ million 1*	*Overspend on SSA Percentage 2*	*Overspend on SSA £/adult 3*
South Yorkshire			
Barnsley	112·1	26·6	178
Doncaster	158·6	19·9	144
Rotherham	138·5	19·5	134
Sheffield	289·5	12·4	85
Tyne and Wear			
Gateshead	117·8	12·2	92
Newcastle upon Tyne	173·3	12·4	107
North Tyneside	109·2	18·8	136
South Tyneside	97·2	9·9	81
Sunderland	176·8	9·1	75
West Midlands			
Birmingham	724·1	6·4	67
Coventry	190·1	11·2	97
Dudley	156·9	11·7	77
Sandwell	192·0	13·0	113
Solihull	103·7	6·3	43
Walsall	156·9	13·8	113
Wolverhampton	172·8	7·7	72
West Yorkshire			
Bradford	315·7	3·0	30
Calderdale	109·9	20·9	160
Kirklees	219·0	14·9	117
Leeds	389·6	7·3	55
Wakefield	161·7	14·3	97

Community Charge Capping 1990-91

The table below shows the authorities which the Secretary of State is today designating for community charge limitation and the maximum amounts (ie "caps") which he is proposing.

	Budget £ million	*Proposed cap*	*Reduction £ million*	*£ per adult*
Avon	533·7	507·1	26·6	37
Barnsley	142·0	132·0	10·0	59
Basildon	27·9	23·7	4·2	35
Brent	249·3	241·7	7·6	39
Bristol	64·2	56·6	7·6	26
Calderdale	132·9	125·4	7·5	52
Camden	181·4	177·0	4·4	34
Derbyshire	560·6	520·6	40·0	56
Doncaster	190·1	178·5	11·6	53
Greenwich	213·0	203·0	10·0	65
Hammersmith and Fulham	167·5	155·8	11·7	99
Haringey	216·5	206·5	10·0	71
Hillingdon	151·0	141·7	9·3	53
Islington	189·5	185·8	3·7	30
North Tyneside	129·7	122·9	6·8	45
Rochdale	152·0	144·0	8·0	51
Rotherham	165·4	157·5	7·9	39
St. Helens	126·7	122·8	3·9	29
Southwark	241·0	226·9	14·1	86
Wigan	200·6	190·6	10·0	43

Note:

1. Reductions shown as £ per head of relevant population.

Business of the House

5.8 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Sir Geoffrey Howe): With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the rearrangement of business for tomorrow.

I am proposing that the business already announced for Wednesday 4 April—consideration of Lords amendments to the Education (Student Loans) Bill—should now be preceded by a timetable motion on the same business.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): That perfunctory statement means that, with their characteristic insensitivity, the Government are introducing another guillotine motion on a day when we are to hold a guillotined debate —necessarily delayed by the first statement—on the Social Security Bill.

Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman concede that, far from being exceptional motions used to deal with particularly complicated legislation, guillotines are now a normal method of conducting Government business? If the right hon. and learned Gentleman needs to bring in a guillotine motion on a Bill of only four clauses and five pages, guillotines will obviously become the order of the day for all Government legislation, which we would find wholly unacceptable. Why did the Leader of the House intend to bring in a guillotine on the Education (Student Loans) Bill in the middle of last week but then change his mind? Why has he chosen instead to bring it in at the last possible minute? This is not Government business management: it is crisis management.

Is not the real reason for the motion the fact that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is scared of his own Back Benchers and of the strength of the Lords amendments—especially those on housing benefit—and scared of allowing all these matters a full debate in the House? This is government by shambles.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman has a total misconception of the position. Considering the nature of the business for tomorrow, it seems to be in the interests of both sides of the House——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Only the Tories.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: It is sensible, as the Bill is to be considered for the last time, to have a reasonable amount of time allotted to consideration of the timetable motion and the amendments that the House will consider tomorrow afternoon. There should be ample time for that.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): The Leader of the House should have thought again before introducing a guillotine motion on this measure. There are 17 Lords amendments. A significant number were moved by his noble Friends in the other place. There are only three matters of controversy, on one of which the Government have made a substantial concession—students who are disabled. That leaves two matters of controversy. Are the Government so frightened of the democratic decisions of this Parliament and so unable to argue their case persuasively that they cannot in a whole day use the proper procedures to debate two important matters, on which, across the parties, the other House defeated the Government—and rightly so?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for so plainly making the case for the timetable motion that I propose. As he says, the overwhelming majority of the amendments are Government amendments produced in response to representations. He says that there are two matters of controversy. The timetable should allow ample time for their discussion.

Mr. Robert Rhodes James (Cambridge): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that the House of Lords spent three long days debating these matters at great length and with great knowledge? One wonders sometimes whether the Government believe in the House of Lords. As the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) said, the Lords produced three amendments which are necessarily controversial. Surely they should be debated at considerable length. None of us wishes to delay the proceedings of the House. In organising the timetable motion, will my right hon. and learned Friend recollect that some of us care deeply about the future of higher education, and that he cannot guillotine that?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend will understand that the intention of the legislation is to sustain higher education. For the reasons given by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), my hon. Friend will find that the time allotted for consideration will be quite sufficient for the matters of controversy.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will the Leader of the House reflect that there might be a case for a statement tomorrow on a matter that bothered Mr. Speaker greatly today? It was the matter raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas)—the position of the Chairman of the Procedure Committee in relation to the Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence?

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is a different matter. I am worried about lots of things.

Mr. Dalyell *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The leader of the House made a statement on guillotining the Bill tomorrow. The hon. Gentleman must find another opportunity to raise the other matter.

Mr. Dalyell: I am asking for a statement tomorrow on information from the Americans about the Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a statement about the business tomorrow and the guillotine motion on the Students' Loan Bill. The hon. Gentleman must confine his questions to that.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): This is a business statement.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Grocott: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This is a statement about tomorrow's business. My hon. Friend was raising an issue connected with tomorrow's business.

Mr. Speaker: Was he? I thought that he was raising a completely different matter.

Mr. Dalyell: Tomorrow's business should be preceded by a factual statement from a senior Minister on what the United States defence authorities and the Pentagon had to say about the activities of the hon. Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates)—they were raised today, so I do it as a matter of urgency—in the Pentagon in connection with public relations firms on whose behalf he has been acting. There is a wide understanding that the Americans have complained bitterly to our Ministry of Defence about the pressuring and lobbying activities of the Chairman of a Select Committee of the House. Before we leave for the Easter recess, the matter should be cleared up one way or the other. It is a matter of the honour of the House.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The timetable motion that I announced earlier will in no sense inhibit the time available for the discussion of other matters tomorrow. There was no reason for the hon. Gentleman to raise under cover of privilege the wide-ranging allegations that he has just made in his characteristic fashion.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): In view of the widespread filibustering on Report, the guillotine will be widely welcomed. Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that, under the system of student loans, the level of student support in the United Kingdom will be more generous than that in any other country in the western world?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My hon. Friend can make that valuable point tomorrow.

Mr. Banks: Is not this guillotine motion further evidence of the authoritarian nature of the Government, starting at No. 10 Downing street and now pervading the Benches opposite? As the guillotine motion is about saving time—which I assume the Government want to do, as well as killing debate—why does the Leader of the House not consider postponing the Easter recess so that we can debate the matter properly? The Easter recess already seems to me over-generous.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The Easter recess was authorised by the House last week with some enthusiasm.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): When did we first start to guillotine Lords amendments? Is it not inappropriate to say to the second Chamber of a bicameral system that we do not want fully to list or understand the arguments adduced in the Lords' amendments?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am saying no such thing. The time available will suffice for the work in hand.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): Will the Leader of the House reconsider the statement that he made this afternoon? As my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) has already said, this is a four-clause Bill with a fairly short schedule. In effect it simply says that a student loans scheme will be introduced. In Committee we did not cause any problems in dealing with the matter so I should have thought that it would be appropriate to allow full discussion of the Lords' amendments. There is no way that a full discussion can be allowed when, for example, on the housing benefit issue both my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) and I have not had information about the number of students whose loss of housing benefit will be greater than the loan available to them under the scheme. It is pathetic that we have such a timetable for such a small Bill.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman also makes my case. As he says, it is a small Bill. It has been considered in both Houses for 86 hours so far. As the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey said, the time available tomorrow should suffice for the two or three outstanding issues.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I remind the House that we have a guillotined Bill today? The first Division takes place at 7 pm. Questions must be confined to this matter, please.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Would not my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that, rather than have a filibuster on one amendment which could take the House perhaps six, seven or eight hours, we shall have a reasonable time for all the amendments to be debated? Surely that is what the House would wish.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): There has never been any problem with the Bill in the House. It went through Committee in an orderly fashion without a timetable. The same occurred on Report and Third Reading before the Bill went to another place. Now that it has returned with some amendments to be discussed—only two minor technical amendments came out of Committee and were adopted—and we have a chance to discuss the Bill reasonably, why is it to be cut short?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: There will be reasonable time for the amendments to be discussed.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): In view of the business statement, will it release enough time for the Prime Minister to tell us what action she will take against those Tory Members and Ministers who are supporting the law-breaking Fayed brothers and inciting others to break the law in the City of London?

Mr. Speaker: That is a mile wide of the statement.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): May I, with great respect, ask the Leader of the House to remember his responsibilities to the House in general and not just his responsibilities to the Tory party? Notwithstanding the way in which he has organised business for tomorrow, as suggested by the timetable motion, why have we not had time before the Easter recess to have a statement from the Secretary of State for Scotland about capital offsets? We have been promised that statement again and again. With great respect, we have been extremely patient and peaceful in Scotland, although we are characterised as law-breakers. When will the Secretary of State for Scotland come here to make a statement to clear up the mess that the Government have got into?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I take note of the hon. Gentleman's point.

Points of Order

5.20 pm

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

I wish to raise a point of order concerning the proper conduct of Commons business and Members' rights. You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that, in the business statement last Thursday, the Leader of the House announced that the British Nationality (Hong Kong) Bill would have its Second Reading on Thursday 19 April. That Bill has not yet been published. It is available for publication, and I am advised that the printing is complete, but the Home Office tells me that it will not be published until, at the earliest, the beginning of public business tomorrow. At best, therefore, the Government will have withheld publication of the Bill until so late a date that only two sitting days, the last day of this Session and the first day of the next, are available for discussion and consultation between Members.

I understand very well that the Government do not want their own Back Benchers to discuss with each other the tactics by which they will oppose the Bill, but to provide the House with so little opportunity, two sitting days, to consider the content of so important a Bill is a denial of the basic rights of the House.

I therefore ask you, Mr. Speaker, whether there is any pressure that you can bring to bear on the Government to require the Bill to be made available to the House today? I emphasise that it is available: all that is necessary is for the Leader of the House, the Chief Whip or one of their satraps to make the necessary application to you. The Bill would then be at our disposal. I believe that that is not so much right as essential for the proper conduct of our affairs.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Sir Geoffrey Howe): I am glad to be able to confirm that arrangements have been made for the Bill to be published tomorrow. It will be available for more than two full weeks before it comes back for debate in the House. I hope that the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) will find it ample to fill his holiday reading.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to raise——

Mr. Hattersley *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Adley first.

Mr. Adley: I wish to raise a point of order that relates directly to your responsibilities, Mr. Speaker, which refers to one of the Sessional Orders passed by the House that you placed before it on 21 November. That order read:

> "That the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis do take care that during the Session of Parliament the passages through the streets leading to this House be kept free and open and that no obstruction be permitted to hinder the passage of Members to and from this House".

It concluded:

> "that the Serjeant at Arms attending this House do communicate this Order to the Commissioner aforesaid".

I assume that the Serjeant at Arms is ultimately responsible to you, Mr. Speaker, and carries out your instructions.

It is a fact, attested to by all hon. Members, that on many occasions—I am not talking about just today and it has nothing to do with demonstrations—an increasing number of coaches proliferate around Parliament square blocking the streets and preventing parking in and access to the House. That causes a serious disincentive to hon. Members in their attempts to reach this place on time. The powers of the traffic commissioners, emasculated under recent legislation, are partly responsible for the problem.

Those coaches are not all foreign; most of them are British. It appears to me that coach operators demonstrate an arrogant disregard not only for other road users, but the Sessional Order. Surely the parked coaches are an abuse of the ruling of the House and such rule breaking is either being done in ignorance or deliberately. I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to request the Serjeant at Arms to invite the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis to tell us what action he would like the House to take to deal with the problem.

Mr. Speaker: I understand that a substantial number of coaches convey visitors to Westminster. I believe that the Services Committee is looking into the question of traffic in Parliament square. The hon. Gentleman should ask that Committee to consider the parking of coaches as well.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): It is a matter for you.

Mr. Speaker: No, it is a matter for the Services Committee.

Mr. Adley: The order is in the name of the Serjeant at Arms. I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to ask the Serjeant at Arms to inquire what response he has received from the Commissioner of Police.

Mr. Speaker: This is a question for the police, but I shall look into it.

Mr. Tony Banks: Good man.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wonder whether I could ask you to reflect further on the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley)? The British Nationality (Hong Kong) Bill is extremely contentious and controversial legislation. The Bill was promised for today, but clearly it will not be available until tomorrow afternoon.

Originally, we were warned that Second Reading would take place during the week of 23 April. In last week's business statement, we were told that its Second Reading would take place on Thursday 19 April, the day after our return from the Easter recess. That means that there is inadequate time for all parties in this House to have collective consideration of the legislation.

I ask the Leader of the House to consider reverting to the original plan so that we can have its Second Reading during the week of 23 April. That would give reasonable additional time for all parties in the House to consider this important Bill.

Mr. Speaker: That is for the Leader of the House to decide, but the Bill has not yet been presented to the House, so it would not be possible to make it available today.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I must point out that we have a guillotine motion at 7 pm.

Mr. Holt: I am aware of that, and I am sure that the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) is equally aware of it.

My point of order relates to a matter directly under your control, Mr. Speaker, and as you intend to have a word with the Serjeant at Arms about another issue, I want to raise it now. Half an hour ago, when I went to my office, I found that members of the public were going to meetings on that Corridor. People are standing outside our Committee Rooms selling copies of *Socialist Worker* to those going in and out of them. Surely it is wrong and against all the rules of the House that such pamphlets are being sold inside this building.

Mr. Speaker: That is of course absolutely out of order, and I shall certainly get the Serjeant at Arms to look into that matter.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I do not want to be pedantic, but could you reflect on the whole question of business statements and come to some ruling tomorrow? For greater accuracy, it is important to note that the Leader of the House said:

> "With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the re-arrangement of business for tomorrow"

If we are now not to be allowed to make other points pressing for statements is that not yet another erosion, unwitting in your case, Mr. Speaker, of Back Benchers' rights? We must be vigilant on that.

Before tomorrow, will you consider, Mr. Speaker, the issue that arose from Question 4—that is, the anger of the Americans towards one of our senior colleagues at his behaviour in the Pentagon? The Chairman of the Defence Select Committee should make a statement to the House, possibly a personal one, on the allegations now being widely made to the effect that he misused his position in pressing matters in relation to contracts in the Pentagon. It is bad enough that that is done in Whitehall, but to start doing it in other countries, in the Ministries of Defence of our allies, raises serious questions.

Mr. Speaker: Unfortunately, when the hon. Gentleman first raised this point of order, I stopped him, because I did not have the relevant extract from *Erskine May* to hand, but now a blinding light has struck me. I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to page 297 where it states:

> "The Speaker has ruled that when a narrow business statement is made, changing only one item of business, supplementary questions are confined to that item."

That is why I sought to stop the hon. Gentleman.

Leasehold Reform (Residents' Associations)

5.31 pm

Mr. Dudley Fishburn (Kensington): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to give residents' associations the right to appoint managing agents.

This is the second time in the 18 months that I have been in this House that I have sought to bring in a Bill on leasehold reform—I have had two skirmishes in a long campaign, which was spearheaded by my distinguished predecessor Sir Brandon Rhys Williams and which numbers among its battalions many hon. Members, building societies, the Law Commission and hundreds and thousands of leaseholders in London and elsewhere, who find the present state of the law bedraggled, shot through with anomalies and in need of reform.

The selling of residential flats on leasehold, the method by which London was developed in the 19th century, provides a singularly unsatisfactory form of home ownership for the tail end of the 20th century, let alone for the middle of the 21st century, when many of the leases, which are now being written, will finally lapse. No other country in Europe has such a system. Those countries that inherited English leasehold law—for example, the United States, Australia and Canada—have long since reformed or abandoned the practice.

Two reforms are necessary. First, we must be allowed to own individual flats on freehold. At present, the law does not permit it. Flat A, flat B, flat C in a residential block cannot each carry their own independent freehold ownership. By English law, each has to be on a lease, a diminishing asset that opens up a host of problems between leaseholder and freeholder. That is wrong. The Lord Chancellor is currently considering a system by which leaseholders could buy, with no compulsion—willing buyer meets willing seller at market price—their flats in perpetuity. For the first time, a flat could carry the same security as a freehold house. That was the substance of my first reforming Bill, last April. The system, called "commonhold", is well established in other countries. It was first floated in this country, interestingly enough, by the Grosvenor estate.

The essential problem with leasehold is not that it is just one way of providing residential blocks of flats, but that it is the only way under English law. Although someone might buy a 99-year lease on a property, the freeholder, whose residual interest is tiny, still maintains, in law, a disproportionately large amount of clout over the person whose home it actually is. That clout is being used in an increasingly disreputable way.

The problem is not with London's large traditional landlords. They are here to stay. They are a part of London's heritage, and think in terms of generations. Through huge swathes of London, however, there has grown up recently a different kind of landlord, whose time horizon is not 99 years, but rather the scope for profit in 99 weeks.

Few leaseholders will ever see, or know, their freeholders, who in my part of London are often either overseas investors or companies that are forever churning among themselves the legal documents of freehold.

What leaseholders see, by contrast, are the often unreasonable demands and dictatorial behaviour of the managing agents. That is where my second reform, which I seek to introduce this afternoon, comes in.

I propose that residents associations, as recognised in the Landlord and Tenant Acts of 1985 and 1987, be allowed to appoint their own managing agents. The legal cog to permit that is to be found in part V, section 44 of the 1987 Act. There, the provision that landlords appoint managing agents after consulting leaseholders, should be, quite simply, reversed. Leaseholders should appoint them, after consulting the landlords. It is, after all, the resident leaseholders who pay the managing agents for their work and their fee. It is an old principle that he who pays the piper should call the tune—residents' power to residents associations.

Let us consider two recent cases from my post bag. The first is a block of flats on long leases off Kensington high street, where the freehold changes hands under the residents. A new management agent is appointed who, instead of charging the traditional fee of 15 per cent. on the work done, charges one of 77 per cent., which, after an outcry, has now come down—if that is the right word—to 42 per cent. The leaseholders are powerless, short of going to law.

Go to law is exactly what the residents of another block of flats—Oakwood court in the heart of Kensington—have had to do. This huge block has 182 flats on long leases—long, but not long enough. A property company, which does not own the freehold, controls under-leases that run for a few days longer than those of the residents. This allows the property company control over the service charges for the block, which amount to about £1 million a year. Who have they chosen as their managing agents? After an exhaustive assessment of the many such companies offering managing services in London, they have chosen, by chance, one that they just happen to own. That is because the law, as it now unsatisfactorily stands, allows the landlord to choose the managing agent, and does not give the residents a right of veto.

To a good freeholder—there are many—a managing agent's job is strictly neutral. The agent oversees the work that is a legal condition of the lease, and no financial advantage accrues to either side. That being the case, good freeholders mind little who appoints the managing agents. Legitimate work needs to be done, and is being paid for by the residents. This reform is about having the job done not on the cheap, but by those who must pay the bill, realise they must do so and live with the consequences.

The Department of the Environment is about to undertake what it calls a detailed evaluation study of the working of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1987. It will find that, where leaseholders are involved—rather than straight tenancies, which are a different matter not considered here—the law is in need of those two reforms. We should allow commonhold, through which leaseholders can buy their own individual flats on freehold, and permit leaseholders to name their own managing agents. Those are two reforms that this Government, who have done so much for home owners, need to undertake, and soon. Those are two reforms that have the added advantage of being both popular and, as far as Her Majesty's Treasury is concerned, free.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Dudley Fishburn, Mr. Matthew Carrington, Mr. Nigel Forman, Mr. Kenneth Hind, Mr. Chris Butler, Mr. Robin Squire, Mr. Gerald Bowden and Sir George Young.

LEASEHOLD REFORM (RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATIONS)

Mr. Dudley Fishburn accordingly presented a Bill to give residents' associations the right to appoint managing agents: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 6 July and to be printed. [Bill 118.]

Orders of the Day

Social Security Bill

[2ND ALLOTTED DAY]

As amended, further considered.

New Clause 10

REINSTATEMENT OF SEVERE DISABLEMENT ALLOWANCE ENTITLEMENT

'Regulations shall provide that in any case where a person was in receipt of a Severe Disablement Allowance immediately before the commencement of a course of youth training and on ceasing that course fails to secure gainful employment the entitlement of that person to a Severe Disablement Allowance shall be automatically reinstated.'. —*[Mr. Alfred Morris.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

5.38 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Time is now both very strictly and scandalously rationed, due to a guillotine made sharper by the timing of this afternoon's statement on the poll tax, even for a debate about severely disabled young people whose brave attempts to win the independence of gainful employment can result in reducing their incomes.

The new clause is a particularly important one for young people who, while they have severe disabilities, also have abilities. It is strongly backed by the organisations that work to help them, including Barnardo's, Mencap and the Spastics Society. Those are all organisations for which there is high regard on both sides of the House and they insist that the new clause must be added to the Bill. Their concern is not with imagined difficulties which may occur if the Bill becomes law, but with the acute difficulties now of severely disabled young people who strive with exceptional effort, but often unsuccessfully through no fault of their own, to exchange the dependence of social security payments for the independence which goes with having a job and paying taxes.

Barnardo's, in a letter to me yesterday about the new clause, underlines the importance of its purpose and describes it as removing a disincentive which actively discourages

"young people with disabilities from entering YTS".

Hon. Members of all parties who went to the recent "parents' forum" arranged here by Barnardo's will recall the very moving statements made by the mothers of young people with severe disabilities. They told us that, although they passionately want the opportunity to work, their sons and daughters have to face the loss of their severe disablement allowance if they enter youth training and then fail to find work. I am sure that they left all the hon. Members who heard them with the feeling that to withdraw SDA from young people who try so hard to triumph over severe handicap is a form of refined cruelty which Ministers must now urgently stop.

The savings made by the Government from withdrawing SDA in cases where young people cannot find work when their training ends are very small compared with the £1·9 billion given in a single Budget to the richest 1 per cent. of taxpayers. The new clause is about removing a tax

[Mr. Alfred Morris]

on hope, that of young people most of whom, due to lack of employment opportunities, today go from school to scrap heap. All that severely disabled youngsters who receive training, and succeed as trainees, can possibly have today is hope.

As the Minister knows, unemployment among disabled job seekers is more than twice as high as the current rate among able-bodied people. They are pushed to the back of the dole queue, which is still the longest queue in Britain and, as I have demonstrated to him in correspondence, are often made to sit up and beg from the social fund. The Government's own recent survey showed that only 31 per cent. of all disabled adults of working age are actually working compared with 69 per cent. of the population as a whole. The ratio for males was even worse: 33 per cent. compared with 78 per cent. Those findings shout of discrimination against disabled workers. Moreover, the earnings of disabled people who found work were substantially lower than those of non-disabled employees, and the same is true of parents of disabled children.

Those are the bleak facts, known only too well by most disabled people, which face those for whom even trying to train and find work can invite the penalty of losing their severe disablement allowance. At a time when they often need more help, as we heard from parents at the meeting here at Westminster, they lose their SDA. Their reaction, as I know from speaking to many of the young people of whom I speak in this debate, is that their efforts to achieve financial independence are mocked by a system which piles handicap on handicap.

They and their parents know full well that they can lose financially if any attempt at training or employment does not meet with immediate success. They will not automatically requalify for SDA, as provided for in the new clause, and the family is likely to be left substantially worse off. Under the present system, they have to undergo the complex procedure of reassessment and, even then, may lose a benefit of crucial importance to them. Faced with this, many parents and young people feel that attempting a youth training programme is too much to risk.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that in treating disabled young people in this way the Government appear to be going in a different direction from that which was implicit in the White Paper "The Way Ahead", which appeared to encourage people to go on training and then to come back, and not to lose benefits as a result? Surely this is the opposite. That is why we need the new clause—to make sure that there is no discrimination against disabled people.

Mr. Morris: I entirely agree with the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley). His point is one to which I shall return after referring to some particular cases.

Pat Nelson is a foster parent of twins, Nicky and Jackie, aged 18. Both have Down's syndrome and will soon leave school. In describing her fears, their foster parent writes:

> "The way the regulations stand at the moment, if Nicky and Jackie go on to a YTS or take a job, they cease to be eligible for their disability benefit. If that job or scheme fails, the benefit would not automatically be restored because they would have proved that they could work or take part in YTS."

Elspeth McLean, leader of the Barnardo's project aimed at providing youth training opportunities for young people with severe mental handicaps, has also come across this deterrent effect in her work. She tells me:

> "When I recruit young people for my scheme, parents often say to me 'of course we'd like our son or daughter to have the chance of a job or go on a scheme, but what if it goes wrong? Will they lose their disability benefit?' For many, especially those from low income families, this proves just too much."

Noting that the cost of the new clause would be very small, the Spastics Society, in a message to right hon. and hon. Members timed for today's debate, says that my proposal is one of "rational change" and totally consistent with the Government's own proposals in their document "The Way Ahead", which was the point made by the hon. Member for Caernarfon. That being so, the rational change that we are seeking can be made by the House today by approving the new clause.

The Spastics Society's statement to hon. Members goes on:

> "Current regulations impose a risk and act as a disincentive to young people who might otherwise take up training. This new clause ensures a safety net which would give them added confidence and encouragement to do so. Some of these young people may, as a result of their training, find paid employment which would enable them to come off social security benefits altogether."

The Minister knows as well as I do that the Spastics Society is right. He knows, too, that the case work of Barnardo's, Mencap and the Spastics Society fully demonstrates the urgent need for the change. Their endorsement of the new clause is not inspired by any political motive. Their only concern is to help severely disabled young people who feel that today the odds are very heavily stacked against them, notwithstanding the enormous efforts they make to normalise their lives and to make the contribution of which they are capable to industry and to society. They are worthy not of unfair treatment, but of our admiration.

I must warn the Government that disabled young people's insistence on better treatment will not go away. It will be pursued for as long as it takes to satisfy them and their parents that they are being fairly dealt with and that their efforts to gain more independence are no longer mocked by the social security system. The new clause will correct a cruel anomaly and I commend it to right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House.

The Minister for Social Security (Mr. Nicholas Scott): It is a universal desire throughout the House that young people with disabilities be encouraged, if they are able, to take part in youth training schemes and to get themselves into employment. Perhaps I can make some general remarks at the outset before I come to deal with the new clause. There are a number of things which I believe are moving in the direction of encouraging precisely that development.

When we are able to introduce the disability employment credit in 1992, it will be a very big encouragement for people suffering from a disability to take up work, knowing that if they eventually have to give up the work they will retain their underlying entitlement to the longer-term benefits, such as invalidity benefit, when they leave work, and the benefit itself will encourage and make it easier for them to get into employment.

Secondly, I have no doubt that the impact of technology in the workplace, as well as in the domestic environment, will make it possible for many people with disabilities, including youngsters, to get into employment and to hold down important jobs. The third factor is the simple movement of demography. Employers, in both the public and the private sectors, will need the skills of disabled people in the coming decades. They will have to learn to look behind the disabilities to find the abilities. That is important.

The fourth factor that has impressed me during the time that I have held responsibility for the disabled is the sheer determination of increasing numbers of them, especially youngsters, to get into employment and to acquire the independence that that brings.

In speaking to the new clause, I must first remind the House that severe disablement allowance is a benefit for people who are incapable of work. That is the basic definition. As I am sure all hon. Members appreciate, it is the non-contributory equivalent of invalidity benefit for people who have not paid the necessary national insurance contributions. Therefore, the primary medical qualifying condition—this is fundamental—is that the person must be incapable of work.

As I understand the proposals in the new clause, SDA would become payable to people who were capable of work, on the ground that they had failed to find suitable employment. That would be an entirely new principle in the conditions for the benefit and would cut across the basic principles of the SDA scheme.

Mr. Wigley: Does the Minister accept that, on all occasions, we should try to avoid typecasting people as incapable of work for ever more? People may have been incapable of work, and therefore rightly secured SDA, but nevertheless feel that there may be an opportunity to break out. If the opportunity arises for new training, and if that would benefit the person, surely the system should not militate against that by imposing a financial penalty on those trying to break out of typecasting.

Mr. Scott: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. My next few points will, I hope, show that the scheme is not quite so cut and dried as might be imagined from reading the new clause. There are existing arrangements to help former recipients of SDA, who are incapable of work at the time when they finish a YTS course or shortly thereafter, to acquire the right to benefit again. That comes under the so-called linking rules for this benefit and, indeed, for other benefits.

If a person who was receiving SDA before starting a course of youth training is incapable of work at the end of that course, SDA can be reinstated immediately, because the claim links with earlier entitlement. I suppose that it is right to say that, if someone had successfully completed a YTS course, that would be prima facie evidence that they should be capable of work at the end of that course. However, it would still be open to an adjudication officer to decide that, despite the successful completion of that course, the person was incapable of work and immediately to reinstate the SDA to which the person was earlier entitled.

Periods when a person is registered as unemployed count in the same way in linking claims. For example, if a former SDA recipient was registered as unemployed between the end of training and the time when incapacity for work began—someone might leave YTS, be unemployed and eventually be determined as incapable of work—SDA could be reinstated immediately. There is also the provision which allows gaps when those conditions do not apply, perhaps when a person has been working. If such a gap is no longer than eight weeks, entitlement to SDA is not affected. There could be any number of such gaps, provided that none exceeded the eight-week period. For example, someone could try a series of jobs in an attempt to find something suitable, but provided that they decided that they were not suitable within the eight-week period, they would be entitled to SDA immediately. The effect of those arrangements is that a person who becomes incapable of work either at the end of youth training or, in some circumstances, some time afterwards, can have SDA reinstated without waiting for the usual 28 weeks.

It would be a fundamental change to remove the principle of entitlement to SDA—namely, that somebody should be incapable of work. The scheme is more flexible than was suggested by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris). I hope that, in the light of what I have said, he will withdraw the new clause. If he does not, I shall have to advise the House to resist it.

Mr. Morris: I am sorry that the Minister has not accepted what is widely believed to be a compelling case. There is no time now even to press such an important new clause to a Division, but I hope that it will be raised again in another place and carried.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 15

INDEPENDENT LIVING FUND

'In section 32 of the 1986 Act—

(a) after subsection (2A) there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(2B) A payment of £30 million shall be made out of that fund to the Independent Living Fund in the year ending on 31st March 1991 for the purpose of helping people with severe disabilities to live independently in their own homes.".

(b) after subsection (6) there shall be inserted the following subsection—

"(6A) The Secretary of State shall make a payment of £30 million into the Social Fund to enable the payment specified in subsection (2B) above to be made without reducing the amount of money available for the other purposes of the fund.".'—*[Ms. Short.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Alfred Morris: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The new clause is an attempt to ease the serious financial crisis of the independent living fund——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. I beg the pardon of the House. The new clause must be moved by one of the hon. Members whose names appear on the amendment paper.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): I move formally.

Mr. Morris: As I said, the new clause attempts to ease the current serious financial crisis of the independent living fund. Again the time available to debate the new clause has been strictly rationed by the Government, but I must try both to explain its purpose and strongly to emphasise its importance to severely disabled people.

[Mr. Morris]

As its name implies, the independent living fund works to help disabled people, even those with the most severe disabilities, to live their lives independently in their homes wherever that can be achieved. Many severely disabled people dread having to go into institutional care, which is fortunate for the taxpayer because the costs of such care are often much higher than for community care. The House needs no reminding that forcing people into institutions, against their will and against their best interests, can be self-defeating for the Government as well as inhumane.

The independent living fund was created as a safety net after shocking disclosures about the effects on severely disabled people of the social security changes in April 1988. But the safety net is now holed and the hole will grow wider and deeper if the Government do not act urgently to make more resources available to the independent living fund. The present level of funding clearly does not meet the demands that have been revealed. Unless much more substantial and secure funding is provided, the independent living fund will shortly be unable to make any further awards. The result will be that institutional care becomes the only option for disabled people who, with appropriate help, are perfectly capable of living at home.

At the launch of the independent living fund, the Minister said that additional money would be found for the fund if it became oversubscribed. As David Brindle of *The Guardian* first disclosed publicly, that manifestly is now the case, and I ask the Minister to accept the new clause and to do as he promised when the fund began its work. David Brindle wrote that, by the end of March:

> "the fund will be paying 4,500 people—three times the maximum number originally anticipated—at an annual cost of £15·2 million.
>
> There are an additional 1,500 cases approved and pending, representing an additional annual cost of almost £5·1 million, and 600 approvals a month are being added to this at a further annual cost of £2 million."

6 pm

As the Minister knows, the Disablement Income Group, which has done so much to sustain the Fund's work since its inception, is calling for the ILF to be fully funded by the Government in 1990-91. It is doing so because, until the new arrangements for community care start in April 1991, there is nowhere else that disabled people can go for help in covering their expenditure on personal care.

I understand that applications for financial support are currently reaching the fund at a rate of 1,800 per month. Normally, one in three people meet the fund's strict criteria. Thus, a Government cash freeze will mean that, in every month of the next financial year, the fund will have to turn away 600 severely disabled people in need of vital assistance.

Peter Large of DIG states:

> "We are dismayed by the threat to the Fund's existence because it has, until now, been such a success . . . The Fund's careful assessment of each applicant's individual requirements has revealed the true cost of community care for severely disabled people. And it is the extent of need that has [now] put the Fund's existence in jeopardy."

Payments from the fund have kept families together, enabled severely disabled people living alone to stay in their own homes, made it possible for others to leave institutional care and provided essential cover for hard-pressed relatives. The fund has made sound financial sense as well. For many severely disabled people, small amounts of cash have stood between them and an unwelcome move to institutional care, which is far more expensive to the taxpayer than the cost of maintaining the ILF.

Peter Large also states:

> "When the Fund started we knew of severely disabled people existing on beans on toast in order to scrape together enough money to pay for the help they needed. We believed those days were over and that never again would it be necessary to put anyone in the position of having to choose between such basic necessities of life as food and personal support. Unfortunately, we were mistaken."

What he is saying is that very soon the ILF will have to turn away some 650 to 700 "successful" applicants for help every month.

Yet to tighten the fund's eligibility criteria, as the Minister must know, would involve rewriting the trust deeds. He knows as well from the letter sent to him by Elizabeth Hoodless of Community Service Volunteers on 29 March in what very high regard the fund is held by her organisation as by many others who know of its work. It would be helpful to the House if the Minister could respond to that important letter when he speaks in this debate.

Will the Minister also explain why Peter Large's letter for DIG to the Secretary of State for Health, although it was sent to the right hon. and learned Gentleman on 17 September last, has since been only acknowledged? When will the Secretary of State reply? As the right hon. Member for Chelsea (Mr. Scott) may know, the letter sent by DIG to his right hon. and learned Friend was of considerable importance in terms of trying to vouchsafe adequate community care for severely disabled people. Surely it deserves the courtesy of a considered reply.

I give just one case, among scores of which I have details, with regard to the importance of the ILF's work. It is that of Jenny, aged 47, who has been cared for by her sister since her mother died 11 years ago. Jenny suffered severe brain damage in a road accident when she was 15, resulting in a high degree of mental handicap, and she needs constant supervision as well as help in all personal care. Her actual communication is limited to the most basic needs but she talks and demands attention incessantly. The strain of caring for her contributed to the break-up of her sister's marriage and probably to the latter's deteriorating health. Her sister now suffers from angina.

Respite care for Jenny has not been an option since a disastrous experience two years ago which made her terrified of ever leaving home again and left her incontinent. Her sister would not countenance sending her away again, but she has been desperate for some sort of break from the responsibility. She would love to go back to her old part-time work and may well make use of some of the 25 hours a week care now paid for by the independent living fund to do so.

That is the kind of case for which no further help may be available if the Minister is not prepared to accept our proposal in new clause 15. I most strongly urge him to do so at a time when, as he is fully aware, the poll tax is making life even more difficult for severely disabled people and their carers. He will recall that I gave details in the House on 24 January of cases in which families which include a severely disabled person will have to find as much as £756 a year more in poll tax than their current rates.

It would be very helpful to have some sort of response from the Government to the figures I was given by the Spinal Injuries Association. It and many other organisations of and for disabled people are deeply disquieted about the added problems that arise for disabled people from a tax which they regard as hideously unfair.

There will be Tory Members who share my deep concern about the people who face further hardship if the ILF is not given the financial support that it now most urgently needs. I hope that they will not only make their concern clear to the Minister, but will support the new clause which I now commend to the House.

Mr. Scott: The whole Government, of course, take the view that, where it is possible or appropriate, not just disabled people but the elderly and others who need help should have the opportunity to be supported within the community rather than have to go into institutional care. That is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health is currently taking through proposals to enable that to happen increasingly from 1991 and for packages of care to be produced by local authorities to achieve that aim.

I am sure that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) did not mean to imply, although he mentioned a letter to which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health might not have replied, that the Government have not maintained constant and regular contact with the trustees of the ILF and, in particular, the trustees appointed by DIG and DIG Scotland. On a number of occasions, both formal and informal, I have met Mr. Peter Large and Miss Pauline Thompson and discussed these matters with them, and I have, of course, kept in regular contact with the chairman of the trustees of the ILF.

Mr. Alfred Morris: I referred to the letter from Peter Large to the Secretary of State for Health in the debate today. He is very anxious to have a considered reply to a letter which, after all, was sent last September.

Mr. Scott: I cannot recall seeing a copy of that letter but, since it was sent in September, that may not be surprising. Certainly I have had a number of conversations with Peter Large, Pauline Thompson and, obviously, Mrs. Tumim in the interim to discuss not just the matters that we are discussing tonight but other matters affecting the ILF.

The new clause seeks a payment of £30 million for the ILF from the social fund. I recognise at the outset that this is a device—I do not use the word in a pejorative sense—to enable us to discuss an important matter. Obviously, this would not in practice be a sensible way of handling the flows of public money, and for that reason if for no other I would ask the House to reject the clause were it to be pressed to a Division. I appreciate the sentiment behind the proposal, and I hope that my remarks will go some way towards meeting the concern which the clause addresses.

But first I wish to remind the House of the origins of the independent living fund and to pay the warmest tribute to the trustees—those appointed by the Secretary of State and those appointed by the disablement income group and DIG Scotland—who have operated the fund successfully. They have worked much harder than any of them envisaged when they took on the responsibilities of trustees of the ILF, and I pay them the warmest possible tribute.

The House will recall that the fund was established in 1988 with a five-year life following the abolition of the additional payments for domestic assistance which had been available to disabled people under supplementary benefit. We recognised that that left a very small group of the most severely disabled people whose needs might not be fully addressed by the disability premiums available under the new income support scheme.

A separate fund, with cases examined individually by independent trustees, seemed to offer a way of directing help towards that group with a flexibility and sensitivity that would not be possible within the regulated social security system. As I said at the outset, many people—including perhaps Opposition Members—were sceptical when it was set up, but it has done a useful job in the intervening period.

Our original provision for the independent living fund in 1989-90 was £5 million. That was more than doubled, to over £10 million, last year and has been more than doubled again, to £24 million, for the year just starting. There is no doubt that the fund has met its original objective of providing a way of directing individual help to those most in need. But I am afraid that it is also providing money in a wide variety of cases that were never contemplated when it was established. That is rapidly making it impossible for it to function in the way that was originally envisaged.

It is proving not to be possible to provide detailed and individual consideration in a centralised scheme handling as many cases as the fund now handles. As a result, there is a growing danger that the fund will no longer be able to provide the necessary attention to the needs of the original target group. Indeed, handling the current volume of applications is already placing a burden on the trustees which it is unreasonable to ask them to carry.

Because of the developing situation, I have been discussing the matter with the trustees, as I mentioned earlier, in an endeavour to find ways of reorganising the work of the fund so that those for whom the fund was established can receive the help they need.

It is obviously necessary for those discussions to be placed in the context of the new arrangements for community care to be introduced from April 1991. Under those arrangements, local authorities will be devising care packages on an individual basis and in a way that clearly overlaps with the present role of the independent living fund.

6.15 pm

Once the new arrangements are in place, people seeking help should generally be able to look to local authorities, but we recognise that authorities will need time to develop the detailed assessments and complex care packages that will be required. We therefore could not expect them to take on the entire case load of the ILF in April 1991. There will have to be some phasing, with local authorities gradually taking on such cases. There will also need to be some limited short-term arrangements for new cases that arise during the evolutionary stage.

The details will have to be discussed with the local authorities, but we shall obviously have to build in safeguards to prevent irresponsible authorities from placing an unwanted burden on the ILF. So we envisage some form of joint approach to these cases, with a revamped ILF, so to speak, providing only supplemental help from a clearly specified budget during the transitional phase.

The way ahead now for me is to discuss with the trustees how the resources available to the fund can most effectively be used in the current year in a way which enables the fund to meet its original objectives and which provides a smooth transition to the appropriate arrangement after April 1991.

Unfortunately—the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe alluded to this—the rapid growth in claims to which I referred means that provision in the fund for 1990-91 is already heavily committed to current beneficiaries and to those to whom offers of help have already been made. That leaves little scope for the implementation of the suggested changes to which I referred.

I hope that we can reach agreement with the trustees on a sensible limiting of the scope of the fund, and in that case we shall be prepared to find the resources within our existing public expenditure programme to make a further £8 million available for the current year. That is an increase of a third in the current year allocation and a more than sixfold increase in the resources originally envisaged for the fund. I hope that the House will welcome that as an appropriate response to the concerns that have been voiced and, were the clause to be pressed to a Division, which I hope it will not, to reject it.

Sir David Price (Eastleigh): I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply, although a few problems remain outstanding. There is concern about the increase in the burden of cases placed on the fund. My right hon. Friend said that some of those cases were of a nature not envisaged when the fund was established. It would be helpful if he would explain how he thinks they should be handled. If they should not be handled by the fund, who should handle them, certainly in the interim?

Who will handle the cases in the early days of the build-up of responsibility of the local authorities? It is not unfair to local authorities to say that some of them will be able to handle such cases more quickly and better than others. The professionalism needed to handle cases of this nature—many of which are extremely complicated and need much sensitivity and experience to handle—is not universal. It would be strange if it were. It is inevitable that there will be uneven provision in the early days. It is important that something like the fund should remain available in the carry-over period as a longstop. The fund was established in the first instance so that somewhere in the scheme of things there would be a longstop arrangement for really severe cases.

I agree with my right hon. Friend that that should not be an excuse for reluctant local authorities putting an increased burden on the fund. It would be reassuring for all concerned if the fund remained in place for as long as is needed, and I beg my right hon. Friend in his discussions with the Treasury not to agree a terminal date yet, but to see how matters progress.

Mr. Scott: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Sir D. Price) for raising those two points. The answer to the first—about the type of cases that the fund has accepted and for which it has been paying—is that I am not betraying any confidences when I say that the fund has become aware that, as it has become more widely known, a number of local authorities which already have responsibility in this area to cope with the needs of disabled people, instead of meeting those responsibilities, have sent people to the ILF, suggesting that they apply to that area simply to protect their own budgets. That has been a significant factor in the growth that has occurred in the case load of the ILF.

My hon. Friend's second point was that, as we moved into the period after April 1991, with the new community care arrangements in place, inevitably some local authorities would do better than others and there would be, as he put it, an uneven implementation of the new arrangements. That is why I could not envisage the fund coming to an end in April 1991. I assure my hon. Friend that no terminal date has been agreed and that we shall have to see how implementation goes after April 1991.

Mr. Alfred Morris: I hope that the Minister for Social Security will meet the trustees very soon. Meanwhile, I note his announcement of a further £8 million for the independent living fund, and I will not be pressing the new clause to a Division.

Ms. Short: I beg leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 16

ACTIVELY SEEKING EMPLOYMENT

'Sections 10 and 13 of the 1989 Act shall cease to have effect.'.—*[Ms. Short.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Ms. Short: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The intention of the new clause is to abolish the actively seeking work test introduced in the Social Security Act 1989.

The way in which we have to proceed at great haste through the enormously important issues that we are debating tonight is a consequence of the undemocratic guillotine that the Government have imposed on the Bill. It brings the procedures of the House into disrepute and means that important issues cannot be properly debated and that hon. Members who wish to contribute cannot do so.

The provision that individuals must prove, on a weekly basis, that they are actively seeking work or face the possibility of having their benefit taken away is deeply objectionable. It is part of the Government's long-term strategy to encourage low pay in our economy.

Hon. Members should realise that, in the post-second world war benefit system, it has always been obligatory to take a job if one was available; no one has any argument with that. We agree that that is the right structure. However, what the Government did in the Social Security Act was intended to force people to accept jobs that are so low-paid that they might even be paid less than they previously received in benefit. We moved an amendment in Committee to ask that no one should be forced to accept a job which paid less than their benefit. The Government refused the amendment, so that is not the current provision.

In 1979, the Government set out to positively encourage low-paid employment in our economy. They have taken a series of measures to remove protection from low-paid workers and measures that prevented employers from competing for tenders—particularly in the public sector—by cutting wages.

The Government have been enormously successful—regrettably—in that strategy. There has been a massive growth in low-paid work in Britain since 1979. It is a truly shocking and alarming statistic, but 49 per cent. of people at work in Britain are now paid less than the Council of Europe's decency threshold—a standard laid down by the Council of Europe to measure low pay in member states.

The overwhelming majority of low-paid workers in Britain are women. The Minister for Social Security, who has now left the Chamber, made it clear in debates on a previous Social Security Bill that the Government are not concerned about low pay for women. He said that that was not a worry, because many women were part of a two-income household. That is very interesting, and it says something about the Government's underlying attitude to women's work and to how women should be valued. Many women are not in two-income households. Some men and many women head single-parent families. They are trying to work and trying not to be dependent on benefits. They have to struggle to survive on low rates of pay.

The low-pay economy that the Government have so successfully developed during the past 10 years is obviously bad for the individuals concerned. It is bad to have to work, to be creative and to try to be productive while struggling week by week to make ends meet. It is bad for our benefits system, because it means that an ever-growing number of people are claiming family credit, which means that the system is subsidising some of the worst employers—employers who pay bad wages. Lack of training, poor health and safety standards, lack of investment, poor quality jobs and a poor contributions to the economy go hand in hand with low pay.

The positive encouragement of low pay means that the benefits system subsidises some of the worst, least economically efficient employers. The policy is also bad for the British economy, because an economy that seeks to go forward by encouraging low pay will not be successful. Employers who seek to compete by cutting wages and paying low wages do not train, do not invest, do not embrace new technology and are inefficient, and they cannot help the British economy to compete internationally.

The actively seeking work provisions require individuals to show each week that they have been looking for a job. A constituent came to my last advice bureau a week ago. He worked for 20 years for a large manufacturing concern in Birmingham—so one can tell that he was a reliable, hard-working employee. He was thrown out of work in the massive recession that the Government generated in 1980-81, and he has been desperately seeking work ever since. He has been on a whole series of Government training schemes. There are many such men in the west midlands. They are in their fifties, and having worked all their lives, were thrown out of work in the recession and have lived between schemes and bits of low-paid work ever since.

My constituent so desperately wanted work that he went on an employment training scheme, where he was not trained—he was ripped off. He had to work in dirty, bad conditions. He came to see me during the scheme and said that it was a rip-off but he would stay on in case there was a job at the end of it. He did not get a job, and someone else has been taken on, under the employment training scheme, to do the non-paid job that he so badly wanted. he came off ET and now he has been given a form. All such workers will be given a similar form. He has to fill out the form and prove each week that he is actively seeking work. He feels angry and humiliated, and there are a large number of people like him.

Some 700 unemployment claimants each week have been given written warnings about their job-seeking activities in the first seven weeks after the implementation of the Social Security Act 1989. Nearly 600 of those people subsequently had their benefit suspended when their claims were referred to adjudication officers. Then there is an enormous gap in time when the individual concerned has no money, and the adjudication officers do not uphold all the cases that have been referred to them. My constituent is desperate, and is often forced to take appalling employment at appalling rates of pay, and that is the Government's intention.

The Government's strategy is deeply wrong for the individuals affected by it. It is wrong positively to encourage low pay in the economy, which is what the Government are all about and what the Bill is all about. On top of that, it is an outrage to humiliate people by forcing them to show each week that they are seeking work. Many of them write letters but employers do not reply and so it is difficult to produce evidence.

The actively seeking employment provision should never have been made. The clause seeks to withdraw it from the statute book.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): I wholeheartedly agree with the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) that it is extremely bad for an economy to be a low-wage economy. The hon. Lady is right to say that one characteristic of a company which sets out to pay the lowest possible wages is that it tries to avoid its training and investment responsibilities.

However, I part company sharply with the hon. Lady when she says that it is Government policy to set up a low-wage economy. That is absolute nonsense. The Government's objective is and always has been an economy in which unit labour costs are falling because productivity is rising. Productivity rises on the back of investment, and investment last year was at a record level. The threat to those unit labour costs and to investment comes from inflation. It is essential that inflation is squeezed out or we shall be in real difficulties.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): The hon. Gentleman says that it is not the Government's aim to increase the number of low-paid workers. As their numbers have increased over the past 11 years, are we to conclude that that is another Government success or failure?

6.30 pm

Mr. Rowe: That is something of a Morton's fork, but I feel that I can, with one bound, be free. It is much easier to find better employment when one is already employed. That is a characteristic of the labour market. The large number of part-time and full-time jobs available to people with few qualifications provides them with an entry into the labour market which, in an increasingly technological society, they would otherwise find it exceedingly difficult to find.

Mr. Field: The hon. Gentleman's argument would hold good if the number of low-paid workers was falling, but as it is increasing every year, it seems that people are not able

[Mr. Field]

to use a low-paid job as a springboard into higher-paid employment but instead find themselves trapped in low-paid jobs.

Mr. Rowe: One needs greater analysis of the number of people in low-paid jobs who stay in those jobs and of the other opportunities that they have to better themselves by training. Hitherto, training has always been seen as uniquely the employer's responsibility. It gives me hope for the future to detect a growing interest among employees in training in their own time, for their own improvement. That will secure a more prosperous future for us all.

As to the availability for work test, I make the point that individuals working voluntarily for voluntary organisations are often relied upon to turn up on time to bathe an elderly person, take a child to school, or perform some other task. I believe that such people are still subject to the requirement to make themselves immediately available for work. There have been exchanges in the House about that in the past. I am a trustee of Community Service Volunteers, which is one of many organisations making use of volunteers for such work. Although the availability for work rule is accepted by volunteers working with organisations less structured than CSV, I should like an assurance that that requirement will be interpreted flexibly so that a client will not be left in the lurch by the need for his or her carer to turn up for work the very next day.

How is availability for work defined? It is appropriate, particularly in cases such as that of the gentleman cited by the hon. Member for Ladywood, that it should be relatively streamlined and straightforward, but unemployment benefit offices are merging with jobcentres, so will the point be reached where arriving to collect unemployment benefit becomes, ipso facto, sufficient to meet the requirement to be available for work?

We would do better to move eventually to a system of guaranteed minimum income, whereby benefit would not automatically be cut the moment one starts making a certain amount of money. At present, that is done on the side, but I should like that earning capacity to be made the subject of a declaration, when it would not have a stark knock-on effect on benefits.

Ms. Short: One knows the hon. Gentleman to be a very honourable Member of this House. Will he say whether he has been invited by his Whip to filibuster so that we cannot debate child benefits properly?

Mr. Rowe: I apologise if I have given the impression of filibustering. I thought that every one of my points was fresh. I believe that there has been a substantial fall in the number of households in which it is not worth members of the household going to work because they would receive less than they would from social benefits. Can my hon. Friend the Minister confirm that? If so, it is a strong measure of the success of the Government's policies.

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I make the point briefly that it is difficult in an area such as mine, with unemployment at 14·1 per cent., to obtain even a low-paid job in the hope of eventually securing better paid employment.

I ask the Minister to consider the problems in the mining industry, which have been the subject of attention from my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe, (Mr. Morris), the Department of Employment, and others, in relation to workers who left the industry on the understanding that they had retired but who have now been caught up in the requirements of the restart scheme. Most cases have been admirably dealt with, but a small number of people receiving superannuated earnings do not fall within the same ambit of rulings. After 30 years in the mining industry, they find it rather distasteful, at their age, to be caught up in the restart scheme.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): It is a shame that more people do not want to speak on new clause 16, which is revealing of the Labour party's attitude.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: Presumably the hon. Gentleman's intervention relates to the vast amount that I have already said.

Mr. Battle: The hon. Gentleman gives the impression that there can be a fair and open debate on new clause 16, but we are governed by the clock. I should have liked to address the House on new clauses 15 and 16, but I have been unable to do so because of the guillotine.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) has the right to make his speech. He has only just begun.

Mr. Hughes: If the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) will restrain himself from making pointless interventions, he may have an opportunity to contribute. The more he intervenes, the longer I shall take. I have several points to make, and I intend to make them.

The Opposition's new clause would send entirely the wrong signal to people looking for work. A minority—who can say how many?—will be beguiled by the words of Opposition Front Bench spokesmen into believing that there is no need for them to seek work. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) suggested that people seeking work would only obtain jobs producing an income below the level of their existing benefits. That might occasionally be true, but it is not for responsible politicians to tell people, "If you are dissatisfied with your pay or working conditions, or find it too difficult to obtain employment, you can rely on state benefits—we do not want you to put yourself out."

I am reminded by the hon. Lady of some of the experiences that one hears from people in the employment service. I wonder sometimes what sort of country I am living in when, for example, it is suggested that it is unreasonable for people in Tottenham, an unemployment black spot in London, to get on a bus and go to Hornsey to look for work. That is not an unreasonable distance, but the suggestion was described by an officer in Tottenham as fascist. It is an extraordinary contention that people should not be asked to travel a short distance to look for work.

It is a measure of the irresponsibility of the Opposition that at a time when we are experiencing record growth —the number of people in work had increased to more than 26 million by September last year, an increase of 3·1 per cent. over the previous year—and demographic factors are contributing to the demand for labour, they should choose to send out such a negative and depressing message to the unemployed. The Opposition are saying, "Go home and wait for a job to materialise—we will call you if anything turns up."

When I speak to employers in my constituency and in north London, I find that their difficulty is not sorting out applicants but finding anyone at all to fill the jobs. Whether they want skilled or unskilled workers, secretaries, cleaners, accountants or clerks, they cannot get staff. Although unemployment is low in my constituency, it is still significant. I find it difficult to accept that people who come to me for help cannot get jobs. Those people would be encouraged by the Opposition's proposal not to seek work.

It is extraordinary that the Opposition should want to return to the position before October 1989, when the mere fact of a visit to a jobcentre was deemed sufficient to prove that a person was actively seeking work. We are entitled to ask for more than that. People should not only make themselves available at times when jobs are available, but should look at newspapers, attend interviews and, if necessary, attend training courses on how to fill job applications, how to conduct themselves at interview, and so on.

The hon. Member for Ladywood spoke of jobs which paid less than benefit. Surely anyone who has ever been in employment or who has worked in a lower-paid job, as some of us on both sides of the House have at different times——

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): You will soon be back selling double glazing.

Mr. Hughes: It is interesting to note that the Labour party expects to win my constituency. I wish it the best of luck. I hope that it will concentrate its resources on my constituency, because it will do it no good.

Everyone knows that the path to better wages in any job is by building up a record of employment. When people have a record of employment, sometimes they can move to better-paid jobs in the same organisation or to other organisations which are keen to obtain their skills. That is the essence of a skill shortage. Having done a job, however menial, and acquired skill, people can sell that skill to other employers.

I wish to put two important questions to my hon. Friend the Minister. Is it right that the Opposition's proposal would add £100 million to unemployment benefit?

Ms. Short: No, it is wrong.

Mr. Hughes: My hon. Friend will confirm the figure; I would rather take my hon. Friend's word than the usually inaccurate estimates of the Opposition. If that figure is correct, it is surely not a responsible use of public money. The Opposition are always bleating about what public money should be spent on, but they have very little idea of what they would devote to certain areas.

6.45 pm

At the beginning of my speech I mentioned the signals being sent out. It would surely be irresponsible for people to follow the advice of the Opposition and for 50,000 to be added to the unemployed total. The Opposition are trying to build up unemployment as an issue when plainly it is not. They are attempting to add 50,000 to the unemployed total merely to make the case that they have been trying to make for so long.

The Opposition proposal is highly irresponsible. They want to return to the position where people do not actively have to seek work. I do not believe that that would find favour outside the House. I do not think that my constituents would regard it as a responsible way for the Government to act. They would not wish my hon. Friend to have any truck with that nonsense.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Mrs. Gillian Shephard): The provision about actively seeking work was debated at length in the Committee that considered the Social Security Bill in 1989. The hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) agreed that the Minister for Social Security was "right to say that most people believe that the unemployed should seek work actively". The effect of the new clause would be to return to the position before October 1989 which absolved claimants from any clear responsibility to look for work.

It is true that the requirement to be available for work would remain in the Social Security Act 1975 and a claimant would have to take some active steps to draw attention to his availability. But we would be back to the position where one simple step, such as attending a jobcentre, would be enough. There would be no requirement to make any further effort by looking in the newspapers, following up openings and seeking information from employers. The Government believe that that cannot be right for the taxpayer, employers and, indeed, for unemployed people themselves.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) made much of the point of the provision. She tried to accuse the Government of forcing people on to low pay. That is not its point; I must underline that.

Mr. Battle: Since we debated last year's legislation, unemployment has risen in my constituency, and wages are going down from the figures that I quoted for the jobcentre in Bramley last year. That very jobcentre closed yesterday.

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Gentleman always makes strong points about his constituency interest.

I hope to cover some of the points the hon. Gentleman made. The Government wish to motivate and encourage people to take positive steps back into the world of work. Of course, we recognise that we must help people as well. That goes some way to meeting the concerns felt by the hon. Gentleman. That is why we have introduced the biggest ever training programme—employment training—to equip the unemployed, in partnership with employers in the new training and enterprise councils, for the jobs that are available now and are crying out to be done. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) that at a time of record growth in employment, with the number of people in work increasing to 26·4 million in September last year—demographic factors are contributing to the demand for labour—it is extraordinary that the Opposition should choose to send out such a negative and depressing message.

During the passage of the Bill last year, the Opposition could at least plead that they wished to preserve their attitude until they had seen the regulations and been convinced that the new provisions would, as we assured

[Mrs. Shephard]

the Committee, be applied flexibly and fairly. We now have the regulations: it is clear that they allow adjudication officers to take into account all the circumstances of a case in deciding whether a claimant has taken reasonable steps to find work.

The evidence available to us is that people are being treated flexibly and fairly. From 9 October 1989 to 26 January 1990, 11,400 claimants were issued with warning letters for failing to seek work actively, and there is a rising trend in the number of claimants warned about inadequate job search. Most claimants have reacted positively; the employment service reports that an increased rate of entry into job clubs has been maintained, and it has had a number of reports attributing improvements in the number of people entering other training or employment programmes to the new provisions. About 15 per cent. of the claimants warned need to be referred to adjudication officers for consideration of disallowance, but early feedback suggests that there has been little criticism of the operation of the new arrangements. In short, the early signs are that the changes seem to have delivered the changes that we sought within the fair and flexible framework that the legislation provides.

Obviously, we recognise that the skills and abilities and the physical or mental limitations of an unemployed person play an important part in his ability to find work. We want adjudication officers to take local labour market conditions and a person's work experience fully into account in deciding whether a claimant has taken reasonable steps to find work. That was stressed during the Bill's Committee stage last year. The workings of the regulations bear out the Government's emphasis on that point.

We understand that the unemployed want to spend their time usefully by studying or by undertaking voluntary work. That was the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe). If he examines the regulations, he will see the arrangements to allow voluntary work to be taken into account by adjudication officers. The current legislation takes account of all those factors, and also enables the unemployed to engage in other socially desirable activities—for example, as lifeboat men or firemen—or, in the case of the blind, to attend a course of training in the use of guide dogs. Clearly, the Government have not forgotten people with special problems. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment is currently reviewing his Department's services for people with disabilities.

The Government continue to believe that participating in socially useful activities for the benefit of oneself or others and actively seeking work are not mutually exclusive. It is right that the law should allow us to warn the small but significant minority of people who have previously given up looking for work that, unless they take reasonable steps to find it, they will no longer qualify for benefit. Obviously, we will continue to monitor the implementation of all the October 1989 changes. To put the matter into context, only 0·1 per cent. of all unemployed people have been referred to adjudication officers under the provisions since October 1989.

The Government are encouraged that many people warned about inadequate job search have accepted the challenge, and that fuller use is being made of the services provided by the employment service to get more people back into work. The underlying strength of the economy has led to the creation of hundreds of thousands of new jobs; we want the unemployed to be encouraged and helped by the Government and by employers to take the initiative, and to seek out the job opportunities that are opening up.

The changes that we made last October have been accepted by the vast majority of people, including the unemployed, as simply common sense. I have no hesitation in asking the House to reject the new clause.

Question put and negatived.

New Clause 20

CHILD BENEFIT

'In section 1 of the Child Benefit Act 1975, after subsection (2) there shall be inserted the following subsections—

"(2A) Child benefit shall continue to be paid as in May 1987, and direct to the mother.

(2B) In subsection (2A) above, 'as in May 1987' means at rates which have at least the same value as in May 1987 in relation to the general level of prices obtaining in Great Britain.".'.

Brought up, and read the First time.

Ms. Short: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The purpose of the new clause is to maintain child benefit in its current form, paid directly to the main carer —usually the mother—but to make good the amount lost in the freeze between April 1988-89 and April 1989-90 and to index-link the benefit thereafter.

It is obvious that what we have just heard represented a deliberate attempt to prevent serious debate on child benefit. It illustrates the disgraceful way in which the Government have treated the Bill and the major issues that we sought to raise in the House. The Government are ashamed of their position on child benefit, and rightly so, because they are cutting the value of support for children throughout the country and enlarging the poverty trap for the low paid and for lone mothers.

We know that the Ministers are not in charge of their Department and have to do as the Treasury tells them. We know that in the past, along with some of the more decent elements of their party, they have been great supporters of child benefit, but such is their lust to hang on to office in a collapsing Government that they now attempt to justify the outrageous policy of cutting child benefit and then cutting it again to bring the benefit into disrepute and allow it to wither away. That, clearly, is the strategy which underpins the Government's actions, and it is entirely in breach of the manifesto on which they fought the last election.

It is impossible to place a different interpretation on the words on which each and every one of those Ministers fought the election. They said that child benefit would be paid "as now", and directly to the mother. "As now" must imply its value—it would be a joke to say that a benefit whose value had been reduced to almost nothing was being paid "as now". In cutting the benefit, the Government are breaking their faith with the electorate. They have been forced to guillotine the debate and to filibuster because they are so ashamed of what they have to say that they are not willing to say it to the House.

If there were time, I should like to go into some of the details of the Secretary of State's justification for the last freeze in child benefit. It does not bear scrutiny. He said:

> "take-home pay for those on average male earnings has already increased on the past year by some £16 a week, and will have been further increased by up to £3 a week for the great majority of families as a result of this month's reduction in national insurance contributions—indeed, more where both partners are working. The introduction of independent taxation next April will bring further improvements for many".—*[Official Report*, 25 October 1989, Vol. 158, c. 842.]

None of that stands up. First, independent taxation will not affect the majority of families with children. Secondly, increased male earnings do not necessarily go to mothers and their children, as a survey has shown. Thirdly, two-earner couples gain more from a general increase in gross earnings levels and reductions in national insurance contributions than do one-earner couples.

The Government's position is indefensible. All the rhetoric from the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State about their new-found concern for lone parents in need of assistance to avoid the poverty trap is flatly contradicted by what they are doing to child benefit. Child benefit is the one benefit which helps low-paid workers —and, in particular, lone parents—to get off benefit and into work, because they take the benefit with them. The vast majority of lone parents live in poverty, as do their children. They are trapped in that condition because there are no jobs available which pay enough, because the Government have desperately, urgently and thoroughly encouraged low pay in the economy. The erosion of child benefit will increase the already rising proportion of lone-parent families trapped on benefit.

I am sorry that a number of hon. Members have been deprived of the opportunity to speak—not least by the ignorant, stupid and ill-informed speech of the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) on the previous new clause. He was obviously dragged into the Chamber by the Whips to talk about something about which he knew nothing and to prevent serious debate by filibustering.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms. Short: Certainly not—the hon. Gentleman would not do so—and I will not withdraw what I said either.

Mr. Hughes: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I do not expect civility from the hon. Lady. However, I make speeches when I choose and not when anyone else asks me to, so her suggestion is outrageous.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): That is a point for debate, not a point of order.

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Tony Newton): The hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) should realise two things. First, had we wished to prevent her from raising the matter, it would have been easy. The fact that she has been able to raise the matter is a sign that her suggestions about my hon. Friends are unfounded. The House must have thought that what she just said about my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) was outside the conventions of this place. Secondly, I have manifestly not had the opportunity, despite having a substantial set of remarks, to make the speech that I would have wished to make in response to the hon. Lady. It seems sensible, therefore, for us to proceed to the Division that the hon. Lady evidently wishes to have.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): Does the Secretary of State agree with the analysis of child benefit offered by the previous Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), in the Friday debate a few weeks ago——

It being Seven o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded, pursuant to the order [29 March], to put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

The House divided: Ayes 211, Noes 305.

Division No. 154] **[7.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*

Litherland, Robert
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Sillars, Jim
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Martyn Jones.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*

Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Alastair Goodlad and
Mr. Tom Sackville.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 3

REDUCED EARNINGS ALLOWANCE AND RETIREMENT ALLOWANCE

Mr. Flynn (Newport, West): I beg to move amendment No. 6, in page 4, line 20, leave out clause 3.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Government amendment No. 64.

7.15 pm

Mr. Flynn: Clause 3 is at the heart of the Bill and seeks to extinguish entitlement to reduced earnings allowance. The amendment, by contrast, seeks to extinguish the clause.

The clause represents an obvious cut in benefit. To introduce some of the Government's promised reforms —the disablement employment credit and the disablement allowances—the Government must first cut. They are robbing Peter to pay Peter. This follows the Treasury's edict, which has dominated the 11 years of Thatcher's misrule in social security—that any apparent improvement must be self-financing. To reward the disabled with long overdue benefits, they must first be robbed of existing benefits.

Even on the Government's own figures, the abolition of reduced earnings allowance will reduce benefits paid to the victims of industrial accidents and diseases by £41 million in 1992-93, rising to £130 million in the year 2001-2 and to £150 million in the year 2025-26. These figures are almost certainly a gross underestimate because they are based on unrealistic assumptions of the rate of increase in earnings, but even if they are correct they represent a ferocious cut in the incomes of disabled people.

Reduced earnings allowance is an important benefit in terms of the considerable numbers of people affected, of its great value and of the reason for which it is paid. It is received by 146,000 disabled people—a number that has scarcely changed in the past 20 years—so the Government are not obliterating a minor, arcane, anachronistic benefit payable only to a handful of people. It is important to remember that for more than half of those who receive it, it is their only compensation from the industrial injuries scheme.

What is the value of the benefit? In theory, it varies with a loss of earning capacity, but as the maximum allowance for 1990-91 in £30·54, and the loss of earnings generally is far more than that, the maximum is payable in most cases. At least 120,000 people will lose more than £30 per week from the abolition of the REA.

What is the purpose of the benefit? In 1948, our predecessors in this place wisely introduced the allowance, and their reasons for so doing are as compelling today as they were then. Loss of earnings is still specifically excluded from the factors taken into account in assessing entitlement to basic industrial disablement pensions. Since 1986, no disablement pension has been paid at all if a disability is less than 14 per cent., but even a relatively minor disability which does not qualify a person for disablement pension can result in a critical loss of earnings. The REA provides a modest but entirely justified level of compensation for that loss.

In Committee, the Minister produced some eccentric counterfeit arguments to pretend that REA was both unnecessary and a duplication of other provision. He cited the extreme case of a man whose earnings had dropped from £350 per week to £300 per week, as though it was self-evident that such a person did not need REA. But if such a man is sufficiently disabled not to be able to return to a previous job and his earnings have fallen by £50 per week, REA of £30 is probably the only compensation to which he is entitled, so how can it possibly be argued that he does not need it?

What about a man whose income was slashed not from £350 to £300, but from £250 to £200, or a woman whose earnings dropped from £200 to £150, or a man or a woman whose earnings may have dropped not by £50 per week but by £100 a week or even more? There are many such cases. Can it really be the Government's view that such people do not need the £30 allowance?

The Minister also claimed that most REA recipients who cannot work receive invalidity benefits, which he described as an anomalous overlap—a phrase which occurs in the White Paper. If it is an overlap, it has not been regarded as one of any insignificance by anyone in the past 40 years. Is it an overlap? Invalidity benefit, including the highest rate of invalidity allowance, is only £56·90 a week in the current year. Even when allowances for a non-earning spouse and children are added to the total, it is still far below the average take-home pay of the average

[Mr. Flynn]

manual worker. There is no question of over-compensation for the loss of earnings. In the vast majority of cases, there is immense under-compensation. The £30 allowance fills only a small part of the gap.

The only component of invalidity benefit which could conceivably be regarded as overlapping with REA is the earnings-related addition payable under the Social Security Pensions Act 1975, but that is to be abolished under clause 4. The argument that two benefits overlap may justify abolishing one of them, but it can never justify abolishing both. That would be an act of unbridled meanness, but that is what the Bill appears to do.

Very little is left. The clause is a malign, crude attempt to save money by picking the pockets of those who have suffered the afflictions of industrial accidents and diseases. The defence that the cut is part of a package of measures to improve the lot of disabled people is false. The Government claim that it will increase spending on disability benefits up to the turn of the century, but that claim is almost certainly unjustified because of the Government's unrealistic assumptions about the increase in average earnings.

Some disabled people will gain from some of the changes proposed in the White Paper when they come, but only a minority of those entitled to REA will qualify for the proposed new benefits. Those who cannot work will lose both REA and earnings-related invalidity benefit. Among those who can work, some may qualify for the means-tested disability employment credit, but that benefit is expected to reach only about 50,000 people in total. If as many as half those who now qualify for REA are reached, which is most unlikely, that would account for only one sixth of the present total of REA recipients.

The unfairness of discriminating in this way against the victims of industrial injuries is all the greater because, until now, industrial injuries benefits have always been part of the national insurance scheme, financed out of contributions to the scheme and paid for by employers and employees. In Committee, the Minister invented a convenient theory that the benefits were non-contributory, so no breach of contract was involved in their abolition. He wrote to me on that subject and there is no point in re-running the argument, but if the Minister still adheres to the same view, he should have a quiet word with his statisticians. In their annual publication, "Social Security Statistics", they list industrial disablement benefit clearly under the heading "Contributory Benefits".

The abolition of REA is almost the last stage in the process of dismantling the industrial injury benefit scheme. There might be some justification for that if the benefits were to be replaced by equally generous provision for all disabled people, regardless of the cause of disability, but that is not what the Government propose. On the contrary, they are engaged in a massive cost-cutting, cost-juggling exercise in recycling money, in which the victims of industrial accidents and diseases will be among the greatest losers.

Mr. Scott: My first point was touched on by the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn). The provision that we have included in the Bill needs to be seen in the wider context of the Government's overall provision. What we have tried to do is to produce a package of measures that will significantly alter the balance of provision for disabled people within the overall provision. By 1992, when disability employment credit and disability allowance are in place, we shall have addressed the needs of the disabled population as a whole much more effectively. We shall be addressing in particular the needs of those among the disabled who suffer the most disabling of incapacities, particularly people who are disabled from birth or early in life who do not have the capacity to build up entitlement to contributory benefits.

I make no secret of the fact that some of our proposals are specifically designed to redress the balance and direct resources to areas of greater need. The hon. Gentleman acknowledged that that was the approach that I took in Committee. The ending of entitlement to reduced earnings allowance for new claimants is a sensible measure which forms part of the overall strategy. I stress that the change relates to new entitlements. All existing REA entitlements will be preserved and uprated in future under the rules that apply now.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that we were trying to abolish the industrial preference altogether. He is jumping the gun substantially. I have no intention of doing that. I cannot say that there will not be further changes in the industrial injuries benefit system or amendments to the industrial preference, but the clause is not part of a long-term strategy to remove that preference. Sensibly, we are adjusting the balance between different aspects of provision for disabled people.

It is true that the preferences available to the industrially disabled are at present significant and go some way beyond the provisions available to other disabled people. What is more, the benefits are tax-free, non-contributory and generally payable in addition to other benefits, unless they are means-tested, in which case they would be partially disregarded. Furthermore, the benefits are payable whether or not the beneficiary is working. In consequence, someone who receives maximum industrial injuries benefits, along with invalidity benefit and mobility allowance, could have a net weekly income of over £250. That compares with take-home pay of £156 a week for a married man on average manual earnings.

It is not surprising that industrial injuries benefit recipients are not only better off than comparable benefit recipients but, when looking at the population as a whole, are more likely to be found in the middle or upper parts of income distribution.

Within the overall framework of industrial injuries provision, reduced earnings allowance may be paid where a person's earning capacity suffers as a direct result of an industrial accident or disease. However, a person does not have to be severely disabled to receive the allowance. Only 1 per cent. disablement is required to qualify. In the majority of cases, the least disabled benefit from that provision.

I conclude by emphasising two points. First, I reiterate that present beneficiaries and new entitlements established before the Bill becomes law are protected. They will continue to receive REA as long as they fulfil the qualifying conditions and the benefit will be uprated on the same basis as now. I emphasise again that this is part of a wider consideration of the balance of provision among disabled people generally. All hon. Members who consider the matter fairly will look forward to 1992, when the disability allowance and disability employment credit are available. They will represent significant steps in meeting the needs of disabled people that have long been campaigned on but which we have not been able to meet. The clause is part of the way in which we shall introduce those two new benefits.

Mr. Allen McKay: I wish to ask the Minister several specific questions about the reduced earnings allowance and other matters that I have raised before. I accept that existing beneficiaries will continue to qualify. That means that new claimants will not be able to receive reduced earnings allowance.

Many people in industry, particularly my industry of mining, have, over the years, relied upon the reduced earnings allowance. I have persuaded people who were obviously unfit to continue their present work to take on lighter duties either on the surface of the colliery or underground. The availability of REA encouraged those people to leave the work of which they were no longer capable. Previously, many had attempted to carry on because they were worried about a reduction in their earnings. The onset of an industrial disease or the suffering of an industrial accident had a traumatic effect on households with on-going commitments as they realised that their earnings would be reduced. Sometimes such families fell into debt. Until that time, the worker felt that, to all intents and purposes, his working life would continue until he was 65.

7.30 pm

The Bill will take us back to the days before REA was available and it will encourage people to stay in work for which they are unfit. As a result, their injuries or industrial disease will worsen. The Bill is a step backwards. We do not know what 1992 will bring, but I know what the Bill will bring. The person injured or suffering from an industrial disease will henceforth ask himself whether he can afford to leave his work, given that that could cause problems at home. He will have to decide whether to continue in his present work in the certainty that his industrial disease or the injury that he sustained will worsen. If that happened, the cost to the social fund and to the welfare fund would be greater than REA in the long run as the need for care would be so much greater.

A person in low-paid work does not pay so much towards his retirement as he would were he in high-technology work. The fact that REA carried on in retirement until the age of 70 compensated for the loss of superannuation and works pension as a result of injury or disease. That allowance encouraged people to leave work for which they were unfit and to have a better, and probably longer life. It also ensured that the effect of the loss of earnings was cushioned until the age of 70. It is important to reconsider the Bill in the light of those arguments.

It is one thing to look to the future and another to say that existing beneficiaries will not be affected. There is a gap that could cover a lot of people in and out of work. We should fill that gap.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): I have to make a contribution now, because it is obvious that the Government are taking us back to the 1930s. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Oh, yes. I listened to what the Minister had to say and he knows how far my age group goes back. I well remember the bad old days in the mining industry to which my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) referred. I remember the serious injuries and diseases from which miners suffered. My hon. Friend was also right to talk about a reduction in earnings.

Who do the Government think they are kidding? We have been around a long time. It was under a Conservative Government that all the problems first occurred in the mining industry. That happened when I was young. The Minister is not helping to make things any better.

Many people will be shoved on to the scrap heap because they cannot carry out their normal work. The Government are not helping people who suffer an industrial accident or from an industrial disease. They are clobbering such people. I know that the Minister is trying to kid me; he has done it before and is doing it again tonight. I warn him that the workers out there will not like it. The Minister and the Prime Minister have told us that many such workers voted Conservative last time. They will have second thoughts because of the Bill, never mind the poll tax.

I am not satisfied with what the Minister had to say. Never mind the benefits the Minister described, which he believes will encourage workers to leave unsuitable work. Those workers will be chucked on the scrap heap and they will be unable to find another job anywhere else, because no one will be prepared to take them on. People who have suffered an industrial accident or caught a serious industrial disease should be properly looked after by us. It is a high time that the Government rethought their policy on this. We shall do that for them when we are over there on the Government Benches. After the next election we will put things right, make no mistake about it. Perhaps the Minister will not be here to see it happen.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): The hon. Gentleman will not be here.

Mr. Haynes: That is true; I am retiring at the next election. The Parliamentary Private Secretary is opening his mouth behind the Minister when he should be keeping quiet. He is making snide remarks at me, but I have already announced my retirement. I note that the hon. Gentleman has just nipped off to get some advice for the Minister.

I shall not be here after the next election because I belong to a particular age group, but I shall keep my eye on this place, there is no doubt about that. I shall keep my eye on how these Tories react in Opposition when the Labour Government do all kinds of marvellous things.

Mr. Marshall *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Haynes: I note the hon. Gentleman is shaking his head. Does he want to make an intervention? Apparently not. The hon. Gentleman is busy shaking his head and making snide remarks to the Minister instead of getting up and being honest with himself and the House.

The hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) has heard how I feel about the Bill, following what the Minister said. I am not pleased with what he said, nor am I pleased with him. He should have used a different tone and said different things. Most of my colleagues now in the Chamber were employed at one time in heavy industry. We know what it is all about. I bet the Minister has never had a shovel in his hand.

Mr. Scott: I have.

Mr. Haynes: He probably used it to make a fire, but I am talking about real work and a No. 10 shovel. That shovel is as big as a table top.

Some of the poor lads in the mining industry all those years ago suffered under the coal owners and the Minister and the Government are trying to take the mining industry back to those times with all their legislation. We do not accept the Bill.

If the Minister is on the Opposition Benches after the next election he will see what we will do in the interests of poor people who cannot help themselves, particularly those who have given a lifetime to industry and who are seriously hurt or who catch a serious industrial disease as a result. We will help those people and we shall not scratch round for a copper or two like the Government. We will treat them properly and pay them what they are entitled to receive. Those people have made their contribution to our economy so that we might enjoy the benefits. They must be looked after properly, but the Minister has not offered such help tonight. I felt that I had to tell him that.

Mr. Scott: I thank the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) for his journey down memory lane. We are all disappointed that he will not be here after the next election. I do not know whether he saw Black Adder last night, or was it the night before——

Mr. Haynes: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. What the Minister has just said is not true. If I were to stand at the next election he would want me to lose my seat. He should be honest about it.

Mr. Scott: Obviously, I retain my partisan approach to the political struggle, but in terms of personal affection and admiration, I shall be sorry to see the hon. Gentleman go. I wonder whether his ghost will come back to haunt us and his vibrant tones resound across the Chamber. Certainly, he will be with us in our imagination.

The hon. Gentleman caricatured the Government's approach to these problems. He knows as well as I do that while this Government have been in office, benefits for the long-term sick and disabled have almost doubled in real terms—£4 billion extra has been put into provision for them—and that we are continuing to provide £500 million a year for the industrially injured under the special scheme designed for them. Therefore, nobody is neglecting them, but, as I tried to say in my earlier intervention, we are trying to adjust the scheme to make better provision across the range of people who suffer from disabilities.

The hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) asked me two specific questions, one of which involved retirement allowance. People may be entitled to invalidity allowance on top of invalidity pension. Those who do not receive invalidity benefit, but qualify for severe disablement allowance, will be entitled to the new age-related addition, included in the Social Security Bill, which increases payments to them. Any provision in retirement must be seen against the general improvement in the standard of living of pensioners overall during the past 10 years.

The total net income of pensioners has increased by 31 per cent. during this Government. Anyone who goes out and about knows that there has been, on average—I emphasise, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, that we acknowledge that this is an average—significant improvement in the standard of living and net income of pensioners while we have been in office. We want that to continue and particularly wish to address the needs of pensioners who have been unable to gain access to that increase in their standard of living or net income. We have done that by producing special packages to meet their needs.

Mr. Kennedy: I wish to make a small point, one that has often been made in this place. When the Minister talks about real net increases in pensioners' income, he must remember that it has to be set in the context of the break in the link with earnings and the massive difficulties that that has caused over the years. He talked about us going round the country and listening to what pensioners were saying. I am sure that they would not deny any of the increases that they have been given, but they were rightly riled about the fundamental break which has devalued all the other additions that the Government have made.

Mr. Scott: I do not want to drift out of order by entering a more general debate on the standard of living of those in retirement.

Mr. Kennedy: The Minister introduced the issue.

Mr. Scott: Indeed I did. The point of the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone should be seen against the background of the general improvement in living standards which nobody can deny. The standard of living should not be seen just against the state retirement pension, which the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye mentioned. It should be seen against the spread of occupational pensions and the increased income for pensioners from savings in recent years. All those factors have contributed to the overall increase in pensioners' living standards. We should not forget that when we discuss this issue.

Mr. Allen McKay: There are a number of flaws in the Minister's argument. We could disagree about the real level of pensions, but that is another argument. My argument was that reduced earnings allowance also made up for the loss of earning capacity and pension benefits. Irrespective of whether the Minister argues that living standards should be seen against that background, those people's incomes have been reduced. Occupational pensions are based on a person's last 12 months' earnings, which will be reduced if reduced earnings allowance is abolished. The occupational pensions will be based on a reduced earning capacity and will not take into account the addition of hardship allowance or reduced earnings allowance, as the Government prefer to call it. They need increased benefits to make up for the loss of earnings.

7.45 pm

Mr. Scott: I acknowledge that new cases will be unable to receive reduced earnings allowance, but a casual reading of the hon. Gentleman's contribution might suggest that we are taking away present entitlements from those entitled to reduced earnings allowance. As I said earlier, not only entitlements gained up to the present, but those gained before the Bill receives Royal Assent, will be preserved.

I take seriously the hon. Gentleman's other point, but I hope that I can persuade him that it is not as relevant as he suggested. I appreciate the argument. When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I met the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council, which represents the Trades Union Congress, the Confederation of British Industry and other experts, the point was made that somebody in a particular job might contract a condition which, if he continued in that occupation, would endanger his long-term health. In that case, he could be moved to another job in the company and receive REA to top up his income. When we pressed for evidence that that was a problem, the only evidence that we received was anecdotal. There was no real evidence to show that that was a major problem.

The vast majority of REA recipients are not in work in the first place and therefore would not be covered by that provision. There may be the odd case, but I do not think that the provision of REA is likely to be a decisive factor when an employee decides whether to leave his job and find something less arduous which does not leave him open to the conditions that led to his contracting a particular disease.

Even with high earnings, if disability is assessed at 14 per cent. or more, disablement benefit is payable. The hon. Gentleman knows a lot about the mining industry and I highly respect his knowledge. For the three major respiratory diseases common in the mining industry, and one or two others, disablement benefit does not have the 14 per cent. cut-off point, but is payable right down to the 1 per cent. scale. Notwithstanding the fact that disablement benefit is paid as a form of compensation, it is surely right to recognise that, in comparisons of pre and post-accident earnings, disablement benefit makes a contribution to people's income.

Therefore, I still stand by the Government's decision that clause 3 is an important part of a package of measures that will enable us, once we have introduced the two new benefits, to make much better provision and tilt the balance towards those who in recent years have been neglected by the provision—for example, those disabled from birth or early in life. This is a necessary part of that package.

Mr. Flynn: Traditionally, for the purposes of paying this benefit, a distinction was made between those suffering industrial injuries or diseases, and those suffering problems from birth—who had been short-changed by nature—because for so long those who suffered industrial disease were normally the breadwinners in the family. We now know that there is an equally compelling case to provide similar benefits for others who have never worked. That is accepted as a normal, civilising advance which can be seen in almost every country in Europe which try to help disabled people in that way. Sadly, the Government believe that the only way of achieving this is to give to the severely disabled by cutting the allowances to those who are slightly disabled.

While my hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) reminded us of the past—we are all aware of the crippling diseases contracted as an unwanted bonus by many people in mining and other industries—it is not reasonable to suggest that this is over or done with; in the new industries, even more crippling and sinister diseases are emerging. We heard recently of the 500 cases of radiation exposure, unknown and unsuspected in workers in the nuclear industry. There was a programme on "Scottish Eye" about the silicon industry, where again unsuspected problems are arising and unexpected diseases appearing.

I can remember vividly when I started out on my career in laboratories how many of the reagents that we used were regarded as benign, such as benzine and carbon tetrachloride; we splashed them about and used them for degreasants and so on. We now know that these reagents are viciously carcinogenic and that in consequence there is a short life for those who work in laboratories.

The justification for this REA continues. It is a bleak indictment of the Government that, after this long period of trying to introduce proper allowances for the disabled —the five years of waiting for the reports to start and the five years waiting for them to be published—the Government have promised that they will help the disabled, they have trailed the news, they have announced it and re-announced it, and now we find that it is only to come in at the expense of other disabled people.

We would like to press this tonight, but we are aware of the other problems. On second thoughts, another bolt of lightning has struck me and, because of the force of the arguments, we would like to press this to a division.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 186, Noes 262.

Division No. 155] **[7.51 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hardy, Peter
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ingram, Adam
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Litherland, Robert

Livingstone, Ken
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walley, Joan
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Hayes and
Mr. Robert N. Wareing.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
McCrindle, Robert
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, Sir John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman

Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Nicholas Baker.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment made: No. 64, in page 5, line 28, leave out "'and' and insert "'or'.—*[Mr. Scott.]*

Clause 4

COMPUTATION OF ADDITIONAL PENSION FOR PURPOSES OF INVALIDITY PENSION ETC.

Mr. Flynn: I beg to move amendment No. 7, in page 5, line 33, leave out clause 4.

Clause 4 proposes to abolish the earnings-related invalidity pension provided under the Social Security Pensions Act 1975. The White Paper "The Way Ahead" deliberately concealed the true extent of the losses that the long-term sick will suffer. It admits that by the end of the century, 10 years from now, they will be losing £350 million a year—money that the White Paper claims will be spent on other benefits for the sick and the disabled. However, it says nothing about the enormously greater losses that will build up over 20 or 30 years—and those are legitimate advance periods for the consideration of social security.

The truth about those losses emerged only in reply to parliamentary questions. The Minister was forced to admit that, by the year 2025-26, the long-term sick would be losing not only £350 million a year but £1,825 million —more than five times as much. Some of that will be replaced by means-tested benefits, but the net loss will be £1,300 million. According to the Government's figures, only a quarter of that additional sum will be used to pay for the other changes in disability benefits. The other quarters will be a straight cut in spending on the long-term sick and disabled.

It is hard to know how the Government can possibly justify that cut. Exposed before us is the gulf between reality and rhetoric. Even Ministers have not had the gall to suggest that invalidity benefit is too generous in relation to the needs of the long-term sick. The basic rate for the coming year is only £46·90, to which is added an age-related allowance varying from nil to a maximum of £10 a week. The earnings-related pension scheme, when it is fully mature, will add less than 20 per cent. of an individual's earnings, so that, even in the next century, very few people will receive more than half their previous earnings during long-term sickness.

It should be remembered that those benefit levels were not inherited, in the mythology of the Conservative party, from a profligate Labour Government. What is being cut now is a system that has already suffered a great deal. It is all that is left after the savage cuts already inflicted by the Government. The basic benefit has been frozen since 1980, when the link with average earnings was broken. The earnings-related addition was cut by more than one third by the Social Security Act 1986. The Opposition tabled an amendment to that aimed specifically at mitigating its effects on the value of earnings-related invalidity benefit. The then Under-Secretary, who now rejoices in the role of Chancellor of the Exchequer, gave the reply:

> "The proposals that we have put forward are reasonable, affordable and fair as between pensioner, taxpayer and national insurance payer."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B;* 25 February 1986, c. 401.]

The Minister was asked in Committee why, if they were affordable then, they are not affordable now. If they were fair between pensioner, taxpayer and national insurance payer three years ago, why has the position changed? There was no answer from the Minister, but the change is the fact that the Minister is looking for money and is scratching around everywhere to fund the Government's much-vaunted new scheme to help the disabled. That is what has suddenly transformed the position.

The Government have produced another argument for the massive reduction in benefits for the long-term sick —the growth of long-term occupational sick pay schemes. The evidence on which they base that is a weighty report by IFF Research Ltd. and published by the Department in 1988.

The report contains a great deal of information, from which the Government have selected one figure to support their case. It is that the coverage of long-term occupational sick pay schemes has risen to nearly 60 per cent. In Committee I quoted, I believe, nearly every conclusion in that report. I was rather unfairly accused by the Minister of quoting selectively because, having re-read the report, I still can find no other conclusions. I will not repeat them all tonight.

The 60 per cent. coverage does not mean that six out of 10 people suffering from long-term illness receive sick pay from their employers—far from it. The IFF Research report shows that only 4 per cent. of private sector firms in hazardous industries—construction, mining and quarrying—have a long-term sick pay scheme, and another 3 per cent. say that they might make discretionary payments if the employees are lucky. The other 93 per cent. accept no responsibility at all for long-term sickness.

The report also shows that over one third of the schemes exclude recent employees, generally for the first six to 12 months, when accidents are most likely to occur, and 43 per cent. of large firms' sick pay schemes exclude manual workers altogether. Even for those theoretically covered, entitlement to long-term sick pay often depends on the cause of sickness. There is a great deal of picking and choosing in this matter and a very wide range of exclusions, ranging from drug or alcohol abuse to sporting injuries.

When long-term sick pay is paid, it is limited in both its amount and its duration, and only 12 per cent. of schemes provide full basic pay. Even in the public sector, which has been the pacemaker in this field, as in so many others, two out of three schemes have a time limit on them. It may indeed be true that 60 per cent. of employees work for employers with some kind of long-term sick pay arrangement, but it seems very clear that most of the 60 per cent., if they fall sick, will get no long-term sick pay at all. The rest may get something, depending on the reason for their illness.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Is the hon. Gentleman saying that people who have deliberately misused themselves by drug or alcohol abuse ought to be getting that sort of thing from their employers?

Mr. Flynn: I am saying that there should be universal benefits. That has been the principle behind the social security system in this country and in every other country. One could equally argue, and I think that it has been argued in some barbarous circles, that people who are ill as a result of drug abuse should not be treated, although we make different judgments for acceptable drugs, such as alcohol and cigarettes. We have a pension scheme, and we are not in a position to make judgments on how people fell into ill health. That would be treading on very dangerous ground. We need a highly effective scheme, which must cover those who are in it for all eventualities.

The case I quoted showed one of the defects of many occupational schemes, but the hon. Lady is unfair if she is considering that rather than all the others. We know that the occupational schemes are inferior in many ways, and I quoted a long list. We certainly cannot make a judgment on people because of the way in which they acquired their illness. I believe that hon. Members of all parties would find that an intolerable course of action.

So, while it may be true that 60 per cent. of employees work for employers with some kind of long-term sick pay arrangement, it seems clear that most of that 60 per cent., if they fall sick, will get no long-term sick pay at all. The rest may get something, depending on the reason for the illness, but it will not be any substitute for the invalidity benefit that they will lose if clause 4 is enacted.

We are arguing that there is now a universal benefit that is paid without prejudice, and the excuse being given for withdrawing it is that occupational pay schemes are widespread. The occupational pay schemes are woefully inadequate in many directions.

8.15 pm

Mr. Scott: The amendment would delete clause 4. The hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) sought to argue that the Government proposals to curtail entitlement to additional pension with invalidity benefit after 1991 should not be proceeded with despite the fact that, as I explained in Committee more than once, they form an important part of our package for the new provision for disabled people in our society.

I acknowledge, of course, that if the savings are projected into the next century they look pretty massive, but by the time one gets there all sorts of other arguments will no doubt have entered into the dispute across the Floor of the House. It is undeniable also that those savings, having been acquired through this provision, which I shall justify in a moment, will give whoever has my job at that time some scope for manoeuvre. Certainly, within the economy overall, there will be room for manoeuvre and for the redeployment of those sums of money.

Unless I misheard the hon. Gentleman, he suggested that in some way the Government were intending to cut the overall provision in the area of disability. He knows as well as I do that every year from now to the end of the century there will be extra resources above those previously announced in this area, peaking at some £300 million. In my judgment, the extra money will be put into this provision in a much better structured and balanced manner than at the moment.

The hon. Gentleman gave quite a lot of figures and I will begin my response by giving a few of my own. Since 1979 the number of people entitled to invalidity benefit has almost doubled—from 600,000 to just under 1·2 million—and expenditure has risen in cash terms from £840 million to £3·8 billion. Moreover, if we take spending over the whole range of social security benefits payable to the long-term sick and disabled, as I said on the earlier amendment, it has increased by some £4 billion in real terms. That is a pretty substantial record and the whole house should recognise that. We can all speculate about what has led to the tremendous increase in the take-up of invalidity benefit over that period, but this is not perhaps the time to go into that, unless other hon. Members wish to intervene and make a point.

On invalidity benefit, the current average payment of additional pension is £9 a week, with a maximum of some £41 a week. As I said in Committee, this costs some £450 million a year and it is estimated that, if we went on in the same way, by 1998 the average weekly payment of additional pension would rise to £21 a week, with a maximum of £84, and the annual cost would rise to a staggering £1·6 billion. All this is on top of the basic invalidity pension and the invalidity allowance.

So, in considering the future structure of benefits available for the disabled, we needed to consider whether continued expenditure on this scale was a sensible use of available resources when set against other priorities in provision for disabled people. Our conclusion was that it was not, for two main reasons.

First—I apologise to the House for repeating this, but I must emphasise it very strongly and I believe it personally very strongly—a major aim in the proposals set out in our paper, "The Way Ahead", is to provide more help for those disabled at birth or early in life. The whole House ought to agree with that objective. If we allowed additional pension to grow as alarmingly as I have outlined, we would be further widening the gap between those who have been able to work and those who have not.

Secondly, as the hon. Member for Newport, West agreed, occupational sick pay cover is growing. I agree with him that it is uneven at present, but nobody can doubt that its coverage is extending at a steady rate. Coverage has tripled in the last 15 years, and there was no dispute about that in Committee.

As I emphasised in Committee, the tighter employment situation in which we shall find ourselves in the coming few decades will make employers more willing to offer packages including provision for long-term sickness and disability to attract people into their work forces. Indeed, that will put extra bargaining weapons in the hands of trade unions negotiating packages for their members in large-scale enterprises. They should find it easier to negotiate this type of provision because in the coming years there will be great competition for skills. We can therefore look forward to seeing that uneven provision evened out and further extended in the years ahead, and that will be a good development.

Those are the two main reasons which led us to make our proposals in "The Way Ahead" for the curtailment of additional pension for invalidity benefit and the introduction as a consequence of the two new benefits—the disability allowance and the disability employment credit. They will make for better balanced provision in future.

The clause does not affect existing rights to additional pension. All the rights built up in the years up to and including the 1990-91 tax year will be preserved, whenever the claim for invalidity pension is made, however far in the future that may be. Moreover, such additional pension will continue to be subject to revaluation uprating in exactly the same way as at present.

That all means that, even with the provisions in clause 4, the cost of additional pension will still grow from the present £450 million to £1·3 billion in the next 10 years. The provisions in clause 4 are consistent with the Government's overall strategy for future provision for disabled people. I urge the House to reject the amendment.

Mr. Battle: The Minister put a gloss on his remarks to emphasise the positive side of what the Government are doing. His phrase "uneven development" may be nearer the truth. On the economic side, his analysis suggests that there will be competition for much-needed skills in the work force in future, but at the same time there could continue to develop—it is developing now—a low-wage economy, with more part-time, temporary and low-paid work. Let us be clear that there is uneven development in the employment sector.

The Minister said that there had been an alarming growth in the degree of invalidity pension. Let us remember that the basic benefit has been frozen since 1980, when the link with average earnings was broken. The earnings-related addition was cut by over a third by the Social Security Act 1986, so the Government cannot claim a gloriously progressive record on this issue.

We have waited a long time for the publication of "The Way Ahead." We had to press to get it, having been told that it would represent a proper survey of the needs of the long-term sick and disabled. We now have the proposals in the new integrated package, which appear to be fine. But part of the Government's strategy seems to involve deciding on a strategy, putting it to the Treasury and then resolving—if they discover that it will cost Government Departments, in particular the Department of Social Security, too much—to look to local authorities as a means of funding that package. That has happened in the past—for example, with housing benefit—and many would say that the social fund notion has involved shifting expenditure to the local level.

The Minister said that local authorities would be putting this package together in conjunction with the Government. On this of all days, we must wonder whether it will turn out to be a capped budget to prevent local expenses from escalating, the whole thing being partly controlled from the centre.

Mr. Scott: I fear that I may be losing the thread of the hon. Gentleman's argument. Is he talking about the community care arrangements? He cannot be talking about the additional pension when referring to local arrangements. Or is he perhaps referring to my previous remarks about the independent living fund?

Mr. Battle: I am questioning the whole structure of the scheme being planned by the Government. The ILF comes into it, but I am particularly concerned with disability benefit because the Minister said that there could be a gap before the introduction of the new benefit for disabled people. We must be sure that whatever emerges during that time will be adequate. Will the cost be borne by local authorities, controlled from the centre—like housing benefit, which is then repaid—or will there be a different budgeting arrangement? At present, central Government control the budget for benefits. I foresee a time when the integration of disabled benefit will mean the burden being pushed to the local level. In other words, local authorities could be expected to pick up the tab, thereby saving central Government the cost.

Clause 4 enables the Government to make savings. "The Way Ahead" concealed the extent to which the long-term sick would suffer as a result——

Mr. Scott: I interrupt the hon. Gentleman in the hope that I can help him while his line of argument is fresh in my mind. There is no intention that the general run of disability benefits should be provided other than centrally, but obviously there are elements of provision, of which community care is one, where a local judgment is likely to be more flexible and responsive to the needs of individuals than any centrally run system could be. But to suggest that we are pushing it off on to local authorities cannot be right.

A clear part of the commitment to community care policies is not only that the Department in which I am a Minister will transfer the reserves that are saved on the existing provision for residential care from our budget, and from our assumptions for an uprated budget—those will be transferred year by year via the Department of Health, presumably through the Department of the Environment, to local authorities so that they have the resources—but that the Secretary of State for Health will be seeking to provide extra resources to enable those policies for care in the community to operate effectively. So long as that provision is properly made and that transfer of resources is properly done—I am confident that that will happen—those decisions are better made at a local level than centrally.

Mr. Battle: I am grateful to the Minister for that intervention and I take it in good faith that that is his intention. We support the assessment of need being made locally, but we wish to be assured that the necessary funds will be underwritten. After all, a few hours ago in the Chamber the Secretary of State for the Environment capped the budgets of local authorities so that they could not meet their assessed needs.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Excess needs, not assessed needs.

Mr. Battle: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for that clarification. When the standard spending assessment was fixed for my city, we needed a meeting with the Secretary of State because the figure was reduced by the Government, as they had not taken into account the needs outlined at local level. In other words, the assessment at local level was overridden by the Government.

We must be assured that the funds will be available. The Minister said that resources from his Department and from the Department of Health would be transferred to local authorities. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will not be saying at some future date that local authority budgets will be capped in such a way that they will not be able to provide for the needs that have been assessed locally.

Otherwise, we feel that, as has happened with local housing, the service level and the policy of providing service will pass to local government but resources to fulfil those commitments will not be given, so the local

[Mr. Battle]

authorities cannot undertake the job. That would be a most cynical move, in this area of all areas. Therefore, I welcome the comments that the Minister has made in his intervention, but I hope that his colleagues in other Departments will be able to give such clear assurances.

8.30 pm

Mr. Flynn: The answer that the Minister gave was unsatisfactory. He again made a point, as he did in Committee, about how much extra spending will take place. He took me to task for suggesting that there would be a decrease. As the Minister knows, it is difficult to make an objective judgment about what will happen in future. Our reason for suggesting that there would be a decrease was the Government's unrealistic assumption about the growth of wages. It all depends who has the most accurate crystal ball that will give us the clearest picture of the future.

We suggest that what destroys the Government's case about extra spending is their ludicrous proposal that average earnings will increase by a mere couple of per cent. We shall continue to disagree with the Government on those issues and about what is likely to happen in the future. The purpose of tabling the last two amendments was to underline that the Government are not increasing spending on the disabled. They are recycling the money spent on the disabled just as much as they are ring-fencing housing payments to tenants on council estates.

The Government's philosophy is that, if there has to be an increase, there must be a complementary decrease in spending somewhere else. Today, we are trying to expose what is taking place to the House. We are trying to show that this is not an act of generosity. We are an aging population and we are more aware of disability than ever before. The disabled are keenly aware of all the awards and allowances that are made.

As the Minister said, we could talk at great length about why there has been an increase in the amount of money claimed by the disabled. We all welcome that increase without any reservations. However, we are looking forward to a more ambitious and generous reaction from the Government. We did not expect them to come up with this Bill. Although the Bill contains good things that we could welcome, we hope that those good things will be financed by new money and not by taking money from people with other problems.

Mr. Scott: As the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) knows, public expenditure figures are published on a three-year cycle. It is already clear that we will have extra provision above the public expenditure survey three-year period for the long-term sick and disabled. I said earlier in the debate that extra resources will be put in in each and every year to the end of the century. Looking beyond that, one is moving into crystal ball territory.

Extra resources are being committed and the Government's commitment and their record on providing extra resources for the disabled far exceeds that of previous Governments. We can be proud of what we are doing for the long-term sick and disabled in this country.

Mr. Flynn: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 5

LATE CLAIMS FOR WIDOW'S BENEFIT WHERE DEATH IS DIFFICULT TO ESTABLISH

Amendment made: No. 24, in page 6, line 42, leave out 'that section' and insert

'the section 165AA of that Act inserted by section *[Retrospective effect of section 165A of the principal Act]* above'.—*[Mr. Scott.]*

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I beg to move Amendment No. 68, in page 6, line 47, leave out 'his'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Government Amendments Nos. 69 to 74.

Mrs. Shephard: All these amendments fulfil a commitment that we gave in Committee. In this group of amendments, we undertook to see if the already beneficial provision proposed in clause 5 in Committee for widows could be extended to widows' invalidity pensions. I am happy to say that we have been able to do so.

To deal briefly with the background to the provision, we have been conscious of the difficulties faced by widows who, because of circumstances beyond their control, make a late claim for widow's benefit and then find themselves caught by the existing 12 months limitation on payment of arrears.

The type of case we have in mind—fortunately, there is a small number of such cases—is where the widow's claim is delayed more than 12 months because her husband has disappeared and there is a lengthy delay in the discovery of his body; or if his body is not found, when she has to rely instead on the presumption of death provisions. Such cases are fortunately rare, but they do exist; we felt it right and proper to make special provision for them, and we did so in the Bill. The clause provides that there shall be no limitation on the payment of arrears of widow's benefit where a claim which is late is made within 12 months of: the date on which the widow first knew of her husband's death, where his body has been found; or the date on which the adjudication authority gives a determination of presumption of death where no body has been found.

Also, because some of these women will be of pensionable age, the clause as drafted lifts the normal 12 months on review of earlier decisions awarding benefit. So that a woman receiving the married woman's lower rate of category B retirement pension, who establishes belatedly that she is in fact a widow, can have her pension reviewed to the higher rate appropriate to a widow, back to the date of widowhood.

I come now to the purpose of the proposed amendments. They extend the provision to two further benefits—thus going further than the commitment we gave in Committee.

First, we propose extending it to cover widows invalidity pension under section 15 of the Pensions Act. This is an alternative route to IVP for a widow who, although she is incapable of work when widowed, does not qualify on her own contributions. That was a specific matter of debate in Committee. It enables her to get invalidity benefit, exceptionally by using her late husband's contribution record—and would benefit the widow who was too young for a widow's pension at all or who perhaps has only a low rate of widow's pension because of her age when widowed. It would also benefit a widow whose late husband's contribution record entitled her to a higher rate of invalidity pension than her own record.

Secondly, a widow who remains incapable of work until pensionable age and who does not qualify for a category A retirement pension on her own contributions in the normal way can, exceptionally, become entitled on her late husband's contributions. Again, such cases are rare, but we accept the logic of extending that beneficial provision for women who are widowed in that particularly horrible way, to widows' invalidity pension and to the consequential retirement pension where appropriate.

These amendments extend a beneficial measure to more widows. I commend them to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 69, in, page 7, line 9, leave out from

'for' to 'by' in line 10 and insert 'any of the widowhood benefits, that is to say—

(i) widow's benefit,

(ii) an invalidity pension under section 15 of the Pensions Act, or

(iii) a Category A retirement pension by virtue of subsection (5) of that section,

was made or treated as made in respect of the death'.

No. 70, in page 7, line 14, leave out 'widow's' and insert 'a widowhood'.

No. 71, in page 7, line 35, leave out 'widow's' and insert 'a widowhood'.

No. 72, in page 7, line 43, leave out 'widow's' and insert 'widowhood'.

No. 73, in page 8, line 6, after 'benefit', insert—

'any invalidity pension under section 15 of the Pensions Act'.

No. 74, in page 8, line 10, leave out from 'for' to end of line 12 and insert—

'a widowhood benefit, within the meaning of section 165B below, which is made or treated as made by virtue of that section.'.—*[Mr. Scott.]*

Clause 7

THE PENSIONS OMBUDSMAN

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I beg to move amendment No. 36, in page 8, line 30, at end insert—

'(2) In the Tribunals and Inquiries Act 1971—

(a) in paragraph 23 of Schedule 1 (certain tribunals concerned with pensions to be under the general supervision of the Council) there shall be added at the end of the second column—

"(e) the Pensions Ombudsman established under Part IVA of the Social Security Pensions Act 1975 (c. 60) in respect of his functions under or by virtue of section 59C(2) of that Act."; and

(b) in section 8(2) (which specifies the paragraph numbers of the tribunals which are excepted from the requirement of concurrence to the removal of members) after "22" there shall be inserted "23(e)".'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: Government amendments Nos. 50 to 52 and 38.

Amendment No. 9, in page 22, line 43, after 'year,' insert—

'which may include a report on any case or cases in which he has made an investigation,'.

Government amendments Nos. 39 to 43, 53, 54, 44 to 46, 55, 47, 79, 50, 48, 80 and 81, 49 and 57.

Mrs. Shephard: This group of amendments also covers matters that were the subject of promises in Committee.

The effect of amendment No. 36 will be to include the pensions ombudsman in schedule 1 to the Tribunals and Inquiries Act 1971. That would mean that the council on tribunals would supervise that part of the ombudsman's jurisdiction which deals with the determination of the disputes of fact or law.

The effect of amendment No. 44 would be to enable the council on tribunals to be consulted about the rules governing that part of the ombudsman's jurisdiction which considers cases of maladministration. Amendments Nos. 45 an 46 are consequential on that.

The effect of amendment No. 38 is to bring the pensions ombudsman into line with powers already available to the Health Service commissioner, for example. It will provide the ombudsman with the power to delegate certain of his functions other than the determination of a dispute or complaint to his staff. That provision will allow the ombudsman's staff to require information or documents from those who hold them, and to examine witnesses on behalf of the ombudsman. The ombudsman would then weigh up the evidence available and reach a determination.

Amendments Nos. 39 and 42 deal with a matter that I promised in Committee to consider. Their effect will be to provide for the extension of the Ombudsman's jurisdiction to cover employers and such other persons or bodies as are concerned with occupational and personal pension schemes, as well as the trustees or managers of a scheme.

Amendment No. 39 also provides that the Ombudsman could investigate cases that arise before this legislation has taken effect. Although the rights of scheme members are most dependent on the trustees or managers of a scheme, employers clearly have a role to play in the operation of schemes. Membership may arise out of the contract of employment, and of course the employer generally contributes to the scheme and collects the members' contributions. The employer is also likely to be involved when a bulk transfer takes place or when a scheme is wound up. This is to ensure that the pensions ombudsman covers bodies such as insurance companies when they are acting both as managers and as agents of the trustees or managers.

The effect of amendment No. 41 will be to widen the definition of an authorised complainant to include people who believe that they are entitled to be a member of a scheme but have been denied membership. Amendment No. 40 is consequential. Amendment No. 43 will clarify that a scheme member includes any person who is or has been in pensionable service under the scheme, and that those people will therefore be entitled to approach the pensions ombudsman.

Amendments Nos. 47 and 48, and 79 to 81, are minor legal amendments to do with appeals and with enforcing the ombudsman's determination in Scotland. The effect of amendment No. 49 is to give the pensions ombudsman the power to publish reports of individual cases he has investigated in whatever way he sees fit, if he thinks it would be appropriate for him to do so.

In Committee, I promised to consider the publication of case reports by the ombudsman. As I explained, we do not believe that the ombudsman should be required to publish details of all his investigations, but he should have the power to publish details of particular cases where he feels it is of particular significance. In other words, it is over to him. The ombudsman may wish to publish reports

[Mrs. Shephard]

of cases of general interest, with the details of individual complaints anonymised. That provision therefore extends the ombudsman's powers of publication to reflect that intention, and protects him from the law of defamation.

Opposition amendment No. 9 would duplicate the intention of our amendment, giving the ombudsman the power to include details of individual cases in his annual report if he wished to do so. I therefore invite the Opposition to withdraw amendment No. 9.

Amendments Nos. 50 to 57 deal with the extension of those provisions to cover Northern Ireland directly. Under the Northern Ireland Act 1973, pensions are a transferred matter on which a devolved Northern Ireland administration may legislate. However, as occupational or personal pension schemes are usually offered on a United Kingdom basis, it is deemed practicable for the registrar of occupational and personal pension schemes and the pensions ombudsman to be appointed on a United Kingdom-wide basis. Therefore, the appointment of those officers—but not their functions—becomes a matter for the Secretary of State for Social Security. I remind the House that the OPB itself is United Kingdomwide. Amendments Nos. 51 to 57 are technical amendments consequential on amendment No. 50. I commend them all the House.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 8

REGISTRATION OF OCCUPATIONAL AND PERSONAL PENSION SCHEMES

Mrs. Shephard: I beg to move amendment No. 37, in page 10, line 13, at end insert—

'(6A) The Secretary of State may direct the registrar to submit to him, in such form and at such intervals as may be specified in the direction, such statistical and other reports as the Secretary of State may require; and the Secretary of State may determine at his discretion whether or not to publish a report submitted to him under this subsection.'.

This amendment will require the registrar to submit to the Secretary of State such reports as he may request and to give the Secretary of State power to publish those reports if he wishes to do so. In Committee, I accepted the principle of an Opposition amendment based on previous legislation and that it would be useful for the Secretary of State to have a power to ask the registrar for statistical and other reports and to publish them if he sees fit. We undertook to bring forward our own provision to achieve that. I commend the amendment to the House.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 9

MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS RELATING TO PENSIONS

8.45 pm

Mr. Flynn: I beg to move amendment No. 13, in page 10, line 39, at end insert—

'(3) In sections 3 and 7 of the 1986 Act, for the words "April 1993", wherever they occur, there shall be substituted the words "April 1991".'.

I thank the Minister for Social Security and the Under-Secretary of State for generously examining the arguments presented in Committee. A large number of amendments have been given the proper consideration that they fully deserved and have been adopted. The Bill will not be tolerable as a consequence, but it will be better.

Sadly, there will be no great degree of agreement on this amendment, which concerns a matter of great importance. I refer to a growing scandal which has resulted in a great many people being misled by actions which have flowed from Government legislation.

The effect of amendment No. 13 will be that the 2 per cent. inducement to persuade people to leave SERPS and take out personal pensions will cease in April 1991 instead of continuing for another two years. There are many reasons for wanting to terminate the abuse of which I speak at the earliest possible date.

It is grossly unfair that the majority of national insurance fund contributors should have to bear the cost of a bribe payable to a minority. The fact that the minority is much larger in numbers than the Government bargained for means that the cost of the bribe is also much greater—as is the unfairness to those who have not taken it.

It was expected that the scheme would be in surplus by £5 million for the year, but in fact it is in deficit to the tune of nearly £1 billion. That is because of the greater take-up of the bribe, which has distorted the choice between the state scheme and occupational schemes on the one hand, and so-called personal and money purchase schemes on the other. Instead of making a rational choice based on a sober assessment of the long-term implications for their pension rights, the public have been subjected to unscrupulous advertising campaigns based on the suggestion that one can get something for nothing by signing up for a "personal" pension. The outspoken criticism of those sales methods by the regulatory body LAUTRO has had little effect—as the disgraceful posters displayed in branches of the Midland Bank demonstrate.

I could have cited many advertisements, including one asking, "Are you a SERPS?" However, the Midland Bank has about the most disgraceful record. Its methods are not only misleading but grossly, cynically and deliberately dishonest. In a frantic rush to grab its share of the lucrative personal pensions market, even a body as reputable as a national bank has produced advertisements which are wickedly deceitful. Every branch of the Midland Bank that I have visited displays the following notice prominently:

"How often does the Government give you something? Up to £5,250 could be yours, to invest in your Midland Personal Pension Plan. Only if you act by the 5th April 1990. Plus income tax relief to boost your contributions."

Its meaning could not be clearer—that the Government will give individuals £5,250 to invest in a personal pension, with added tax relief. Rarely have so many lies been concentrated in so few words. The Government's "gift" includes £1,242 of the individual's own national insurance contributions plus £2,359 employers' contribution, those sums being transferred to the personal pensions scheme instead of earning pension rights in the state scheme.

The whole of that large sum comes from the employer and the employee, but it is advertised as a gift. Then there is the extra £1,242 which is paid into the personal plan as a bribe to induce as many people as possible to opt out of the state scheme. That looks like a gift until one realises that the money is taken from the national insurance fund and that the fund is being plundered in order to finance personal pension schemes. The fund is being damaged. The deficit this year is calculated at £1·5 billion.

All the figures that I have given add up to £4,843, not the £5,250 in the advertisement. Where does the other £407 come from? It consists of the tax relief on the contributions to the personal pension scheme. Let us look at it again. The Midland bank poster says that the Government will give the person £5,250 plus income tax relief. Is not that a con? I put that question to the Midland bank, who said, "No, you can get extra tax relief if you pay additional contributions to the scheme." The poster says nothing about extra tax relief. Of course, there is no extra tax relief for someone taking out a basic, rebate-only personal pension scheme, as most people would.

As for the £5,250 gift itself, that applies only to earnings of at least £350 a week from now until April 1993, and depends on payments being made into a personal pension scheme for the whole of that period. The poster, which is fairly typical of those published by respectable organisations, gives no warning that, even with the Government gifts, the state pension remains a far better buy for most people than a personal pension. If it takes such dishonesty to market a product, however one looks at it, one can be fairly sure that the product is hardly worth buying.

We have a welter of other information coming in too. Not only has LAUTRO condemned the advertising but an assessment has been made by an independent group of consultants called PIRC, Pension Investment Research Consultants. We were told yesterday by the Secretary of State that 3·6 million people have taken out these schemes. On the previous figure of 3 million, PIRC is convinced that 1 million will lose because they have not taken out pension schemes but saving schemes. According to the independent group, those people will have poor pensions at the end of the day, and they will be deprived of the benefits of the state scheme.

We are concerned about who will advise those people when the loss leader no longer has an effect and they have to come back into the state scheme. It has become increasingly clear that the Financial Services Act 1986, which was intended to guarantee that pension scheme salesmen offered the best advice to customers, has failed to achieve that aim. On the one hand, so-called independent financial advisers have been selling schemes on a commission basis, which makes them anything but independent, while, on the other, tied agents of insurance companies are forbidden to recommend the schemes of any company other than the company which pays them.

Some insurance companies are resorting to indiscriminate mail shots which exclude the possibility of independent advice. There is clearly no case for bribing people to succumb to commercial pressures. The result is that many people are paying into schemes, against their best interests, even when on certain assumptions a personal scheme appears to be a better buy than the state scheme in the short run. The Government's own figures show that within a few years it will pay them to go back into the state scheme.

Yesterday I received a parliamentary answer to a question which I had asked about how much was spent by the Government on advertising SERPS. The answer was predictable: nothing has been spent because it is nobody's responsibility to sell the superior state scheme. The 3·6 million people to whom I have referred are being pushed out of the state scheme because the state does not want the responsibility of dealing with them in future. Because of what it would cost the country, they are being pushed into inferior schemes. The consequences will come home to roost. A scandal will emerge when many people, many in their 40s and 50s, discover that their pension is hardly worth having.

The decision of whether to continue paying into a personal pension scheme should be taken annually as the balance of advantage changes from year to year. In making the decision, people should not be influenced by the promise of something for nothing which might mean that they continued paying into a scheme when it is no longer in their interests to do so.

The amendment proposes April 1991 for the ending of the bribe for two reasons. First, by the time the Bill becomes law several months of the 1990-91 tax year will already have passed; secondly, the burden falls on the national insurance fund a year in arrears, so the bribe for 1990-91 will be paid in 1991-92. That happy year will be the last year of a Tory Government. From 1992 on, a Labour Government will need to put the finances of the national insurance fund on a proper footing so that we can make a start on the creation of what the country really wants—the new social insurance system set out in Labour's policy review.

Mr. Haynes: I realise only too well what the Government are about. The right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) fiddled about with SERPS and interfered with the scheme which was running in the interests of the workers who contributed to it. I contributed to it before I came to this place. The right hon. Gentleman would not listen to the points that were made to him, so we have to have the argument all over again.

As I said earlier at Question Time about the defence team, this lot too should be summoned to the Bar and dealt with because of what they have done. The Minister can take that grin off his face; this is a serious matter. If the Minister had been in the United States, he would be in Alcatraz. He would deserve that; there would be no one there but himself unless he had his two colleagues with him.

Yesterday, I asked a question to which I got a very unsatisfactory answer from the Secretary of State. He need not shake his head. Yesterday he responded to my supplementary question by asking a question. He did not answer my question. Mr. Speaker would not let me back in to answer the question that he asked. What the Government are doing is a racket. All they are doing once again is feeding the pockets of the rich. They do so in many other ways, and here they are, doing it again. It is a scandal. I support the amendment, because it is necessary. I will never change my mind about what the Government are doing to pensions.

The Government are robbing people. They talk about protecting the taxpayer, but they are pouring taxpayers' money into the pockets of a few rich people. The Secretary of State was not here earlier; let me tell him that we will put matters right when we are in government. Although I shall not be here after the next general election, I shall be watching on television, and then the Government will be sorry for what they did.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I wish that the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) would not exhort other hon. Members not to smile when he has a big grin all over his own face. I am sorry to tell him that it is very disarming.

Perhaps I can correct some of the assumptions that were over-colourfully expressed by the hon. Member for

[Mrs. Gillian Shephard]

Newport, West (Mr. Flynn). First, he said that the cost of the incentive is being borne by the minority; that is not the case. Only about 30 per cent. of people in full-time employment are not in either an occupational or a personal pension scheme. The majority are taking advantage of the contracted-out rebate.

Secondly, it is not the case that the national insurance fund has been either bankrupted or plundered. The fund still has a healthy balance, which is twice the recommended level. The great success of personal pensions—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry that Opposition Members do not support them—is just one reason why the revenue going into the fund has dropped. Another reason is the restructuring of national insurance contributions introduced last October which has been widely welcomed throughout the country. Arrangements are made in the Bill to correct the balance in the national insurance fund, as Opposition Members——

It being Nine o'clock, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded, pursuant to the Order [28 March], to put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

The House divided: Ayes 195, Noes 283.

Division No. 156] **[9.00 pm**

AYES

Abbott Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Ingram, Adam
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Litherland, Robert
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael

Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, Sir John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tony Durant and
Mr. David Lightbown.

Question accordingly negatived.

New Schedule

'INSERTION OF SCHEDULE 3A TO THE PENSIONS ACT

"SCHEDULE 3A

ANNUAL INCREASE IN RATE OF CERTAIN OCCUPATIONAL PENSIONS

Interpretation

1. In this Schedule—

"annual rate", in relation to a pension or the later or earlier service component of a pension, means the annual rate of the pension or component, as previously increased under the rules of the scheme or this Schedule;

"the appointed day" means the day on which this Schedule and section 58A of this Act come into force;

"the appropriate percentage", in relation to an increase in the annual rate of a pension or a component of a pension, means the percentage specified in the last revaluation order made before the increase is to take effect as the revaluation percentage for the last revaluation period of twelve months;

"earlier service component" means so much (if any) of the annual rate of the pension as is attributable to pensionable service before the appointed day;

"later service component" means so much (if any) of the annual rate of the pension as is attributable to pensionable service on or after the appointed day;

"pension" does not include—

(a) a guaranteed minimum pension or any increase in such a pension under section 37A above; or

(b) any money purchase benefit;

"pensionable service" has the meaning given by paragraph 3 of Schedule 16 to the 1973 Act;

"qualifying scheme" means a scheme to which section 58A of this Act applies;

"revaluation order", "revaluation percentage" and "revaluation period" shall be construed in accordance with section 52A above.

Annual increase of later service component

2.—(1) If, apart from this Schedule, the annual rate of a pension under a qualifying scheme would not be increased as mentioned in section 58A(1)(b) of this Act, the annual rate of its later service component shall be increased annually by an amount equal to the appropriate percentage of the annual rate of that component as applicable immediately before the increase takes effect.

(2) The first increase by virtue of this paragraph in the rate of a pension shall take effect before the expiration of the period of twelve months beginning with the commencement of the pension and subsequent increases shall take effect at intervals of not more than twelve months thereafter.

(3) This paragraph is subject to paragraphs 4 to 6 below.

Annual increase of earlier service component where scheme is in surplus

3.—(1) If on any valuation day the value of a qualifying scheme's assets, as determined in accordance with regulations, exceeds the value of its liabilities, as so determined, the amount of the excess (the "valuation surplus") shall be applied in accordance with the following provisions of this paragraph in providing for annual increases, up to the aggregate referred to in sub-paragraph (6) below, in the annual rate of the earlier service component of each pension under the scheme that would not, apart from this Schedule, be increased as mentioned in section 58A(1)(b) of this Act.

(2) The amount of each annual increase to be provided in pursuance of this paragraph in consequence of a valuation surplus shall be an amount equal to the appropriate percentage of the annual rate of the earlier service component of the pension in question as applicable immediately before that annual increase takes effect.

(3) The days which are "valuation days" for the purposes of this paragraph are—

(a) the appointed day, except in a case where regulations otherwise provide; and

(b) each subsequent day as at which the assets and liabilities of the scheme in question are valued for any purpose.

(4) Where, in consequence of a valuation surplus, this paragraph requires provision to be made for annual increases in the annual rate of the earlier service component of a pension, the first of those increases shall take effect before the expiration of the period of twelve months beginning with the later of—

(a) the valuation day as at which the valuation was made which disclosed the valuation surplus; or

(b) the commencement of the pension;

and subsequent increases shall take effect at intervals of not more than twelve months thereafter.

(5) In any case where—

(a) a valuation of the assets and liabilities of a qualifying scheme discloses a valuation surplus, but

(b) the amount of the surplus is insufficient to provide in full for the annual increases otherwise required by this paragraph in pensions under the scheme,

the valuation surplus shall be applied in providing for the increases so required, but only at the percentage rate that would apply year by year in relation to those increases if, for the maximum percentage of 5 per cent. specified in section 52A(9)(a) above, there were substituted such lower percentage as represents the greatest maximum percentage by reference to which the valuation surplus is sufficient to provide for annual increases in the earlier service component of the pensions in question.

(6) If a valuation surplus is disclosed on a valuation at any time when either—

(a) in consequence of one or more prevous valuation surpluses, provision has already been made for the annual rate of the earlier service component of every pension under the scheme which is required to be increased under this paragraph to be so increased annually in the aggregate by at least the appropriate percentage of that rate, or

(b) the application of part only of the valuation surplus would be sufficient to secure that result,

this paragraph does not require that valuation surplus or, as the case may be, the remaining part of it, to be applied in the provision of increases under this paragraph.

(7) The power to make regulations conferred by sub-paragraph (1) above includes power to provide that the value of the scheme's assets or liabilities is to be calculated and verified—

(a) in such manner as may, in the particular case, be approved—

(i) by a prescribed person;

(ii) by a person with prescribed professional qualifications or experience; or

(iii) by a person approved by the Secretary of State;

(b) in accordance with guidance prepared by a prescribed body;

(c) in accordance with prescribed principles and requirements; or

(d) in accordance with principles determined by the person who performs the duties of calculation and verification.

(8) This paragraph is subject to paragraphs 4 to 6 below.

Proportional increases where first period is less than 12 months

4.—(1) Where a pension commenced to be paid less than twelve months before the the date on which its first increase under paragraph 2 above is to take effect, the amount of that first increase shall be determinied by the application of the formula—

$$\frac{M \times I}{12}$$

where—

M is the number of months, rounded to the nearest whole month, in the period beginning with the commencement of the pension and ending immediately before that date; and

I is the amount of the increase that would have been required by that paragraph, apart from this sub-paragraph.

(2) This paragraph shall apply in relation to the first increase of a pension by virtue of paragraph 3 above in consequence of each successive valuation surplus as it applies in relation to the first increase of a pension under paragraph 2 above.

Restriction on increases where member is under 55

5.—(1) No increase under paragraph 2 or 3 above is required to be paid to or for a member of a scheme whose pension has commenced but who has not attained the age of 55 at the time when the increase takes effect, unless—

(a) he is permanently incapacitated by mental or physical infirmity from engaging in regular full-time employment, or

(b) he has retired on account of mental or physical infirmity from the office or employment in respect of which, or on retirement from which, the pension is payable.

in which case the pension shall be payable at the annual rate at which it would have been payable apart from this sub-paragraph.

(2) The rules of a scheme may provide that if, in a case where a pension has been paid to or for a member under the age of 55 at an increased rate in consequence of paragraph (a) or (b) of subsection (1) above, the member—

(a) ceases to suffer from the infirmity in question before he attains the age of 55, but

(b) continues to be entitled to the pension, any increases subsequently taking effect under paragraph 2 or 3 above in the annual rate of the pension shall not be paid or shall not be paid in full.

(3) In any case where—

(a) by virtue only of sub-paragraph (1) or (2) above, increases are not being paid to or for a member, but

(b) the member attains the age of 55 or, in a case falling with sub-paragraph (2) above, again satisfies the conditions set out in paragraph (a) or (b) of sub-paragraph (1) above,

his pension shall thereupon become payable at the annual rate at which it would have been payable apart from sub-paragraph (1) or (2) above.

Regulations

6.—(1) The Secretary of State may by regulations direct that section 58A and this Schedule shall have effect, in such cases as he may specify in the regulations, subject to such modifications as he may specify.

(2) In sub-paragraph (1) above "modification", without prejudice to the generality of that sub-paragraph, includes addition, omission and amendment.

Overriding effect of the increase provisions

7. The provisions of section 58A of this Act, this Schedule and any regulations made under it override any provision of a qualifying scheme, other than a protected provision (within the meaning of paragraph 7 of Schedule 1A to this Act), to the extent that it conflicts with them.".'.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second times.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *then proceeded, pursuant to the Order [28 March], to put forthwith the Question,* That the new schedule be added to the Bill.

Question agreed to.

Schedule accordingly added to the Bill.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER *then proceeded to put forthwith the Question on the remaining amendments, moved by a Member of the Government, of which notice had been given, to that part of the Bill to be concluded at Nine o'clock.*

Schedule 2

THE PENSIONS OMBUDSMAN

Amendments made: No. 43, in page 23, line 37, after 'person', insert—

'(a) who is or has been in pensionable service under the scheme, as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 16 to the 1973 Act or paragraph 3 of Schedule 3 to the Social Security Pensions (Northern Ireland) Order 1975, or

(b)'.

No. 53, in page 23, line 39, at end insert—

'or under Article 2(5) of the Social Security Pensions (Northern Ireland) (S.I. 1975/1503 (N.I. 15)) Order 1975 as a member in relation to the scheme for the purposes of Part IV or V of that Order;

"Northern Ireland public service pension scheme" means a public service pension scheme, within the meaning of Article 2(2) of that Order;'.

No. 52, in page 22, line 20, after 'Act', insert

'or any corresponding legislation having effect in Northern Ireland'.

No. 38, in page 22, line 31, at end insert

'and any function of the Pensions Ombudsman, other than the determination of complaints made and disputes referred under this Part of this Act, may be performed by any member of that staff who is authorised for that purpose by the Pensions Ombudsman.'.

No. 39, in page 23, line 11, at end insert—

'(2(A) The Secretary of State may by regulations provide that, subject to any modifications or exceptions specified in the regulations, this Part of this Act shall apply in relation to—

(a) the employer in relation to any description or category of employment to which an occupational pension scheme relates or has related; or

(b) any prescribed person or body of persons concerned with the financing or administration of, or the provision of benefits under, any occupational or personal pension scheme,

as it applies in relation to the trustees or managers of such a scheme.

(2B) The Pensions Ombudsman may investigate a complaint or dispute notwithstanding that it arose, or relates to a matter which arose, before the coming into force of this Part of this Act.'.

No 40, in page 23, line 31, at end insert '(i)'.

No 41, in page 23, line 34, after first 'person' insert

'; or

(ii) whether a person who claims to be entitled to become a member of the scheme is so entitled,',

No 42, in page 23, line 35, at end insert—

'"employer", in relation to a pension scheme, includes a person—

(a) who is or has been an employer in relation to the scheme, or

(b) who is or has been treated under section 66(3) below as an employer in relation to the scheme for the purposes of Part III or IV of this Act, or under Article 2(4) of the Social Security Pensions (Northern Ireland) Order 1975 as an employer in relation to the scheme for the purposes of Part IV or V of that Order;'.

No. 54, in page 23, line 41, after 'scheme', insert

'or a Northern Ireland public service pension scheme'.

No. 44, in page 25, line 34, leave out from 'making' to end of line 36 and insert

'and investigation of complaints under this Part of this Act.

(2A) Subsection (2) above is without prejudice to the powers conferred by section 10 of the Tribunal and Inquiries Act 1971 to make rules with respect to the procedure which is to be followed in connection with the reference and investigation of disputes under this Part of this Act.'.

No. 45, in page 25, line 37, after 'rules', insert

'referred to in subsections (2) and (2A) above'.

No. 46, in page 25, line 38, leave out 'such an investigation' and insert

'an investigation under this Part of this Act'.

No. 55, in page 25, line 44, after 'Act', insert

'or under any corresponding legislation having effect in Northern Ireland'.

No. 47, in page 26, line 23, leave out

'by way of case stated'.

No. 79, in page 26, line 29, at end insert—

'(9) Subsections (4) and (5) above shall be construed, in their application to Scotland, as if contempt of court were in Scots law categorised as an offence.'.

No. 56, in page 26, line 39, after 'Act', insert

'or under any corresponding legislation having effect in Northern Ireland'.

No. 48, in page 27, line 1, leave out

'by way of case stated'.

No. 80, in page 27, line 7, after 'enforceable', insert—

'(a) in England and Wales,'.

No. 81, in page 27, line 8, at end insert

'; and

(b) in Scotland, by the sheriff, as if it were a judgment or order of the sheriff and whether or not the sheriff could himself have granted such judgment or order.'.

No. 49, in page 27, line 8, at end insert—

'(6) If the Pensions Ombudsman considers it appropriate to do so in any particular case, he may publish in such form and manner as he thinks fit a report of any investigation under this Part of this Act and of the result of that investigation.

(7) For the purposes of the law of defamation, the publication of any matter by the Pensions Ombudsman—

(a) in submitting or publishing a report under section 59B(6) or subsection (6) above, or

(b) in sending to any person a statement under subsection (1) above or a direction under subsection (2) above,

shall be absolutely privileged.'.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

Schedule 3

OCCUPATIONAL AND PERSONAL PENSION SCHEMES

Amendments made: No. 75, in page 27, line 39, after 'manager', insert ', or the trustee,'.

No. 76, in page 28, line 3, after 'employer', insert 'or of the scheme'.

No. 75, in page 30, line 4, at end insert

'and to be so paid in priority to all other claims falling to be met out of the scheme's resources.'.

No. 23, in page 31, line 1, leave out to line 7 on page 32 and insert—

'Employer to make good deficiencies on winding up

2. The following section shall be inserted into the Pensions Act after the section 58A inserted by section [Annual increase of certain occupational pensions] above.'.

No. 58, in page 34, line 42, leave out 'pensionable' and insert 'normal pension'.

No. 59, in page 36, line 10, leave out paragraph (d) and insert—

'(d) where the scheme provides that part of the earner's pension shall accrue after the termination of employment date by reason of employment after that date, the later earnings addition.".'

No. 60, in page 36, line 18, leave out

'on which he attained pensionable age'

and insert

'after his termination of employment date'.

No. 61, in page 36, line 38, leave out paragraph (d) and insert—

'(d) where the scheme provides that part of the widow's pension shall accrue after the termination of employment date by reason of the earner's employment after that date, the later earnings addition.".'.

No. 62, in page 36, line 46, leave out

'on which he attained pensionable age'

and insert

'after his termination of employment date'.

No. 78, in page 38, line 4, leave out '(d)' and insert '(e)'.

No. 57, in page 39, line 30, at end insert—

'Extension of certain pension scheme provisions to Northern Ireland

11A. In section 68(4) of the Pensions Act (provisions which extend to Northern Ireland) for the words "Section 57 of this Act extends" there shall be substituted the words "The following provisions of this Act, namely, sections 57, 59B, other than subsections (4) and (5)(b), and 59K(1), (2), other than paragraph (a)(ii), (3), (4) and (8) extend".'.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

Schedule 5

MINOR AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendments made: No. 67, in page 43, line 38, at end insert—

'Regulations relating to industrial injuries and diseases

3A.—(1) In section 76 of the principal Act, after subsection (4) (power to make regulations for determining, among other things, the time at which a person is to be treated as having developed a prescribed injury or disease) there shall be inserted—

"(4A) Notwithstanding any other provision of this Act, the power conferred by subsection (4)(a) above includes power to provide that the time at which a person shall be treated as having developed a prescribed disease or injury shall be the date on which he first makes a claim which results in the payment of benefit by virtue of this Chapter in respect of that disease or injury."

(2) In section 77 of that Act, at the end of subsection (2) (power to modify provisions relating to disablement benefit and its administration) there shall be added the words—

"and for the purposes of this subsection the provisions of this Act which relate to the administration of disablement benefit or reduced earnings allowance shall be taken to include section 165A and any provision which relates to the administration of both the benefit in question and other benefits."

(3) Regulations 6(2)(c), 25 and 36 of the Social Security (Industrial Injuries) (Prescribed Diseases) Regulations 1985 (onset of occupational deafness and time for claiming in respect of occupational deafness or occupational asthma), and any former regulations which they directly or indirectly re-enact with or without amendment, shall be taken to be, and always to have been, validly made.'.

No. 85, in page 44, line 29, at end insert—

'Restrictions on entitlement to benefit in certain cases of error'

5A.—(1) In section 104 of the principal Act (reviews), after the subsection (6) inserted by section 5(3) of this Act, there shall be inserted—

"(7) Section 165C below shall apply in relation to a review under this section of a decision on the ground that it was erroneous in point of law in any case where the claim in question was made or treated as made as mentioned in subsection (1)(b) of that section as it applies in relation to a claim so made or treated as made."

(2) After the section 165B of that Act inserted by section 5(2) of this Act there shall be inserted the following section—

"*Restrictions on entitlement to benefit in certain cases of error*

165C.—(1) This section applies where—

(a) on the determination of a Commissioner or the court (the "relevant determination"), a decision made by an adjudicating authority is found to have been erroneous in point of law; and

(b) a claim for benefit is or has been made or treated as made (whether by the same or any other claimant and whether for the same or some other benefit and whether before or after the relevant determination) which, in consequence of the relevant determination, falls to be determined otherwise than it would have been determined had it been required to be determined in acordance with the erroneous decision.

(2) Where this section applies, the claimant in relation to the claim mentioned in subsection (1)(b) above shall not be entitled to the benefit in question—

(a) if it is a widow's payment, in respect of a death occurring before the relevant date, or

(b) if it is any other benefit, in respect of any period before the relevant date,

notwithstanding anything in section 165A(2) above.

(3) In this section—

"adjudicating authority" means an adjudication officer, a social security appeal tribunal or a medical appeal tribunal;

"the court" means the High Court, the Court of Appeal, the Court of Session, the House of Lords or the Court of Justice of the European Community;

"the relevant date" means whichever is the later of—

(a) the date on which the relevant determination was made; and

(b) the day falling twelve months before the date on which the claim is made or treated as made.".'.

No. 88, in page 48, line 36 at end insert—

'Mobility allowance for certain persons eligible for invalid carriages: pre-consolidation amendment.

10A. The amendments of paragraph (a) of section 13(2) of the Social Security (Miscellaneous Provisons) Act 1977 by the National Health Service Act 1977 and the National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978 shall be deemed never to have been made and that paragraphs shall accordingly have effect and be deemed at all times to have had effect as originally enacted.'.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

Schedule 6

REPEALS

Amendments made: No. 83, in page 54, line 3 at end insert—

'1977 c.49.	National Health Service Act 1977	In Schedule 15, paragraph 71,
1978 c.29	National Health Service (Scotland) Act 1978.	In Schedule 16, paragraph 44.'.

No. 26, in page 54, line 12, Column 6, at end insert—

'Section 32(4).'.

No. 87, in page 54, line 15 column 3, at beginning insert—

'In section 33(10A), the word "and" immediately preceding paragraph (e).'.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

Order for Third Reading read.—[Queen's Consent, on behalf of the Crown, signified].

9.14 pm

Mr. Newton: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

We have the opportunity for only a short debate, so I shall be brief and shall not deny others the opportunity to speak, particularly those who served on what I am told was a good-natured but demanding Standing Committee.

As Bills go, even perhaps as Social Security Bills go, this Bill is not large. The last one on which I served was the Social Security Act 1986—or the reform Act, as I would call it, although I am not sure that the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) would accept that description. Nevertheless, the Bill's importance is considerable and has grown during its further consideration in the House last week and this week, with the new clauses that have been added on occupational pensions and lone parents.

The Bill has three strategic objectives, with which I think that both sides of the House agree, even if there are differences of opinion—sometimes substantial—as to how those objectives should be pursued. First, the Bill contributes to the development of what we believe to be a structure of benefits for disabled people which is both more coherent and more sustainable in the long term, while bringing the prospects of early additional help to the terminally ill through the removal of the six-month qualifying period for attendance allowance and improving the position of many thousands of people in receipt of severe disablement allowance. Those legislative changes should be seen alongside the other improvements being made almost at this very moment through the uprating that is taking place this week and next and other changes later this year which will help almost 500,000 long-term sick and disabled people and their carers at an additional cost of some £100 million.

Secondly, the Bill contains several changes designed to strengthen the arrangements for the maintenance of lone parents and their children, In particular, it makes such maintenance more effective as a basis on which the lone parent who wishes to do so can move from benefit into employment. That, too, should be seen alongside what is being done either in the current uprating or later this year to make real improvements in benefits both for lone parents and for many other low-income families with children.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does my right hon. Friend share with me—I doubt whether he does, but I would like him to do so—the view that it is easier for a lone parent to move into employment if the family allowance is uprated in line with inflation?

Mr. Newton: I noticed that my hon. Friend was in the Chamber earlier. No doubt she would have made that point if there had been more extensive debate on child benefit, and I note her view. I also note that if maintenance payments could be effectively enforced, they would make an even greater contribution than the allowance that my hon. Friend is worried about.

Thirdly, and certainly not least, the Bill makes significant further improvements to the framework of occupational pensions by providing greater protection in various ways, including the introduction of an important measure of inflation-proofing for rights derived from future service and making a similar degree of inflation-proofing the first call on scheme surpluses when such surpluses exist. The context in this respect is the growing success of the Government's policies to promote occupational and personal provision, building upon the foundations of the basic state pension.

I have outlined the main themes of the Bill, although it contains many other useful measures. The Bill is useful and worth while, and it will advance our provision for many who deserve and need our help. I commend it to the House.

9.19 pm

Ms. Short: Although some of the Bill's contents are acceptable to us, we believe that it should not receive its Third Reading because of the nature of the majority of its contents and, more importantly, because of what it fails to contain.

The guillotine that the Government introduced on Report, before there had been any debate on the Bill, was designed to prevent proper debate of many important questions that should be dealt with but which are not contained in the Bill. It is important to put the Bill in its proper context. This is the 12th Social Security Bill that the Government have introduced. The effect of the cumulative changes in social security benefits and in our tax system has been a massive redistribution of resources from those with least to those with most.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Not true.

Ms. Short: It is absolutely true. Although I agree with the hon. Lady about child benefit, even though she called it family allowance, she should recognise that the figures are shocking. The Government should be deeply ashamed of them.

In 11 years the Government have taken £6·6 billion from the bottom half of our population. Of that sum £5·6

[Ms. Short]

billion has gone to the richest 10 per cent. and £4·8 billion has gone to the top 5 per cent. The Bill is part of that process. The Government deliberately set out on that policy and such are its cumulative effects which they have achieved by stealth.

One of the disgraceful things that has made people poorer was the break in the link between the state pension and earnings. The hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) has referred to that. A fantastic amount of money has already been taken away from pensioners, thus excluding them from the benefits of economic growth. According to Library figures, a pensioner couple has lost £20 a week as a result of deliberate Government policies and a single pensioner has lost £12.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): Does the hon. Lady accept that the Labour Government of 1974-79 did not always keep their pledges and that their performance when running the economy and the pathetic increase in the standard of living of those in employment meant that it was no great achievement to attempt to keep pensions in line with earnings?

Ms. Short: I know that the hon. Gentleman is blustering because he is shocked by the true figures. He has not made a telling point. The cumulative figures are clear and demonstrate a deliberate massive redistribution from those with least to those who do not need more. That is what has happened as a result of 12 Social Security Bills and changes in taxation. The hon. Gentleman has made a broad, ill-informed remark about the performance of the economy in the 1970s at a time when our economy is in deep difficulty. The Government thought that they could get faster economic growth out of greater inequality. A lot of people have been hurt. Their economic experiment has failed and that is why the Government are in such grave difficulties.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I agree with my hon. Friend that pensioners have already suffered as a result of Government legislation. We should also consider their plight as a result of the community charge. In the case of a couple when one person is still working and even when their income is just over the limit at which one begins to pay the community charge, the working partner must pay the community charge of the retired partner. Money will be taken off pensioners once again.

Ms. Short: My hon. Friend is right. The Government have deceived pensioners by their ill-thought-out so-called concession made in the Budget. They said to pensioners with some savings that they would give them lots of money, but they did not tell them the true story. Many, many pensioners with some savings believe that they will receive some relief, but because the Government falsely attribute a higher rate of return on their savings, many of them will be deceived and bitterly disappointed. Their suffering will be in addition to that described by my hon. Friend.

I was trying to list some of the factors in the cumulative, massive redistribution from those in need to those without need which has made our country so unequal and bitterly divided and the Government so unpopular with the electorate.

I mentioned what the Government have done with state pensions. The erosion of the value of child benefit is another serious matter. Due to the way in which the debate was squeezed today, we were unable to challenge the Government to tell us the truth. Everyone who considers these issues believes that the Government are trying to allow child benefit to wither away. The hon. Member for Lancaster is right: that would be disastrous particularly for lone parents or people on low incomes who are on benefits and want to get off them. High child benefit will help people to make that transition; the erosion of child benefit traps them into poverty. It also deprives women of income. Giving the money to mothers ensures that it is spent on children.

There are all sorts of other issues which should have been included in the Bill and which we would like to have discussed. The removal of young people's right to benefit has enlarged the enormous and shameful growth of homelessness across the land. It shames everyone, whatever their political views. Young people, often those who grew up in care and do not have relatives to fall back on when they get into difficulty, are living on our streets and are not entitled to benefit. They are unable to get a step up and get on with life because of what the Government have done to the benefits system.

The truth is that, after 11 years of Thatcherite rule, our country is deeply, bitterly and unhappily divided. There is enormous public unease about the degree to which it is divided. It is interesting that Conservative Members think that the Thatcherite experiment has led to a change of political values in Britain. But the annual survey of British social attitudes shows that cumulatively, over every year, people in Britain have become less and less happy with the Thatcherite project, more and more worried about how deeply divided our country is and more and more willing to pay a little more tax if that is what is required to look after pensioners and the sick. The people of this country do not support the experiment and its consequences.

The experiment has been enormously costly. We lived through a period of the good luck of oil becoming available. It could have given us the chance to restructure our economy and invest in the long term. Instead, it was wasted on an experiment, using materialism, greed, selfishness and inequality as an economic engine, which has failed and hurt many people.

The Bill contains some provisions that we welcome, and in which we take a pride. In Committee the Minister of State was honest and good enough to give the Opposition credit for some of the good factors in the Bill. He said that they were the results of democracy and of previous Social Security Bills when the Opposition had argued a case which was unassailable—if I may use a word that has probably changed its meaning given recent developments in the Conservative party.

The change in attendance allowance for the terminally ill who are unlikely to survive the six-month waiting period is, of course, welcome. We made that clear in Committee. We worry that the allowance does not extend to cover elderly people who might need it because they have had a severe stroke. The Government are so worried about spending money that they have excluded elderly people from the value of such benefits, but we welcome the provision as far as it goes. The Government must have credit for it, but we also take some credit.

We are deeply unhappy with the disability package about which the Government attempt to boast.

Conservative Members do not have to take our word for that; they can consult any of the disability organisations and find out that they are deeply and savagely critical of that package. They criticise the fact that they were not properly consulted and the duplicity underlining it.

The pretence is that lots of new money has been found to help disabled people. But more has been clawed back than has been provided. Money has been taken away from disabled people to put forward a package that helps some, but takes away from other disabled people. It is a cosmetic package, not an enlargement of resources to look after people with disabilities and help them to be independent and self-reliant, as many of them wish to be.

We welcome some of the improvements in the Bill that relate to occupational and private pensions. We are glad that there is to be an ombudsman. We decided in Committee that we could not possibly call it an "ombudsperson"—it would be too odd a word, although my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) suggested "ombudskvinne" which is apparently "person" in the right language, Norwegian.

We also welcome the limited protection against the erosion of the value of pensions with inflation, but we do not understand why the Government did not go as far as we wanted in enlarging the powers of the ombudsman and setting alongside them a tribunal that could deal much more happily with complaints from pensioners, thus avoiding the enormous problem and cost of having to go to the High Court to settle questions of trusteeship. There could have been a much leaner and more efficient system that would have protected pensioners much better.

On protection against inflation, of course we welcome the 5 per cent. protection for early leavers and the Government's late decision to protect everyone where there are surpluses, up to 5 per cent. But we do not understand why the Government cannot go as far as our amendment in Committee and say that, when there are surpluses, there will be full protection against inflation.

As we are all living longer and might be talking about a 20-year retirement span, people get poorer as they get older when there is no protection against inflation. If there is a surplus, it is the most reasonable thing in the world to have protection, not up to 5 per cent. but up to the level of inflation. That is what Opposition Members argued in Committee. It is another unassailable case, and I do not understand why the Government could not accept it.

We also welcome the provisions to encourage energy conservation. They fall oddly in this Bill, but there they are. They are limited to people on low incomes. They are welcome as far as they go, but in our view they do not go far enough. Energy conservation is one of the most important policies available to a country such as ours, and it benefits everyone—the planet, people's heating bills and so on. Such a policy is absolutely beneficial and means that we do not have to rely on nuclear power, with all its pollution and waste that people dread. Nuclear power is being proved more and more to harm the health of those who work in the industry and their children. It is firm Labour party policy to go very much further.

The country is raging with anger at the injustice of the poll tax, but that injustice comes on top of an even bigger redistribution from those with least to those with the most; but it has been done cumulatively and by stealth, so there has never been a moment when the people could show their rage as they are showing it about the poll tax. I refer to cumulative effects of the changes in social security and taxation system.

It is pretty clear to all of us that the Government have had it and that their economic experiment in the glorification of greed, selfishness and inequality is coming to an end. The British people do not like it and they want no more of it. We look forward greatly to the defeat of the Government and to the introduction of our own social security legislation, which will create a much more just settlement in our country. It will protect those who are in need and create pathways out of poverty for people trapped on benefits, instead of making bigger and bigger poverty traps such as the present system provides.

To hon. Members on the Government Benches—sometimes they worry me because they seem to read nothing—I say that it is all set out in our policy review. We will take power, implement the policy review and bring about a more just, more equal and economically more efficient society, and we look forward to doing so.

9.34 pm

Sir George Young (Ealing, Acton): It would be a tragedy if the House were to adopt the advice of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) and deny the Bill a Third Reading. That would deny the real help that the Bill provides for many thousands of people who are looking forward to that help. I listened with interest to what the hon. Lady said about the redistribution of wealth and also to what she said about greed. I found it impossible to relate what she was saying to the Bill. Far from redistributing wealth from the less well-off to the rich, the Bill does the opposite. Even if we accepted the premise from which she started, which I do not, it would not lead us to the conclusion that the Bill should be rejected.

Despite the recent controversy about the Bill—the debate on the guillotine and on the new clauses—the bulk of the Bill has been non-controversial. The Committee stage was broadly harmonious——

Ms. Short: How do you know?

Sir George Young: The hon. Lady has conceded as much in our debates on the Floor of the House.

The vast majority of measures in the Bill are non-controversial and have been welcomed by hon. Members on both sides of the House. They should reach the statute book as soon as possible.

The hon. Lady mentioned the help for the terminally ill; more than 50,000 people will benefit from that. Does she really want to deny them that help by voting down the Bill? There is the extension of the severe disablement allowance, with an additional £10 a week for more than 250,000 people. Does she want to deny them that help? There is the introduction——

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir George Young: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will allow me to continue; that may allow him the opportunity to make his speech, whereas if I give way, it may deny him that opportunity.

As more and more people invest larger sums in personal pensions, it must be right to provide better protection to that investment by extending the ombudsman principle to

[Sir George Young]

personal pensions—a system that has been tried and proved in so many other aspects of our society. I also welcome the protection for early leavers. Mobility is important in furthering the development of the economy and we want people to move from one job to another. The current arrangements act as a disincentive to national mobility, which is very much in the country's interests, and I welcome the proposed protection.

I commend the Government for listening as the Bill has passed through its stages. They listened to the argument about rules for self-investment and dropped that part of the Bill at an early stage. Last week, they listened to the argument about income support for those in residential and nursing homes. They listened to the argument about the independent living fund and have found an additional £8 million for that. The Budget changes—which are social security changes—on the capital limits reflected a listening Government who were conscious of what was expected. There have been further changes on the surpluses, which have also been broadly welcomed, and further help for lone parents.

It was a good Bill when it started, and it became better as it went through its stages. I find the reforms sensible —reflecting changes in society—realistic and prudent. I hope that the House will give it a Third Reading.

9.37 pm

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on Third Reading. I shall confine my brief remarks to clause 10, which deals with energy efficiency in low-income households. I could make the same points about that as my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) made in her philosophical remarks on the deficiencies of the Bill in general. The Bill divides society into three groups: the very rich, who will clearly benefit; the generality of society—the middle 70 per cent.; and the 20 to 30 per cent. welfare-dependent group at the bottom. We are only too familiar with that group, having studied what has gone wrong with American society during the past 10 to 20 years—yet the Government seem intent upon repeating that experiment in Britain.

Let us consider what this Bill does for energy efficiency in the context of the general question of how we handle the entire energy question. The Government intend to use the less well-off for target practice with a scheme that had virtually collapsed when they thought that they had a reduction in the unemployment statistics sufficient to bring forward new regulations and criteria for putting people on to the community insulation project schemes—the ET rule. This was known as the extra tenner rule in the community at large.

It was extremely unattractive to the bulk of the people under 25 who had previously volunteered to go on to the old community programme rules and were involved in community insulation work under community programme rules.

It was not that unemployment declined; it was that the unattractiveness of the ET rule meant that the under-25 group no longer wished to go on to the schemes, which eventually collapsed under the present Government. They are trying to revive them now, and obviously we do not criticise that, but in the 18 months in which they allowed these schemes to collapse, they received innumerable warnings, not only from Opposition Members but also from the organisations involved in the work—those on whom the Government are now depending to revive the work—that things were going very badly indeed, with a drop of 60 per cent. or more in the work of draught-proofing and installing loft insulation in the homes of the less well-off on local authority estates, old terraced property, and so on.

While bringing this Bill forward, the Government are also doing a great deal to damage the possibility of the less well-off to afford heat. While this Bill has been in Committee, we have seen our major public utilities which provide the raw energy used to heat homes increase prices by very large amounts indeed. Gas has gone up by 7·7 per cent. even though there has been no increase in the production cost, and electricity has gone up for the domestic consumer by an average of 9 per cent., but with a loaded increase in the areas in which there are more low-income families.

In my own region, south Wales, which has one of the lowest family incomes in the country, the price to domestic consumers is to rise by 12·9 per cent. in the year that started last week. Furthermore, we have already been promised by the Government that in the coming years prices will rise not by the retail price index minus X, as we were promised at the time of the electricity privatisation legislation, but by RPI plus X. So the minus of privatisation has become a plus. If we have average inflation this year, that will be about 9 per cent., so the increase will be another 11·5 per cent., and that will apply to the following year as well. In south Wales, we know now from the Government's announcement that, in three years, the price of electricity will rise by about 50 per cent., while in the better-off parts of the country, the best calculation that we can make is that it will rise by some 25 per cent.

That is the damage that the Government are doing to the less well-off in society at the same time as they are pretending to do something for them in this Bill. They are creating a three-tier society. We understand now that they intend to enable the rich who apply for shares in the privatised electricity companies to have a rebate of 10 per cent. on their electricity bills. That is outright discrimination in pricing electricity. What good will that do the pensioner?

This Bill is not only completely inadequate from the point of energy conservation but, together with other measures such as the rises in electricity prices and a proposed concession to shareholders, highly divisive. It is completely inadequate from the energy conservation point of view, because it is an example of this Government talking green but acting blue.

9.43 pm

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute briefly to this short debate before the House rises for Easter. Not having had an opportunity of taking much part in the deliberations on the Social Security Bill, I have looked at some of the issues with keen interest, because issues relating to social security and how we should look after the poorest in our society are probably the most challenging of all the matters that come before the House and are of great concern to those of us who profess Christian values.

One cannot always support everything that the Government propose. About three weeks ago in the House, along with right hon. and hon. Friends, I found that I had to vote against the Government on the clause relating to income support in another Bill. I am delighted to report that that matter has largely been put right in this measure. In any event, just because some of us are occasionally unhappy with a detail of social security policy does not mean that secretly we are unhappy with the rest. Far from it, and that is why I was anxious to contribute to the debate.

I went into my village church last Sunday morning with a heavy heart. We had seen on television the disgraceful scenes in the west end of London on Saturday. The weekend press was not kind to the Government or our leader and, it being my turn to read the lesson, I took encouragement—*[Interruption.]* This is not a party political matter. I took great encouragement from some words from Philippians chapter 2, given in the New English Bible translation as:

> "Look to each other's interest and not merely your own."

There is no greater commendation from any authority about how we as politicians should reflect on how we care for the weakest in society.

I shall support the Bill at this stage, as I have throughout its passage, with enthusiasm, for two reasons. The first is that it is packed full of good provisions for which many of us have been asking for some time. I recall taking part in a debate late at night towards the end of the summer when I asked the Minister of State to produce in the autumn a package of measures for the disabled. One might have been forgiven at that time for doubting that he would do that, but I then urged hon. Members to consider his work on behalf of the disabled, and it is a fitting tribute to that work that such measures are included in the Bill.

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield) *rose*——

Mr. Greenway: I will not give way. It is a short debate and other hon. Members wish to take part.

I must declare my interest in the pensions industry. In a few letters to the Secretary of State at an early stage of the Bill, I said that I could not support the provision for self-administered pension schemes and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) rightly pointed out, that provision has been dropped. We now have some valuable additions to our pensions legislation.

Much is happening in the whole sphere of social security for which the Government can take credit. I find deeply distasteful much of what is said purely for party advantage about the care and compassion issue. No political party has a monopoly—*[Interruption.]*—on care for the weakest in society.

The second and more important reason why I support the Bill with enthusiasm is that the Government are providing more money by way of social security than have any previous Government. We are now paying £1 billion a week in social security, at a time when more people are at work in Britain than ever before. I regret that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) said that she felt unable to support the Bill. Anyone in doubt about the Government's committment to look after the weakest in society need only consider some of the measures that have been introduced. Anybody doing that will support the Bill with enthusiasm.

9.48 pm

Mr. Battle: I am attempting to ask the title of the Bill that we shall be sending to another place. The measure that we considered in Committee comprised 18 clauses and 6 schedules. This Bill is quite different. Although it has provisions concerned with disability, disablement allowance, reduced earnings allowance, pensions and so on, some of which we welcome, we found on Report that the Bill grew like Topsy, with new matter being introduced. Had we had time properly to discuss the provisions that greatly concerned us, the Chancellor's beneficence might have proved not all that it was claimed to be.

Similarly, there were the changes that were forced on the Goverment as a result of their ill-advised introduction of the social fund. The High Court overruled the Goverment and they had to come back and tack a clause on to the Bill, and the same thing happened with their residential care provisions.

If we had had a full debate and it had not been guillotined, we might have got further. We might have been able to consider whether there is absolute protection against eviction of old people from homes. I am not sure that the Bill goes far enough to cover that or to cover their care and maintenance. Substantial new policies have been tacked on to the Bill. It almost seems to be a new Bill. We have not had a chance properly to debate it on the Floor of the House because of the guillotine.

Earlier this evening, Conservative Members asked why Opposition Members did not want to debate the Bill. Some of us did want to talk about the clauses that dealt with pensioners' incomes. Some of us wanted to point out that, as a percentage of average earnings per year since 1979, pensioners' incomes, particularly those living on the state pension alone, have gone down. We did not have a chance.

The child benefit debate lasted 13 minutes. We could not discuss why the Government have frozen child benefit for the past three years and why they seem likely to do the same again.

A clause was tabled in my name which might have some topical significance. It concerned the families of people locked away in prison. Those families suffer because their benefits are taken away. They have to pay twice. I would have liked time to speak about the actively seeking work clause, which was included in another Bill that we opposed but which was nevertheless enacted.

Although the Minister says that not many cases have been reported, in my constituency, wage rates advertised in job centre windows are going down. Jobs that were on offer at £1·30 or £1·20 an hour last year are now down below £1 an hour. People are forced to accept those wages or be told that they can have no benefit.

All that is taking place against a background of rising unemployment. If the Minister and the Secretary of State care to have another glance at the Government Actuary's report on benefit upratings in the Vote Office, which was published in January, they will find that it makes it plain —as does no document other than the Red Book—that unemployment in the financial year starting this April will rise. Within the Actuary's report there is an estimate of the reduction in contributions to the national insurance fund as a result of the increase in unemployment. Those reductions will mean cuts in other social security benefits, and in pensions during the coming 12 months.

[Mr. Battle]

The Chancellor, appearing on "On the Record", was asked how the Government could win, bearing in mind the present rate of inflation. He said that it should be remembered that, when unemployment was high, they won. He was saying that the Government are once again prepared to use the weapon of unemployment to bring down inflation. The unemployed are politically expendable.

My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) has often spelled out the facts and figures about how income and wealth have been redistributed from the poor to the rich. They have been taken from the benefits system and redistributed to the richest people, not least by the tax cuts Budget of 1988. The final act in the redistribution of wealth from the poor to the rich is the poll tax.

The Government are already proposing another social security Bill next year. I am certain that, before then, the Government will introduce an additional transitional relief scheme when they realise how hard the poll tax has hit people—just as they did when the Social Security Act 1988 started to bite into housing benefit. On that occasion, the Minister was back at the Dispatch Box introducing transitional relief to ensure that pensioners, the disabled and those on low incomes would receive protection. The same will happen when poll tax starts to bite.

This is not the Bill we set out with, and I do not believe that it is the Bill we should commit tonight to be considered by another place. I suggest to the Government that, rather than turn the Bill into a holdall for their other policy mistakes, they should rethink it.

9.54 pm

Mr. Scott: In commending the Bill to the House for a Third Reading, I may say that I am glad that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) was willing to accord it at least the status of a curate's egg, believing it to be good in parts. I take a more flattering view of it, and I was surprised that the hon. Lady devoted so much of her speech not to the Bill's contents but to two tangential issues—pension incomes and child benefit.

The arguments on pensioners' incomes have been well trodden across the Floor of the House. Opposition Members tend to concentrate on the value of the state pension, but we believe that what matters is the money that is in the pockets of pensioners. I freely acknowledge that, in part due to the maturing of SERPS but also because of the greater growth of occupational pensions, and because savings are increasingly contributing to pensioners' standard of living——

Ms. Short: Because of high interest rates.

Mr. Scott: Only partly. The factors I mentioned are all contributing to the high standard of living enjoyed by those living in retirement. It is manifest that pensioners are enjoying a higher standard of living now than in the past. We know that some have not shared in that, and we have taken special steps to give them help.

As to child benefit, I repeat my remark during Question Time yesterday that there is no policy of allowing it to wither on the vine. Each year, the Government decide whether it is more sensible to spend small amounts of the resources available to us spread thinly across the board, or to concentrate larger amounts on people who really need the most help. The fact that we have chosen to do the latter for the past three years does not mean——

Mr. Wray: Will the Minister allow me to intervene? Why is he misleading the House? He talks as though the Bill is giving people something, whereas it actually takes something away from them. The Bill is really about gaining money for the Government. The Minister talks about spending £230 million on the disabled, but he does not mention that the provisions of clause 2 will gain £15 million for the Government in the first year and £50 million every year thereafter. In the first 20 years of the 21st century, the Government will gain £1 billion annually. Why does not the Minister tell the House that?

Mr. Scott: I am sorry that I gave way to the hon. Gentleman. I thought that he intended to make a short, specific point.

I was grateful for the support of my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young), who clearly illustrated the damage that would be done in the unlikely event that the Opposition were able to prevent the Bill from being committed for consideration by another place. I was grateful for his acknowledgement that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, and I hope myself, have listened to points made during the Bill's progress by those outside the House as well as by right hon. and hon. Members.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) was critical of the new insulation grants scheme. The Government have a good record on energy conservation, but we aim at achieving more, and the fresh approach taken by the Bill will help. My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) expressed the view, which I reinforce, that economic success should be the engine for producing a more compassionate society able to give more to help the needy. I am glad that, with my hon. Friend's acknowledged expertise in occupational pensions, he felt able to welcome the Bill's provisions.

I contrast our measured and deliberate strategy with the Opposition's policies. I am minded to wonder whether the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) or the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) has been following carefully the proceedings on the Bill, either in Committee or on the Floor of the House, because consistently the Opposition have moved amendments which would commit them to more and more public expenditure if and when they ever return to office. We have added up the commitments which would result from their amendments, and they come out at about £1·5 billion. Any future Labour Government would rapidly find themselves on the same path as the Labour Government in which Lord Barnett was Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who spent their first two years in office spending money they did not have.

I am particularly proud that we have managed to put together a disability package——

It being Ten o'clock, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded, pursuant to the Order [28 March], to put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

The House divided: Ayes 293, Noes 205.

Division No. 157] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael

Aitken, Jonathan
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley

Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter

Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom

Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stokes, Sir John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tony Durant and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret

Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland

Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Ingram, Adam
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Robert N. Wareing.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Prescription Charges

10.14 pm

Mr. Robin Cook (Livingston): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the National Health Service (Charges for Drugs and Appliances) Amendment Regulations 1990 (S.I., 1990, No. 537), dated 8th March 1990, a copy of which was laid before this House on 9th March, be annulled.

This will be a short debate, as it is based on a prayer and must finish by 11.30 pm. Indeed, it will be so short that the House will remember that I have made speeches longer than this whole debate. In opening the debate, I shall confine myself to the central proposal—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. The House is attempting to hear the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), who is moving the prayer.

Mr. Cook: You disappoint me, Madam Deputy Speaker. I had hoped that I had stimulated unusual interest in my speech.

As I was saying, I shall confine myself to the central proposal of the regulation, which is that, if the regulation is carried by the House, it will increase prescription charges by 9 per cent.—in a year in which the Government have based the funding of the National Health Service on the assumption that inflation will be 5 per cent. If the regulation is carried, prescription charges will be £3·05. That figure is so large that Conservative Members may have difficulty remembering what it was when they took office. To assist them, I remind them that in 1979, when they inherited office from the last Labour Government, prescription charges were 20p. My hon. Friends will have no similar difficulty in recalling what the *Daily Mail* said in that year, when we warned that the Conservatives might double prescription charges—it called the warning "another Labour lie".

I must confess to my hon. Friends that the *Daily Mail* had a point, as we had failed to warn the nation of the full shock in store for patients in the NHS. If the latest increase is put in place, prescription charges will be 1,425 per cent. higher than when Labour left office.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): Will the hon. Gentleman remind me, as I have forgotten, what proportion of National Health Service patients pay prescription charges?

Mr. Cook: One quarter of those who claim prescriptions pay the prescription charge. If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I will deal with that point at some length in the course of my remarks. I very much hope that I shall have his attention when I come to that aspect. If that is a factor in the hon. Gentleman's thinking, we may be able to persuade him with reason to join us in the Lobby.

To put the increase in perspective, in 1979 one could get three prescriptions for the price of one packet of cigarettes. After this regulation is in place, one will need to club together the price of almost two packets of cigarettes to pay for one prescription. That relative price movement provides an awkward footnote to the Government's health strategy.

It would be bad enough if the new prescription charge merely covered the cost of the drugs that it purchased, but we have arrived at the stage when prescription charges will exceed the cost of a large number of the prescriptions that they pay for.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cook: I will give way, but as we have to conclude by 11.30, this had better be the last time.

Mr. Marshall: The hon. Gentleman is taking us down memory lane. Will he confirm that the Labour party promised in 1974 to get rid of prescription charges but did not do so?

Mr. Cook: I fully admit that the last Labour Government had their failings. If the hon. Gentleman's concern is that we failed to get rid of prescription charges, I happily offer him a compromise: we shall withdraw any commitment to getting rid of prescription charges if he will join us in the Lobby to vote for a prescription charge of 20p as opposed to the Government's proposal for a charge of £3·05. To complain that the last Labour Government left charges at 20p hardly seems a logical or rational argument for increasing the charges to £3·05.

To return to the point that I was about to make, arising from a highly contemporary parliamentary answer, the Minister of State admitted only last month that one third of all prescriptions dispensed have a drug content costing less than the face value of the prescription charge. They are the more common drugs, amounting to more than a third of the total number of prescriptions. Forty-five million prescriptions are being dispensed every year on a prescription charge which renders a profit to the Secretary of State. The National Pharmaceutical Association has furnished me with a full page listing common drugs which can be bought over the counter at a cheaper price than they can be obtained on prescription. Is that what Conservative Members want to achieve? Is it part of their strategy of commercialising health care to encourage patients to dose themselves rather than to seek a prescription on qualified medical advice?

Over the years, as we have debated the matter, I have become familiar with the defence that the hon. Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) has already advanced. It is that the exemption from prescription charges is so wide that there is no real problem. The reason why the proportion of people who are exempt from prescription charges is so high is that the majority of prescriptions are for pensioners and children, who are automatically exempt. The majority of prescriptions to adults under the age of retirement are not exempt.

For example, people with chronic illnesses, who represent a large number of those who require prescriptions, are not exempt. They may have conditions which require repeated prescriptions, and those repeated prescriptions may well be expensive, but such people have no automatic exemption. There is no exemption for people who suffer from cystic fibrosis, asthma, Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis or schizophrenia.

Each of those diseases has been brought to the attention of the Government by organisations representing people who suffer from them and the people who care for those who suffer from them. Repeatedly over the years the Government have refused to widen the exemption to cover them. All the conditions that I have mentioned automatically and unavoidably lower the sufferer's

[Mr. Cook]

capacity to earn. They all require medication—perhaps two or three prescriptions a week—but there is no exemption for sufferers from them unless they pass the income test.

That brings me to the income test as the basis for exemption. A feature of the Government with which my hon. Friends will be familiar is that means tests keep getting meaner. I am indebted to my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) for winkling out of the Minister of State the fact that the number of people eligible for free prescriptions on grounds of income fell by half a million last year. That is the result of the changes made in April 1988. Changes were made to the income test for free prescriptions without any statement to Parliament or debate in the House. As a result of the changes, only 3·4 million adults in Britain, out of the whole population under retirement age, qualify for free prescriptions on the grounds of low income. The rest have to pay, unless they fall into one of the other small exempt categories.

One group of people who have increasingly become liable to pay the full prescription charge are those in receipt of invalidity benefits. Since the changes in 1988, many of those people found that they lost the exemption that they had on the grounds of low income, not because their income rose in real terms but because the threshold fell in real terms. The problem for them is that, once they are carried £1 over the income threshold, they lose all their exemption. By definition, if someone is on invalidity benefit, the chances are that they require regular prescriptions—perhaps two or three a week. But even if they require two or three prescriptions a week, the moment they go £1 over the income limit they are expected to find £9 to pay the face value of the prescription. That is a serious reduction in the standard of living for a household living on perhaps £70 or £80 per week.

I have seen the correspondence between one such person on invalidity benefit and the Minister's office. The correspondent wrote complaining that, following the change in the income test, he had not been able to afford five prescriptions that he had needed in the previous month because he could not spare the necessary £14 out of his tight budget. The reply from the Minister of State's office—I exempt the present Minister of State from blame, as the letter came from her predecessor's office—was masterly in its incomprehension of what life is like on a hand-to-mouth existence in which one has to count every penny. The reply, if you please, advised the correspondent that it would be cheaper for him to make a bulk purchase by buying a season ticket for the prescriptions. As the correspondent pointed out in his letter to me in rather blunter terms than I can share with the House, if he could not budget to find £14 to pay for the prescription charges how did the Minister imagine that he would find £40 to buy the annual certificate in the first place?

Every week, pharmacists are confronted with patients who have been given three prescriptions and ask the pharmacist to advise them which ones they really need because they cannot afford all three. I find it curious that Conservative Members keep denying that charges have that effect. After all, every Conservative Member believes in market forces—it is a condition of membership of the modern Conservative party. They know that market forces work by the price signal, so it is an article of faith that if prices go up, demand must go down. That is certainly what has happened with eye tests.

This week marks the end of the first year since charges were introduced for eye tests. Every survey—there have been many—concludes that charges have been accompanied by a 30 per cent. drop in eye tests—3·5 million fewer eye tests have been performed, so 3·5 million people have been put off by the new price signal of a tenner a test.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): That is damaging to health.

Mr. Cook: The Secretary of the Association of Optometrists shares my hon. Friend's belief as he observed on Monday, that 200,000 people have been missed who might have serious eye conditions which would have been detected if they had come forward for a test, as they would have done last year. He said:

> "I think it is inevitable that people will go blind as a result of charging."

The deterrent that we have seen in the case of charges for eye tests can also be witnessed in the case of prescription charges. The Government's own figures show that prescriptions that are not exempt, those prescriptions for which there is a charge, fell from 107 million in 1979 —I have already reminded the House that the charge then was 20p—to 70 million in 1988. That is a reduction of about a third. That drop is all the more remarkable given that, in the same period, those prescriptions which are exempt continued to rise.

The York Centre for Health Economics has made the reasonable estimate that, if prescriptions for which people have to pay had continued to increase at the same trend growth rate as those which are exempt, the number of prescriptions for which people are currently paying would be double the current level. In other words, half the demand for prescriptions has been suppressed by the current level of prescription charges.

Ironically, in the very month in which the Government have announced the latest increase, the Institute for Fiscal Studies released a study which concluded:

> "The entire fall in the number of charged prescriptions could be accounted for by the increase in the real level of the prescription charge"—

an entire fall of one third in real terms.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies is not alone in its judgment. The latest increase has been condemned by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, the National Pharmaceutical Association and the British Medical Association—the very organisations which speak for pharmacists and for general practitioners. They are the people who see the effect of prescription charges on their patients. They know that it is a tax on the sick and they find it repugnant that the people who are most sick have to pay most. There can be no justification for the latest increase.

The House began its proceedings after Question Time today with a ministerial statement on capping local authority poll taxes. I invite the House to conclude the day's work by joining me in the Lobby to cap the Government's own poll tax.

10.30 pm

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Whenever the House talks about prescription charges, we have a debate that is little better than a charade, because it is full of cant from Opposition Members. If we consider the history of prescription charges in this country, we must remember that a Labour Government first took upon themselves the power to impose prescription charges. We must remember that in 1964 Lord Wilson won the election on the promise that he would get rid of prescription charges. He did for three years, but then Lord Jenkins reintroduced them in 1968. In 1974, Lord Wilson was at it again; he promised to get rid of prescription charges.

It is no use the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) saying that prescription charges were merely 20p at the end of his term of office. The integrity of election promises is at issue. It is surely wrong and cynical——

Mr. Cook: I am delighted at the hon. Gentleman's observation about the integrity of election pledges. May I invite him to consider two issues to which he must address his mind in the context of this debate? First, will he show my hon. Friends and me where, in the Conservative manifesto in 1987, there was a commitment to introduce charges for eye tests or dental examinations? Will he cast light on how it was that before—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman may seek guidance, but he will not find a reference in the manifesto.

Secondly, will the hon. Gentleman cast light on how it was that the Conservative party could assure the country in 1979 that it had no intention of doubling prescription charges when it increased them fifteenfold?

Mr. Marshall: We made a commitment in 1979 to improve the quality of the Health Service, which is what we have done. Those prescription charges are part of that improvement. Those who vote against prescription charges tonight are voting against an income for the Health Service of more than £200 million.

Dame Jill Knight (Birmingham, Edgbaston): I wonder whether my hon. Friend noted with the same interest as I did the fact that, in all the remarks of the hon. Member for Livingston tonight, not once did he say what cuts he would impose on the Health Service to meet the drugs bill.

Mr. Marshall: My hon. Friend is right. The choice facing the country is simply whether we want——

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North) *rose*——

Mr. Marshall: I have given way twice, and I am trying to answer my hon. Friend. When I have done so, I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman.

The choice facing the country is simple: do we want a better Health Service for those who are ill or do we want free drugs for people who can afford to pay for them? The Labour party must say how many nurses it would get rid of, how many fewer hip replacements and how many fewer heart transplants there would be if its views were to prevail.

Mr. Corbyn: I shall take the hon. Gentleman back to 1979. Will he tell us exactly what the pledge was in that Conservative election campaign? I seem to remember very well that there was a pledge not to increase prescription charges. That has clearly been broken. The argument then was just as valid as it is today: by increasing prescription charges, one increases the cost for those who can least afford it because they are ill at the time.

Mr. Marshall: I well remember 1979 because that was when the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) was causing chaos throughout north London by persuading refuse collectors not to collect refuse, indulging in a series of strikes and disrupting education in the London borough of Haringey, where schools were closed for several weeks.

As for the hon. Gentleman's talk of an alleged election promise, no promise was made in 1979 not to increase prescription charges. A specific promise was made in 1974, however, which the Labour party refused to honour. It is perhaps significant that we have not heard from the Labour party tonight what its policy is. Is it the policy of the 1989 Labour party conference, which was to get rid of prescription charges, or is it a fact that its latest policy review fails to mention the subject at all? I suspect that Labour Members have realised that no one will believe any promises they make in respect of prescription charges.

Mr. Robin Cook *rose*——

Mr. Marshall: I have given way three times.

Mr. Cook: If the hon. Gentleman will ask these questions, he must expect them to be answered. The answer is perfectly straightforward. Our commitment, as a first priority, is to abolish the charge for eye tests, and that will go; secondly, we will abolish the charge for dental examinations, and that will go; then we will make what progress we can within resources in reducing the prescription charge. There will certainly be no increase. If there is no increase, it will mean that the prescription charge will decline with inflation. Of course, under the next Labour Government, inflation will be so low that that will not be satisfactory, so I assure my hon. Friends that I shall seek to make real cuts in the value of the prescription charge.

Mr. Marshall: That has been a valuable little exercise: we have managed to smoke out from the Labour party spokesman on health the fact that a future Labour Government would retain prescription charges. The commitment to reduce them is so "pie in the sky" that we know it will not happen. To be told that a future Labour Government will reduce the rate of inflation, when under the previous one inflation increased within 12 months to 25 per cent. and the average rate of inflation was twice the rate under this Government, is pure "pie in the sky" economics.

There are widespread exemptions for these charges, and we should look at them in relation to the total drugs bill. We have been told that they are going up by 8·9 per cent. in the current year. What we were not told by the hon. Member for Livingston was that the drugs bill is estimated to go up by 13 per cent. this year, so that prescription charges will be meeting a smaller percentage of the total drugs bill.

We should also look at the size of the drugs bill, which in the current financial year will be £2·4 billion. I should have thought that a system of charges raising less than 10 per cent. of the total drugs bill is not at all unreasonable. The charges are not paid by the needy, as the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) said, because there are widespread exemptions covering a very large number of people.

I believe that the charges are reasonable. I believe that the opposition to them is full of cant and humbug and pays no attention to what the Labour Government did.

10.37 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): I am not going to follow the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall), particularly on his line of argument, although I would say that perhaps the best —or perhaps not the best but the most worrying—thing that could be said about his speech is that he actually sounds as if he believes it. It strikes me that we have had a recurrence of debates at about this hour of the evening, when Ministers from the Department of Health or the Department of Social Security are frequently lambasted from their own Back Benches on a variety of issues, but when there will be one loner, one loyalist, who will stand up and read the brief, either from Smith square or the Whips Office.

I wonder, when the hon. Member speaks, how it is that the Whips allocate these things. It must be on a "short straw" basis, the choice of who has to make the speech defending a policy which, to judge by the expressions on the faces of other hon. Members on the Government Benches, particularly those interested in health issues, is fairly indefensible. I suspect that, within the parliamentary Conservative party, it works rather like a reverse example of how one loses a driving licence—by accumulating points over time. The more of this kind of speech one makes, the more one accumulates points; one does not lose one's licence at the end—one is given a knighthood for services to the state. So I wish the hon. Gentleman well in his endeavours.

Let us just deal with the reality of this. One thing struck me when this year's increase in prescription charge was announced. It is a worrying fact, which reflects the longevity of the Government and, alongside that longevity, the extent to which the public have become much less interested over the years in increases in these charges. For slightly more than a decade, we have become used to way-above-the-odds increases in prescription charges that, even compared with when I entered the House in 1983, are no longer as big and as dramatic a story in the media—[AN HON. MEMBER: "They should be."] They certainly should, but they are not. That is a sad reflection of an almost weary acceptance among reporters. They feel that it is the same old story again of the Government putting up prescription charges above the level of inflation, even though inflation is well beyond what was anticipated in the current financial year.

In addition, that group in society who are most dependent upon prescriptions—the categories referred to by the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook)—are all too often the same strata of strained financial cross-sections who have the weakest voice, not only on prescription charges but on housing and social security policies. Therefore, we are right to debate these matters on each and every occasion they arise, so that we can give voice to the reality that we hear in our constituency surgeries. I cannot believe that Conservative Members do not hear it also, because they certainly appear to be hearing all the complaints about the poll tax. They have somewhat selective hearing when it comes to social security issues in general and health policies in particular.

The hon. Member for Livingston also referred to eye test charges and the deregulation in that category of the Health Service, with the resultant serious problems. During the past few months, my party, through a questionnaire, has polled the opinions of almost 2,000 opticians throughout England, Wales and Scotland. The results have been in line with what the professional associations have found—that there has been about a 30 per cent. drop in the number of people seeking eye tests. Almost as high a number—28 per cent.—of opticians feel that there is a question mark against their financial liability if the changes introduced last year are not reversed.

We now have a contrast. A year ago, when Lords amendments were debated on the Floor of the House, the Government majority was slashed to single figures or at least the low teens. They sought to overcome the amendments on dental and optical tests imposed in another place. I took the trouble to read the *Hansard* of the exchanges during that debate, including the remarks of the Minister and the Secretary of State. They offered the same assurances that they are now offering on prescription charges—that they would not have a detrimental effect, that there would be sufficient exemptions, that it was scaremongering by the Opposition, that there was no need to upset people, and so on.

The evidence since then is overwhelming and disastrous. First, the changes make nonsense of public health preventive medicine policy. Secondly, they must raise legitimate anxieties about public safety. With a 30 per cent. drop in eye tests, how many people are now behind the wheel of a vehicle on our roads who, had they had an eye test during the past 12 months, would be wearing glasses and would therefore be safer drivers? They also make nonsense of transport policy and public safety on our highways, which should be an arm of government into which the Department of Health has an input.

Thirdly, the Government are carrying out a survey of opticians and are due to publish the results in May. Surprise, surprise, I have been looking at some of the detailed comments that the professional associations have made, and we should take with a pinch of salt any findings in the Government's collection of statistics that apparently give the lie to the most recent surveys. I say that because the questions are loaded. They are loaded to avoid the public's giving the kind of answers that would give an accurate reflection of this attitude to eye tests.

I will give one example. One of the questions asked is: "Have you had an eye test since Christmas?" They do not say since the beginning of the year, or in the last three months. MORI has been asked to advise on the efficacy of using the word "Christmas" and it says, as an organisation of experienced opinion pollsters, that that is a deliberately vague term in that it stretches the bounderies of recollection back as far as November, and that it does not line up with the kind of dates over which the Government have been promising that they would be able to give accurate figures.

Secondly, the pollsters ask the public not if they had to pay but what kind of eye test they had. They say: "Did you have a National Health Service eye test, or did you pay for an eye test?" Again, they are trying to confuse the public by the questions they are asking.

I sent the Secretary of State a copy of the questions which we circulated throughout Britain, and a copy of the responses. I think he will find that they are far more accurate and honest. Given that the results produced from nearly 2,000 opticians approached directly are completely in line with the figures discovered as a result of the professional bodies carrying out their surveys, if the Government figures are far removed from those, it is because their supposed survey has been rigged.

In comparison with what we were assured over dental and optical charges 12 months ago and the disastrous downturn since, one can have no confidence whatsoever in the Goverment's latest hike in prescription charges, because any assurances that they can offer are likely to prove too low, not least when we hear the kind of assurances drafted from Smith square for Back Benchers which immediately preceded my own contribution.

10.47 pm

Mr. Roger Sims (Chiselhurst): This debate, as the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) implied, is an annual event that takes on something of a ritual quality, not least with the Pavlovian response from Members on the Opposition Front Bench. These are entirely predictable, although certainly more enjoyable from the lips of the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) than from some of his predecessors.

I assure the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye that I am not a pressed man but very much a volunteer, as I hope my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Patnick) can confirm. Indeed, I am no party hack on this or any other issue.

Mr. Kennedy: Having served on a number of Committees with the hon. Gentleman, I would never accuse him of that. I think that is why he tends to stand further way from the Treasury Bench.

Mr. Sims: I am grateful for that compliment from the hon. Gentleman, as no doubt the hon. Member for Livingston is for the one that I just paid him.

As the subject has been mentioned, I remind the House that I believe that it was wrong for the Government to impose charges for eye tests and teeth checks, and spoke and voted accordingly. I believe that the evidence that we have already heard in the debate this evening, when it has had more time to emerge, will prove the case, but time will tell.

Having established my position on that, I am bound to say that I think it entirely reasonable that those who can afford to do so should make a contribution towards the cost of prescriptions. After all, more than half the population are within the exempt categories and only one quarter of prescriptions are charged for. We are talking of £3 or so per item, although with the use of the so-called season ticket facility the average cost reduces. However, I sometimes wonder whether people are as aware of this facility as they should be and whether it might usefully be given more publicity.

I was interested that the hon. Member for Livingston made a comparison with the cost of a couple of packets of cigarettes. Is it unreasonable to expect people to pay for a prescription what they pay for a couple of packets of cigarettes or a round of drinks in the pub, although they probably pay a good deal more for a round of drinks?

Another comparison might be with the items on a normal shopping list at the chemist. People expect to pay £2 or £3 for cough mixture, aspirins, sticking plasters and many other items to be found in the average bathroom cabinet. Is it unreasonable to ask people who can afford it to pay £3 for a prescription?

If Opposition Members are really against it, they must answer the questions posed by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall). The Department estimates that this increase we are discussing will provide the NHS with £13 million. What alternative method of raising money for the NHS do Opposition Members have? Should it come from increased taxes? Or would they prefer cuts to be made in NHS expenditure to protect those with means from having to pay a little more for their prescriptions? If that is their view, it is a curious socialist philosophy.

Were Labour Members to follow through their party conference policy and abolish prescription charges, they would have to find about £170 million, if my calculations are right. There would have to be huge NHS cuts to find that sort of money. The Government proposal is reasonable and reflects the higher cost of pharmaceutical services in the NHS.

10.52 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): We must discover the real reason why, yet again, the Government wish to increase prescription charges. After all, the Conservatives have increased them every year snce they came to power in 1979.

Conservative Members have offered only one reason for the increase—that of raising money for the NHS. Compared with the overall NHS budget, the extra cash that this increase would raise—£13 million—is chickenfeed.

The Government have had huge sums at their disposal, but have invested them otherwise than in the NHS. In a recent short debate on the Consolidated Fund Bill, I pointed out that the Conservatives had raised about £50 billion through selling public assets—the family silver—and a further £83 billion from North sea oil. No previous Government have had such enormous resources at their disposal from which to make a larger contribution to the NHS. Yet today we are discussing a mere £13 million, which will penalise the poor and the sick. It is disgraceful.

I believe that there are other reasons why the Government wish to increase prescription charges. They may wish, for example, to establish financial disincentives so that people will think twice before obtaining the drugs that they require. Is that the reason why the Government are bringing forward increased charges?

My hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) mentioned the report by York university, which is well worth studying. A number of points raised by that report give us cause for concern. We are worried about the implications of increased prescription charges, because the York report said that

"increasing prescription charges may . . . be reducing as opposed to enhancing the use of primary care resources."

The Government must be aware of that problem. They are affecting the way in which general practitioners operate, and the way that primary care can assist the patient.

The Government must also be aware of the huge reduction in the take-up rate for prescription since charges were introduced. Some 107 million were cashed in 1979. The figure was down to 70 million by 1988. We should all be concerned about the implications of that for the patients involved.

[Mr. David Hinchliffe]

be valued and will be used rather than flushed down the toilet or the drain? Do the Government feel that if something is paid for it is more valued? I have been waiting to hear the Government's justification from the Government benches for another huge increase in prescription charges, but frankly no reason has been given.

The real reasons relate to the Government's wider political objectives for the National Health Service. The Under-Secretary of State for Health knows my view of the scenario because he heard it last week and the week before. He heard it in the Standing Committee on the National Health Service and Community Care Bill. He understands my view of the Government's actions. I feel that I need to repeat it again and again because I genuinely believe that the Government's policies are part of an overall plan to transform the National Health Service into something quite different.

The Government have made a deliberate attempt to undermine public confidence in the National Health Service during their time in office—for example, by the way in which they have continued to underfund the service. Year in and year out since 1982, the National Association of Health Authorities report has indicated massive underfunding of the Health Service.

The Government have deliberately provoked industrial disputes within the National Health Service. The nurses' dispute and the ambulance crews' dispute were inflamed deliberately by the Government and in particular by the Front Bench and the Secretary of State for Health. The Government have attempted to try to convince people that we can no longer afford a state National Health Service and that we need to consider alternatives to the service that we have been fortunate enough to have since the 1940s.

Those Government policies are part of an overall plan to prepare for something very different. The Government have deliberately attempted to create a public expectation that one now has to pay for the health care which has been freely available in this country since the inception of the National Health Service. What other justification can there be for the provisions in the Health and Medicines Act 1988 for eyesight checks that the hon. Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) mentioned?

My hon. Friend the Member for Livingston cited some appalling figures tonight—3·5 million fewer eye sight checks have occurred as a result of the charge. That number of people would otherwise have gone for those checks. What other justification can there be for charges for dental checks? Charges for hospital parking will be a disincentive for people to attend hospital or to visit relatives in hospital. What other justification can there be for the huge jump in prescription charges?

The measure relates to wider issues than just another huge increase in prescription charges. I was fortunate to have been born shortly after the inception of the National Health Service, so I never knew about doctors' bills—but I have read about them and I have been told about them. It is fitting that my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) is here tonight as I have read the volumes that he wrote about Nye Bevan and learnt from those and from other publications about the reality before the inception of National Health Service.

In the past week, the reality of the situation that we may face has been brought home to me. One of my constituents is facing a bill for £6,000 for private health treatment which she cannot afford to pay. The medical insurance company which she thought would cover those expenses has told her, "Sorry, but because of a technicality you are not covered" and she is being sued for £6,000. That sort of thing should have gone out of the window in 1948, on the introduction of the National Health Service.

The real reason behind this measure is the Tory policy of turning the Health Service into a commercialised, pay-as-you-go, American-style health care system. Anyone who believes in the NHS should today and in any future debate vote solidly against the Government in defence of the Health Service of this country.

11 pm

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): I agree with the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) about how remarkably little coverage there has been of this measure in the national press. In the Library, I failed to find one mention of it in any national English newspaper. Unlike the hon. Gentleman, I do not think that that is the result of apathy, but that newspaper commentators and the majority of the public accept that there is nothing wrong in asking people who can afford to pay prescription charges to make some contribution—albeit not an economical contribution—and so provide the Health Service with substantial additional revenue at a time when the drugs budget is rising rapidly.

It is easy to caricature prescription fees as a charge on the sick, as was said by the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle), and to claim that they deter people from seeking proper medical treatment. That may be good political hyperbole, but the majority of the public reject it as totally divorced from reality.

The reality is that the Opposition recognise the strength of the argument for prescription charges. Although Labour abolished charges in 1965, they reintroduced them three years later, at a 25 per cent. higher level. In 1974, Labour promised to abolish prescription charges but failed to do so during their subsequent four years in government. Last year, Labour's national conference voted to abolish charges, but the shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury must be concerned that prescription charges raise £212 million—the equivalent of budgets for six or seven health authorities of reasonable size. The total amount raised by all Health Service charges, many of which Labour introduced after the war, is £1,020 million annually, which even Opposition Members, in their saner moments, would regard as a significant contribution to NHS funding.

Most people accept that it is a sensible, progressive and sane proposition that people who are able to contribute to prescription costs, and have sufficient income, should do so. The charges involved can hardly be regarded as regressive. Of a total of 335 million prescriptions, no fewer than 260 million are provided free of charge. The number of prescriptions per person has risen by about one tenth since 1977, the amount spent on the drugs budget per se has risen from £550 million in 1979 to £2·4 billion, and the drugs budget is rising significantly faster than increases in charges.

Despite that background, the exemptions that the Government have allowed, which account for a higher proportion of the total drugs budget, have increased over the past 10 years. In addition to children under 16, all pensioners, people on income support or family credit, expectant mothers and mothers who have had a child within the previous 12 months, in 1982 the Conservative Government allowed a further extension to include mothers who have had the appalling experience of having a stillborn child within the previous 12 months, between 1983 and 1985 they made further exemptions for medical conditions, and in 1988—a fact that has not been mentioned by the Opposition or by my hon. Friends—they extended exemption to students under 19 who are in full-time education.

It is scarcely surprising that, with 55 per cent. of the population and a far greater proportion of those needing prescriptions being exempt, the changes are met with understanding and, indeed, a deafening silence by the newspapers which might be expected to oppose them.

The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) mentioned the Institute of Fiscal Studies and an article in its February magazine. It is not surprising that research shows that the increase in charges of some five times in real terms over the past 10 years has not resulted in any decrease in the number of prescriptions. Indeed, between 1979 and 1987 the number rose by 11 per cent. The hon. Gentleman said that the Institute of Fiscal Studies showed that the number of paid prescriptions declined from 107 million to 70 million between 1979 and 1988 and that this showed that the increase in prescription charges had reduced the number of people who were prepared to pay for prescriptions. That may be a significant determinant. Indeed, the Institute of Fiscal Studies argued that.

The Institute of Fiscal Studies also argued that many people who would no longer pay for prescriptions realised, as a result of prescription charges going up, that they had a statutory right to free prescriptions and, far from stopping taking out prescriptions, more of them went to their doctors to get the free prescriptions to which they were entitled. Instead of increased charges leading to a decline in the total number of prescriptions given out by doctors, they had the opposite effect.

The Institute of Fiscal Studies has showed that increasing prescription charges can have a beneficial effect on take-up and on preventive health care. The hon. Member for Livingston was not prepared to elaborate on that when he discussed the report. For that reason and the other reasons that I have outlined, I shall support the regulations and oppose the Opposition prayer.

11.9 pm

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): Earlier today we debated the poll tax capping legislation. My local authority will be capped for increasing its expenditure by 6 per cent.; after 11 years of Conservative government, we now find ourselves debating a 1,000 per cent. increase in prescription charges. As my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) pointed out to me earlier, this, too, is a kind of poll tax. Conservative Members have provided no more than a tissue of excuses for the attempt to privatise medical care and introduce market forces that underlies the Government's proposals.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Like the poll tax, this tax on health will affect most seriously those whose housing and working conditions are worst: their health will suffer most.

Mr. McCartney: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The introduction of charges will cause the cronically ill to ask doctors to delete items from multiple prescriptions, or to abandon their prescriptions altogether.

Opposition Members have said a good deal about the general implications of the proposals; I refer specifically to the problems of women who cannot afford to pay multiple prescription charges. I am currently dealing with the case of a constituent of my late colleague Allan Roberts, who was the Member for Bootle. Because she could not afford the three-part hormone replacement therapy package, a growth of hair now covers her face and she lives almost as a hermit. She was recently sent to a consultant dermatologist in Liverpool, who has written to me that the case is one of the worst that she has seen. Because of cuts, however, she cannot begin to treat the patient for nine to 12 months, although the patient is deemed to be in the emergency category. She has advised the patient that, if she is prepared to pay, treatment can begin at the same hospital 24 hours after an appointment has been made.

I have already written to the Minister about the case, so I shall not go into detail now, but it illustrates graphically the disincentive that multiple prescription charges will introduce: people will be discouraged from either embarking on or continuing treatment.

Conservative Members have simply parroted their speeches. I think that the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) must have left his speech on his seat, and the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) must have picked it up and read out pages 3, 4 and 5. Perhaps another hon. Member will read the concluding passages. The hon. Member for Hendon, South spoke of raising resources for the National Health Service, but he did not mention the Government's proposal to provide £40 million in tax relief for private medical insurance in the current financial year. I trust that one of the first steps that the Labour Government will take will be to remove that relief, and pump the money back into the NHS, so that people need not pay prescription charges.

Mr. John Marshall: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Gentleman has had ample opportunity to put his case. He has been out of the Chamber since then—for medicinal purposes, I understand.

The issue at stake is this: how can we establish preventive medicine within the confines of the NHS and ensure that multiple prescriptions are effective for preventive and treatment purposes? The Minister owes it to the House to explain clearly why the Government have failed on the 15 occasions when prescription charges have been raised to do anything to protect those who require multiple prescriptions. That affects women in the main and there is growing evidence that the lives of many women who go without hormone replacement treatment become an abject misery. Far more expensive hospital treatment may be needed later in their lives, whereas, if the treatment had been carried out through the prescription service, much of the pain would have been relieved and much of the expense of in-hospital treatment would not have been incurred by the National Health Service.

These dangerous increases run even against the Government's concept of value for money. The proposals are not value for money for the National Health Service in terms of their long-term effect on people's health. I know

[Mr. McCartney]

that the Minister is desperate to speak tonight to explain why it is in the interests of the nation's health once again to increase prescription charges.

Why, when the Select Committee on Social Services is in the process of analysing in detail the effect on uptake of the introduction of eye test charges, are the Government attempting to influence public opinion to their way of thinking? All the evidence so far suggests that there has been a substantial and growing decline in the number of people using the service. In some areas, the drop is not 30 per cent. or 40 per cent., but 60 per cent. and above. Most of them are areas of social deprivation and high unemployment, with a high incidence of child deaths and a high mortality rate. Yet the Government, with their warped way of seeking to influence public opinion, are trying to suggest that the charges are not having the effect that the evidence before the Select Committee suggests.

I hope that the Minister will make two promises tonight: first, to put all the independent evidence from the current investigations about eye tests before the Select Committee so that we can check and verify it, and, secondly, to amend the regulations next year, if not this year, to allow some relief for people, especially women going through hormone treatment, who must have multiple prescriptions.

11.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Roger Freeman): The House owes a debt of gratitude to my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight) and for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall). They have performed a valuable function in drawing out of the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) a commitment—a Front-Bench commitment, I assume—that a Labour Government would freeze the prescription charge in monetary terms. He gave that commitment clearly. In the coming year, they would remove £13 million from the National Health Service. Freezing the charge is an irrational way of targeting resources on those who most need assistance and a very inefficient way in which to proceed.

The House would have expected a more reasoned argument from the hon. Gentleman, perhaps indicating certain categories of those receiving prescriptions on whom he wished to concentrate resources. Instead, we had an argument based more on political symbolism than reality. It is convenient for an Opposition Front-Bench spokesman to spend money by forgoing increases in charges without, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South so clearly put it, explaining precisely where the resources were to come from.

That adds a further £13 million to the cost of the hon. Gentleman's two previous commitments—to end compulsory competitive tendering, which will lose the NHS £100 million, and to end, in view of the Labour party's evident hostility to them, private practice and income generation, losing another £100 million to the NHS.

Mr. Sims: Can my hon. Friend reconcile the apparent commitment to freeze prescription charges with the commitment of the Labour party conference to abolish them altogether?

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I was taking the words of the hon. Member for Livingston at face value as a Front Bench commitment, but my hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the Labour party's commitment, which would lose the Health Service about £180 million—the revenue from charges, which contribute about 8 per cent. of the total cost of the drugs budget.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): The Minister paid glowing tribute to his hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall). Given that he referred to a drugs budget increase of 13 per cent., how can the Minister justify an element for inflation of a mere 5 per cent.?

Mr. Freeman: I was coming to that very point. It is reasonable to increase prescription charges from 1 April 1990 by 25p, from £2.80 to £3.05. The 8·9 per cent. increase cited by the hon. Member for Livingston compares with the 10 per cent. increase in resources going into the NHS in the coming year—amounting to about £30 billion in the United Kingdom.

The hon. Member for Livingston referred to the rate of increase in the total drugs bill during the past few years. Certainly, the average monetary increase has been about 13 per cent. We believe that those who can afford to pay should contribute, by way of an increase in the charges, a reasonable proportion of the cost of the drugs bill, bearing in mind that increase. Our proposals for indicative drug budgeting are intended not to reduce the real cost of the drugs budget but to bring some moderating downward pressure on the rate of its growth.

We understand that the real cost of drugs must increase each year, to pay for new techniques in the NHS and for an aging population, so the drugs bill is rising at 13 per cent. in monetary terms; set against that, the increase of just under 9 per cent. in prescription charges is reasonable. I have already said that only 8 per cent. of the total cost of our drugs budget is recovered by way of charges. That total was £2·2 billion in 1988-89, and it is forecast to rise further in the coming year.

The proportion of the average cost of drugs prescribed that prescription charges recover is also relatively modest. For prescriptions for which there is a charge, the charge covers only 36 per cent. of the average cost of the prescription. The hon. Member for Livingston selectively referred to drug costs, but I am taking the total cost of the prescription, which rightly includes all the other costs of preparation and dispensing. The plain fact is that charges amount to only one third of the total cost of prescriptions.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) said, the increased resources available to the NHS in the coming year are of the order of £12 million to £13 million. The hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) called that chickenfeed, following the hon. Member for Livingston, who said that he would forgo that increase. I invite the House to consider what £13 million amounts to per district health authority—*[Interruption.]*—including that of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). It amounts to some £65,000 in the coming year alone. That is the increase that would be forgone. It is equal to five qualified nurses for every district health authority. I put it to the hon. Member for Wakefield that those sums are not chickenfeed.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I should be grateful if the Minister would put my comments into their full context. I said that the money was chickenfeed in the context of the overall NHS budget. I am sure that the Minister would agree with that.

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman is ducking the issue. The total sum of £13 million, just under 9 per cent. in the coming year—I shall come on to deal with waivers of prescription charges which make the system fair—and £65,000 on average per health authority, which is equal to five qualified nurses, are real numbers which make a real difference.

We have a generous system of waivers for prescription charges. The hon. Member for Livingston rightly said that some 75 per cent. of all items dispensed are free. The exempt categories include those on low incomes, pensioners, children under the age of 16, students under the age of 19, and expectant and nursing mothers. It is a generous range of exemptions, amounting to three quarters of all prescriptions.

Mr. Tom Clarke: So why bother with the rest?

Mr. Freeman: We bother about the £180 million collected from the other 25 per cent. because it is a significant sum for the National Health Service. It is ploughed back into patient care and it is contributed by those who can afford to make the payment. By waiving those charges—as an act of political symbolism, I suspect —the hon. Gentleman would lose the NHS real funds of £180 million, which is equivalent to £1 million per district health authority.

Mr. Robin Cook: The Minister lays heavy stress on the revenue to the NHS from the charges. If that is the sole argument that he can adduce in defence of the increase, where does his argument stop? If raising revenue for the NHS is the only concern, why not introduce charges for seeing a GP? Why stop at prescription charges? We must surely grasp the fact that we are debating the fundamental principle that people should pay for the NHS not at the moment when they are sick, but when they are well.

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman carefully did not subscribe to the view of his party that prescription charges should be abolished. He carefully said from the Front Bench that in his judgment the charge should remain at £3·05 and not be increased further. I will give way to the hon. Gentleman if he wishes to correct me.

Mr. Cook: The Minister is creating a problem for a future Labour Government. Every time the Government increase the prescription charge, they increase the cost of abolishing it, as the Minister well understands. I said that in the first instance there would be no further increase in real terms and that we would seek to reduce the prescription charge as resources permitted. *[Laughter.]* I do not see what hon. Members find funny about that. We have made an explicit commitment that the first priority will be to abolish the charge for eye tests. The second will be to abolish the charge for dental examinations. The third will be to make what progress we can to reduce the prescription charge. If the Minister is worried about the cost of that, he should join us in the Lobby today and vote against his increase, which will merely increase the cost of abolition.

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman is changing his tune —[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] He has clearly redefined the commitment from the Labour Front Bench. He is now saying from the Front Bench that the Labour party would not increase the prescription in real terms. Perhaps he will clarify the position.

Mr. Cook: If the Minister is in any doubt, I am glad to repeat the commitment. We shall not increase the prescription charge and we shall seek real reductions in it. I would also like to achieve cash reductions.

Mr. Freeman: We strongly believe that the proposals are fair, reasonable and prudent. I invite the House to throw out the prayer and support the regulations.

It being half-past Eleven o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Prayers against statutory instruments, &c. (negative procedure)).*

The House divided: Ayes 197, Noes 278.

Division No. 158] **[11.29 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Ingram, Adam
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey

Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo

Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Hayes and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*

Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fenner, Dame Peggy

Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fox, Sir Marcus
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*

Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Gerrard
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*.
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor

Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Kenneth Carlisle and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.

MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Ordered,

That Mr. John Bowis and Mr. Ernie Ross be discharged from the Select Committee on Members' Interests and Mr. David Evans and Mr. George Howarth be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Durant.]*

PETITIONS

Orange Grove Farm

11.41 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): This petition is from one of my constituents who is due to lose her and her husband's home by the action of bailiffs. She has fought many court cases and lost them, often on her own, in a desperate attempt to keep her husband from news that could seriously harm him. Time has caught up with her and she has only this House to which to appeal.

The petition states:

> To the honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled. The Humble Petition of Mrs. Evelyn May Mason, Orange Grove Farm, 1, Handley Lane, Clay Cross, Chesterfield, Derbyshire, showeth she and her husband are to have bailiffs sent to their home to take possession of their property on 12th April 1990, that this will have a serious adverse effect upon the health and well-being of her Husband as shown by medical evidence, That the loss of their home is excessive and unreasonable restraint for the minor amounts that were initially allegedly outstanding to Rice and Co., Solicitors, Saltergate, Chesterfield.
>
> Wherefore your petitioner prays that your Honourable House will take measures to prevent bailiffs from entering and taking over the home of Herself and her Husband.
>
> And your petitioner, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc.

It is signed by Mrs. Mason.

To lie upon the Table.

Human Embryos

11.43 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I have the honour to present a petition from the parishioners of St. Aidan's church, Seahouses, Northumberland. The petitioners affirm that the newly fertilised human embryo is a living human, and pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation forbidding any procedure that involves the purchase, sale, discarding or freezing of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment —unless that is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned—and all forms of trans-species fertilisation. The petition has also been signed in the same terms by members of the Alnwick branch of the Catholic Women's League.

I support the petitioners in their desire that the House should enact legislation to prevent the use of embryos for research, and I look forward to the opportunity so to vote, now that the House is to have a day dedicated to the subject in the near future.

To lie upon the Table.

11.44 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I wish to present a petition which was presented to me after a meeting at my local parish church, St. Joseph's, on Sunday, which was attended by 170 local parishioners, including priests. The petition is presented on behalf of Mrs. Jacoba Cornelius Slee, 3 Davett Close, Leicester, Monsignor O'Down, the Vicar General of Leicestershire and 785 other signatories.

It reads as follows:

> To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled: The Humble Petition of members of St. Joseph's, the Sacred Heart and Our Lady's churches, Leicester, and the members of Leicester, East constituency, sheweth that we affirm that the newly fertilised human embryo is a real, living human being. THEREFORE, WE ELCOME the statement in the report of the committee of inquiry into human fertilisation and embryology, the Warnock report, that "the status of the embryo is a matter of fundamental principle which should be enshrined in legislation", and its recommendation that the embryo of the human species should be afforded protection in law; AND THEREFORE WE OPPOSE all such practices as are recommended in the report which discriminate against the embryo or violate his or her human dignity and right to life.
>
> WHEREFORE YOUR PETITIONERS PRAY that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which *(a)* forbids any procedure that involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding or freezing of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done soley for the benefit of the embryo concerned); and *(b)* forbids all forms of trans-species fertilisation.
>
> And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will for ever pray, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Local Government Finance

11.46 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): This petition was organised by a Mrs. Robinson of 36 Firs avenue, Ashfield in Scunthorpe, and it deals with the issue of the poll tax and how it affects people who are at home with no income, in particular, married women. Mrs.

[Mr. Elliot Morley]

Robinson attracted 437 signatures from many people, mainly women, who feel aggrieved that the poll tax is an unfair system of taxation. Even though it is meant to be based on individuals, it is people in their position with no income who are expected to pay 100 per cent. of the charge. I very much sympathise with Mrs. Robinson and the many who organised the petition.

The petition reads:

> To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled.
>
> The humble petition of the people of Scunthorpe sheweth
>
> That the introduction of the poll tax (community charge) is objectionable to those people, many married women, who are at home with no income of their own, yet are expected to pay 100 per cent. of the poll tax if their partners are working, even though this was supposed to be a tax on individuals.
>
> Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House will replace this unfair and unworkable tax with one which recognises ability to pay and is based on a simpler and fairer system.
>
> And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will every pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Out-patient Services (Cheshire)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Tony Durant.]*

11.47 pm

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): I should like to thank the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State who has stayed to reply to this Adjournment debate, because he has had a wearying evening up to now and a long day; but I assure him that it is a matter of great concern to the people of Warrington and Cheshire because it concerns the out-patient services provided in Warrington and Cheshire.

During the ambulance dispute, the managers ordered cuts in non-emergency out-patient services. As a result, the number of vehicles available for out-patient services in Warrington was reduced from 10 to three. I must refute right away the statement made on behalf of health service managers by Hugh Lamont of the Merseyside regional health authority, who alleged that these cuts were made because ambulance crews refused to provide out-patient services. I read from a press release of the Warrington health authority, which is signed by Mike Shannon, the unit general manager of the district general hospital, about the industrial action in the ambulance service:

> "In order to maintain the emergency ambulance service it is now necessary to reduce the non-emergency workload ambulance staff. As from Tuesday 10th October 1989 there will be no outpatient transport available to walking patients. The inconvenience that this will cause is very much regretted, but the reduction in this service is necessary to sustain the emergency service . . . The geriatric day hospital of the general hospital and the elderly severely mentally day patient unit of Winwick hospital are not affected."

That action was taken by the management. Indeed, the press release recognised the inconvenience that the reduction would cause.

It is therefore surprising that, far from beginning to increase provision, the management are trying to maintain the position that applied in Cheshire generally and in Warrington in particular. They have reduced the number of vehicles for out-patient services from 10 to three, despite the discomfort that that would cause, and which was recognised by Mr. Shannon in the press release.

Evidence of that is shown in a memo from Mr. M. J. Lloyd, divisional commander control, Cheshire ambulance service. He said:

> "At a meeting with the D.H.A. representatives of all Cheshire districts today, the following level of P.T.S. provision was insisted on. It will therefore be actioned from Monday 12 March 1990—no increase in the level of provision that has been operative during the national dispute."

I have already referred to the severe cuts in Warrington and in Cheshire generally. Mr. Lloyd also said:

> "In operation requests for transport must always be met with a negative response, it is then up to the person requesting to medically justify the request. Any problems regarding this should result in the person requesting being directed to the relevant unit general manager."

I cite that document as evidence that the Cheshire ambulance service and, indeed, district health authorities throughout Cheshire, are trying to keep provision at the skeleton level that applied during the national dispute. That has already caused many protests from organisations in Warrington and Cheshire generally.

Those cuts were made without consultation with anyone, and certainly without observing the statutory duty to consult the community health councils. I wish to quote a letter sent on 23 March to Mr. Rae, the district general manager of Warrington health authority, from Mrs. Roylance of Warrington community health council. She said:

> "The committee is extremely concerned that the decisions referred to . . . have been implemented without consultation."

She goes on to say:

> "The CHC questions the basis on which the instructions were issued: (i) the reduction in the level of service represents 'a significant variation in the provision of service' on which the CHC has a statutory right to be consulted."

That consultation did not take place. Indeed, in a final paragraph, Mrs. Roylance says:

> "The Chairman and members of the Council are deeply concerned that the CHC's statutory right to be consulted has been ignored and they request the resumption, without delay, of the level of ambulance service available in Warrington prior to the national dispute, pending the outcome of formal consultation."

It is quite evident that this has upset all the members of the community health council. They make the point that they were not consulted at all in relation to this.

What has happened in Warrington and in Cheshire in relation to out-patient provision—or the lack of it—is, I suggest, a breach of the Government guideline in health circular HC(78)45, which says:

> "Ambulance services are required to provide or arrange the provision of suitable transport, free of charge, normally to the nearest hospital or treatment centre with hospital based facilities, where the necessary treatment can be obtained, to NHS convalescent homes, dentists' surgeries or Artificial Limb Appliance and Assessment Centres for any patient (emergency or non-emergency) who is considered by a doctor, dentist or midwife to be medically unfit to travel by any other means."

The words "by a doctor, dentist or midwife" are very important in the context of the rest of what I have to say in relation to this matter.

I now have to quote from a press release, again issued by Mr. Mike Shannon, who, I remind the Minister, is not a clinical practitioner but the unit general manager of Warrington health authority. He says—this was issued on 28 March—

> "As we know, the recent industrial dispute within the ambulance service has now ended, and great efforts are now being made to reinstate an appropriate service as quickly as possible.
>
> This is being done, but strictly in accordance with the long-established rules within the Health Service that ambulances are not white taxis"—

whatever Mr. Shannon means by white taxis; I presume he means that a taxi service was being provided, rather than an ambulance service—

> "but can be authorised only on medical grounds."

If Mr. Shannon, in referring to a white taxi service, is claiming that the service has been abused and ambulances have been ordered on other than medical grounds, he gives no examples.

The unit general manager has no right to question in this way the clinical judgment of doctors, dentists and midwives. Now, of course, ambulances will be allowed not on medical grounds but on the whim of the unit general manager. In his reply to Mrs. Roylance he claims that these services are strictly in accordance with NHS rules, but they are not. He goes on to say:

> "Ambulance services are authorised by clinical staff."

So far, so good, but then he says:

> "If there is a dispute between the requester and the ambulance staff, I am called upon to arbitrate."

The unit general manager may have many worthy and endearing qualities, but why should he be called upon to arbitrate when a clinical judgment has been made? He is saying, in effect, "I shall have the final say as to whether a service shall be provided."

The result of this arbitrary action is that those who are least able to speak up for themselves are the most affected, in Warrington and the rest of Cheshire. I am of course referring to the sick, elderly, infirm and disabled. It is having a devastating effect on those people.

I do not have time to cite the many examples that I have. So I will give two, as reported in the *Warrington Guardian* of 30 March. In the first case, that newspaper wrote:

> "Hospital staff said . . . that out-patient services have . . . been minimised to stretcher cases only. One out-patient, who has just had his right leg amputated, was told he is not eligible for transport and must continue making his own way to hospital. The 71-year-old ex-serviceman, secretary of Culcheth Royal British Legion, told the Guardian: 'I have just been fitted with an artificial leg and have to visit a physiotherapist every week to learn how to use it. I also make regular visits to the Artificial Limb and Appliance Centre in Liverpool and am continually having to depend on friends. This is a very desperate situation.'".

Clearly, such a man is covered by the guidelines and should have been provided with transport.

In the second case, the paper wrote:

> "Another woman aged 72 was refused an ambulance to have an artificial leg fitted in Liverpool. She had no friends or relatives to help, and was forced to cancel the appointment and manage without."

Nobody—least of all the Minister, knowing him as I do—would try to justify that state of affairs or what is happening to the out-patient vehicle service in Cheshire and particularly in Warrington. How ill does a person have to be to qualify for an out-patient vehicle in the area? Why are those concerned not abiding by the guidelines, particularly when, it seems, the decision no longer rests with the members of the clinical profession but with accountants and faceless bureaucrats, such as the unit general manager? They should be obliged to live up to the guidelines laid down by the Department.

We must not forget the effect that all this will have on jobs. The non-emergency ambulance staff, because of the reduced number of vehicles in Cheshire, are not fully deployed, even if they are fully paid. If those members of staff are not being deployed, redundancies are bound to result. Indeed, as many as 60 drivers in Cheshire could be made redundant, and nine of them will be in Warrington.

During the ambulance dispute, half the non-qualified ambulance staff were put on temporary contracts. Their services will be dispensed with as soon as the management finds it convenient to take that step. Penny-pinching of this kind must not take place at the expense of the sick and those in need. The cuts should cease immediately, and I hope the Minister will announce that from tonight, full out-patient transport services will be restored.

12.4 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Roger Freeman): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle) for the kind remarks which he made at the outset of this brief debate. The hon. Gentleman thanked me for staying. I am always pleased to reply to debates that he initiates, but the hon. Gentleman is the only person present who has any choice in the matter. You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the only other person present in the Chamber apart from myself—my

[Mr. Roger Freeman]

hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Mr. Durant) —have no choice in the matter. Nevertheless, I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's remarks.

The hon. Member for Warrington, North concentrated on out-patient ambulance services and upon the consequences for the patient of the changes that I shall describe in a moment, rather than the consequences upon the unions. He was fair to do that, and I shall therefore concentrate on the consequences for patients.

Since 1982, the Chester health authority has managed a single ambulance service for all five district health authorities in Cheshire—Chester, Crewe, Halton, Macclesfield and Warrington. It has run that service efficiently, and has introduced diesel vehicles, paramedic training and cardiac care training. A lot more needs to be done, but the authority is to be congratulated on the start that it has made.

As with all other ambulance services throughout the country, there are two fairly distinct aspects to the service. The first and most important is the need to respond promptly to accidents and emergencies—or 999 calls—to meet doctors' requests for urgent admissions and to move patients who need to be transferred from one hospital to another. These can, quite literally, be a matter of life and death, and it is entirely right that the utmost priority should be given to that side of the service. Recent events have underlined the importance that the public attach to the accident and emergency service. The other aspect is the routine transportation of outpatients to and from hospital or treatment centres. That is clearly the service which the hon. Member is most concerned about.

When we talk of routine cases, we have to distinguish between patients who have a medical dependency, such as oxygen therapy or who may need to be lifted in and out of their homes—those are clinically necessary services which are provided by the Cheshire ambulance service—and those patients who simply need a transport service to and from hospital. I say "simply", but of course that transport service is important, particularly for those people who need some form of public transport because they do not possess a car, or because it is to far to walk to and from the hospital.

In the examples which I have cited, where there is a clear clinical necessity, the service is clearly needed and will continue to be provided. However, the social need for transport is not a function of the ambulance service.

The hon. Gentleman has pressed me to define what is meant by clinically necessary services in his health authority and, most importantly, who defines what those services should be.

Before the ambulance dispute, I am told, the Cheshire service had 37 ambulances available as emergency ambulances but very often only between 12 and 14 were available, as quite a number—clearly the majority—were being used for non-accident and non-emergency work. Clearly that was unsatisfactory, because the accident and emergency service can, and I understand in some cases did, suffer.

Now the fleet of ambulances in Cheshire has been modernised. Some 20 ambulances are dedicated to accident and emergency work and there are some 22 other vehicles for non-accident and non-emergency work. I am told that those mainly comprise 10 to 12-seater vehicles. The numbers will grow marginally in the future to some 22 ambulances dedicated to emergency work and some 24 for non-emergency work.

A new system has been introduced for financing the ambulance service in Cheshire from 1 April this year. The proposals were under consideration before the dispute began but are only now being introduced.

The amount retained at the Chester headquarters for the accident and emergency service proper is some £4 million for 1990-91, and approximately £1·2 million has been allocated to the five districts. They will use that sum to purchase non-accident and emergency services either centrally from the Cheshire ambulance service—I have indicated the vehicles that could be available—or locally. The key requirement still is that the services provided must be clinically necessary.

Locally, there will be patient transport managers in the districts, to assess the needs for non-accident and emergency work—always concentrating on the clinical need for such services.

The hon. Gentleman asked the perfectly fair question: to what extent is authority delegated to those managers for making clinical judgments? I do not expect them to make clinical judgments. That is not their function. The responsibility for making the decision as to whether or not a patient is, for clinical or medical reasons, in need of transport rests with the medical staff, not the managers —who are there to manage the service and to match resources against clinical need.

It may help if I explain the reasoning behind the proposals. Until recently, during the day there have been about 37 ambulances theoretically available as a maximum for accident and emergency duties, but only one third of those could really be called on if needed. The other two thirds have been engaged on routine duties such as planned admissions to hospital or carrying out-patients to and from treatment centres. Not only has that reduced the number of vehicles available for emergencies, but it has been wasteful of resources to deploy fully trained and equipped crews on duties that could easily be carried out by personnel with less training, in simpler vehicles.

While Cheshire has managed overall to meet the minimum times laid down nationally for responding to an accident or emergency call, the position at individual stations has often been dangerously near, or actually below, the mark. This has put a considerable strain on the service. At night, at weekends, and during the "quiet hours", the level of emergency cover has stood at only 17 ambulances. Taking into account the geographical spread of Cheshire and the network of motorways that intersperses the county, that is very sparse cover.

Demand has sometimes meant that even ambulances reserved for accident and emergency duties have been called upon to deal with planned journeys involving patients discharged from, or being admitted to, hospital. It is for these reasons that the working party studying the needs of the Cheshire ambulance service has recommended a two-tier service. That does not mean a first and second-class service. The proposal is for a distinct accident and emergency service with the very latest equipment and with staff trained to the highest level, able to perform a range of life-saving techniques—and, it must be said, with more dedicated vehicles.

The non-emergency ambulance service will continue to transport patients with a medical need as determined by a clinician. That service, as organised by Chester for the county of Cheshire, will be available to the districts. They will have freedom either to purchase services from Chester or to make their own local decisions.

There may be patients who can make their own way to and from hospital but who find difficulty meeting the cost of travel. They can apply for help with these costs and should ask the hospital about this. The Department of health leaflet H11, "NHS Hospital Travel Costs", explains who can claim help with fares incurred travelling to and from hospital and how the scheme works. There is also a Cheshire dial-a-ride service for registered disabled.

That is our mechanism for providing help in a social context for those who cannot afford the full costs of travelling to or from hospital.

Mr. Hoyle: The dial-a-ride service does not provide that, nor was it set up to do so. Its purpose is to provide vehicles, not for travel to hospital, but for disabled and other people who need to go shopping and so on. There cannot be help from that service, because it is already stretched to the limit.

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman; I stand corrected. The record will show that it is a service available within the community and not to and from hospital. I am not familiar with the service, but doubtless next time I am in Cheshire I shall make detailed inquiries about it.

I should make it clear that geriatric day care attendances, with which there were, I understand, some problems during the recent dispute, will be given priority, as will other cases which in the light of individual circumstances merit special attention. I am talking now about the non-accident and emergency services. The intention is to use the available resources to best effect and to make sure that those who really need the service obtain it—that is, those with a clinical need—as promptly as possible.

The working party has also recommended that ambulance stations provide more flexible and appropriate cover throughout the country. It has recommended that there should be a redistribution of resources to provide 22 emergency ambulances during the day and 20 at night. This will improve cover in the Crewe, Ellsmere Port, Malpas and Warrington areas. These recommendations are aimed at strengthening the accident and emergency service and providing overall a service more tailored to the needs of the people who use it.

Mr. Hoyle: There are two points I should like the Minister to explain. Why was there no consultation with anyone, and particularly with the community health council? I am willing to give the Minister a copy of the document. How can he say all these things when Mr. Lloyd, divisional commander, control, says plainly that there has been no increase in the level of provision operative during the national dispute?

Mr. Freeman: I do not know to which document the hon Gentleman is referring. I look forward to receiving a copy from him. I shall certainly look into the point about consultation procedure. I shall also send copies of the *Official Report* to region and district for additional comment.

As I understand it, this is a reorganised service which concentrates the resources on accident and emergency and which does not diminish the proper service which should be provided for those who have a clinical need for transportation. It means, perhaps, that those with no clinical need who were using the service will no longer be able to do so. I believe that it concentrates resources where they are most needed in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. I think that is best, not only for his constituents but for the Health Service as a whole.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seventeen minutes past Twelve o'clock midnight.

House of Commons

Wednesday 4 April 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

SOUTH YORKSHIRE LIGHT RAIL TRANSIT (No. 2) BILL

Read the Third time, and passed.

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Cyprus

1. **Mr. Orme:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy towards Cyprus following the breakdown of United Nations talks.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Francis Maude): In line with Security Council resolution 649, we will continue to support United Nations efforts to bring about a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement to the Cyprus dispute.

Mr. Orme: I thank the Minister for that reply. Can he tell the House what action he is taking, along with our European colleagues, to bring meaningful negotiations, especially with Turkish Cypriots who want negotiations? What part are the Government taking in that regard?

Mr. Maude: That matter is properly raised when there are discussions between the United Kingdom Government and the Turkish Government. The right hon. Gentleman asked about action by our European partners. We have taken the view, as have many others, that the best chance of achieving serious negotiations leading to an enduring settlement is the initiative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, to which we have given strong support, and we have done all that we can to help it move forward.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: Will the Government continue to set their face like flint against any recognition of the Denktas regime in the north of Cyprus? Bearing in mind the enormous demographic changes that have taken place in the north of Cyprus as a result of the arrival of a large number of Turkish settlers, should not we regard any elections that take place there with some sceptism?

Mr. Maude: On the first point, there is certainly no intention to recognise the proclaimed so-called republic of Turkish northern Cyprus. It was illegally declared and we shall not recognise it. On the second point, it is certainly the case that there are some settlers in northern Cyprus. It is difficult to know the exact number, but I understand that the proportion of settlers to the indigenous population is not such as to have a decisive effect on any elections that may take place. It remains the case that we have to look for a representative of the Turkish Cypriot community with whom business can be done.

Mr. Corbett: Now that the United Nations Secretary-General has felt justified in complaining about the intransigence of Mr. Denktash in the intercommunal talks under his sponsorship, will the Minister have a word with his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister before she goes to the Gallipoli commemorations later this month and ask her to seek discussions with the Turkish Government to get them to make better efforts to use whatever influence they may have over Mr. Denktash? Does the Minister agree that the best key to the solution of the problem for the two communities in Cyprus lies in Ankara?

Mr. Maude: There will be discussions with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister when she goes to Turkey later this month, and it seems likely that this subject will come up then.

Subsidiarity

2. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assurances he has sought that the policy of subsidiarity would operate to the benefit of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maude: We support the principle of subsidiarity as an important way of avoiding unnecessary legislation at Community level. There is widespread support for the principle across the Community, and we believe that it should be rigorously applied in practice.

Mr. Gill: Given the reluctance of large organisations and bureaucracies to devolve powers to the lower orders, does my hon. Friend consider that for the principle of subsidiarity to be acceptable it will be necessary for a full and detailed prospectus to be issued showing what powers will be devolved to the national Parliaments?

Mr. Maude: I am not sure that I regard the nation states of Europe as the lower orders. I accept my hon. Friend's point that it is important that there should be the maximum leaving of powers to the nation states, the member states of the Community. On the desirability or otherwise of a comprehensive list of what should be done at each level, the best way to proceed is for there to be a presumption, effectively, that matters are best dealt with at national level unless it can be shown that that is better done at Community level. That is the principle of subsidiarity, which has been widely subscribed to by political leaders across the European Community. Our concern is that the words are not yet matched by deeds. It is important that they should be.

Mr. Spearing: Will not the Minister reconsider the use of the phrase, "principle of subsidiarity"? Has he seen the report of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs about the operation of the Single European Act, HC 82 of this Session? When I was asked about the issue as a witness, I said that the only thing that was clear about it was that it was not clear. Has he read the opinion of Mr. Speaker's Counsel about this use of the word and its meaning? Does he recall the exchanges that he had with the Select Committee on European Legislation? Bearing all those matters in mind, will he reconsider his definitive use of the word?

Mr. Maude: I have certainly seen the excellent report of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, produced under the Chairmanship of my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell). I have not read in detail the evidence that the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) gave to the Committee, but, having been alerted to its seminal importance, I shall do so. The point that he made, that there was no universally accepted definition of subsidiarity, is fair. It is important that it should be defined in a way that exerts pressure for matters to be dealt with at national, not Community, level, unless a case can be made for matters to be dealt with better at Community level. That is something we support and shall seek to promote.

Eastern Europe (Elections)

4. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received about the conduct of the elections in eastern Europe.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. William Waldegrave): We have received a number of representations expressing the hope that the elections in eastern Europe will be free and fair. The East German election and the first round of Hungarian elections appear to have been conducted properly. They mark a major step forward in the creation of democratic, pluralist societies.

Mr. Thurnham: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the growing interest among would-be parliamentarians in eastern Europe to visit this country, to see for themselves how this mother of Parliaments works? Is he further aware of the great assistance given by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and by the Great Britain-East Europe Centre?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am well aware of the good work done by the Great Britain-East Europe Centre, which is financed largely by the Foreign Office. I am also aware of the good work done by the IPU, a number of other organisations and Members of Parliament from both sides of the House. There is a good deal of room for more such interchanges.

Sir David Steel: Has the Minister of State noticed one significant feature of the elections that were held in the German Democratic Republic and Hungary—and, indeed, Namibia—and that are now under way in Czechoslovakia? It was significant that not one of those emerging democracies was daft enough to imitate the British electoral system. Does he accept that the principle that a public minority should no longer hold sway in any of those countries is good, and one which might be followed here?

Mr Waldegrave: If I were the right hon. Gentleman, I am not sure that I should pursue that argument because one of the difficulties emerging in some of those countries is the incredible plurality of parties produced by the proportional systems that they are following. One country now has 68 parties. Those countries may face dire problems of weak Governments at times when they need a clear direction of policy. That may cause them great problems. Therefore, the right hon. Gentleman would be wise not to press that point. There is a matter relating to the Hungarian election on which I can agree with him: Hungary has managed to hold a successful election which produced no Socialist parties.

Mr. Cormack: Is my right hon. Friend aware that in Romania, which I had the chance of visiting recently—[Hon. Members: "Hear, hear."]—there is concern among the members of the historic parties about the position of the National Salvation Front and that elections there should be free and fair? One way in which Romanians believe that that can be achieved is to send a team of observers from this country. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that observers go in considerable numbers and early enough to see the preparations?

Mr. Waldegrave: I can announce today in response to the sensible point made by my hon. Friend that we propose to send a team of 12 professional election observers drawn from senior local government officers, some of whom have taken part in observing elections in Namibia and elsewhere, to observe the last part of the campaign and the election itself. That is in addition to the Members of Parliament who will be observing the election. That will go some way towards meeting my hon. Friend's legitimate concern.

Central America

5. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to meet members of the Government of the United States of America to discuss human rights in central America.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Tim Sainsbury): We have regular discussions with the United States Administration on a wide variety of subjects, including central America.

Mr. Griffiths: The Minister will no doubt be aware that this weekend the five central American presidents met and issued a statement calling on the Contras to be disbanded when President Chamorro takes office on 25 April. What are the Government doing to ensure that that happens? It is essential for democracy that these destabilising forces be taken out of action.

Furthermore, what are the Government doing to persuade the Americans, who have had such a bad influence on Nicaragua, to help get rid of the Contras?

Mr. Sainsbury: We have consistently supported the Esquipulas process and the efforts of the central American states to find a peaceful solution to the disputes in the area. I hope that the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends will do likewise and not criticise the United States Administration all the time, perhaps concentrating a little more on condemning organisations such as the FMLN —Faraburdo Marti National Liberation Front— which seek to overthrow democratically elected Governments by terrorist means.

Mr. Hind: Will my hon. Friend invite the new President of Nicaragua, Mrs. Chamorro, to London and to Westminster so that the House and the Government can congratulate her on removing another left-wing socialist regime in central America?

Mr. Sainsbury: I can assure my hon. Friend that the President-elect of Nicaragua would be a very welcome visitor here. We warmly welcomed her victory in the election, and we pay tribute to those who were responsible for the election being carried out in a free and fair manner —particularly to the numerous observers, including United Nations observers, who played a major role in ensuring that the election was free and fair.

Lithuania

6. **Mr. Sillars:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent consideration the British Government have given to their relations with Lithuania and the Soviet Union.

Mr. Waldegrave: We support the right of the Baltic peoples to decide their own future, and have welcomed the considerable progress made in the past two years.

In view of recent developments in Lithuania, we think it vital that restraint should be shown on all sides and that progress should be made through dialogue between the Soviet authorities and the Lithuanians. We attach particular importance to the repeated statements by the Soviet leadership that there is no question of the use of force. We have made clear our concerns to the Soviet authorities.

Mr. Sillars: Is the Minister aware that, given the increasing bullying and harassment of the Lithuanians by the Kremlin, his statement, which appears even-handed, is unacceptable to a growing number of people in this country? Will he now make a slight but significant change of policy and tell President Gorbachev boldly that the right of self-determination of the people of Lithuania was not extinguished by the secret protocol of 1939, and that President Gorbachev should be ashamed of claiming to be a beneficiary of that fact? That right of self-determination is enshrined in the Helsinki accord; and no one can trust that there has been a fundamental change in the Soviet Union until it adheres to those accords, particularly in relation to Lithuania.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Helsinki accord, however, also recognised de facto the boundaries of the Soviet Union as they are. They also recognised that changes in boundaries should be conducted by negotiation. The sheer truth of the matter is that peaceful transition to the independent Lithuania to which the Lithuanians have a right must be achieved through negotiation.

I can inform the House of one optimistic development, which is that a Lithuanian delegation is now having discussions with a senior member of the Politburo Mr. Yakovlev. We hope that those talks will lead to progress.

Sir Peter Blaker: Is my right hon. Friend aware of reports that the Soviet Union is intimating that it would be prepared to be more reasonable towards Lithuania if the west were to make concessions on German unification? Presumably, that means that the west should agree that Germany should not remain a member of NATO. Will my right hon. Friend dissociate himself from any such thoughts? Would not the right course be for the Russians to stop bullying Lithuania and to agree that Germany should remain a member of NATO if it so wishes?

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend is right to suggest that no such deal should be contemplated and, indeed, it would not be possible. I agree with him and with the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars) that sabre rattling and threats by the Soviet Union are not the way to conduct the negotiations that should be carried through to a conclusion.

Mr. Heffer: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the Soviet Union, under Stalin, took over Lithuania, Latvia and other countries, and that that was an act of aggression against their peoples? However, is it not clear that Lithuania would not even be in a position to talk about independence had it not been for President Gorbachev's stand on perestroika? Although the Lithuanians have an absolute right to complete freedom from the Soviet Union, should not we endeavour to support sensible discussions and negotiations rather than military action by either side?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman talks a great deal of sense. It is inconceivable that any Soviet leader during the past 40 years would have walked into the crowds at Vilnius to argue with the people about these matters. He would have sent a tank, and that would have been the end of it. We are anxious about the sabre rattling, but the hon. Gentleman is right to say that steps have been taken in the right direction, and that that would not have happened without the general progress in the Soviet Union during the past few years.

Mr. Kilfedder: In the circumstances, should the Government appoint a diplomatic representative to Lithuania?

Mr. Waldegrave: That would not be right at the present time. As the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) said, the Lithuanian people are entitled to independence, and when that is achieved we shall recognise the state. To intervene now might arouse further tension, which would not be sensible. We know from past events that if the worst came to the worst and force were used—we urge that it should not—there is nothing that we could do to stop it. It would be foolish to raise expectations that we could.

American Television

7. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the United States authorities concerning broadcasting by American television on a Cuban frequency, in violation of international agreements; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: None.

Mr. McKelvey: Will the Minister explain why no representations have been made? Is he saying that the Government support such naked aggression by America on a small neighbouring country—*[Interruption.]* Is not there an agreement, signed by 138 countries, that prohibits that sort of invasion of television and radio air space? As the Prime Minister has a special relationship with America, will he please tell that country to stop those naked aggressive cowboy tactics against a small country and ask it to abide by the agreement that it has signed?

Mr. Sainsbury: I find it astonishing that the hon. Gentleman appears to regard something that might allow the people of Cuba to receive information from a source other than that controlled by their Government as naked aggression. There are two reasons why we have made—

Mr. Kaufman: That is inviting lawbreaking.

Mr. Sainsbury: If the right hon. Gentleman would be quiet for a moment, he might hear my answer.

There are two reasons why we have not made representations. The first is that it is for the International Telecommunications Union and the International Frequency Regulation Board to decide whether the broadcasting of TV Marti complies with international regulations. Secondly, it is a matter for the countries concerned, not for the Government.

Mr. Hanley: Does my hon. Friend agree that countries should seek the protection of such international regulations only if they obey them?

Mr. Sainsbury: We have always taken the view that one cannot be selective about the laws that one obeys.

Mr. Foulkes: But the American Government are violating a large number of international agreements to which they and the British Government are signatories, in what is now being described as tele-aggression on Cuba —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Foulkes: As you know, Mr. Speaker, Conservative Members often ask Opposition Members to condemn lawbreaking, so why do not the British Government condemn this lawbreaking by the Americans?

Mr. Sainsbury: I had hoped that Opposition Members would support the efforts of the BBC World Service, for example, to ensure that accurate information about world affairs is available in as many countries as possible. I suppose, from what the hon. Gentleman has just said, that he would regard that as radio aggression. As I said earlier, it is for internationally established organisations and the two countries concerned to make a judgment.

Mr. Burt: When my hon. Friend next discusses television transmissions to Cuba with the United States, will he encourage it to beam as many programmes as possible about the collapse of communism in eastern Europe, so that the Cuban population can see what will surely come to them within the next couple of years?

Mr. Sainsbury: I fear that my hon. Friend is on to an important point. The Cuban authorities, and the President in particular, may be most alarmed at the idea of the people of Cuba being allowed to know what has happened elsewhere and fear that yet another Marxist-socialist regime would be overthrown if they did.

German Unification

8. **Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to have discussions with Chancellor Kohl concerning the prospect of German unification.

13. **Mr. McWilliam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet Chancellor Kohl; and what issues will be discussed.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): Together with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, I met Chancellor Kohl at the Anglo-German summit on 30 March. We had a good discussion on subjects that included the external aspects of German unification.

We welcome Chancellor Kohl's commitment to resolve the external aspects of German unification before unification itself takes place, and to continued German membership of NATO.

Mr. Smith: Does the Secretary of State accept that the imminence of German reunification makes nonsense of the Prime Minister's insistence on pointing short-range nuclear missiles at the people of East Germany? In the interests of European and world security, will the Cabinet now get the Prime Minister to change her mind on that?

Mr. Hurd: The position was made pretty clear in the joint press conference that Chancellor Kohl and the Prime Minister gave. That NATO will continue to need a sensible mix of conventional and nuclear weapons in future is agreed generally in the alliance, and certainly between us and the Germans, and the hon. Gentleman will have heard what Chancellor Kohl said about needing full protection. We need to decide what that sensible mix of nuclear and conventional weapons on the continent of Europe should consist of—an important task, which has not yet been completed.

Mr. Cash: Will my right hon. Friend make it clear that whereas we wish to have and hope to continue good Anglo-German relations, the concentric circles proposals, which would tend to marginalise the United Kingdom in the context of our relations with the rest of Europe and with Germany, would not be acceptable to the United Kingdom, that we would not accept Mr. Christophersen's proposals on economic and monetary union, which were tabled recently at Ashford castle, and that we do not intend to move towards the political union currently being put forward through the European Commission?

Mr. Hurd: We are certainly opposed to any definition of political union in Europe which includes a central executive or a central Parliament removing powers from this Parliament. That is clear. As regards economic and monetary union, there was a meeting of Finance Ministers in Ireland last weekend which was the first stage in something for which we have always argued—full and adequate preparation. As my hon. Friend knows, we are in favour of beginning and completing stage 1 of the Delors plan, but we do not believe that stages 2 and 3, which have been debated in the House, should point us in the direction of central institutions in that sphere. That is a substantial discussion under way among the right people.

Sir Russell Johnston: Does the Foreign Secretary agree that a great many people take a different view from that which he has just expressed? In particular, Chancellor Kohl, when at Koenigswinter, indicated that he saw German reunification in the context of accelerating economic and monetary union within the European Community. Does the Foreign Secretary agree with that?

Mr. Hurd: We are in favour of and committed to moving towards economic and monetary union. It is just that, as the hon. Member knows, we have a different route for that process which we regard as a more liberal and open route. As was clear from the press comments on the meeting in Ireland, a substantial discussion is under way. The only people who would be surprised that we were taking a substantial part in that substantial discussion would be those who have not listened to what we have been saying on the subject.

Mr. Robert Banks: Given that the uniting of the two Germanies is a natural desire of the German people and is unstoppable, is not the prospect of a united Germany nevertheless a chill reminder of two world wars? Would it not be appropriate to discuss with Chancellor Kohl the establishment of a ceiling on the military forces and types of equipment that Germany may use in future?

Mr. Hurd: As my hon. Friend knows, the present discussions in Vienna deal just with the limits on Soviet and American manpower. We have to harvest that agreement, which may not be entirely easy, and get it in the bag. After that, it is possible that all of the allies may wish to go on to a wider discussion including troop limits not just for the two super-powers but for others, possibly the Germans and possibly ourselves. As the Prime Minister said in Cambridge, we do not exclude the possibility of reductions. That is the next stage. The first stage is to get the agreement which is on the board and which is a possibility at Vienna.

Mr. Kaufman: The right hon. Gentleman was less than straightforward in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith). In view of the fact that Chancellor Kohl, when in this country last week, publicly joined all other sensible NATO leaders in opposing modernisation of short-range nuclear weapons—that is what he said—and in view of the fact that Britain is completely isolated on this issue, will the Foreign Secretary say which enemy the short-range nuclear weapons are aimed against? Is it the President of Czechoslovakia or the Prime Minister of Poland who were entertained at No. 10 recently? Is it the voters of East Germany or the voters of Hungary who have just defeated communism? Is it the Soviet troops who, as the Prime Minister herself says, should continue to be stationed in East Germany for the sake of European stability? We realise that the Prime Minister is totally irrational on this issue, but if the Foreign Secretary——

Hon. Members: "Speech."

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is rather a long question.

Mr. Kaufman: If the Foreign Secretary is to be at all credible as a candidate for the Tory succession, will he take the side of a sensible Chancellor Kohl against a loopy Prime Minister?

Mr. Hurd: The House was a little unkind to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). He needs a little time to disentangle himself and we must show him some tolerance.

The purpose of all force, be it conventional or nuclear, is to deter an aggressor.

Mr. Tony Banks: Which one?

Mr. Hurd: The point of the existing doctrine and of any future doctrine is to deter any possible aggressor. What is particularly agreed between Chancellor Kohl and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is that to achieve that in the case of Germany, Britain and the rest of the allies, there must be a sensible mix of nuclear and conventional weapons. That is what Chancellor Kohl said at his press conference, and that much is entirely clear.

NATO

9. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the implications of the result of the East German elections for the NATO alliance.

Mr. Hurd *rose*——

Hon. Members: Get on with it.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Hon. Members: He is wasting time.

Mr. Hurd: I am sorry, but at least I have disentangled myself in silence, which is perhaps preferable to the alternative offered by the right hon. Member for Gorton.

NATO has long supported the cause for freedom in the German Democratic Republic and throughout eastern Europe. We welcome the democratic elections in the German Democratic Republic, because the establishment of a genuine democracy there will contribute to stability and security in Europe. We stress the crucial importance of continued German membership of NATO.

Mr. Tredinnick: Does my right hon. Friend agree that Chancellor Kohl's commitment to keeping West Germany within NATO is as important to West German security as to that of all western nations?

Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is great concern in the hosiery and shoe industries in my constituency in Leicestershire that the elections in East Germany and eastern Europe will herald a new flood of imports? Does my right hon. Friend further agree that to help British industry there must be strict regulations on imports from eastern Europe as a consequence of the democratic process there?

Mr. Hurd: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend's first point. His second point is also correct. Under existing arrangements, the western border of the Federal Republic of Germany is policed and controlled to ensure that East German goods do not enter the Community unfairly, and that will continue.

Mr. Wareing: Has the Foreign Secretary seen a report in *Stern* magazine of a poll in West Germany in which a majority of West Germans said that they were opposed to any form of NATO forces across what is now the boundary with the German Democratic Republic, up to the Oder-Neisse line? Is the right hon. Gentleman prepared to reassure not only the West German people but the Soviet Union that, regardless of whether Germany is in or out of NATO, Britain will not support NATO forces moving up to the Oder-Neisse line?

Mr. Hurd: It is extremely important for the security of us all that a united Germany should remain in NATO. However, there is a wide body of reasonable opinion that so far as the eastern part of a united Germany is concerned, there should not be stationed there NATO—that is to say, United States, British, French or Canadian—forces.

Mr. Wells: Does my right hon. Friend agree that if war, tension and instability in Europe are not to result from the unification of Germany and democratic elections in East Germany, it is essential for each nation to follow the path of negotiations on difficult issues, as in Lithuania? Will my right hon. Friend outline the careful and considered negotiations that he faces in the next two or three months?

Mr. Hurd: It would take a little time to do that. The two-plus-four negotiations, about which I gave evidence to the Select Committee this morning, are now beginning; the discussions in NATO are under way; the discussions in the European Community, for which there will be a special European Council on 28 April, are under way; and there are the discussions about the Polish borders, in the achieving of which we have played a prominent part. In all those ways, we now have what was clearly lacking a couple of months ago—a set of frameworks or discussions in which the external aspects of Germany unification can be taken on board and dealt with.

Vietnamese Boat People

10. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement on the situation of Vietnamese boat people in Hong Kong.

Mr. Maude: For the first time since May 1987, there is now a sustained net outflow of Vietnamese boat people from Hong Kong. But it is too soon to know whether there will be another large influx into Hong Kong this year.

Mr. Darling: Does the Minister accept that aid to Vietnam is the one thing which might stop the flow of refugees from Vietnam to Hong Kong and might also encourage some of the refugees and boat people to go back? Have the Government been using the refugees as negotiating pawns in their discussions with the Vietnamese Government? Will the Minister make it clear that no matter how reluctant the United States Government may be to give it, unless aid is given to Vietnam the refugee problem—whether they are economic or political refugees—will continue?

Mr. Maude: When the boat people return to Vietnam, aid is given. Substantial amounts of money are given to accompany their return and to provide for their reintegration and resettlement in their own communities, and it is right that that should happen. The incentive for them to return is thus already provided.

As for deterring people from leaving Vietnam in the first place, one reason why they leave is, of course, poverty in Vietnam—a country which is undergoing economic reform. I do not think that it would be right for us to start any large-scale programme of support for Vietnam while that country steadfastly refuses to accept its international obligations in respect of its own people. The whole international community has rightly said that Vietnam should accept those international obligations.

Mr. Raison: Is the Minister satisfied that the number of volunteers in Hong Kong to go back to Vietnam is building up satisfactorily? Does he feel that sufficient information is given to boat people in Hong Kong about the advantages of return and that enough information is given to potential boat people in Vietnam about the disadvantages of going to Hong Kong?

Mr. Maude: I believe that more information is being transmitted in the way that my right hon. Friend suggests. There is some evidence this year that the number of those leaving certainly north Vietnam, from which there has been the biggest outflow in recent years, is reduced. I have no doubt that a principal reason for that was our decision in December last year to return a planeload of people to Vietnam. That sent a clear message to north Vietnam that there was only one place for people who were not refugees to go, and that was to return to Vietnam. I hope that that message is being understood more widely in Vietnam.

Mr. James Lamond: Is the Minister, in his determination not to allow any economic refugees from Vietnam to come to this country, keeping in mind the fact that in the German Democratic Republic right now there are more than 50,000 refugees from Vietnam on long-term work contracts? If Germany becomes united, presumably those people will be able to move into the Federal Republic and perhaps even into this country. What will the Minister do about that?

Mr. Maude: The hon. Gentleman talks as though it is a decision by us not to allow economic migrants to come here. He must be aware that that decision was reached unanimously by every country that has any interest in the matter. No country in the west is opening its doors to non-refugees. All have taken the view that the only place for those people to go is back to Vietnam. The fact that there are some Vietnamese workers in the GDR arises from the fact that the GDR voluntarily opened its doors to them. No country in the west is opening its doors to those in Hong Kong.

Mr. Lester: Does my hon. Friend realise that the Vietnamese Government are in a Catch-22 situation? If they seek to please us by agreeing to the involuntary repatriation of their people they offend the American State Department, which strongly opposes that. The fire ought to be directed at getting the American State Department to make an assessment of the present situation in Vietnam, because it believes that people are being sent back to a tyrannous regime that it remembers from 1979. We are now in 1990 and the situation is different, and for the American State Department to get its policy right it needs to make a reassessment of the true situation in Vietnam.

Mr. Maude: We have made the point to the United States Administration that the Vietnam of today is not the same as the Vietnam of 10 years ago. Things have moved forward. The country is certainly reforming in economic terms, with some reforms of a political nature, and that is very desirable. But the Americans have a position on this matter which is somewhat curious and is wrapped up in the history of the past 20 years. The view that my hon. Friend expresses is reasonable, but until Vietnam accepts its international obligations to accept its own people back it would be wrong for us to go unilaterally down the path of giving aid.

Mr. Kaufman: Will the hon. Gentleman reconsider the implications of the reply that he gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) in which he seemed to imply that the only economic aid to be provided for Vietnam would be if Vietnamese people went to Hong Kong and then back to Vietnam. Surely the answer to the problem of economic migration from Vietnam is to make that extremely poor country less poor so that people will not wish to migrate for economic reasons, and sensible western economic aid for infrastructure and construction is the best way to do that. Will the Government break free from the American obsession on Vietnam, have their own policy and provide economic aid?

Mr. Maude: The idea that the right hon. Gentleman seems to be propounding—that our policy on Vietnam is identical with that of the Americans—is a bizarre one. I did not say to his hon. Friend that aid was available only for those returning. The fact is that aid is given to those who return to encourage them to do so, and that is having its effect, but it must be clear that if we were to take a decision tomorrow to introduce aid into Vietnam that could not deter an outflow of people from Vietnam this year. Hong Kong has an immediate problem of enormous dimensions. It would be better if the right hon. Gentleman could bring himself to express a little concern about the burdens that that territory is bearing.

Romania

12. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussion he has held with the Government of Romania on the forthcoming elections in that country.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs discussed the forthcoming election in Romania with the Romanian Foreign Minister, Mr. Celac, in Windhoek on 20 March. Our position is that a free and fair campaign and poll are vital for Romania's progress towards democracy.

Mr. Flynn: Does the Minister agree that we must do something in addition to the initial discussion? Is he aware of the growing international concern and the concern inside Romania that next month's election will lead to a continuation of one-party rule in that country because the present Government there is full of people involved in the previous regime? Does he agree that the only thing that will allow a free election is reasonable access to the media by the alternative parties? Is not there a grave danger that the ruling Government—the Frontului Salvarii Nationale—will turn out to be not the front for the salvation of the nation, but the front for the salvation of communism?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am well aware of the anxieties that have been expressed in the sense that the hon. Member describes. There are other views, but we are monitoring the situation closely. As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack), it is essential that we have a proper capacity to observe the campaign and the election. We have also taken some further steps to try to help to provide the capacity for opposition parties apart from the National Salvation Front to fight the election, and we have decided to send more than 100 tonnes of paper to enable people to print pamphlets, as that is not at present available in Romania.

Mr. Allason: Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is great anxiety in Romania about the continuing activities of the National Salvation Front, in particular about the fact that it is claiming credit for much of the EEC aid that has gone to that country? Can he reassure the House that he will make sure that the aid that goes to Romania from this country in the form of newsprint and other EEC aid will be fairly distributed and that the National Salvation Front cannot claim credit for it?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend makes a good point and we shall endeavour to do that. It is also important to distinguish between the role of the National Salvation Front in different parts of Romania. I believe that in some places it genuinely represents a broad alliance of people, but in other areas there is much more doubt about its role.

Mr. Faulds: As to Romania, a country which I have not recently visited, unlike so many of my colleagues——

Mr. Tony Banks: You must be the only one— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Banks: My hon. Friend must talk to Thomas Cook's about a trip.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Faulds: I thought that you were going to arrange it for me, Mr. Speaker. Will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that whatever Government evolves from the forthcoming elections in Romania, Her Majesty's Government will make strong representations to that Government that they should totally abandon the appalling Ceausescu policy of destroying hundreds of traditional villages and dozens and dozens of Romania's marvellous medieval churches?

Mr. Waldegrave: I believe that there is the prospect of a room becoming available in a couple of weeks' time which the hon. Gentleman could take up. It is fair to say that the National Salvation Front instantly abandoned the policy of destroying villages and there is no evidence that there has been any going back on that position.

Mr. Boswell: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is essential that the future Romanian political system should make adequate provision for the political, economic and educational rights of the important Hungarian and German-speaking minorities, not only in the interests of the consent of their own population but in terms of its acceptability to neighbouring states?

Mr. Waldegrave: The treatment of minorities is exceedingly important. The Hungarian minority, with its long-standing history of conflict with the Romanian majority, is one of the most difficult of those issues. However, it behoves us also to say that the Hungarians should treat the situation carefully because there are two sides to that issue.

Council of Ministers

14. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the General Affairs Council of Ministers meeting of 2 and 3 April.

Mr. Maude: The Council considered preparations for the intergovernmental conference and Herr Genscher reported on recent developments in Germany. The Commission reported on talks on EC-Japan trade, on progress in EC-EFTA discussions and on the signature of a trade, commercial and economic agreement with Czechoslovakia. We proposed that all quantitative restrictions on imports from Czechoslovakia should be removed as from 1 July.

The Council discussed work on immigration problems and member states' policies on visas for eastern Europe.

My right hon. Friend argued for further measures of Community support to the black population of South Africa, and a trade and co-operation agreement with Argentina was signed.

Ministers of the Twelve agreed, at my right hon. Friend's suggestion, to issue a further statement on Lithuania.

Mr. Campbell: Was there a chance at the Council of Ministers meeting to discuss the appalling pollution of the North sea? If not, when does the Minister intend to get a grip on that problem?

Mr. Maude: The hon. Gentleman may not have noticed, but there was a large conference on the North sea recently, at which it became apparent that although we have 40 per cent. of the North sea coastline, less than 20 per cent. of the pollution in the North sea comes from the United Kingdom.

Mr. Favell: Can my hon. Friend say whether our European partners accept that under this Government there is no chance of the United Kingdom being part of a federal Europe?

Mr. Maude: We have made our views on that very plain. We have a clear vision of the sort of European Community that we want to be part of, and it is not a federal one.

Mr. Ernie Ross: Will the Minister assure the House that the General Affairs Council will keep in the forefront of its mind the recommendation from the European Parliament that no further protocols on scientific and cultural agreements should be allowed between the European Community and Israel until Israeli forces on the West Bank and in Gaza treat Palestinians in a much more reasonable fashion?

Mr. Maude: We understand the anxieties that have been expressed by the European Parliament, but we cannot accept that sanctions of the sort suggested are the right way forward.

Mr. Lawrence: Since the conclusions of this very important Council might have ramifications—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lawrence: Since the Council's conclusions might have substantial ramifications for the future of Britain, would not it be a good idea, in the interests of parliamentary responsibility, for us to be told in advance of such meetings, the order of agenda and the views likely to be expressed by British Ministers?—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are pleased to have the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) back with us, but perhaps he could remain silent while the Minister speaks.

Mr. Maude: The point raised by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) is one which surfaces from time to time. We make clear in answer to a parliamentary question each month the main subjects likely to come up at the Council of Ministers in the forthcoming month, so that much is public knowledge. As regards making the Government's position absolutely clear in advance, one cannot know beforehand exactly what propositions will be made and the way in which the discussion will go. It would be unreasonable to expect us to be able to do so.

Mr. Robertson: The Minister's list of subjects raised at the meeting did not seem to include the conduct of Iraq. Surely Her Majesty's Government must have raised that subject at the first meeting of the General Affairs Council since the murder of Farzad Bazoft, the illegal incarceration of Daphne Parish and the continued incarceration of Ian Richter. Not only that, we have seen Iraq trafficking in nuclear triggers and this week's threat to use chemical weapons against Israel.

If the subject was not raised, why on earth was it not? Why are the Government not initiating a major international isolation of the evil regime in Iraq? Are they paralysed by the fact that at the last Foreign Affairs Council meeting they themselves undermined Community sanctions against South Africa?

Mr. Maude: The hon. Member's last point is a fairly fatuous one. As regards his first point, we asked for support from our European Community partners for the appeal for clemency for Farzad Bazoft, and the Twelve responded very fully to our request. As for the other issues, there are other fora in Geneva in which we are raising those issues, but the hon. Member would do well to bear in mind the interests of others concerned who are imprisoned in Iraq. We must tread carefully.

Mr. Dunn: When the issue of German reunification was raised, was it agreed by Ministers that the process leading to reunification should be handled with great caution and that, before reunification can take place, the fears, anxieties and concerns of West Germany's allies and neighbours must be debated and resolved?

Mr. Maude: There is no dispute between the Federal Republic of Germany and any of the European Community partners about that. It is accepted that German unification has implications for a number of other countries, not just in the Community but more widely. The point that we made some months ago, now generally accepted, is that there must be fora in which these matters can be properly discussed. There are considerable implications for the European Community in the absorption of the German Democratic Republic into Germany; they must be sorted out and fully discussed.

South Africa

16. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with officials of the South African Government.

Mr. Hurd: I met President de Klerk, Mr. Pik Botha and other South African Ministers in Cape Town on 19 March. We had good talks, which reinforced my view that the South African Government are committed to fundamental reform. I also met several opposition leaders in South Africa and saw some of the 250 aid projects that Britain is supporting to help prepare black South Africans for the future after apartheid. I made it clear throughout that our aim is to see apartheid dismantled and to help the development of a peaceful, prosperous and democratic South Africa.

Mr. Hughes: The House will be encouraged by what the Secretary of State has said, but did he raise the additional important matter of the remaining residual debt of Namibia, which the International Court of Justice in 1971 ruled was improperly incurred during the period of South African administration? Apparently, the figure is 892 million rand—one third of Namibia's GDP. That debt should not have to be paid by Namibia but by South Africa. If the matter was not raised, will the Foreign Secretary undertake to raise it at the earliest opportunity?

Mr. Hurd: No, I did not raise the matter. I heard about it later when I was in Windhoek and I know that it is being discussed by the new Government of Namibia and the South African Government. We shall keep an eye on what happens.

Mr. John Carlisle: Since Mr. Mandela and the African National Congress have now pulled out of the intended talks with officials of the South African Government because of the continuing violence in the black townships, would not it be totally inappropriate for our Prime Minister to meet Mr. Mandela when he comes to London next week unless he and the ANC totally renounce the armed struggle and move towards a more peaceful solution in South Africa which must accommodate Chief Buthelezi and Inkatha?

Mr. Hurd: It is a pity that the meeting on 11 April has been postponed, but I understand that President de Klerk and Mr. Mandela intend to meet shortly. We hope that that will lead to talks about the talks which have been postponed and then into a wider grouping in which everyone expects leaders such as Chief Buthelezi to have a clear place.

Soviet Foreign Minister

17. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent communications he has had with the Soviet Foreign Minister; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Hurd: I last met Mr. Shevardnadze on 12 February in Ottawa at the open skies conference. Our discussions focused on developments in Europe. Since then we have kept in frequent direct touch.

Mr. Winnick: Is it the Foreign Secretary's intention to discuss with the Soviet Union the bloody terrorist dictatorship in Iraq and the way in which chemical weapons have already been used against the Kurdish nationals in that country? Is not there a strong case for the closest possible co-ordination between nations, including those in eastern Europe, to ban the sale of high-level technology to that terrorist regime? Is not it time that we learnt some of the lessons of pre-war years in no longer appeasing notorious and bloody dictatorships?

Mr. Hurd: Yes, indeed—I covered that point in my recent statement on the subject. It is important that we should draw the Soviet Union and other eastern European countries as closely as possible into the work of enforcing the non-proliferation treaty and the missile group to which I referred in my statement.

Local Government Finance (Scotland)

3.32 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the introduction of a scheme in Scotland which takes account of the fact that the increase in the upper capital limit for community charge benefit which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his Budget speech cannot be applied restrospectively.

I propose accordingly to set up a temporary scheme outside the social security benefits system to provide for special payments to those affected in Scotland. I have in mind those with capital resources of between £8,001 and £16,000 who will receive community charge benefit this year and were liable for the personal community charge during 1989-90. The scheme which we are discussing with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities envisages that these people will get a special payment which will be the same percentage of the community charge that they paid last year as their rebate will be of this year's charge. I intend to make minor amendments to the transitional relief regulations in order to implement the scheme.

I have already indicated that we believe that around 15,000 to 20,000 individuals might be eligible. Expenditure will depend on the precise numbers benefiting, but I consider that a scheme of the kind I have described will require financial provision of up to £4 million, to cover both the value of payments and administration costs. The sum of up to £4 million is small in comparison with the total resources of £9,500 million available to me, and will be found as part of the normal process in which projected underspends and overspends are adjusted throughout the year. No spending programme will be cut.

With this scheme the Government have shown willing to respond to the concern which was expressed in Scotland about the implications of the increase in the upper capital limit.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): I welcome the statement; it would be ungracious to do otherwise. I recognise the Secretary of State's embarrassment about the announcement on the poll tax made in the Budget. I would have been more impressed by his personal position if he had not so vehemently argued that Scotland's complaint was entirely bogus until the 11th hour.

Today's announcement is a small mercy indeed when measured against the disaster brought by the poll tax. Yet again the Secretary of State is trailing lamely at the rear, splicing this ex gratia scheme on to an already impossibly complicated system. It is a recipe for a continuing sense of injustice in Scotland.

May I ask the Secretary of State some specific questions? Is it true that he made no attempt to obtain additional funds from the Treasury? If not, why not? If the Chancellor was not contributing, why did the Secretary of State have to go cap in hand for permission to correct a basic injustice from his own resources? Is it not nonsense to pretend that an underspend on a planned target is anything but a cut?

Will the Secretary of State confirm that transitional relief must be calculated before entitlement to the ex gratia scheme can be settled? Does not that mean that no one will see the colour of the Secretary of State's money for some months? When does he think that payment is likely?

As the right hon. and learned Gentleman has decided to calculate the percentage rebate entitlement for 1990-91 and apply it to last year's poll tax figure, will he consider an alternative? Would not the best option be to calculate the sums due to applicants in the last week of 1989-90 on the assumption that the new scheme applied then, and calculate last year's total payment on that basis?

The Secretary of State has been careful to stress that the cost will be up to £4 million. Was not the value of the concession greatly exaggerated by the Government, and, from all the indications, it is not clear that the likely payments in Scotland in total will be less than £2 million and that well below 15,000 people will benefit? Will not the average annual payment be well under £100?

Does the Secretary of State accept that the fundamental difficulty is that the scheme, which in effect is being extended to cover 1989-90, does little to help that vulnerable group with modest savings and limited income, perhaps boosted by a small occupational pension? Is it not true that in the coming year a pensioner couple in Glasgow with a basic state pension of £75·10 and a works pension of £15 who have a combined capital of £15,000 will be left to find the full poll tax of £12·18p a week without any form of help? Can he confirm that a single person aged 50—for this purpose again living in Glasgow—who has recently lost his job, is in receipt of unemployment benefit of £37·35 and has capital of £11,000 derived from his redundancy payment will not receive any rebate even when the scheme is in place? In the coming year, such a person will pay 16 per cent. of basic income in poll tax because of the assumed income of £4 a week for every £1,000 of savings above £3,000.

May we have an assurance from the Secretary of State that, this time at least, he will stir himself to push for necessary change? May we have the floor level of £3,000 increased to a realistic figure to reduce the taper, or at least have the tariff income, which assumes a return on capital of 21 per cent., brought down to a figure that an investor might receive from a bank or building society? Is there not a pressing danger that, if the scheme remains as it is, for thousands hope will turn to dismay and disappointment and then to anger?

Mr. Rifkind: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his generous welcome for the statement and for the speech that followed. I shall respond first to his question about additional funding.

I did not seek additional funding, and I shall explain why. The Chancellor's statement on the increase in the capital limits applies throughout the United Kingdom—to Scotland as well as to England and Wales—and community charge payers in Scotland will receive the same full benefit as charge payers in England and Wales. The additional provision that I have announced today applies to the past 12 months. Those who paid community charge in Scotland but had savings of more than £8,000 may now get a refund, whereas ratepayers in England or Wales, whose rates may have been higher than the community charge in Scotland and who did not receive a refund, will not be entitled to any payment. It seems, therefore, that if I propose a scheme which is limited to those making payments in Scotland, it is not unreasonable that I should administer it from within the Scottish Office. That is a matter of principle and is appropriate in the circumstances.

The hon. Gentleman asked why I needed to discuss this matter with the Chancellor of the Exchequer and my other right hon. Friends, when normally the Secretary of State has full discretion about how he uses his funds. That is a prefectly fair question. I have complete discretion on how I use funds for the normal purposes for which the Scottish Office is responsible. However, when I am considering the use of certain funds for a policy issue which does not normally come within the responsiblilty of the Scottish Office and which will be properly interpreted as a change when compared with the statement made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer only two days earlier—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] The Opposition have been out of office for a long time and I appreciate that they may not be able to recollect easily the normal conventions that operate within government. When a Secretary of State proposes to make an announcement which is not in accordance with a statement made by the Government 48 hours earlier, it would be seen at least as a matter of normal courtesy to discuss it with colleagues, as each Minister speaks on behalf of the whole Government.

The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the actual refund that will be paid will be a percentage of the sum paid by the community charge payer in the last year. He asked why it could not be calculated on the basis of the payments made in the final week of the year. That is the suggestion that the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities made in discussions with the Scottish Office. It is an interesting question. The consequences of adopting COSLA's approach could be bizarre. If a person's savings and earnings in the 52nd week of the year were significantly different from the rest of the year, the refund paid might be greater than the total community charge payment of the individual for the year in question. That would be an absurd outcome, which the hon. Gentleman would not want to acknowledge.

The hon. Gentleman queried the number of people who might benefit in Scotland and the consequential cost as a result of the proposals. Our figures are the best estimates and are provided by the Department for Social Security. No one can say for certain what the figure will be. The best estimates are the figures of 15,000 to 20,000 people leading to a cost of up to £4 million. If it is less or greater, it will be accommodated within the scheme. Time will tell. It depends on the number of people who apply under these arrangements.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before I call Back-Bench Members today, I must say that I understand that yesterday there was concern that some were not called following the statement, although I did call all those who were adversely affected. As this statement is welcomed by the House—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"]—and bearing in mind the constraints on time as again we have to debate a timetable motion, in order that as many hon. Members can be called as possible I ask hon. Members to put one question and the Secretary of State to answer one question.

Mr. Alick Buchanan-Smith (Kincardine and Deeside): Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that we on this side of the House welcome without any grudging his remedying of this unfairness? Does he further accept that he could avoid all this debate about where the money comes from to pay for this if he would only take it from his overspend?

Mr. Rifkind: I am not sure whether I follow my right hon. Friend to his conclusion. He will recall from his days in the Scottish Office and other Government Departments that during the financial year there is always underspending on particular programmes and as a consequence supplementary allocations are made to other programmes. When underspends are identified, as they always are, we have already identified that which will be the first call on that underspend.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that the numbers may not be as great as he anticipates? The earnings rules could well mean that many people with capital up to £16,000 will still not qualify. It looks as if the administration of the scheme will take up a substantial part of the £4 million and will probably be more than the actual delivery.

Can the right hon. and learned Gentleman comment on the decision by the English Department to offer revenue support grant in advance to English and Welsh authorities although he is not doing the same for Scottish authorities? That will further increase the poll tax this year in Scotland compared with England and Wales by £3·50 per head.

Mr. Rifkind: In reply to the hon. Gentleman's first question, I have to say that we will have to wait to see what the numbers are. He is wrong about the administrative cost. The scheme that I propose is administratively simple, because people will be applying for benefit for the year that is just beginning in any event and the same application will be made. All that they will be required to identify is their community charge payment for last year, and a simple formula will determine the sum that has to be paid.

The hon. Gentleman is under a misunderstanding about the other matter that he raised. We have already discussed with COSLA the question whether there should be front-loading of payment of revenue support grant. We are awaiting a paper from COSLA about whether and, if so in what way, it would like to see the payments changed. It has made no such request in the past. We have said that we are quite willing to discuss the matter with COSLA and to respond constructively if it puts forward reasonable proposals.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): Will my right hon. and learned Friend remind the Opposition that in Scotland the community charge raises only 20 per cent. of local authority expenditure, whereas in England it raises 30 per cent.? Before the Opposition stand on their consciences and ask for fairness, they should be reminded that if they want fairness for Scotland they should be screaming for fairness for England.

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. and learned Friend is right when he says that the average contribution of community charge payers is lower in Scotland than the average in England. Of course these averages vary from place to place—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"]—which is not surprising. Therefore, within Scotland and England a range of contributions is made by community charge payers depending on the social and economic circumstances of the locality in question.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): How can the Secretary of State's scheme address the original injustice done to Scotland when neither the Chancellor nor the Prime Minister have moved an inch from their respective positions on Budget day? There will not be a penny of extra Treasury cash for Scotland. The whole amount is to be found from within the Scottish budget and from areas where that £4 million might otherwise have been expended. If this is the best that the Secretary of State can do from within the Cabinet, it is time that he got out of the Cabinet by tendering his resignation now.

Mr. Rifkind: I appreciate that the latter comment must be a crucial part of the hon. Gentleman's question. I shall deal with the more substantive element. The hon. Gentleman keeps changing the story. The concern expressed was whether the relief in terms of savings that has applied from day one in respect of community charge payers in England and Wales should also be available for those who have been paying the community charge in Scotland for the past 12 months. The scheme ensures that that will be the case.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that this scheme is another example of how the Prime Minister and the Government respond generously to Scotland, as they have done for the past 11 years? That was recognised on 19 March, when there was not a single demonstrator outside the Scottish Grand Committee meeting in Edinburgh when we discussed the community charge. That clearly shows that the Scots have now understood that the community charge is fair.

Mr. Rifkind: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend that the Government have consistently shown that they are responsive to concern expressed in Scotland. The very fact that, within 48 hours, the Government were prepared in the face of criticism to respond to the concern shows that my hon. Friend's observation is entirely justified.

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): The right hon. and learned Gentleman's statement to the House was brief. There is nothing wrong with that. It is the explanation that worries many of his hon. Friends and the Opposition. What will the right hon. and learned Gentleman say to the charge that there seems to be a permanent pot of gold in the Scottish Office when any problems beset the Government? How does he reply to the charge that, as a consequence of the way in which this was done, it is more of a zig-zag than a U-turn? It is dangerous that for the first time in history a Secretary of State is inviting the Treasury to cut the budget of the Scottish Office.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman has made an interesting observation which no doubt will be listened to carefully by the Treasury. It will be grateful for allies, from whichever source they may come. The hon. Gentleman is an unlikely ally of the Treasury—but who knows? He has been a Minister and no doubt is aware of such matters. He knows as well as I do that during any financial year every Government Department finds that it requires less than it originally anticipated for particular matters and makes supplementary allocations elsewhere. All Ministers do that. Today I am simply identifying the target which will be the first charge on the underspends when they appear.

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): One accepts that, particularly at this stage of the financial year, there will be no difficulty in the Scottish Office finding £4 million from underspends and good housekeeping. However, for the avoidance of doubt, will my right hon. and learned Friend make it absolutely clear that the timetable of the A77, the Ayr road route, will not be jeopardised by today's announcement?

Mr. Rifkind: Not only can I reassure my hon. Friend, but I can anticipate similar questions from other hon. Members on both sides of the House and give them the same unqualified assurance.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to eradicate another unfair anomaly arising from the fact that the poll tax was introduced in Scotland a year ahead of England and Wales—that people in Scotland who receive income support receive no additional benefit to enable them to meet the additional burden of the poll tax? If the Secretary of State is incapable of persuading his Cabinet colleagues to give a backdated rebate to those people, will he join me in calling for the abolition of the poll tax, which is an absolute nightmare for many poor people and is fast becoming a nightmare for the Government?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman is under a misapprehension. Income support was increased for all recipients throughout the United Kingdom at the same time. The 20 per cent. rule, to which the hon. Gentleman is referring, was introduced under the rating system in both Scotland and England and Wales. The hon. Gentleman's memory is failing him.

Mr. David Lambie (Cunninghame, South): Now that the Secretary of State has made this change to the poll tax rebate scheme, which will benefit only a small number of people, is it not time that he considered the whole rebate scheme and introduced a 100 per cent. rebate instead of the present maximum of 80 per cent?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that the community charge rebate or benefit scheme is a matter for the Department of Social Security. The fact that approximately one in three people in Scotland benefit from community charge rebates suggests that the scheme is widely applied. That is how it should be.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): This is one of those rare parliamentary occasions when a new character enters the parliamentary and political folklore of Scotland—Malcolm the magician, a Scottish Office Minister who is apparently capable of conjuring vast amounts of money out of thin air. Let me ask the questions which many people will be asking the Secretary of State for Scotland. From where is the money coming, and who would otherwise have benefited from it? Does he expect people in Scotland to believe that he was in the Scottish Office contemplating the problem when he suddenly discovered £4 million in his hip pocket or that he had a piggy bank marked, "Chancellor of the Exchequer Mistakes Bank"? Will he come clean and tell us who will lose so that these other people may benefit?

Mr. Rifkind: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his complimentary introductory remarks, which are entirely appreciated and, some might say, entirely appropriate, but it is not for me to speculate on that. With regard to the substantive part of his question, I am responsible for a budget of £9,500 million. The likely maximum cost of the scheme will be £4 million—

Mr. Dewar: Two million.

Mr. Rifkind: If it is £2 million, it will be even less of a problem, but our estimate is up to £4 million. I assure the hon. Gentleman that that will not cause any loss of sleep for any Ministers in the Scottish Office and will not involve cuts in any programmes. I have already told the House,how the matter will be dealt with, so I shall not risk repeating myself in order to inform the hon. Gentleman further.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): For the benefit of the House, can the Secretary of State tell us the precise moment at which the level of political panic became such that he decided that the protests were not bogus but legitimate? Why cannot he answer the simple question of where the £4 million would otherwise have been spent? Does he realise that a pensioner couple in his constituency on basic state benefit, with lifetime savings of £12,500, are liable for more poll tax than the Secretary of State for Scotland as an individual? Justify that to Scotland.

Mr. Rifkind: First, the hon. Gentleman is straying into issues for which the Department of Social Security is responsible—the rebate scheme.

I do not know at this stage of the financial year which programmes will be underspent. What I do know is that every year, under successive Governments and in every Department of Government, there are significant underspends in programmes. Usually when they appear, one then decides where to use the resources. I anticipate only that the first call on such underspends will be the scheme that I have announced today. That is only right and proper, because it will involve a benefit for the people of Scotland that will not be available to those elsewhere in the United Kingdom, whose rates payments may have been higher than the community charge payments of those in Scotland who will receive funding under the scheme. I know that the hon. Member for Garscadden, who is always anxious to be fair in these matters, will understand the strength of that argument.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Ron Brown.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. English money goes to Scotland and English Members of Parliament are entitled to be called in the right order on a statement such as this.

Mr. Speaker: Since the hon. Gentleman has disclosed what I hoped was a private message that I sent him, I must tell him that I will call English Members—this is a United Kingdom Parliament—but this statement concerns Scotland, and I propose to call Scottish Members first.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is that not yet another example of abuse of the television cameras in the House? That lamentable hon. Member wanted to be called before four and has just managed to do so.

Mr. Speaker: I hope that we take no notice of the cameras——

Mr. Faulds: They are why the hon. Gentleman did what he did.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sure that hon. Members do not do that.

Mr. Jim Sillars (Glasgow, Govan): Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): Further to the point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have been sitting here and have not sought to catch your eye, but I sit here regularly, as you know, and I want to know whether, in future statements by Secretaries of State from England, English Members will be called first, before Scottish Members——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not usurp the authority that has been given to me. I have said that I will call English Members, and I decide in what order they will be called.

Mr. Sillars: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I shall not object to your first ruling. I understand that you think that this is the Parliament of the United Kingdom, but may we have your assurance that your decision to call English Members will have nothing to do with the spurious proposition that English money goes north of the border—because it does not?

Mr. Speaker: I am not concerned with spurious propositions.

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith): Despite the Secretary of State's gimmicks, is it not clear that there is a community charge in Scotland, and the charge is that the Government are oppressive and vindictive? That has been clear for some time, irrespective of the poll tax.

Even so, the guru of the Tory party, Adam Smith—a Scot—warned the Bourbons a long time ago that a capitation charge would mean revolution—and decapitation. The Government should be warned of that. The regional elections are coming up shortly. To the fore in those elections will be those who are wholly opposed to the poll tax. I only wish that the Labour party was 100 per cent. against it. I certainly am.

Mr. Rifkind: The House will have heard the hon. Gentleman's rebuke of the Labour party and his perception that the Labour party lacks enthusiasm for the campaign against the community charge that it is currently waging. I have not the slightest doubt that the hon. Gentleman, who appears to be a convert to the views of Adam Smith, can put forward his views with his customary eloquence.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Will the Secretary of State give an assurance that this money will not be found through staff cuts in the Scottish Office? Is there not concern about the machinations of his hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), who has made that proposal?

Mr. Rifkind: I can give the hon. Gentleman a categorical assurance to that effect.

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): Can you, Mr. Speaker, enlighten the House on whether there is any precedent for a Secretary of State——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must ask a question of the Secretary of State.

Mr. Watson: Is there any precedent for the Secretary of State coming to the Dispatch Box at a time when his party's support is on a par with the bank rate? That event is clearly connected with the fiasco of two weeks ago. The right hon. and learned Gentleman said that he expected 15,000 to 20,000 people would benefit from the change. That suggests an individual payment of about £250. Can he explain where that comes from? Is it not true that, in fact, the figure will be much lower, both individually and in total?

Mr. Rifkind: The precise figure will depend on the rebate to which the applicant is entitled for the financial year that is just beginning. For example, if he is entitled to a 50 per cent. rebate, that same percentage will be applied to the community charge that the applicant paid last year. It will vary depending on the personal circumstances of the individual concerned.

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): Does the Secretary of State accept that the Budget debacle has damaged beyond repair his ability to represent Scotland in the Cabinet? We all know that he had to go cap in hand to the Prime Minister to obtain his concession. Can he confirm that he also had to go cap in hand to the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth)?

Mr. Rifkind: I do not understand the question. If, on some other occasion, the hon. Gentleman would care to explain his question in slightly greater detail, at least I would understand it, even if I could not respond to it.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): Could the Secretary of State tell me—I promise not to tell anybody else—how he got himself into this mess in the first place? Why did none of his ministerial colleagues consult him? Why did no one tell him that the limit was being raised from £8,000 to £16,000? Why did he protest that the whole argument was bogus? Why has he turned cartwheels—which is not a pretty sight?

Now that the Secretary of State has such heavy influence with is ministerial colleagues, will he have the rebate scheme amended so that all entitlement to rebate is paid? We must get rid of the nonsense whereby, if the rebate is less than 50p a week, it is not paid. That is absolute madness. The work has been done on calculating the rebate, so it makes sense to pay it.

Mr. Rifkind: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has already said that neither the Department of the Environment nor the Scottish Office was given advance notice because his announcement referred to social security benefits. Therefore, the Department of Social Security was the only Department informed. On the latter part of the hon. Gentleman's question, we will draw the points that he made to the attention of the Department of Social Security.

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): Is the Secretary of State embarrassed that the Prime Minister, who is responsible for the introduction of the community charge, has had her bill reduced from £2,200 to £750? Does he find it embarrassing when trying to explain that to the Scottish electorate? Now that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has his new-found persuasive powers, does he still think that the community charge is a vote winner?

Mr. Rifkind: I certainly believe that those in Scotland who suffered heavily from the rating revaluation do not wish for a return of the rating system. I noted the reaction of Labour voters to the Labour party's roof tax proposal. It showed that more than 80 per cent. of Scottish Labour voters believe that the roof tax would harm them and Scotland as a whole.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): It is said that the Secretary of State had to offer his resignation to obtain the Prime Minister's permission to spend Scotland's money in Scotland. Is he aware that during his darkest hour that evening, the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland, the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), was stabbing him in the back on Scottish television? Is it not time that he asked the hon. Gentleman to resign and do the Tory party in Scotland a favour and Scotland itself an even better favour?

Mr. Rifkind: I always appreciate helpful suggestions from Opposition Members, but I cannot help but think that if Opposition Members are so anxious for my hon. Friend to resign, it must be because they consider him, rightly, to be a tremendous asset to the Conservative party in Scotland.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Does the Secretary of State take any pride in coming to the Dispatch Box like a skinny-ma-link warlock having got permission from the mistress of the coven to take some silver from one pocket and put it into another? Is it not a disgrace that he has to be dragged here to make a statement on the issue when, if there had been any violence in Glasgow on Saturday, he would have been only too pleased to come to the Dispatch Box to condemn the Scots? Is he not putting the Union in danger, and is it not a fact that on 3 May his party will be eliminated from the Scottish scene?

Mr. Rifkind: I am not sure what will happen to my party, but at least I am still a member of my party, which is more than the hon. Gentleman can say.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Is the Secretary of State aware of the considerable concern in England and Wales that the Chancellor's Budget statement discriminated against couples? Does that discrimination also apply in Scotland?

Mr. Rifkind: I do not accept the premise that there is discrimination against couples, so I cannot accept what the hon. Gentleman is suggesting.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): Why is it that, the more melancholy the pibroch, the wider the British taxpayer's purse opens, giving the Scottish island ferries a substantial subsidy from British taxpayers when no other offshore islands in the United Kingdom receive such a subsidy? Why does Scotland have such a vice-like grip on the wallets of the British taxpayer?

Mr. Rifkind: Subsidies are given to Caledonian MacBrayne to ensure that the island communities remain viable. Any attempt to impose fully commercial tariffs on those services would soon lead to the depopulation of those islands. The same cannot be said for islands elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I will take points of order in a minute.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): My right hon. and learned Friend knows that I have difficulty rising in my place, but I have been doing so all afternoon because there is something that should be said. Is my right hon. Friend aware that during Scottish questions the Opposition have continually accused the Scottish Office and the Government of not listening and not caring? We have now proved that we listen and we have proved that we care in a positive way——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is supposed to be asking a question.

Mr. Dickens: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that we have proved in a positive way that we listen and care? Is he not amazed that, despite that, the Opposition do nothing but grumble? Are they opposing for the sake of it, or is it just that there is no pleasing some people?

Mr. Rifkind: No, I am not amazed. I would have been amazed if the Opposition had behaved any differently.

Mr. John Maxton (Glasgow, Cathcart): If the Secretary of State is now responding to demands in Scotland, why does he not respond to the demands of 85 per cent. of the Scottish people and withdraw the poll tax altogether? If he is going down the road of making concessions under pressure, why does he not help those who are in genuine need as a result of the poll tax and ensure that he introduces 100 per cent. rebates, that he backdates all rebate claims to 1 April 1989 where they would have applied at 1 April 1989, and that he bases the transitional relief scheme upon the real poll tax figures, not the notional figures that he plucked out of the air when he introduced it? Would not that be a way of giving real help to the people of Scotland who are sorely oppressed by the tax?

Mr. Rifkind: It would be wrong to apply the transitional relief to local authority expenditure at whatever level local authorities choose to apply it. The purpose of a transitional relief is to provide support for those for whom the change in the system has led to increased bills, not for those who find that their bills have increased because their local authorities have decided to use the opportunity to increase spending substantially. The hon. Gentleman knows that perfectly well.

Points of Order

4.10 pm

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Can you give the House some advice? I understand that this afternoon the Government are to present the British Nationality (Hong Kong) Bill. It is proposed that the Bill should have its Second Reading on Thursday 19 April. That means that there will be effectively only two working days for the House to consider its attitude to the Bill. There is no secret about the matter; 80 Conservative Members are opposed to the Bill, and they may well find that they can ally themselves with the official Opposition.

There is a proper process by which we may discuss with the Opposition a reasoned amendment. The Bill is being pushed through the House and the opportunity of the Easter Adjournment is being used to try to abort such discussion. It is an abuse of the procedure of the House. We ask you, Mr. Speaker, to protect us. We ask you perhaps to suggest to the Government that they might delay the Second Reading of the Bill for, say, a week. It will come into effect only in 1997. The British people, whose very nature is affected by the Bill, will not thank the Government if it is dealt with in a slipshod way.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has been here a long time, and he knows perfectly well that what he has said is not a matter for me. I do not organise the business in the House. I do my utmost to ensure that we get on to the business, as we are trying to do today. I cannot help the hon. Member. The Bill has not yet been presented, but with any luck, it will be presented in a few minutes.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, relating to the debate which we shall have later this afternoon on the Education (Student Loans) Bill. As a Back-Bench Member who is worried about the legislation, I seek your advice. I understand after a conversation with the Public Bill Office that Lords amendments Nos. 8 and 10, which were passed by the other place by a majority of 98 to 51, will not be debated by the House because they would impose a charge on the public revenue.

Can you confirm that, Mr. Speaker, because the issue of housing benefit is critical for the student population? If that is the case, is it not possible for the Government to bring forward a new money resolution to enable us to ensure that students may have access to housing benefit? I quote the recent example of 21 February when the Minister of State, Scottish Office brought forward a new money resolution on the Enterprise and New Towns (Scotland) Bill. Have you had such an approach from the Government, Mr. Speaker, or can you say whether there is a possibility of such an approach?

Mr. Speaker: I have had no request from the Government to bring forward another money resolution. As the hon. Lady has raised an important point in which the whole House may be interested, may I say that I have looked carefully at it. I am satisfied that amendments Nos. 8 and 10 would impose a charge on the public revenue not authorised by a resolution of the House. Therefore, under paragraph 3 of Standing Order No. 76, the Lords amendments must be deemed to be disagreed to.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. If a Secretary of State comes to the House and makes a statement which is palpably false, you would take a very severe view of it. Equally, if an Opposition Front-Bench spokesman accuses a Secretary of State of misleading the House, surely you would have the right to ask whether it can be substantiated. In a press statement, the shadow spokesman for local government accused my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State of misleading the House over the administrative costs of the poll tax and the way in which the selection of capped local authorities was made. That is a serious allegation against my right hon. Friend, who is not here to defend himself. What action can you take, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that that matter may be properly aired in this House?

Mr. Speaker: It is frequently alleged that the House is being misled, but for a right hon. or hon. Member to be accused of deliberately misleading the House is a totally different matter. I am sure that the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) does not want to be too mealy-mouthed about the matter.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will have heard about the Vietnamese boat people, but are you aware, Mr. Speaker, of the Hong Kong plane people? Apparently, planeloads of Conservative Members have been sent to Hong Kong and are being sent to Hong Kong. I think that the name of Ian Greer Associates has been mentioned, but I might not be correct. The Conservative party's Whips Office has also been mentioned. A very important measure will come before the House as soon as right hon. and hon. Members return from the Easter recess. It is a matter of interest that certain Conservative Members have been wined and dined, and for all one knows——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am not a member of this party, and I have no knowledge of these matters. I cannot see that they have anything to do with me.

Mr. Marlow: I am sure that my colleagues are totally incorruptible but, as you know, Mr. Speaker, in the event that a right hon. or hon. Member makes an overseas visit relating to, or arising from, membership of the House, if the cost of such a visit is not wholly borne by the right hon. or hon. Member concerned or by public funds, an entry must be made in the Register of Members' Interests.

As to the involvement of the Conservative Whips Office, we are not sure whether the trips have been paid for out of public funds. I think that we ought to know to what extent they have or have not been paid for in that way.

You will also know, Mr. Speaker, that an entry must be made in the Register of Members' Interests within four weeks of the event. I understand that certain Members of Parliament are going this weekend, but the Second Reading debate will be taking place within about a week of their return. The House should know before right hon. or hon. Members vote on the Bill, or even speak on it, whether or not they have been on such a visit. It is a very important matter, and one that has created a great deal of controversy within the party and throughout the country. It is vital that the House should know which right hon. and hon. Members have been to Hong Kong and how long they spent there before they speak in the Second Reading debate.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have no knowledge of those matters. I hope that all right hon. and hon. Members will enjoy a very good Easter recess, but I have no knowledge of where they will be spending it.

However, the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) makes a serious allegation against his hon. Friends. I am certain that if they participate in the Second Reading debate they will declare their interest in the normal way.

Mr. Marlow: I said that my right hon. and hon. Friends are incorruptible.

Mr. Speaker: I do not think that anything can arise beyond that.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I refer to the point of order raised earlier by the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing). Although I accept the accuracy and validity of your ruling, Mr. Speaker, is it not the case that, on an important issue such as the granting of housing benefit to students, it will do great damage to the credibility of this House if students can see that it has done nothing to debate a matter crucial to them because of the Government's failure to introduce a money resolution?

Mr. Speaker: The Chair is bound by Standing Orders, and I can exercise no discretion.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The point of order raised by the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) did not concern a trivial matter, and the House should not be content simply to sweep it away. The Patronage Secretary is in his place, and he could come to the Dispatch Box and either confirm or deny the allegations. A very serious matter has been raised, and the Patronage Secretary has an opportunity now to clear it up.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: We have a heavy day ahead, and it is timetabled, so I hope that we can get on.

A propos the matter that has been raised, it is, of course, a serious allegation, and I said that. I equally said that I was certain that all hon. Members with an interest of that kind or any other kind to declare would declare it.

Sir John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I make no charge of corruption against any hon. Member, but is there not the important constitutional point that, when a Bill of such importance as the British Nationality (Hong Kong) Bill is due to come before the House, it would be more seemly and in keeping with the traditions of this great parliamentary assembly, the home of democracy, for us to have more time to consider it before it is introduced?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a point of order for me.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a pont of order, Mr. Speaker. I agree with you that the remarks of the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) were important because of the precedents. When people have been involved in treating, such matters have been debated and certain decisions taken.

I suggest that on this occasion the hon. Member for Northampton, North should put the facts in writing to you, as a matter of privilege—as should occur under the new rules—and he should name names. Then, if the issue goes before the appropriate Committee, the Patronage Secretary should be brought before that Committee to explain his conduct in the matter.

I would only add that if so many Tory Members are going to Hong Kong on a free junket, they could do us and the country a service and not come back.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As one of those who has been to Hong Kong—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."]—I registered that interest with the Registrar of Members' Interests, in the same way as my hon. Friend for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) registers his visits to the Iraqi dictatorship.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker, I regret to say that I have not been invited to Hong Kong. Were I to be invited, surely that would help my understanding of the situation there. We are in danger of gross humbug. I regard hon. Members who visit foreign countries as people who become experts in the affairs of those countries. I respect the views of my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) when it comes to middle eastern affairs. I note that in the Register of Members' Interests it says that he visited Iraq in September 1989 for five days. It adds that the money came from Arab sources, and it has been alleged that it came from the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let us not have a debate on this issue. Wherever hon. Members go, I hope that they have a jolly good holiday.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I return to the point of order relating to the question concerning the Education (Student Loans) Bill. None of my hon. Friends would willingly be party to challenging the privilege that this elected House should have in respect of the expenditure of money. But I ask you, Mr. Speaker, to use the time during the debate on the guillotine motion to reconsider your decision that Lords amendment No. 8 involves a question of privilege.

I believe that your ruling is based on your understanding that it involves the expenditure of new money. It does not. It involves a continuation of expenditure already authorised by the House under existing legislation. While the Government have proposed that housing benefit should be removed from students, that legislation has not yet been approved by Parliament, so the existing statutory provision by which students are able to gain housing benefit stands.

That approval was given under a pre-existing money resolution, and in those circumstances it seems that no question of privilege arises, because the other place was simply asking that an authorisation already given by this House should continue. I realise that this is not something on which you can give an instant decision, Mr. Speaker, but I should like you to take time in the next three hours to reconsider the matter.

Mr. Speaker: As the House would expect, I have already done so, but I shall certainly reconsider it, and when I return later I shall make a pronouncement on the matter. We must move on now.

BILL PRESENTED

BRITISH NATIONALITY (HONG KONG)

Mr. Secretary Waddington, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Hurd, Mr. Secretary Walker, Mr. Secretary King, Mr. Secretary Rifkind, Mr. Secretary Brooke, Mr. Secretary Howard and Mr. Peter Lloyd, presented a Bill to provide for the acquisition of British citizenship by selected Hong Kong residents, their spouses and minor children: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 119.]

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I shall put together the Questions on the two motions relating to statutory instruments.

Ordered,

That the Legal Advice and Assistance at Police Stations (Remuneration) (Amendment) Regulations 1990 (S.I., 1990, No. 487) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

That the Legal Aid in Criminal and Care Proceedings (Costs) (Amendment) Regulations 1990 (S.I., 1990, No. 488) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

British Nationality (Hong Kong) Bill

4.26 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As you know, the shadow Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), has already complained about the delay in the publication of the British Nationality (Hong Kong) Bill. A few seconds ago the Bill was presented to the House. I was told by the Vote Office a few minutes ago that we will still not be able to get copies of the Bill at the Vote Office until after 5 o'clock. That is quite ridiculous, and it is inhibiting the work of the House that we did not get the Bill yesterday. The Bill was printed yesterday. It has been presented to the House and it is not available. You should protect the interests of Opposition Members and of Back Benchers on both sides of the House in this matter, Mr. Speaker, and ensure that the Bill is available immediately.

Mr. Speaker: I shall consider that matter. It is for the Minister responsible to ensure that copies of the Bill are available. I am sure that the hon. Member's voice will have been heard—at least, I hope so.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. We have just given a First Reading to the British Nationality (Hong Kong) Bill. You may not know officially, but the House knows that the Second Reading is timed for Thursday 19 April. In other words, there will be a lapse of only two parliamentary days between now and then. Is it in order that such an important Bill should be provided with such little time for consideration between First and Second Reading?

Mr. Speaker: It is certainly in order. Whether the time available for hon. Members to study the Bill is sufficient is a matter for hon. Members to take up with the Government. It is not a matter for me. As was said earlier, it is perfectly true that two sitting days will elapse, but there are other days in the recess when hon. Members may have the opportunity to study the Bill.

Poll Tax (Abolition)

4.28 pm

Mr. John Hughes (Coventry, North-East): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to repeal the Local Government Finance Act 1988; and for connected purposes.

I welcome this opportunity to introduce my Bill to repeal the Local Government Finance Act 1988. There should be no misunderstanding about the poll tax. It was not the creation of any local authority or of my own authority, Coventry city council. The tax demands that the poorest, the young and the old should pay the same amount as a millionaire, a millionairess or the Prime Minister, and was spawned by the Government and by the Prime Minister, who will gain £2,000 a year with the imposition of the poll tax. It is an immoral Government measure which will make the rich richer and the poor poorer, and it will impose untold hardship.

Hon. Members brought these facts to the Government's attention, but our pleas for compassion on behalf of the poor went unheeded. My attempt in July last year to introduce a referendum to prevent the poll tax becoming law was thwarted by the Government. If my poll tax referendum Bill had found its way on to the statute book, there would have been no demonstrations last Saturday and there would have been no violence, which I wholeheartedly condemn. Let there be no ifs or buts about that. The violence, looting and rioting which put at risk thousands of citizens and their families exercising their right to protest, and also the police handling of the affair demand a full parliamentary inquiry, and I call for that.

I condemn violence from any quarter—the violence of a parasitical minority and the violence contained in the many anti-social measures that the Government bring before the House of Commons and steamroller through it. Political thuggery or street thuggery—the product of their violence—is the same. There is no difference between the pain suffered as a result of being physically assaulted and the unbearable pain associated with the long wait for a hip replacement, or the excruciating pain that is suffered when someone is denied treatment for gall stones or kidney stones. The poll tax can be classified only as political thuggery and it will hit my poor constituents hard.

Only four of the Coventry city wards have less deprivation than the country's average. The contrast in the life styles of Coventry's citizens becomes apparent if one flies across the city in the Goodyear airship, as I did. In the south-west of the city—Kenilworth road and the surrounding area where the beneficiaries of the poll tax live—one sees large houses and vast green spaces, undisturbed by factory buildings, and one private swimming pool after another. In stark physical contrast—diametrically worlds apart—are the densely packed housing areas of Foleshill and Wood End, where homes jostle with factories and industrial estates. That is where the poll tax losers live.

In my constituency, every ward has more poverty than the average for the whole country. Foleshill and Wood End head the list. They have the highest unemployment, the greatest overcrowding, the greatest number of pensioners living alone and the greatest number of single-parent families. Moreover, Foleshill has the greatest number of families who have come from the New Commonwealth. Even a visit to the swimming baths puts a severe strain on their meagre incomes.

Two years ago, those impoverished citizens could claim a full rent and rate rebate. They could obtain grants for essential household items. Today, even the poorest must pay 20 per cent. of the poll tax. They shiver through the winter months, unable to heat their homes. Some even die from hypothermia. They cannot afford good food and good clothes. They are forced to go, cap in hand, to loan sharks to borrow money, or they are forced to take out a loan from the usurious Tory Government.

My poor constituents will be unable to pay the poll tax. It would be irresponsible of me to accuse them of being tax dodgers who are forcing an extra tax levy on the rest of Coventry's citizens. The blame for that must rest squarely on the Prime Minister's shoulders. The Prime Minister and her Government are the real tax dodgers in a quite personal sense in that they are the poll tax gainers.

I should be guilty of an even greater degree of irresponsibility if I supported the poll tax and its draconian legal penalties, and I should be culpable of gross irresponsibility if I ignored my constituents' plight. The poll tax is an obscenity. It requires a depraved mind, capable of the most perverted reasoning, to vindicate a tax which exacts the same amount from the poor as from the rich. My constituents are affected by such extremes of wealth and circumstances. That is why I have decided, after a great deal of thought and after carefully examining my conscience, to refuse to pay the poll tax. As an elected representative, I did not take that decision lightly and I do not put pressure on my constituents to follow my example, but if they wish to take part in a non-violent campaign they will have my support.

There comes a time when every elected representative must examine the morality of his or her actions—and the poll tax is the pinnacle of immorality. There is an old socialist saying that it is better to break the law than to break the poor, and I support that. That is why I seek to change this anti-social law and why I bring my repeal Bill before the House. It provides for the use of a referendum as a means of bringing about that change, which has the support of 75 per cent. of the population, as any democratic Government would recognise. That is why local authorities can give the Government a lead on this, especially the 20 which have been poll tax-capped. They could hold their own referendum. They could be given a mandate by their electors.

That is why I call on my own authority, Coventry city council, to be in the vanguard. Coventry city council conducted a citywide referendum on the rates on 27 August 1981. I now call on it to hold a referendum on a far graver issue—the poll tax. With the assistance of Coventry and other local authorities, I hope that we shall be able to wipe the poll tax off the statute book.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. John Hughes, Mr. Dave Nellist, Mr. Harry Barnes, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mr. Bob Cryer, Ms. Mildred Gordon, Mr. Harry Cohen, Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Mr. Pat Wall, Mr. Terry Fields, Mr. Dennis Canavan and Mr. Dennis Skinner.

Poll Tax (Abolition)

Mr. John Hughes accordingly presented a Bill to repeal the Local Government Finance Act 1988; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 4 May and to be printed. [Bill 122.]

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In view of the unanimous support for the repeal of the poll tax which has been shown in the House today, I suggest that we move on to all the succeeding stages of this Bill so that we can carry it and satisfy the people out there, the electorate who want to get rid of it, and I so move.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that that is not in order. A day has already been named.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order that on the Bill that we have just had, to which there is the strongest possible opposition among some Government Members, no one moved against it or spoke against it, although the duty Whip was heard to say that he had never heard such nonsense in his life? Would he not have liked to get up and argue why he regarded the measure as nonsense, so that we could have a decision here and now about where Parliament stands?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All that I need say is that what has occurred has been quite in order.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was here and heard my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Hughes) move his Bill, and it was supported by the House. Have you had any suggestion that hon. Members on the Government Benches were prevented from speaking against the Bill because of the embarrassment to the Government if the Bill were passed today?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We cannot debate the matter now.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Conservative Members are anxious to get on to the important business before us. We do not want to fool around with something that will never become law anyway.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am trying to do just that. I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her help.

Education (Student Loans) Bill (Allocation of Time)

4.39 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. John MacGregor): I beg to move,

That the following provisions shall apply to the remaining proceedings on the Education (Student Loans) Bill:

Lords Amendments

1. The proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments shall be completed at this day's sitting and, if not previously brought to a conclusion shall be brought to a conclusion six hours after the commencement of the proceedings on this Order.

2.—(1) For the purpose of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph 1 above—

(a) Mr. Speaker shall first put forthwith any Question which has already been proposed from the Chair and not yet decided and, if that Question is for the amendment of a Lords Amendment, shall then put forthwith the Question on any further Amendment of the said Lords Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown and on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House doth agree or disagree with the Lords in the said Lords Amendment, or, as the case may be, in the said Lords Amendment as amended;

(b) if Mr. Speaker is satisfied that any remaining Lords Amendment imposes a charge upon the public revenue such as is required to be authorised by resolution of the House under Standing Order No. 47 (Certain proceedings relating to public money) and that such charge has not been so authorised, he shall in accordance with Standing Order No. 76(3) (Lords Amendments deemed to be disagreed to) declare he is so satisfied and shall put forthwith a separate Question on any other Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown relevant to that Lords Amendment;

(c) Mr. Speaker shall then designate such of the remaining Lords Amendments as appear to him to involve questions of Privilege and shall—

  (i) put forthwith the Question on any Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown to a Lords Amendment and then put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House doth agree or disagree with the Lords in their Amendment, or as the case may be, in their Amendment as amended;

  (ii) put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in a Lords Amendment;

  (iii) put forthwith with respect to the Amendments designated by Mr. Speaker which have not been disposed of the Question, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said Amendments; and

  (iv) put forthwith the Question, That this House doth agree with the Lords in all the remaining Lords Amendments;

(d) as soon as the House has agreed or disagreed with the Lords in any of their Amendments Mr. Speaker shall put forthwith a separate Question on any other Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown relevant to the Lords Amendment.

(2) Proceedings under sub-paragraph (1) above shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

Stages subsequent to first Consideration of Lords Amendments

3. Mr. Speaker shall put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for the consideration forthwith of any further Message from the Lords on the Bill.

4. The proceedings on any such further Message from the Lords shall, if not previously brought to a conclusion, be brought to a conclusion one hour after the commencement of those proceedings.

5. For the purpose of bringing those proceedings to a conclusion—

(a) Mr. Speaker shall first put forthwith any Question which has already been proposed from the Chair and not yet decided, and shall then put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown which is related to the Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) Mr. Speaker shall then designate such of the remaining items in the Lords Message as appear to him to involve questions of Privilege and shall—

  (i) put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown on any item;

  (ii) in the case of each remaining item designated by Mr. Speaker, put forthwith the Question, That this House doth agree with the Lords in their Proposal; and

  (iii) put forthwith the Question, That this House doth agree with the Lords in all the remaining Lords Proposals.

Supplemental

6.—(1) Mr. Speaker shall put forthwith the question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for the appointment and quorum of a Committee to draw up Reasons.

(2) A Committee appointed to draw up Reasons shall report before the conclusion of the sitting at which it is appointed.

7.—(1) In this paragraph "the proceedings" means proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments or on any further Message from the Lords on the Bill, on the appointment and quorum of a Committee to draw up Reasons and on the Report of such a Committee.

(2) Paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings.

(3) No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of, the proceedings shall be made except by a Minister of the Crown, and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

(4) If the proceedings are interrupted by a Motion for the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration), the time at which, under this Order, any proceedings are to be brought to a conclusion shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

8.—(1) The proceedings on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after they have been commenced, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings.

(2) If the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before the time at which proceedings on the Bill are to be brought to a conclusion under this Order no notice shall be required of a Motion made at the next sitting by a member of the Government for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

I will begin by setting out why I believe that it is right to ensure orderly and sensible debate on the Lords amendments. First, as several hon. Members pointed out yesterday, this is a comparatively short Bill. Secondly, it has had lengthy and thoroughly comprehensive discussion in both Houses. All the issues before us today have been exhaustively debated and we now have to take decisions. Thirdly, the great majority of the amendments are either those in which the Government have responded positively to points made by hon. Members on both sides of the House as well as in the other place, which I hope will be acceptable to the House for that reason, or technical amendments. We are therefore demonstrating that the Government have responded to debates and we have reached the wrap-up stage.

I am sure that the motion is realistic and practical for the proper dispatch of business and that it will commend itself to all my hon. Friends and to most Opposition Members, if they are honest, because it does not impress anyone to delay returning to our constituencies for the recess by arguing pointlessly through the night on minute technical details.

I will elaborate on that. We have given the Bill substantial attention. This House and another place have together devoted some 90 hours to debate a Bill of four clauses and two schedules. That total includes about 40 hours in Standing Committee. More than 360 amendments have been tabled, half in this House and half in another place. More than 120 amendments were tabled in the Standing Committee, which then considered about 80 of them.

Those statistics totally refute any suggestion that the Government deliberately kept the Bill short in an attempt to prevent discussion on the finer points of the scheme. There has been every opportunity to explore all the principles, objectives and details of the scheme, down to the finer points of administration. There has been more discussion about detailed administration on the Bill and the scheme than on many other measures going through the House.

At the same time, there is recognition now that the format of the Bill has the great merit of flexibility of operation hereafter. It is understood that, as with the student grants maintenance scheme, from time to time there is obviously a need to change the details. We have said that we may wish to review the scheme, and from that review we may wish to change some of the details. Clearly, it makes sense to do that through secondary legislation rather than primary legislation.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): Does the Secretary of State agree that there would be less debate and fewer amendments if the Government had been much clearer and more detailed in the first place about what they were proposing? Is not one of the reasons why a short Bill has taken a relatively long time the fact that the Government have said so little about so much?

Mr. MacGregor: Throughout the passage of the Bill the Government have deliberately tried to be helpful to both Houses in responding to all queries. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that. We have been getting on with the detailed preparation of the Student Loans Company and at each stage we have reported to the House on the arrangements. We have therefore been clear with the House. The debates have been very thorough and have covered all points. The Bill has gone through reasonably quickly because it is a short Bill on a single scheme, but there has certainly not been any shortage of discusson in the process.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): Will my right hon. Friend devote some time to the fact that this is only the fifth time in the history of our nation that a guillotine has been applied to Lords amendments? It is a very new process which only started in the parliamentary Session before last. Will my right hon. Friend justify how it is constitutionally right to predetermine how long we take to discuss amendments raised in the second Chamber of a bicameral system?

Mr. MacGregor: I was trying to explain why I think that the motion is right in relation to the Bill before us, and I believe that I have support of the great majority of my hon. Friends.

There have been a number of changes to the Bill as it has progressed through both Houses. That bears witness to the value of parliamentary scrutiny. The changes fall into three categories. The first relates to technical amendments which were tabled in another place and, by and large have followed from further consideration of the details of the Bill in the light of debates in both Houses. The second category relates to changes of a detailed nature in response to points made by my hon. Friends and other hon. Members and includes all those relating to parliamentary procedure as well as to clarification of points such as the balance between grant and loan. The third category relates to a few points of substance. I cite, in particular, changes made—not always on the face of the Bill, because that was not necessary—in relation to increases in access funds and the disabled. Those amendments were in response to points made frequently in debate. Both issues have been thoroughly debated in both Houses and in Standing Committee. All the arguments have been held, all the issues have been debated, and we have accepted some additional points. That is all that has happened.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): As the measure went through the House of Commons at a fairly leisurely pace, and there was ample opportunity to discuss it in Committee and on the Floor of the House, why were none of the amendments dealt with initially? Why have they all been made in another place, apart from a couple of technical amendments which were adopted in Committee?

Mr. MacGregor: It is because the Government were listening very carefully. In a number of debates in the House, we made it clear that we were listening and considering what to do. In the light of that consideration, some of the same points were made in another place and we decided to table certain amendments. I assure the House that the debates in this House as well as those in another place persuaded us of the value of those amendments.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster) *rose*——

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray) *rose*——

Mr. MacGregor: I am keen to get on so that we can get down to debating the amendments, but I will give way.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Am I right in believing that my right hon. Friend accepted the amendments allowing access funds for the disabled?

Mr. MacGregor: We have increased the access funds by a further £10 million—I shall return to that later—and we have made some amendments to assist the disabled in repayment of loans. We have also made some proposals which do not have to be on the face of the Bill but to which I referred in answer to a parliamentary question.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Perhaps the Secretary of State has given way to me because of my natural Scottish reserve and reticence, but in the context of the balance between grant and loan, will he spell out in detail the implications

[Mrs. Margaret Ewing]

of that balance for Scottish students who undertake the four-year honours course, which is the most common course in Scotland?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Lady knows that that matter has been debated in the House. She and I had exchanges on it during Question Time. We have made it clear that we intend to extend the time for repayment of loans of five years' duration or more, but not those of four years. I made that clear in answer to a parliamentary question in the House.

I pay tribute to the sterling work done in Committee and in another place. Hon. Members on the Standing Committee devoted a lengthy period to the most careful analysis of the Bill. My hon. Friends played a particularly noteworthy part in achieving changes of substance. My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) was a persistent advocate of the need for an increase in the access funds. We listened carefully to his argument and others and I hope that he will be pleased with our response. I also pay tribute to the Government spokesmen in another place, the Earl of Caithness and Baroness Blatch—we have before us the fruits of their labours.

Although we are approaching the final stages of the Bill, it is important that we do not engage in pointless repetition. The motion, if passed, will help to ensure that the scheme is ready for the beginning of the next academic year. We shall need to place regulations before Parliament soon, and additionsl preparatory work will be needed before the scheme is fully operational. Students will benefit considerably from the additional resources made available through top-up loans, and many students would not welcome being denied a loan as a result of filibustering. It is therefore right that we deal with the Lords amendments in a businesslike and proper fashion, without pointlessly spending much time throughout the night on technical details.

I have no doubt that the motion will give hon. Members the opportunity to raise wider issues, but I will briefly record one or two points about the Bill. The objectives of the Bill are to facilitate the expansion of higher education, in particular by providing more money to students while they are studying and, over time, to lighten the burdens of student support and maintenance support on taxpayers and parents.

The Anderson committee envisaged an eventual expansion of the higher education system to about 175,000 students, but in 1990-91 we expect that there will be more than 450,000 mandatory award holders and more than 1 million students in total. We are committed to continuing that expansion. The cost to the taxpayer of supporting students' living expenses has risen from £236 million in 1962 to £623 million this year at current prices, without taking account of inflation.

Loans will relieve the burden on parents and taxpayers and will give students access to more money. They will be able to use part of the high income that they can expect as graduates to borrow from the taxpayer and to repay the loan when their income rises. The loan will be at a zero real rate of interest, which is much more favourable than commercial borrowing terms or the loan schemes operating in most overseas countries.

Mr. Robert Rhodes James (Cambridge): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is the guillotine motion, but the Secretary of State is making a Third Reading speech.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): The motion lends itself to relatively wide debate.

Mr. MacGregor: I have already dealt with the guillotine. No doubt the speeches of other hon. Members will go rather wider than the motion. It is right briefly to place on record some of the key points.

The loan scheme will be more favourable than those in operation in most overseas countries. Moreover, graduates whose incomes, for any reason, are low, will be able to defer repayments. Deferments will be available to those on incomes below 85 per cent. of the national average. If the scheme were in operation, graduates could defer if they were earning less than £11,500. Deferment answers arguments that the scheme penalises those who choose a lower-paid occupation and women who choose to bring up a family. The deferment arrangements mean that they are not penalised. Top-up loans will more than compensate most students for any loss of benefit. We estimate that the benefits received by student claimants would have averaged £315 in 1990-91. That is more than outweighed by the loan.

We recognise that there will be circumstances in which further help is needed, and there will be three access funds, currently worth £25 million in total. To answer the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman), we have added a further £10 million to provide discretionary support to students where it is needed to enable them to join or to remain on courses. The funds will be administered by the students' own educational institutions, which are best placed to assess their students' circumstances.

Differences in accommodation costs—this is an important point that I should like to make clear, not least to my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster, who asked about it—were taken into account in the distribution of the access funds to the Universities Funding Council and to the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council. The Government wish the councils to have regard to the same factor in making allocations to their institutions. This autumn, students will have access to a 25 per cent. increase in resources compared with current grant if we pass the amendments and the Bill is given Royal Assent.

The grant will be uprated in the autumn and loans will make available £178 million in addition to grant. We estimate that students in scope of loans would have been able to claim only £68 million in 1990-91. The net increase to students' budgets from the autumn should be £135 million. That is a mark of the scheme's generosity. Under the scheme, there will be progressive reduction in the real value of the parental contribution. When the scheme reaches maturity, parents in comparable circumstances will eventually pay little more than half the present contribution. The scheme offers parents a real benefit. That is why it is important to get on with the Lords amendments and to pass the Bill. The loan will not be means-tested. It will therefore be a valuable resource to the 40 per cent. of students whose parents do not make the full assessed parental contribution.

Mr. Simon Hughes: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You must consider whether the Secretary of State is still in order——

Mr. Alan Amos (Hexham): This has nothing to do with the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes).

Mr. Hughes: I am asking Mr. Deputy Speaker to consider this point. The motion is to guillotine or to timetable debate. It therefore precludes debates on a range of issues being taken separately. If they were taken separately, the points that the Secretary of State is now making could be made in those debates. This is a timetable motion. It surely cannot be right, instead of the House having the opportunity to debate the 17 Lords amendments, for the Government to use the guillotine and the limited time that they have made available to make their case, which they ought to make point by point in each of the debates. That is an abuse because it is substituting a timetable for proper ordered debate of different issues. It surely matters not whether it is the Secretary of State or the newest Bank Bencher who uses that procedure.

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it on the same point?

Mr. Pawsey: Yes. Do you agree, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the interventions made in the speech of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State underline the necessity for the motion?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: As I said earlier, the motion lends itself to relatively wide debate. I note that the Secretary of State is referring regularly to the Lords amendments with which the House will deal later. It seems to me that he is giving the background to the Lords amendments. How long the House takes on the motion is a matter not for the Chair but for the House.

Mr. MacGregor: I am anxious to get on, which is why I have not referred to matters such as housing benefit, as I suspect that other hon. Members will. I want as much time as possible to be given to the Lords amendments. The point that I am making, succinctly and briefly, is that it is important to deal with the Lords amendments as quickly as possible so that we can progress and so that the benefits of the scheme can be available to students.

It has frequently been argued that loans will inhibit entry into higher education. We have had long debates on that, but it is clear that, in general, countries with long-established loan schemes have a higher proportion of their young people in higher education than we do. Nor is there any sign that loans have deterred people from less prosperous backgrounds or from ethnic minorities from entering higher education.

We have carefully considered all the alternatives to the scheme presented to us, but I believe that they do not bear scrutiny. Providing additional resources as grant rather than a loan is simply not an option. Expenditure would continue to rise as the number of students increased, whereas the Government scheme reduces public expenditure in the medium term as repayments mount up.

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have forborne rising previously but, with respect, this is an abuse of the procedures of the House. I once attempted to make a similar speech to the Secretary of State which had nothing whatever to do with a guillotine but everything to do with the substance of the Bill concerned and was rightly called to order. I suggest that the Secretary of State's speech is wholly out of order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have already dealt with that point. I can add nothing further.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall make one last point, and I am entirely following your ruling, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I have set out elsewhere the arguments against repaying loans through an additional national insurance contribution or through some form of graduate tax. I note how —including during debates in the other place—the advocacy of those options has faded away. We have given the scheme and the Bill thorough examination and the Government have accepted a considerable number of the Lords amendments. That is because, in the light of the discussions in this House and the other place, it has been right to do so. I have already explained that the amendments are either in response to points made by hon. Members on both sides of the House or technical amendments. Later, we shall debate two subjects on which I shall make it clear that we should not accept the Lords amendments. I emphasise that the majority are in response to points that have already been made.

The debates in this House, the other place and outside have shown that there is more widespread acceptance of the principle that

"the beneficiaries of higher education should make a financial contribution towards it."

Those are the words of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals. We are simply putting in place a scheme of loans to supplement maintenance grants which most other similar countries already have. Both our levels of student maintenance support and the terms and conditions of the loans are more generous than theirs. The Bill will benefit from the changes that we are proposing to accept as a result of parliamentary debates. Now it is necessary to get on so that we can put the scheme in place in good time to enable students to get the 25 per cent. increase in resources that we are making available. That is why I commend the motion to the House.

5 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): This guillotine motion is wholly without merit or justification. There has been no filibustering on the Bill. The motion is a simple abuse of power by an authoritarian and once all-powerful Government who are now in an advanced state of disorder and decay. I am not surprised that the Secretary of State spent 15 of the 20 minutes of his speech wholly outwith the terms of the motion, reading from a press notice about the alleged advantages of the loans scheme. He knows that the motion is unworthy of him and his office. Although the motion is an act of power, it conveys no strength, but rather the weakness of a Government who are afraid of argument and are trying to deny, even to themselves, the consequences of what they wish to force through.

The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) rightly and courageously said that, until two years ago, there had never been a precedent in the history of this House for any Government to seek to guillotine a Bill in the Commons during consideration of Lords amendments. The record of this Government, even with a majority of 100 over every party combined, is the record of

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a Government who are unwilling to listen and almost incapable of listening to arguments with which they do not agree.

The only other Government with a similar majority —the Labour Government of 1945-51—introduced only three guillotines. The Conservative Government of 1951-64 managed just 15 and the Labour Government of 1974-79, who had a majority of just one and at one stage had no majority, managed 11 guillotines. This Government in less than two years have managed to guillotine 12 Bills. There has been no necessity for almost any of those guillotines.

Mr. Pawsey: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: No. I shall give way in a moment.

As is well known, last Wednesday the Opposition were told through the usual channels that the Bill would be guillotined. That announcement would have coincided with the last day of consideration of amendments and Third Reading in the other place, so in a cynical and squalid manoeuvre typical of the Government, that guillotine motion was withdrawn in order to lure their Lordships into the belief that the Government would at last play by the rules. As the Bill has now passed its stages in the Lords, the motion is being reintroduced in this House at the shortest possible notice to the Chamber.

The motion gives us three hours to debate the guillotine and no more than two and three quarter hours to debate 15 of the 17 amendments passed by their Lordships. We have no time to debate the most critical amendments of all, those on housing benefit. I earnestly hope, as do all Opposition Members and, I dare say, many Tory Members, that, in the light of representations and as no privilege arises because the expenditure has already been authorised by the money resolution, Mr. Speaker will agree also to allow debate on those amendments. Even taking only the 15 amendments, the time allocated for debate amounts to no more than 10 minutes per amendment. The Secretary of State made the audacious claim that to allow this debate to continue unguillotined would lead to what he described as pointless repetition. Some of the serious and significant issues raised by their Lordships, some of which have never been debated in the House, deserve rather more than 10 minutes of discussion.

There is the issue of whether there should be consultation and who should be consulted on the new courses to be made the subject of the loans scheme. There is the major issue of parliamentary scrutiny of delegated legislation. There is the issue of the new powers taken for this authoritarian Government to force university and college administrations against their will to co-operate with the measure without adequate compensation. There are amendments on disabled students which may have all-party support, but which certainly deserve proper consideration.

There are amendments on the marketing and canvassing of loans to students or potential students under 18 and on the disclosure and sale of information belonging to the Student Loans Company. That raises the question of the circumstances in which the Student Loans Company could be privatised, as the Under-Secretary of State has promised will happen, and whether that privatisation could take place with the sale of the information that the Student Loan Company has.

The House has never discussed two key issues: the new controls over the institutions and loans to under-18s. Yet the Secretary of State treats the House with such contempt that he is willing to allow us only 10 minutes' discussion per amendment.

On 20 October 1989, *The Times Educational Supplement* reported a vision of the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson) about the Bill. Incidentally, he is the campaign organiser of the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine). He said:

> "We are potentially into another poll tax scenario in which our MPs welcome the principle of loans without waking up until it is too late to the practical repercussions".

Most Conservative Members are not so much asleep as in a trance. They are transfixed and rendered incapable by the desperate prospect of defeat that inexorably comes closer every day. One word should awaken them from their trance, although whether it will I do not know. One word should make every Conservative Member with an ounce of self-interest and survival refuse to back this guillotine motion. One word should be sufficient warning to send them running, and that word is Baker. [HON. MEMBERS: "Straw."] It is Baker. This Bill has the curse of Baker upon it. *[Laughter.]* I am glad to see that Conservative Members laugh before the gallows.

The man who created teacher shortages on a scale never before seen, the man who collapsed teacher morale on a scale never before seen, the man who rendered Conservative education policies less popular than ever before and the man who invented the poll tax and then cut and ran is the same man who invented the loans scheme and then cut and ran. The mess that he leaves on this is no less than the mess that he left on the poll tax.

Mr. Pawsey: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman criticised my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for straying from the point and getting involved in a wide-ranging debate. What is he doing now, if it is not that? It is extraordinary.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am applying the same rules to both Front Benches.

Mr. Straw: With respect, Mr. Deputy Speaker——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. With the greatest possible respect, I say that that is not the case, because my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science was discussing education and the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) is discussing everything under the sun.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It would be better for the House if hon. Members left those points to me and if we got on with the debate.

Mr. Straw: The hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman) should listen for once and take my advice. I am seeking to explain why it is in the interest of Conservative Members as well as of the Opposition to vote against the motion.

In this week's *Sunday Times*, there was a lengthy and well-informed article about how the Conservative party managed to sink ever deeper into the mire on the issue of the poll tax. It spoke about the authors of the loans scheme, the guillotine motion and the poll tax. A ministerial colleague of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), was quoted as saying:

> "Baker was clever enough to see the problems but ambitious enough to overlook them."

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You are rightly allowing a wide-ranging debate on this matter, but when an hon. Member starts to debate the community charge he is well out of order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) is regularly mentioning the motion and is in order.

Mr. Straw: Not only was the right hon. Member for Mole Valley clever enough to see the problems of the poll tax but he was clever enough to see the problems of the student loans scheme. In both cases he was ambitious enough to overlook those problems, knowing that he would not be around when they came home to roost. They have been left to the hapless and luckless present Secretary of State for Education and Science. More fool him for picking up the challenge.

Let us look at what the Secretary of State claimed in his speech for the loans scheme. He said that it was designed to "relieve the burden" on taxpayers. It will cost the Exchequer £750 million in the first three years and £2,000 million over the next 20 years. Because the money will disappear into a black hole of administration, default and deferral, the scheme will cost most students dear. Far from helping poorer people to gain access to higher education, the scheme will be an indiscriminate subsidy to the middle classes who need it least.

> "the arguments about access are .... bogus."—[*Official Report*, 20 October 1989; Vol. 158, c. 422.]

Those are not my words, but the words of the Secretary of State's hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Nelson). Those who need it most will be denied the greatest amount through the immediate loss of housing benefit, worth up to £400 or £500 in some cases, and by an immediate cut in the real value of the grant.

A scheme designed by the right hon. Member for Mole Valley to be run by the banks is now in administrative chaos. I shall quote from a piece of ancient history:

> "Baker wins bank loans for students".

The right hon. Member for Mole Valley persuaded an ever compliant *Sunday Telegraph* to write that just nine months ago. He did not win bank loans, because his hyperbole had no substance. The curse was working and the banks cut and ran, ready to risk the fizz and fury of the Prime Minister to protect their market share.

Conservative Members should think again before voting for the motion, because they will be voting for the early introduction of a new nationalised corporation. Such was the desperation of the Government when faced with the collapse of Baker's scheme that they had to set up a new nationalised corporation to run it.

Like the poll tax, the loans scheme is morally offensive. It takes money from those who need it and gives money to those who do not want it, and it wastes millions in administration. It is born of that unique combination of arrogance and incompetence, the hallmark of the Government.

> "Walk carefully, do not wake the envy of the happy gods. Shun hubris",

wrote C. S. Lewis. This modern Conservative Government have walked carelessly and dealt carelessly with the lives of others. Through that arrogance, pride and haughty spirit, they have made careless decisions on the poll tax, on schools, on the Health Service and on student loans. They will pay for their hubris by nemesis, by crushing defeat, and the Education (Students Loans) Bill will play a major part in that defeat.

I once thought that the instincts for survival of the Conservative party went before all. If Conservative Members vote for the guillotine, it will prove not only that they will lose but that they want to lose and have lost the capacity and will to survive. I oppose the motion.

5.15 pm

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): We have listened to a somewhat unusual speech by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), suited more to the Palladium than to the House of Commons. We have heard the ritual moans about time and the ritual synthetic anger and references to an anti-democratic guillotine. I remind the Opposition that the guillotine record stays with them and that the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) introduced five in a day. He gave a new meaning to the expression "a bunch of fives". If there was a cup for successful guillotining, it would be held by the Opposition. They would have it firmly bolted to their mantelpiece, because they are the experts in guillotines. The right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent, the great democrat, was at that time the great dictator, the arbiter of parliamentary time.

The debate and the time that it takes will be the real measures of the Opposition's concern. The quicker we start to debate the substance of the Lords amendments, the more time there will be for constructive discussion. It occurs to me, as I am sure it has occurred to my hon. Friends, that we have listened to all the Opposition arguments. We listened to them on Second Reading, in Committee and on Third Reading and we know just how feeble those arguments are. We know that the Opposition's case is discredited and I am certain that they will therefore seek to run the guillotine motion for the full three hours.

The justification for the measure is to be found in the need to attract more students in advanced education and to generate the new money that makes that possible. No hon. Member doubts that there must be a limit to the number of students that the taxpayer can support on the present grant-only basis. It is not possible to soak the taxpayer for every single penny. The loan is £420 and it is interest-free. It is not repayable until the student leaves university, commences employment and earns 85 per cent. of the national average wage. There will be no negative dowry, because we all know perfectly well that, if a woman chooses to start a family, she does not start to repay the loan until she starts to earn.

It has been argued inside and outside the House that high taxpayer support is necessary to guarantee a high level of admissions to advanced education. Since 1979, the value of the grant has steadily reduced, but despite that reduction, the number of students has increased by 200,000. Therefore, there is no case to answer that a reduction in grant equals a reduction in student numbers. Those 200,000 extra students help to underline two specific points: first, the success of my right hon. Friend's policies

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on advanced education, and secondly, the fact that we have had success with our general education policies. There is no point in seeking to increase access to higher education unless the appropriate number of young people come from schools to take advantage of it and clearly that is the case in the United Kingdom. We have been successful in raising the standard and quality of state education.

I do not believe, as Opposition Members have said, that top-up loans will discourage those from blue-collar backgrounds from going into advanced education. Such people currently account for about 61 per cent. of the population, but they account for 21 per cent. of admissions to universities and 24 per cent. to polytechnics. Therefore, it seems that the present grant-only system has not been a conspicuous success for youngsters from blue-collar homes. They are the same young people who are prepared to borrow, and at commercial rates of interest, to finance a second-hand car and purchase video equipment, and will certainly borrow to facilitate their education, which, in turn, will assist them to attain a better standard of income once they have gained their degree. Those Opposition Members who say that they will not actually patronise young people. Young people going to university seem to have more common sense than some Opposition Members who argue that point.

I do not know what will happen when Mr. Speaker rules on the question put to him by the hon. Member for Blackburn, but I should like to briefly touch on the subject of social security benefits, because they are relevant to the matter under discussion. The estimated value of social security benefits likely to be claimed by each eligible student in 1991 is about £300, but the top-up loan is £420. Therefore, there is a substantial increase in the resources being made available to students.

I see little virtue to the taxpayers in student loans and social security benefits being made available at one and the same time and to one and the same beneficiary. Most of those in receipt of social security benefits do not have the benefit of receiving a grant from their local authority to continue their studies. Students seem to be in a different category from most other claimants or recipients of social security. I am firmly convinced, as I am sure are my hon. Friends, that the Government's proposals will result in the great mass of students receiving more support in the form of a loan than they could have claimed in benefit.

I acknowledge immediately that some students will be worse off as a result of the changes. In their case, the level of benefit that they were receiving may have been higher than the £420 interest-free top-up loan, but—and this is a big but—such students will be able to turn to the access funds for help. Students currently claiming benefit receive about £68 million a year. The value of loans is £200 million a year. Therefore, it is clear that there is a substantial increase in the amount of resources being directed at students.

It is fair to remind the House of a point that was well made by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, that next year resources for students will be increased by 25 per cent.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Is it not likely that many of those in receipt of housing benefit will probably live in the sort of area where holiday work can be found and, therefore, they will not encounter difficulties in supplementing their income?

Mr. Pawsey: My hon. Friend makes a genuinely important point, which I can reinforce by saying that my five sons who went through college all earned money during the vacation. My hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) has told me that she went through university without the benefit of a grant and had to rely on loans on which she paid a commercial rate. Clearly, interest-free loans would represent a substantial benefit.

Mr. Harry Barnes: Is that why the hon. Gentleman refused to pay his parental contribution for the five children whom he sent through college? I believe that that was what he told us in Committee. Obviously, the legislation is directed to help children who are in the same plight as his children were, but it is of no benefit to people from working-class backgrounds.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. In dealing with that point, I am sure that the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) will bear it in mind that we are discussing the allocation of time motion.

Mr. Pawsey: I am obliged to you for reminding me of that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall, in due course, and in the friendliest way, take the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) outside and put him right about the points that he made. I have already mentioned the various benefits for young people from blue-collar homes. My five sons all received a parental contribution, but I did not make it up to the appropriate amount. My sons had to obtain work in order to get through college.

In debate after debate in the Chamber, I have called for the access fund to be substantially increased from the original figure of £15 million. I unreservedly congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on the substantial increase that he has announced. The House will be aware that the Government have increased the size of the access fund, designed to assist students who face financial difficulties, by £10 million. That is deeply appreciated, not just by Conservative Members, but right across the House. It will be of substantial benefit and assistance to many students. The total value of access funds stands at £25 million in place of the original figure of £15 million.

The three prongs of student support—loans, grants and access funds—will more than make up for any loss of benefit. Social security benefits are targeted where loans are not. Benefit targeting is not always effective, if only because the student's family circumstances are not taken into account and those parents well able to pay more towards their children's upkeep at college are not asked to do so. That comes back to the point made for me by the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East. The benefit system does not represent a good, reasonable or effective use of scarce resources or good value for taxpayers' money.

Some students live in accommodation provided by the institution. The rent currently charged reflects an element for the rates and, as those rates have been abolished and the community charge introduced, those students should receive a rent reduction equivalent to the saving made by the institution. Students should not be required to pay the

20 per cent. part community charge and maintain a contribution to the old rates system. In short, students should not be required to pay twice. The same applies to private landlords and I certainly hope that they will take that aspect on board. It will be grossly unfair and unjust if landlords do not reduce their rents by the amount of rates previously charged.

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): Is my hon. Friend aware that the lodging allowances board, which determines nurses' lodging allowances, has decided to reduce those allowances by the amount of the rates element? That is a good precedent.

Mr. Pawsey: I am delighted——

Mr. Simon Hughes: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I must ask you what on earth the speech being made by the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) or the interventions in it have to do with the motion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have already reminded the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) once of that. I am finding it difficult to relate his remarks to the allocation of time motion or to the Lords amendments.

Mr. Pawsey: You will be relieved to know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I now bring my remarks to a close.

I want to see the Bill on the statute book because I believe that it will benefit students, parents and taxpayers —a trinity of opinion which, if not holy, is certainly important.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Mr. Simon Hughes.

Mr. Pawsey: What is the hon. Gentleman going to talk about?

5.31 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I am going to speak to the guillotine motion——

Mr. Pawsey: That will make a change.

Mr. Hughes: This motion adds a dangerous practice to a dangerous policy and I appeal to Conservative Members to be very careful about voting for the guillotine.

The Bill has had great difficulty even getting to this stage——

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Robert Jackson): Nonsense.

Mr. Hughes: It is not nonsense; I am about to give the House the evidence for my proposition.

On Second Reading in this House the Bill had a Government majority of 81. Some Conservative Members voted against it and others abstained. At one stage in Committee the Government has a majority of only one. Then we six Divisions on Report and the Government majority was never more than 73. In the Division on one of the amendments that my party moved, the Government's majority fell to 43.

On Third Reading, only 100 hon. Members supported the Bill. The majority was only 51——

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hughes: Not for a moment.

No guillotine motion curtailed debate on the Bill in Committee, although there was one delay—caused by the ending of the involvement of the banks, which suddenly disappeared in the middle of the Committee stage. The Chairman then accepted a motion for the Adjournment of the Committee because the basis on which the Government planned the scheme had suddenly been aborted by the banks deciding not to play ball.

Then the Bill went to another place, where there was much discussion about it. So bad did their Lordships find the Bill that they contemplated the almost unprecedented move of moving a motion to adjourn consideration before Second Reading because there was not enough of a Bill to debate. In the event, they took the almost equally unprecedented step of proposing a reasoned amendment on Second Reading. That is rarely done by their Lordships, who usually give Bills sent from this place an automatic Second Reading on the understandable assumption that, as an unelected Chamber, they should not question the principle of a piece of legislation. However, the reasoned amendment was tabled because there was so little in the Bill to question. The Bill was a hollow Bill—a sham.

In subsequent debates in another place, Members of the House of Lords on all sides—Government, Opposition and Cross Benchers—expressed their opposition to the Bill. Some of the most eminent and respected academics in the land opposed it. As a result, the Government suffered defeats on at least three substantial areas of policy. They were defeated on housing benefit. The other place decided that students should be entitled to it, not disqualified from it. The Government were defeated on the treatment of disabled students, on an all-party motion. And they were defeated on an amendment moved by my noble Friend Earl Russell, on the important constitutional principle that Parliament should not only automatically debate the secondary legislation—given that there is nothing in the primary legislation—but should also be able to amend it.

The great demerit of the Bill is that because the Bill itself contains no details—they will come only later—they cannot be amended by Parliament. We concede at our constitutional peril the precedent of making laws without being able to amend them.

Last week, when proceedings were about to finish in another place, the Government suggested that they would table a guillotine motion but then did not do so. The Leader of the House made it clear in answer to business questions that whether there would be a guillotine depended on what happened in the other place on Thursday last week. There were no further Government defeats that day, so nothing happened which might have affected the Government's decision.

We can therefore only conclude that the reason why there was no announcement of a guillotine in last week's business statement, and the reason for a business statement only yesterday announcing the guillotine, was that the Government wanted to hide from their Lordships the fact that, for only the fifth time in the history of the British constitution, debate on amendments made by the second Chamber was to be guillotined. Had the Government been honest, they would have let their Lordships know that fact. Their Lordships would not have been very pleased and might have caused some difficulty before giving assent to the Bill last Thursday.

The Bill therefore returns to us with a proposal that debate on it should be limited. There are only 17 Lords

[Mr. Hughes]

amendments: 12 of them are Government amendments, one is an all-party amendment, one is a Labour amendment and one is a Liberal Democrat amendment. Two amendments have been disallowed, and if they continue to be so disallowed there will be only 15 left for debate—a maximum of 24 Divisions. Is that really justification for the Government to announce a guillotine, when there is still time before Easter for fuller discussion?

I did not hear one sentence in the speeches of the Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), who chairs the Conservative Back-Bench education committee, advancing an argument justifying the guillotining of the Bill. We are therefore left in the following position. First, we are told that we cannot debate the view—there is a great deal of consensus on it —that students who have no money should be eligible for funds to pay for the housing that they need when studying. I hope, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that when the time comes you will agree to allow us to debate that matter, for the reasons that other hon. Members have already given—we have already voted the money for the implementation of the Bill and its consequential amendments. If the Bill and the money resolution on it do not provide the money, I understand that social security legislation would be able to do so instead.

Given the opposition to the Bill, it is clear that, if this place or the other place were fairly representative of the British people, the Bill would never have got this far. If the Government ignore the limited task of revising legislation that is performed by the unelected second House and do not respect their Lordships' arguments, the case for having a second House at all is seriously weakened. I do not support an unelected second House—it is an anomaly and we should have got rid of it a long time ago—but, I support a two-Chamber Parliament, with both Chambers having a reciprocal role and neither abusing the processes or role of the other.

The trouble is that, as this Parliament has gone on, and as the Government have continued in power—I say this with some sadness—an increasing succession of good people, among whom I include the current Secretaries of State for Education and Science and for the Environment, have one by one gradually given in to the authoritarian pressures imposed on them from elsewhere. I do not know whether, in this case, it is the Prime Minister, the Leader of the House, the Chief Whip or someone else, but there is no justification for Ministers to come, in equanimity and fairness, to this House to argue for a guillotine in these circumstances. There is no precedent that is justified or paralleled. There is no need for it. It is a gross discourtesy both to the issue and to the seriousness with which the other place tried to address these important matters. The guillotine is an exceptional procedure and it is exceptionally bad, and on constitutional grounds this sort of guillotine should be resisted at all costs.

This legislation contains matters of great substance and, some of us believe, of substantial risk to higher education. I listened to all the argument both in the Committee and outside, and I am not at all persuaded that the Bill does not threaten access to higher education for many people. If we threaten higher education, we threaten our future as a society. If at the same time we couple a threat to our future education with a threat to the constitutional procedures under which we discuss legislation in the democratically elected Parliament of this land, we are doing a double disservice not just to the students of today and tomorrow, but to all our people.

I sincerely hope that we shall have no more of that and that there will be enough hon. Members of principle, on the Conservative as well as the Opposition Benches, to show the Government today that, whatever we think of the Bill, to treat Parliament in this manner is unacceptable, and that we shall vote the guillotine out.

5.42 pm

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): I have managed to catch your kindly eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on a couple of occasions when we have debated guillotine motions. The way in which the Government now recklessly decide to guillotine almost anything that moves is of concern both to Members of Parliament and to those outside. We base our authority in this House on showing that there is consent for what is done. It therefore behoves us to argue, to reason and to win on that basis.

The history of this place shows that we have been extremely cautious about the use of guillotines. Indeed, it is a comparatively recent development. The Irish troubles necessitated the getting of business through the House and therefore the introduction of the guillotine. Governments were extraordinarily cautious of curtailing debate, because it is on the basis of debate that we assess that people outside will wear the legislation that follows. As two of my hon. Friends said in a similar debate last week, consent in connection with the poll tax should cause us to pause. Did we really assess that the people would wear that tax, regressive and unacceptable as it now appears to many of us?

As I said last week, between 1945 and 1951 there was perhaps the most radical programme in the history of this nation. I also said that I had had difficulty in identifying the use of the guillotine. However, with the help of the House authorities, I can now say that there were three guillotines. The years from 1951 to 1974 were politically contentious, and the battle moved backwards and forwards across the Chamber between Labour and Conservative. There was a total of 15 guillotines during that time. During the lamentable period from 1974 to 1979, there were only 11 guillotines, five of them on one day—as has been regularly pointed out and also acknowledged by the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), the former Leader of the Opposition. However, a Government with a majority of nil, which is why I think that it was almost improper to use the guillotine, used it only 11 times during those years.

I shall not deal with the earlier years of this Government, but during the parliamentary Session 1988-89 they indulged in 14 guillotine motions on 10 Bills. That shows the level of what is happening. Among those guillotines was one on the poll tax legislation. I have written on the back of my cheque book—I regret to say —that this is only the fifth guillotine motion on Lords amendments in the history of Britain. Do we really think that is highly appropriate? Who searched out this new method of truncating debate?

I thought that it must be a socialist measure because the Labour party is not well disposed towards free speech, but not a bit of it—it is a Conservative measure. I seems that our party has taken the view that the House of Lords is redundant and that we do not have to discuss their part in our procedures. We simply pay allegiance and say the correct words. Only two years ago, for the first time in the history of our nation, we truncated debate on Lords amendments. We do not have Indiana Jones who can dash to our rescue—instead, we have Guillotine Jones in the Whips Office who truncates anything that moves if it appears that we want to understand the reasons for the legislation.

We cannot prejudge the issues. I do not necessarily know how other people weigh them. Only by listening to their views can I arrive at a decision. Guillotine Jones has assessed the House pretty well. We want to go home, do we not? That is our principal duty. We want to be home by 10 o'clock. If there is one thing that the guillotine does, it is to ensure that we know when the vote will be called. I have said time and again that it is not in the interests of the party or of the Government to go for the guillotine because in the end we shall not signify as clearly as we should that the legislative measures have the consent of the population, based on reasoned argument. That is the assurance that we are seeking.

I plead with the Government to be cautious about the use of the guillotine. The scorn that we show for the process of free speech and debate in this Chamber will be seen as hubris and will come back on us. That is why I am speaking as clearly and as loudly as I can, as I did last Wednesday. The Secretary of State has given barely a reason for the guillotine. His speech referred to the merits of the legislation, if it is passed. I have to tell him that I have no doubt that the legislation will be passed. Our majority is one of the largest ever enjoyed by a British Government.

We do not doubt that the Government will have their way, but they will not even go to the politeness of saying that the debate can run on the reasoned amendments from another place. There is no big deal in that. In essence, we are being told that the merits of the debate in another place are not worth more than six hours. That is how we weigh up their Lordships. After all, they are only there through an accident of birth or by appointment and are not worth very much. They have become awkward in recent years——

Mr. Jackson: I know how passionately my hon. Friend feels about this, and I respect that—we are all concerned about the issues—but if my hon. Friend is saying that the Government have no regard for the House of Lords, perhaps he could tell us how many of the amendments passed in another place the Government have accepted.

Mr. Shepherd: I understand that my hon. Friend is a member of All Souls, but I do not have to go to All Souls to know that that is a non-question and irrelevant to my point. The reckless pursuit of inhibition of free speech and debate on the floor of the House is not in our interests and we should be extraordinarily cautious in the use of guillotines.

5.48 pm

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) and the hon. Members for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) and for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) have made an overwhelming case against the motion. I do not know whether anyone on the Government Front Bench is treating those speeches in a derisory manner. The spokesman for All Souls apparently is—he should pay a little more attention to parliamentary procedures. Anyone who listened to those three speeches would have concluded that a powerful case had been made against the Government's motion.

Whenever we have a motion of this kind, reference is made to the guillotine motions that I introduced when I was Leader of the House. At least when I was Leader of the House I always took the precaution of moving the motion myself—I did not run away and leave somebody else to do it, as is becoming more and more the habit of the present Leader of the House. A week or two ago, when he failed to move a similar motion, saying that he was in Chile, the Patronage Secretary was brought along to do the job instead, but that was not satisfactory either.

We have had no apology today from those who run the business of the House for the Government. The Secretary of State is not responsible for the business of the House. The Government are so ready to introduce guillotine motions in the exceptional circumstances that have been described that they do not even trouble to ensure that the Leader of the House puts his case to the House of Commons. That alone is a disgrace.

There is no comparison whatever between this motion and the guillotines that I introduced. As the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills said, at that time it was a narrow House of Commons—only a few votes divided one side from the other—so without a guillotine in certain circumstances the Government would not have been able to get through any legislation at all, which would have been a frustration of parliamentary processes and utterly intolerable.

Some Conservative Members, including the spokesman for the Select Committee on Procedure, believe—it was almost implicit in what the Secretary of State said today—that we should have guillotine motions regularly and that this is a better way of getting the business through because we need not worry about time. Whenever I have spoken for or against guillotine motions, I have never favoured that view—for the reason that I have given before and which I repeat today. It is a matter of profound importance for the salvation, safety and future of the House of Commons as a great democratic assembly that the guillotine should be used only in rare circumstances. When it is resorted to, it should be argued for carefully before the House of Commons. That is the only circumstance in which I ever introduced a guillotine, and the only circumstance in which anyone who believes in parliamentary government should be prepared to do so.

The present Government, however, have thrown aside all those protections and precautions, and all consideration of the way in which parliamentary business should be carried out. More regularly than ever before in parliamentary history, either just before a Bill goes to the Lords or when it returns from there, the Government introduce a guillotine motion to curtail debate on the fag end of a Bill, at the very time when it should be the business of the House to consider what has been said in the House, in the other place and outside. The whole purpose of our procedure for Bills is that we take account of what is said outside.

The Secretary of State showed no consideration of those matters when he introduced the motion. He referred to the "wrapping-up stage"—a novel phrase in our parliamentary history. I should be glad if he would point

[Mr. Michael Foot]

out anybody else who has referred to our consideration of Lords amendments as the "wrapping-up stage". According to the normal procedures of Parliament, there is no wrapping-up stage. There should be proper procedures whereby we have time to debate such questions, especially questions which are of great importance to many of our constituents and which, as the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey properly emphasised, were bitterly debated in the other place where the Government could not command any great majority. I should have thought that all those arguments would also have appealed to the House of Commons.

The Government are curtailing debate on a matter of great importance to masses of people throughout Britain and the Leader of the House does not even have the courage to move the motion himself.

As the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills rightly said, if the Government had listened on the poll tax they might not be in such a scrape now. The Government never listen except when the Prime Minister is caterwauling in Ministers' ears, saying that they must get the business through. The Government have introduced a series of measures which will injure the education of the British people. The Under-Secretary of State knows well that in practically every decent university, and especially at Oxford, what he and his Department have done is regarded with contempt—and the Government will be all the more regarded with contempt because of their rejection of the proper processes of parliamentary discussion in introducing the measure.

I hope that the House of Commons will reassert itself. A vote against the motion would not destroy the Government, but it might teach them a necessary lesson—too late for them to learn from, but good for the House of Commons none the less.

5.56 pm

Mr. Robert Rhodes James (Cambridge): There is no justification whatever for the motion, to which I shall stick strictly. My hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) has recited the figures of the number of guillotines, which used to be few and far between. I well remember when the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) was Leader of the House and his invariable courtesy, and there was no guillotine on our lengthy and contentious debates on devolution.

We are about to debate—if we ever get to them—the Lords amendments to this important Bill. Why a guillotine? Why would any hon. Member filibuster on those? On 3 April my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall)—a temporary Member of the House—said:

> "In view of the widespread filibustering on Report, the guillotine will be widely welcomed."—[*Official Report*, 3 April 1990; Vol. 170, c. 1069.]

There was no filibustering on Report. We have all tried to debate these matters sensibly and thoughtfully, so why this measure? There is a belief on the Front Bench, or the temporary Front Bench, that any opposition is the result of treachery or deceit. Those of us who have endeavoured over the past two or three months to persuade the Government to change their mind on some matters, as we have persuaded the other place to do, are now being told that debate will be curtailed and the guillotine will fall.

That is the certain course to disaster. The House, which I love and have served for 25 years, is based on debate and discussion, disagreement and agreement. I have learnt a great deal in the House from listening to Opposition Members. I would not say that I have acquired wisdom, but I have learnt a great deal, and I hope that I have imparted something. The moment we start stopping that, which is what the process is all about, we shall destroy the heart and soul of the House of Commons and the heart and soul of British democracy.

I loathe the Bill and I loathe the motion. I shall vote against all of it. I wish that I had the eloquence to express to the House how angry I feel that my party should have the temerity, arrogance and stupidity to try to force such measures through.

Mr. MacGregor: Does not my hon. Friend accept, as I made clear in my opening speech, that we listened carefully to the debates on the Bill in the House? We have accepted a number of amendments which have been put forward because they are in response to points made in debate.

Mr. Rhodes James: I can only ask my right hon. Friend, then why move the guillotine?

5.59 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Some Conservative Members seem to think that it is a great wheeze to keep pointing out to my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) that he introduced five guillotine motions in one day, as if that meant that the guillotine motion before us, or any recent guillotine, was justified rather than something that needs to be argued for on its merits. Even if there was merit in putting forward five guillotines in one day, that would not justify the guillotine motion on this Bill.

By this time we could have been well into the debate on the first set of amendments; we might even have passed them. Instead, we will spend probably three hours on the guillotine debate and will have only a limited period in which to discuss the amendments themselves. When we allow for a Division at 10.40 pm, about 15 minutes later the car parking area will look like the start of a motor race as hon. Members rush away. Those who want to dash away after exercising their vote at the behest of the Whips should be allowed to leave, and other hon. Members who wish to consider an important measure, on which there is great feeling on both sides of the House, should be given a further opportunity to pursue the amendments which have come to us from another place, as well as the additional amendments which have been tabled.

We should be allowed to consider the measure properly. The quality of debate on the amendments might have some impact on the future of the legislation. We do not just debate specific items at different stages but put out markers for the future. As a result of debate, there might be greater understanding in future.

We have six hours to cover the timetable debate and the consideration of the amendments. Some hon. Members have pointed out eloquently that the timetable motion is procedurally and constitutionally corrupt and should not be before us. We have seven batches of important amendments to discuss. In most cases there are amendments to amendments. It is not a case of the

Government supporting certain proposals, that being the end of it, and we can all disappear. The amendments tabled by various hon. Members should also be discussed.

In the seven batches of amendments, 15 of the 17 Lords amendments, and nine of the 16 amendments to Lords amendments have been selected for debate. In theory, we could have eight Divisions on amendments and on the timetable motion. Therefore, we could spend two hours going through the Division Lobbies, which would cut further into the time possible for debate.

The measure is significant and important. We should have time to discuss the consultation procedure, the parliamentary procedure for dealing with regulations and the grant regulations themselves. The Bill is an enabling measure. It cannot be argued that, because it is only a four-page Bill, with few clauses, it can be trundled through quickly. Because it has such vast implications, we should discuss it in great detail and should try to dig out all that is involved in it.

The Bill has implications for students with disabilities and consumer credit for minors. My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) has tabled an amendment on data protection. I have often heard him speak on the subject, in which he has great expertise. I would be happy to listen to him on this occasion. I believe that he would make a significant contribution on the disclosure of information which will be available to the student loan organisation. However, that amendment is the final one in the seventh batch, and the chances of getting to it are remote.

We should not be discussing a timetable motion. Instead we should have had the opportunity to consider matters in detail, as was done in Committee, on Report, on Third Reading and in the other place. The Government claim that the amendments which they have tabled arose because of the quality of debate in the House and in the other place. I doubt whether it was the quality of the discussion which caused the Government to put forward amendments. I believe it was because of politics and the fact that there was a rebellion in certain ranks within the Conservative party. Detailed consideration of all the amendments on the Amendment Paper led to considerable improvements in the Bill.

The measure has fantastic significance for the future of higher education and for a growing number of people with great potential who should be given the opportunity to participate in higher education. I refer to people from a working-class background, women who have been discriminated against, members of ethnic minorities who need encouragement to become involved in the system, and late developers who need a second opportunity to move into higher education, Not only is it their loss, but it is an even greater loss to society if they cannot take advantage of higher education because of the implications of the Bill.

6.8 pm

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): I noted that the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) spoke for nine minutes. Like him, I agree that we must restrict our remarks to the guillotine motion, so I shall endeavour not to speak any longer than he did. Nor shall I follow the comments of the right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) or my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) on the general principle of guillotine motions as they apply in Parliament. There are deep issues involved. Certainly I do not intend to address those now. The right hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent is the expert, because during his time as Leader of the House he guillotined the Aircraft and Shipbuilding Industries Bill, the Dock Work Regulation Bill, the Health Services Bill and the Rent (Agriculture) Bill. I remind the House that he also guillotined an education Bill.

I shall not pursue that point because common sense enables me to support the opening remarks of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science, who said that the Bill is straightforward. At the same time, I accept that the Bill is controversial and that a number of my right hon. and hon. Friends, whom I respect, hold differing views on it. Nevertheless, we all understand what it is about, so I do not agree with those who argue that there must be a lengthy debate, going on for ever and ever. Most of us understand the issues, which is why I am happy to support my right hon. Friend's opening remarks.

I can support also my right hon. Friend's statement that the Government have made a positive response to the representations by Members of another place and by right hon. and hon. Members of this House. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) reminded the House that no guillotine or curtailment of debate was exercised in Committee, on which I served, and that the debate there was very wide-ranging. That supports the Government's case.

Mr. Jackson: The Government were particularly appreciative of the points that my hon. Friend made repeatedly in Committee about the need to increase the access fund, to which we also responded.

Mr. Thompson: My hon. Friend gives me a chance to shorten my speech still further, because I intended to welcome the response made to my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) and to my own strong representations.

It is good news for students, not least those at the university of East Anglia in Norwich, in my area, that the access fund for higher education has been doubled, from £10 million to £20 million, making the total funds available £25 million. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will keep that sum under review as the scheme progresses, for the benefit of students. After all, we are all interested in providing students with extra benefits and with the furtherance of good higher education.

Mr. Pawsey: Will my hon. Friend comment on the possibility that in his own constituency, for example, landlords will continue to include the rates element in the rents that they charge students? I know that he condemns that practice, and I shall be grateful if he will give the House the benefit of his views.

Mr. Thompson: I entirely support my hon. Friend's argument that landlords should reflect the changes brought about by the new local government finance arrangements, of which we are all aware. In the Norwich *Eastern Evening News*, a group of landlords stated that they would honour their obligation to reflect that change. I do not know whether all landlords in Norwich and elsewhere will do the same, but I hope that they will.

I promised that I would be even briefer than the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East, so I shall move on

[Mr. Thompson]

quickly. I welcome also the increase in the disabled students' allowance, for which many of my hon. Friends campaigned in Committee, and the disregard of disability-related benefits when assessing income for deferment.

Even more important than the concept of student loans is the value and level of the total student grant—although I do not have time to discuss that in detail this evening. The good news about the new scheme is that it makes more money available. In the present political climate, it is not always possible to emphasise the positive aspects of legislation, but that improvement should not go unremarked.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The Government often trot out the line that so much more money is being made available, but will the hon. Gentleman be honest enough to admit where that money is coming from? The answer is that it is being borrowed and must be paid back. It is not the result of great munificence on the part of the Government.

Mr. Thompson: I am happy to agree with the argument that the student loans scheme is a student loans scheme. There is no way that I can deny what is already in the title of the Bill. The hon. Gentleman is good at taking up time, but I want to make progress.

There has been much argument about access to higher education, a subject on which I have addressed sixth form students in Norwich. Concern is felt about whether the Bill will increase or decrease access to higher education, particularly among young people from lower income groups. I would go so far as to say that, if access decreases as a direct consequence of the scheme, we would all be deeply concerned. I take the view—although I cannot yet prove that it is correct—that the Bill will help to increase access. Figures in a parliamentary answer that I received reveal that the number of applications for university places in the current year has increased.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Is my hon. Friend aware that the number of applications has increased by 20 per cent. over the previous year?

Mr. Thompson: I am delighted that my hon. Friend reminds me of the precise percentage increase, which makes my point even more effectively.

I have always rejected the argument that access to higher education will be negatively affected by the scheme's introduction.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): What will the hon. Gentleman be willing to do if it is proved in the near future that the number of students enrolling for higher education is falling? Also, does he acknowledge that current applications have been made under the existing grants system?

Mr. Thompson: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's second point, because I know from my own meetings with sixth formers that they are fully aware of the scheme. Not all of them currently support it, but they know of it.

As it is the Government's declared policy to increase the numbers in higher education, not only would I be concerned if they were to fall, but so would my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science.

Mr. Jackson: The Government have made it clear on a number of occasions that we are continuing to monitor the position. Figures are collected and analysed, and we shall be aware of trends. In the full publicity of this House, I make a private bet with my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) that in five years' time the proportion of students from working-class backgrounds will have increased substantially.

Mr. Thompson: I shall discuss later with my hon. Friend the nature of our wager, but I am not anxious to make too many bets. Nevertheless, I agree with his general point. Not enough emphasis has been placed on two of the scheme's positive aspects. One is the removal of the parental contribution, which will benefit many families. The other is that it is altogether a better scheme for students. Common sense dictates that there will be enough time for a debate. I know that I have exceeded the time that I allotted myself, but there have been several interventions.

Mr. Harry Barnes *rose*——

Mr. Thompson: I will allow the hon. Gentleman to intervene, provided he does not mind if my speech continues a little longer.

Mr. Barnes: The hon. Gentleman has been speaking for 10 minutes, whereas my own contribution lasted for nine minutes. The hon. Gentleman has therefore spoken for longer than I did, if not better.

Mr. Thompson: The hon. Gentleman is right. My only excuse is that I have given way to some excellent interventions.

I support the remarks of the Minister. Apart from the wider debate about guillotine motions—I have sympathy with some of the remarks that have been made about that —common sense determines that we shall have enough time to debate the Bill.

6.20 pm

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): It was a privilege to hear the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mr. Rhodes James), whose comments were fundamental to the artificial debate that we are having on the timetable motion. We are contriving to ignore a major reality for young people, which is their entitlement to student grants and, above all, to housing benefit. That hon. Gentleman encapsulated everything that I wanted to say, and I wish simply to endorse the anger that he reflected, albeit in a restrained way.

The Goverment are showing contempt for the House from which the amendments have come, and that could result in problems for us. They are also showing contempt for Members of this House because an issue that is of root importance to students in the north of Ireland will not be debated because of the lack of time.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Government have accepted no fewer than 17 Lords amendments?

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: Fifteen.

Mr. Mallon: The fact remains that the timetable motion shows contempt for the other place and, as I have explained, for Members of this House. That will greatly affect our ability to discuss matters vital to youngsters in the north of Ireland, youngsters who up to now have had faith in our democratic processes.

When we try to explain to them our inability to discuss issues crucial to their further education and say that we were prevented from doing that because of an archaic rule, they are bound to feel that we consider such procedures to be more important than the future of their education. To explain that away requires a degree of eloquence far exceeding that of any Member.

Mr. David Evennett (Erith and Crayford): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that all these issues were debated on Second Reading, in Committee and on Third Reading and that constraints of time will concentrate the minds of speakers in tonight's debate?

Mr. Mallon: I take the hon. Gentleman's point about constraints of time concentrating speakers' minds, but when on crucial issues such as these we resort to the artificiality of the guillotine, we are damaging our democratic processes and insulting the young people whose futures we should be debating.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: The hon. Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) referred to the debates in Committee. The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) will be aware that, because of the procedures of the House, only one minority party was allocated a place at that stage, and that place was occupied by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). That meant that the SDLP, the Welsh National party, the Ulster Unionists and the SDP were excluded. The House will appreciate why we are vexed at the fact that we shall not have time to debate many issues that concern us, especially as we participated fully at all other stages, when we were able to do so.

Mr. Mallon: The hon. Lady is right, and our only good fortune was that we were admirably represented in Committee by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes).

As we consider what has happened recently in London and in other British cities, we realise that democracy is a very tender plant indeed which must be nurtured and cosseted. That is equally true of the future of our young people. The guillotine on this issue makes me angry. Fortunately, the hon. Member for Cambridge said more eloquently than I could what I wanted to say. Not only are we showing complete indifference to our position as legislators, but we are showing gross indifference to the young people of the nation and their future educational status.

6.25 pm

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): I am anxious, before deciding how to vote on the allocation of time motion, to raise certain issues. But first I should declare an interest in that I am a member of the court of Brunel university, which is in my constituency.

The University Funding Council wants Brunel to expand its intake of students by 10 per cent. That means that students, because there is not sufficient accommodation on campus, can come to Brunel only if they can find and afford accommodation off campus. In practice, that means accommodation somewhere in Uxbridge, Southall or Ealing.

Brunel needs 400 more units of student accommodation. That need is at present being considered by the university, which hopes to build some of them. But those units can be provided only if the cost of borrowing is spread over the existing student accommodation. That would make it as expensive as off-campus accommodation. If Brunel were to build, say, 600 additional units, the cost of doing that at current interest rates would put those units above that of off-campus accommodation.

The cost of off-campus accommodation at Brunel and at other London universities is higher than in any other part of the country. I therefore question whether the amount of the maximum loan facility to be made available to students in London will be sufficient. I had hoped for an opportunity to debate that in relation to Government amendment No. 7. I do not know whether there will be time for that debate if the guillotine motion is approved.

It is a tough guillotine motion. It does not specify a period for the House to debate each amendment, so I have no alternative but to ask the Minister some questions before deciding how to vote on the matter. I say that because the cost of on-compus accommodation at Brunel is, on average, £25 a week. The cost of off-campus accommodation is about £37·50 a week, or £12·50 more.

The Minister will appreciate that, over a 30-week academic year, a student living off campus must find an additional £400 a year, plus the cost of travelling to and from university. We should be given time tonight to debate whether the access funds will be sufficient to allow the university to provide additional financial assistance for students living off campus.

The Minister said that the access funds would be substantially increased. I am pleased about that, and I congratulate the Government on securing that additional funding from the Treasury. I hope that the Minister can put my mind at rest on the important question that I have raised. It affects London universities in particular and those which, like Brunel, have many students living off campus. I hope that the Minister will comment on the extent to which the funding council will be able to allocate funds to the university to help students in that position.

Mr. Jackson: I reassure my hon. Friend that the Government have substantially increased the size of the access fund and have made it clear to the funding council that, when they distribute funds to institutions, the Government expect relative housing costs to be a major factor in the formulae which determine distribution. The institutions will take housing costs into account when they make allocations to students in need. I have no doubt that Brunel, which, as my hon. Friend says, is situated in a relatively high-cost area, will benefit from those arrangements.

Mr. Shersby: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Will the universities decide how to dispose of the funds allocated to them by the funding council?

Mr. Jackson: It will be entirely a matter for the universities.

Mr. Shersby: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend. I shall not detain the House any further. I wanted the opportunity to raise those important points on behalf of a university which is situated just outside Greater London.

6.30 pm

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): It is unfortunate that the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) was not here earlier, when the hon. Members for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) and for Cambridge (Mr. Rhodes James), and my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot), spoke about the guillotine. They did so eloquently and, certainly for someone of my experience, provided a clear insight into what the Government are attempting to do through the motion.

The guillotine was clearly planned at least last week by the Government but was withdrawn, in what can be described only as a cynical manoeuvre, to avoid alerting the other place, which was still considering the amendments until Thursday of last week. That further compounded the Government's disarray on the Bill, which is best illustrated by the pull-out of the banks and the confusion surrounding that, which continues to surround how the Student Loans Company will operate. The confusion was further compounded in Committee in the other place last week when the Government were forced to table a new amendment to the Bill. That arose because it became apparent that the offer of loans to people under the age of 18 could render the Student Loans Company liable to criminal proceedings under the Consumer Credit Act 1974.

I see that you are now in your place, Mr. Speaker. The subject of the Consumer Credit Act and minors under the age of 18 was never raised in the Chamber nor in Committee. Yet the Government are now attempting to steamroller the Bill on to the statute book without further discussion of that important matter. We have to ask why the Government find a guillotine necessary. The Minister and subsequent Conservative Members who spoke on the motion have failed to justify the need for a guillotine.

For a guillotine to be used on a flimsy four-clause Bill shows that the Government are running scared of their Back Benchers. On the various occasions when the legislation has been discussed in the Chamber, some Conservative Back Benchers have voiced their opposition to the Bill in various ways. It seems to me that the Government are attempting to deny those Back Benchers a further opportunity to air their opposition. That is a shabby tactic, but it is quite in character with the way in which the Government have carried through the Bill. They refused to accept amendments in Committee. They refused to listen to the arguments of Opposition Members in Committee.

Since the Bill was introduced, the Government have had no intention significantly to modify their proposals, despite the strength of opinion held by hon. Members on both sides of the House and in the education community. Powerful evidence was presented to hon. Members in Committee, but the Government consistently refused to listen to that opinion. They have ignored the effect that the Bill will have on access and on the costs to students. Those two items are inextricably linked and the Government have refused to recognise that.

Mr. Beggs: Much reference has been made to the 30-week term and housing benefit. Is it not a fact that few landlords will allocate accommodation to students if they receive rent for only 30 weeks?

Mr. Watson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that matter, because it brings me back to a subject that I raised in Committee—rents paid by students in the city of Edinburgh. Edinburgh's rents are possibly the second highest in the United Kingdom outside London —with the possible exception of Aberdeen. I quoted a case in Edinburgh that showed clearly that the result of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1988 was that many landlords had decided that students were no longer suitable tenants and were getting rid of them at every opportunity. Landlords were choosing to change houses available for rent and to sell them.

I was unconvinced by the hon. Members for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) and for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson), who repeated arguments made in Committee about the poll tax. The poll tax has been in existence in Scotland for the past year and during that period landlords have consistently refused to withdraw the rates element of rents demanded of tenants, who now have to pay poll tax independently. The hon. Member for Norwich, North said that he is sure that landlords in Norwich will not do that. Certainly the information that I am receiving from other parts of the United Kingdom proves that that is not the case elsewhere, and that is a further worry to students who are likely to be denied accommodation or, if they are not denied it, asked to pay significantly more.

I regret that we do not have the opportunity to discuss housing benefit because it is an important aspect of the Bill. The withdrawal of benefits to students fundamentally hits at the argument that the Government have advanced that the Bill will increase resources to students and take away some of the weight on parents' shoulders. In theory, parents will not be required to make a contribution, or such a large contribution, but in fact, parents who can afford it will be asked by their student sons and daughters to bail them out during vacations when they cannot find employement or are unable to claim housing benefit, unemployment benefit or income support.

It is unfair of the Government to ignore the fact that that will affect precisely the students whom they claim that they want to attract into education—working-class students, whose numbers at universities in the United Kingdom dropped between 1979 and 1988 from 22·5 per cent. to 19·9 per cent. at the same time as the value of the grant was decreasing. I cannot understand why the Government will not take on board the fact that the reason why the number of students from that socio-economic background decreased during that period.

The Government have consistently failed to make it clear how the offer of loans to students from such a background will encourage them into higher education in much larger numbers—not just larger numbers—than previously. That is why it is particularly unfortunate that amendment No. 8, which was carried in the other place and which reinstated the payment of housing benefit to students, is not being allowed to be presented this evening. That certainly lets the Government off the hook, but it shows that when the Bill was put under scrutiny in the other place they made a decision based on common sense, and the amendment was carried by a majority of almost two to one.

Throughout its various stages, the Bill has been shown to be universally unpopular and unwanted, except by the Government and those Conservative Back Benchers who have been whipped into the Lobby. As has been demonstrated this evening, the Government do not have enough confidence in the Bill to submit it to full scrutiny or to submit the amendments carried in the other place to adequate debate.

The Government's tactics in introducing the guillotine motion and the sleight of hand with which they did so, bring them no credit whatever. Neither does any aspect of the Education (Student Loans) Bill bring the Government any credit.

6·38 pm

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I respect the opinions of my hon. Friends the Members for Cambridge (Mr. Rhodes James) and for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), both of whom are distinguished in the House for their independence of mind and the integrity of their views. Normally I find myself very much in agreement with their view on the way in which the business of the House is conducted—or misconducted, as is sometimes the case. However, I feel that there could be a reason for implementing the guillotine, because of the time and the brouhaha expended on the subject of a relatively small change in the way in which the over-privileged are already funded by the under-privileged.

That has already received a great deal of time in the House and in the other place. There is nothing so nauseating as the sight of the privileged pursuing even more privileges. It is the middle classes who resent the Bill. The fact is that 80 per cent. of students come from the middle classes. They are attempting to protect and to some extent extend the great privileges that they already enjoy. Partly on account of birth and partly on account of the financial background of their families, they are able to benefit from a university education.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) referred to my personal experience. I come from what is partronisingly called a blue-collar family. I paid all the costs, apart from tuition, of my college and university education. There was no housing benefit or social security benefit in those days. Furthermore, when I began teaching I was expected to pay back the cost of my education by teaching for a number of years. If I had not done so, I should have been expected to pay back the cost of my training. That was accepted. However, society has reached the point at which it is resented if the state does not pay for various things. I do not share that view.

The great majority of people who make a success of their lives have not had a university education. Between 80 and 90 per cent. of the entrepreneurial class—the poor bloody infantry who support the rest of our society—do not go through to the age of 22, or more, as wards of the state who are paid for by their fellow citizens. Those people look askance at the way in which Members of Parliament devote so much of their time to protecting the privileges of those who already have it so good. For that reason, the Government are right to curtail the time that we should spend on debating the issue.

My quarrel with the Bill is that it does not go far enough. There is no reason why those who will enjoy the better things of life, by virtue of their birth, attributes and intellect, should expect yet more of those whose lot it is to leave school at 16, without resentment, and work their way through life, pulling themselves up by their own elbow grease and boot straps. The less time we spend on debating these privileges and the sooner the full cost of higher education is met by those who benefit from it, the better.

The entrepreneurs on whom the wealth and progress of our society depends ask for no privileges from this House. All they ask for is to be allowed to keep as large a proportion of their resources as they can, so that they can be ploughed back into promoting their own self-interest and progress. That is what we should work for. Those who, by birth and intellect, are already endowed with privileges that many people lack should not come to the House, or to the other place, with their begging bowls and ask for yet more assistance from those who work to provide it.

6.43 pm

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): During the last two hours we have heard contorted and specious arguments in support of the motion. For most of the time, we have heard no arguments at all. There was a Second Reading speech by the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey). As for the speech of the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), at last she came clean as to where the Conservative party was heading in its funding of higher education—towards a system based not on ability to benefit but on ability to pay.

Those who spoke in favour of the motion gave no good reason why this miserable specimen of a Bill should be timetabled. The only argument which might have carried any real conviction—that hon. Members want to make the quickest possible exit from this place for the Easter recess—has not been repeated since the Secretary of State for Education and Science alluded to it. I suspect that when Conservative Members are greeted by their constituents' anger about the poll tax, mortgage interest rates and rent, they will wish that they had stayed here for Easter.

When one considers the allocation of time motion for consideration of the Bill, one wonders whether there is a little-known standing order which provides that anything to do with student loans must be dealt with as near as possible to weekends and public holidays. It is more than a matter of curious coincidence that our first debate on the student loans proposal, almost a year after the White Paper was published, was on a Friday, that the statement about the withdrawal of the banks from the scheme was held back until the last day before the Christmas Adjournment, that the Report stage was on a Thursday and that today is the last full day of business before the Easter recess.

It is all the more bizarre that, having relied on such recreational carrots to drag the Bill along thus far, the Government should decide that they need the big stick of the guillotine as well. As my hon. Friends the Members for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) and for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) have said, the guillotine cannot be defended. The Bill had not been timetabled previously; there was no filibustering at any of the earlier stages; the Lords amendments cover issues not previously debated here, such as compelling higher education institutions to help to administer the scheme, and the implications in relation to the Consumer Credit Act 1974.

The guillotine was introduced at the last possible moment. The Bill was withdrawn from last week's business in a shabby and cynical maneouvre, thus misleading the other place as to the Government's intentions. As my right

[Mr. Andrew Smith]

hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Foot) said, a guillotine motion should be used only in rare circumstances and it should be argued for carefully. We have heard no such careful argument in favour of the motion today.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I support all that the hon. Gentleman says and I do not wish to distract him from it. However, to confirm what he said and to deal with a point —just in case the record does not reveal it—raised by the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), I think that the hon. Gentleman will agree that the time that this House has had to debate the Bill since the Second Reading amounts to 10 hours, which was the time spent on Report and Third Reading, and that we have gone from Second Reading to Third Reading in just over two months. It is only just over a month since the Bill was sent to the Lords and returned to us. There has been no delay. The House has not spent an inordinate time debating any of the provisions in this important Bill.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman is right. We have just seen the bulldozer in operation, and it is unjustifiable. Any impartial observer is left with no other impression than that of a Government running scared. As my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) said yesterday, this is not so much a matter of business management as of crisis management.

What is the purpose of the guillotine? What is the great volume of business that the Government claim justifies its imposition? There are just 17 Lords amendments. Two of them have been ruled out of order on grounds of privilege, three are minor Government drafting changes, 10 are changes initiated or supported by the Government and just two of them reflect Government defeats in the other place —on draft regulations and on repayment terms for disabled students. It is as pathetic as it is insulting that the Government should stoop to the use of the guillotine to bulldoze this measure through. As the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) said, in a speech as persuasive as it was passionate, the guillotine is a disgrace to the Conservative party just as it is a disgrace to the House.

The Government cannot claim in their defence that our amendments are capricious, trivial or wrecking when we have sought to defend and improve upon the changes made in another place. These are changes to ensure meaningful consultation—something totally absent from the Government's approach; changes to enable Parliament properly to consider the regulations by which the scheme will operate; changes to reimburse institutions for their enforced participation in the administration of the scheme; changes to ensure that the loan does not become more than half of maintenance without primary legislation; changes to safeguard the position of students with disabilities; and changes to protect those under 18 and to safeguard against the disclosure of information by the Student Loans Company.

Had we had the chance—we hope still to have it—we would have argued strongly for the reinstatement of housing and other social security benefits, the withdrawal of which will cause much hardship and represent the removal of basic rights of citizenship to which everyone is entitled.

These are not unreasonable changes. They undoubtedly reflect the consensus of the general public, education institutions and students. If hon. Members on the Government Benches had the opportunity to vote freely according to their judgment, I have no doubt that the amendments would be carried here, too. I draw the attention of the House to the words of the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mr. Rhodes James) yesterday, when he told the Leader of the House

"that some of us care deeply about the future of higher education, and that he cannot guillotine that".—[*Official Report*, 3 April 1990; Vol. 170, c. 1068.]

We heard from the hon. Member for Cambridge today a testament to the conviction that he expressed yesterday in his moving and dignified speech in defence of the best traditions of the House and against a Government who are abusing them and thereby abusing democracy. The hon. Gentleman's voice should be heard today and hon. Members should follow his advice in the Division Lobby.

A wise Government would listen, take notice and act in accordance with the overwhelming majority opinion on these issues—but then a wise Government, with the best interests of higher education and the country at heart, would not have introduced the student loans scheme or the Bill in the first place. The Bill remains, as it started, a triumph of narrow ideology over common sense and the common interest. The scheme that it would introduce is an expensive administrative nightmare, damaging both to students' welfare and to the national interest, closing avenues of opportunity at the very time when Britain should be opening them up.

Mr. Pawsey *rose*——

Mr. Smith: No, I cannot give way now.

This guillotine motion, like the Bill that it timetables, could have been brought forward only by a Government deaf to public opinion through arrogance, and arrogant because they do not care. As the Bill is pushed lamely towards the statute book, it bears its makers' mark in its ill-considered provisions which have been a shambles from start to finish.

Like the poll tax, the cost and unfairness and the deep unpopularity of student loans will return to haunt the Prime Minister, who insisted that the Bill should proceed. The Opposition's commitment to grant will be one more reason why we shall be elected to office, when we will repeal this damaging scheme, just as we urge the House to reject this draconian and unnecessary guillotine today.

In a phrase which can be taken only as the deepest insult to democracy in this Parliament, the Secretary of State in opening the debate referred to tonight's proceedings as the "wrapping up" stage. I will tell him what is being wrapped up—the Government and their insufferable arrogance are being wrapped up. I urge all hon. Members on both sides of the House to vote against this unnecessary, draconian and insulting motion.

6.54 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Robert Jackson): All hon. Members will share my admiration of the hyperbolic style of my good friend and neighbour the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith). I shall be brief in winding up this debate—although perhaps I may not use such an expression after what has been said about the phrase "wrapping up"—and, in the interests of enabling us to get on with the debate, I will speak only to the guillotine motion. I ask hon. Members on both sides of the House to forgive me if, because of this, I do not respond on this occasion to some of the points which have been made but which are outside the scope of the guillotine motion. Nevertheless, I am very grateful to some of my hon. Friends and to Opposition Members who allowed me to intervene in their speeches, thus enabling me, I hope, to clarify some issues.

It is common ground in the House that it would be rather nice not to have to use the guillotine. I respect and rather admire, and indeed am sometimes a little terrified by, the passion of my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), but we all know that as long as we have the right—unusual in comparison with other Parliaments—to speak for as long as we like, the guillotine will be one of the awkward facts of parliamentary life.

What I have to say now does not apply to my hon. Friends the Members for Aldridge-Brownhills and for Cambridge (Mr. Rhodes James), but let me remind Opposition Members of Oscar Wilde's remark that hypocrisy is the tribute which vice pays to virtue. It implies that, while expressions of hypocrisy are to be desired from time to time as reinforcements of virtue, we should not overdo it. As has been observed, Governments of both parties have used the guillotine and doubtless Governments of both parties will do so in future, should there be an occasion when there is a Government of another party. Meanwhile, let us remember that the Bill to which this guillotine relates is only a four-clause Bill. Let me remind the House also that it has undergone no fewer than 90 hours of debate in both Houses.

It is interesting to compare this with the other legislation with which I have been involved, the Education Reform Act. Before it was enacted, it was a 235-clause Bill which took up 216 hours in both Houses. I calculate that today's Bill has had no fewer than 22 hours of discussion per clause, compared with 1·3 hours of discussion per clause of the Education Reform Bill. In my opinion, our debate was of high quality. Hon. Members on both sides agreed that the House of Commons Committee stage led to a genuinely constructive and civilised exchange of views, and I pay tribute to Opposition Members, to the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) and to my colleagues for that.

Debates in the other place are by definition always of a constructive and civilised character. That is no doubt one reason why the Government have accepted no fewer than 17 Lords amendments. Since there has been a suggestion from, among others, my hon. Friends the Members for Aldridge-Brownhills and for Cambridge that the Government are in some way disregarding the other place, let me give some indication of the substance of those amendments.

We have agreed to consultation before amending schedule 1; we have agreed to amendments to schedule 1 by the affirmative resolution procedure; we have agreed to the affirmative resolution procedure for the first student loan regulations; we have agreed to amendments in relation to disabled students, for a 50:50 ratio for loan and grant, and to extend protection of information in the hands of the Student Loans Company. So there is no doubt that the Bill has been well and extensively debated and has also been amended in important points of detail.

The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) adduced two arguments against the guillotine: that the points still to be debated are points of great substance, and that if we go on with the guillotine we shall have only 10 minutes for each amendment. I will finish my remarks now to enable us to debate those amendments because that will enable the House to see for itself whether those assertions are true. It is my belief that we will all agree that the amendments that we now have to consider are not particularly important. Most of them are rather minor and we can safely deal with the important ones in the time we have available to us.

Question put:

The House divided: Ayes 289, Noes 212.

Division No. 159] **[7.00 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.

Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
McCrindle, Robert
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Moore, Rt Hon John
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tony Durant and
Mr. David Lightbown.

NOES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McGrady, Eddie
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mallon, Seamus
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James

Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Rhodes James, Robert
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Allen McKay and
Mr. Frank Cook.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That the following provisions shall apply to the remaining proceedings on the Education (Student Loans) Bill:

Lords Amendments

1. The proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments shall be completed at this day's sitting and, if not previously brought to a conclusion shall be brought to a conclusion six hours after the commencement of the proceedings on this Order.

2.—(1) For the purpose of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph 1 above—

(a) Mr. Speaker shall first put forthwith any Question which has already been proposed from the Chair and not yet decided and, if that Question is for the amendment of a Lords Amendment, shall then put forthwith the Question on any further Amendment of the said Lords Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown and on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House doth agree or disagree with the Lords in the said Lords Amendment, or, as the case may be, in the said Lords Amendment as amended;

(b) if Mr. Speaker is satisfied that any remaining Lords Amendment imposes a charge upon the public revenue such as is required to be authorised by resolution of the House under Standing Order No. 47 (Certain proceedings relating to public money) and that such charge has not been so authorised, he shall in accordance with Standing Order No. 76(3) (Lords Amendments deemed to be disagreed to) declare he is so satisfied and shall put forthwith a separate Question on any other Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown relevant to that Lords Amendment;

(c) Mr. Speaker shall then designate such of the remaining Lords Amendments as appear to him to involve questions of Privilege and shall—

(i) put forthwith the Question on any Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown to a Lords Amendment and then put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House doth agree or disagree with the Lords in their Amendment, or as the case may be, in their Amendment as amended;

(ii) put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in a Lords Amendment;

(iii) put forthwith with respect to the Amendments designated by Mr. Speaker which have not been disposed of the Question, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said Amendments; and

(iv) put forthwith the Question, That this House doth agree with the Lords in all the remaining Lords Amendments;

(d) as soon as the House has agreed or disagreed with the Lords in any of their Amendments Mr. Speaker shall put forthwith a separate Question on any other Amendment moved by a Minister of the Crown relevant to the Lords Amendment.

(2) Proceedings under sub-paragraph (1) above shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

Stages subsequent to first Consideration of Lords Amendments

3. Mr. Speaker shall put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for the consideration forthwith of any further Message from the Lords on the Bill.

4. The proceedings on any such further Message from the Lords shall, if not previously brought to a conclusion, be brought to a conclusion one hour after the commencement of those proceedings.

5. For the purpose of bringing those proceedings to a conclusion—

(a) Mr. Speaker shall first put forthwith any Question which has already been proposed from the Chair and not yet decided, and shall then put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown which is related to the Question already proposed from the Chair;

(b) Mr. Speaker shall then designate such of the remaining items in the Lords Message as appear to him to involve questions of Privilege and shall—

(i) put forthwith the Question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown on any item;

(ii) in the case of each remaining item designated by Mr. Speaker, put forthwith the Question, That this House doth agree with the Lords in their Proposal; and

(iii) put forthwith the Question, That this House doth agree with the Lords in all the remaining Lords Proposals.

Supplemental

6.—(1) Mr. Speaker shall put forthwith the question on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for the appointment and quorum of a Committee to draw up Reasons.

(2) A Committee appointed to draw up Reasons shall report before the conclusion of the sitting at which it is appointed.

7.—(1) In this paragraph "the proceedings" means proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments or on any further Message from the Lords on the Bill, on the appointment and quorum of a Committee to draw up Reasons and on the Report of such a Committee.

(2) Paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings.

(3) No dilatory Motion with respect to, or in the course of, the proceedings shall be made except by a Minister of the Crown, and the Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

(4) If the proceedings are interrupted by a Motion for the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 (Adjournment on specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration), the time at which, under this Order, any proceedings are to be brought to a conclusion shall be postponed for a period equal to the duration of the proceedings on that Motion.

8.—(1) The proceedings on any Motion made by a Minister of the Crown for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion one hour after they have been commenced, and paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) shall apply to the proceedings.

(2) If the House is adjourned, or the sitting is suspended, before the time at which proceedings on the Bill are to be brought to a conclusion under this Order no notice shall be required of a Motion made at the next sitting by a member of the Government for varying or supplementing the provisions of this Order.

Mr. Speaker: I undertook earlier, at the request of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), to look again at my decision that Lords amendments Nos. 8 and 10 are not covered by the money resolution in respect of the Bill.

The resolution in question authorises payment out of money provided by Parliament of any sums required by the Secretary of State for making payments under the forthcoming Education (Student Loans) Act. Lords amendments Nos. 8 and 10 would require payments to be made under section 30 of the Social Security Act 1986: in the case of Lords amendment No. 8 to all loan-taking students, whether or not they are currently eligible for housing benefit; and in the case of Lords amendment No. 10 to postgraduate students even if they are not loan takers.

I am satisfied that both Lords amendments would have been out of order if it had been sought to move them in this House and that my decision that it was necessary to invoke Standing Order No. 76 in respect of those Lords amendments is correct.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, for the time that you have taken to reconsider the matter, although, naturally, Opposition Members regret that they will not have a chance to vote on the substantive issue of the denial of housing benefit to students. This matter will now return to the other place with a message from this place. Will it be possible for their Lordships to amend Lords amendments Nos. 8 and 10 and, if they agree, to table an acceptable amendment on which the House could voice an opinion?

Mr. Speaker: Their Lordships would certainly have to consider any message from this place. It would then be up to them what they did about it.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Given the concern that has been expressed by hon. Members, in the interim, will the Government consider a second money resolution that would take account of the implications of section 30 of the Social Security Act 1986, which also could be sent to the other place for consideration?

Mr. Speaker: It is too late to do that in respect of Lords amendments Nos. 8 and 10, but it is always for the Government to consider whether they should introduce further money resolutions.

Mr. Simon Hughes: On a separate point of order, Mr. Speaker. Earlier, the Minister twice made the factual statement—you, Mr. Speaker, were not in the Chair at the time—that the Government had accepted 17 Lords amendments. From the papers before us, that appears to be incorrect. It appears that the Secretary of State will move three motions disagreeing with the Lords amendments. On the face of it, the Government have not accepted three of the Lords amendments. It is important that a misleading impression is not given, because *Hansard* will have recorded the Secretary of State as saying that the Government have accepted 17 Lords amendments.

Mr. Speaker: Until the House gets on to the amendments, it will not know whether the Government disagree with them. I think that we had better get on with them.

Orders of the Day

Education (Student Loans) Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Clause 1

LOANS FOR STUDENTS

Lords amendment: No 1, in page 2, line 11, at end insert "but before doing so shall consult any persons with whom consultation appears to him to be desirable"

Read a Second time.

7.13 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): I beg to move, as an amendment to the Lords amendment, amendment (b), at end insert

'including those listed in paragraph 8 of Schedule 1 to this Act'.

Mr. Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to consider the consequential amendment (c) to the Lords amendment, in Schedule 1, page 3, line 30, at end add—

'(8) Bodies to be consulted under section 1(4) above shall include—

Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals
Committee of Directors of Polytechnics
National Union of Students
Advisory Board for the Research Councils
Association of County Councils
Advisory Centre for Education
Association of Colleges for Further and Higher Education
Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services
Association of Graduate Recruiters
Association of Metropolitan Authorities
Association of Principals of Colleges
Confederation of British Industry
Council of Local Education Authorities
Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
Department of Employment
Department of Education for Northern Ireland
Education Grants Advisory Service
Further Education Unit
Economic and Social Research Council
The Institute of Careers Officers
Universities Funding Council
Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council
National Council for Vocational Qualifications
Scottish Education Department
Science and Engineering Research Council
Secondary Heads Association
Trades Union Congress
Scottish Trades Union Congress
Welsh Education Office
Council for National Academic Awards
Forum for Access Studies.'.

Mr. Straw: The amendments raise a short point, and, in view of the lack of time to debate other major issues, I shall be brief.

In the other place, the Government accepted that there should be consultation on what additional courses should be eligible for student loans. That acceptance is encapsulated in amendment No. 1, but it is not specific about who should be consulted. We have tabled two amendments so that the Secretary of State and the House may have a chance to lay down who should be consulted. Amendment (c) lists all the major national bodies which, so far as we can see, have an interest and should be consulted. I should be glad to hear from the Secretary of State that he accepts that organisations of that national stature and importance should be consulted, among others, if, as I anticipate, Lords amendment No. 1 is included in the Bill.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey):I can be equally brief. The amendment amplifies an undertaking given by the Government in the other place. In Committee we debated at some length whether the student loans scheme could apply to part-time students. As the House knows, they have none of the advantages of a grant system and are not proposed for inclusion in the loans system. My colleagues and I advocated that extension and suggested that it would be proper to use them in the first pilot scheme for loans, if there were to be loans, rather than full-time students. Such an extension should be the subject of proper consultation.

Some of us are worried, having listened to the earlier debate, that even after consultation the Government may not listen. We live in hope, however. It is better that all those with an interest are the subject of consultation and we are specific about who should be consulted. I hope that the Government will respond generously and will say not just that they accept Lords amendment No. 1, as we heard from the Government spokesman in the Lords, but that they are willing to be specific that all the bodies listed and any others with an interest will be consulted about any extension or variation in the number or nature of institutions which will be beneficiaries of the proposed scheme.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Robert Jackson): Lords amendment No. 1 was tabled in the other House by Baroness David, but it was a Government amendment offered to her by Lord Caithness as she had taken the lead in urging the need for it and I pay tribute to her. The amendment qualifies the power in clause 1(4) to amend schedule 1, which is a list of eligible courses, by requiring the Secretary of State to consult before using the power. I commend the amendment to the House.

The Government intend loans to be available for all higher education courses below postgraduate level so long as the student is following the course full time and meets the residence requirements. Accordingly, schedule 1 lists as eligible all types of course at higher education level except postgraduate study. We do not expect to need to revise schedule 1 frequently because it is already comprehensive but, as is generally accepted, we must be able to keep it up to date without resorting to both Houses of Parliament for fresh primary legislation.

Amendments (b) and (c) would insert a requirement into the Bill that the consultation by the Secretary of State before amending schedule 1 should be undertaken with certain specific bodies. It would make consultation with those bodies a statutory requirement, which we are not prepared to accept. To be productive, consultation must be manageable. There is a wide range of interests potentially concerned in these matters and the Secretary of State must be able to decide whose views to seek in a particular case. That will depend on the particular change contemplated at the time. I can assure the House that the Secretary of State will be attentive to representations from all quarters, but it would be wasteful and unnecessary to have a long prescribed list for every change to schedule 2.

[Mr. Robert Jackson]

There are further common-sense considerations. What would happen if a body in the schedule changed its name or went out of existence? Would we have to post letters to an organisation which no longer existed? What would happen if there was a new body which it was sensible to consult about a particular proposal? Those arguments show that it would be absurd to fix a list in the Bill. The Government are serious about consultation. We consult and listen. I recommend the rejection of the two amendments to the Lords amendment.

Amendment to the Lords amendment negatived.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 2, in page 2, line 13, at end insert —

"(5A) The power to make orders under subsection (4) above shall be exercisable by statutory instrument and no such order shall be made unless a draft of it has been laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament."

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. John MacGregor): I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following Lords amendments:

No. 3, in page 2, line 14, leave out from "make" to "subject" in line 16 and insert

"regulations under this section or Schedule 2 to this Act shall be exercisable by statutory instrument which, subject to subsection (7) below and paragraph (1A) of that Schedule, shall be"

No. 4, in page 2, line 18, at end insert—

"(7) A draft of the first regulations to be made under this section or Schedule 2 to this Act shall be laid before each House of Parliament and those regulations shall not be made unless the draft has been approved by a resolution of each House."

No. 5, in page 2, line 18, at end insert—

"(7) A draft of the first regulations to be made under this section or Schedule 2 to this Act shall be laid before each House of Parliament; and if either House of Parliament passes a resolution requiring the draft to be amended the Secretary of State shall withdraw the draft and shall prepare a draft in substitution for the one which is withdrawn.

(8) No resolution shall be passed by either House of Parliament under subsection (7) above in respect of a draft after the expiration of the period of 40 days beginning with the day on which a copy of the draft was laid before that House; but for the purposes of this subsection no account shall be taken of any time during which Parliament is dissolved or prorogued or during which both Houses are adjourned for more than four days.

(9) If, on the expiry of the period of 40 days mentioned in subsection (8) above, no resolution requiring amendment of the regulations has been passed by either House of Parliament, the draft shall not come into force until it has been approved by resolution of both Houses of Parliament.

(10) Where the Secretary of State withdraws a draft under subsection (7) above, he shall lay an amended draft before Parliament and the amended draft shall not come into force until it has been approved by resolution of both Houses of Parliament."

Amendment (a) to Lords amendment No. 5, in paragraph (7),, leave out 'first'.

Mr. MacGregor: These amendments relate to parliamentary scrutiny of the orders and regulations made under the powers of the Bill. The bulk of these are Government amendments which discharge commitments made in another place in response to comments made in this House.

Amendments Nos. 2 and 3 relate to the power to amend schedule 1, which lists types of course for which loans are available. Clause 1(4) provides power to amend schedule 1 by order. This House and the other place expressed concern about the conferring of power to amend primary legislation. We have responded to it through the requirement to consult imposed by amendment No. 1. We do not expect frequent revision of schedule 1. It is already comprehensive, but we must be able to keep it up to date.

Amendment No. 2 applies the affirmative resolution to the order amending schedule 1. We have heeded the concern that the negative procedure originally proposed gives insufficient parliamentary scrutiny. Amendment No. 3 is a consequential amendment.

Opposition amendment 2(a) has exactly the same effect as Lords amendment No. 1, which we have just agreed —that the Government are required to consult before amending schedule 1—and is therefore superfluous. I invite the House to accept Lords amendments Nos. 2 and 3.

Lords amendment No. 4 applies the affirmative resolution to the first use of the regulation-making power to establish the scheme. Regulations made later for further development of the scheme will be subject to negative resolution. The amendment covers the main aspects of the scheme and it is important that I emphasise them. They are the conditions of eligibility, except the list of eligible types of course in schedule 1, which are made in clause 1; the terms of the loan made in accordance with schedule 1(1); and the involvement of higher education institutions in securing access to loans for students.

I hope that amendment No. 4 meets the concerns expressed by hon. Members on Report. We reflected on that debate, which is why I was happy to accept the amendment in another place. I had hoped that it would meet the concerns of the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), who spoke in favour of the amendment on Report, but I see from Opposition amendment (a) to Lords amendment No. 4 that he has ignored the arguments and returned to his old position. The Opposition amendment would make all orders and regulations always subject to the affirmative procedure. It is right to provide flexibility to develop the scheme once it is established through regulations, subject to the negative procedure. That was our original intention even for the first use of the regulation-making power.

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Amendment (a) to Lords amendment No. 4 has not been selected.

Mr. Speaker: I was about to say that, but I thought that the Secretary of State was coming to the end of his preliminary remarks.

Mr. MacGregor: You are right, Mr. Speaker. I failed to observe that amendment (a) to Lords amendment No. 4 was not selected. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) for drawing that to my attention. However, I imagine that he would wish me to make my remarks about amendment No. 5 and amendment (a) to it, which has been selected, because this is probably the most material part of this debate.

On Lords amendment No. 5 we have agreed that regulations first made to establish the scheme should be subject to the affirmative procedure. We have placed that requirement in the Bill by means of Lords amendment

No. 4. That means that, when the regulations are made for the first time, they will be debated by both Houses and approval of both Houses will be required before they come into force. That meets one of the key points in Lords amendment No. 5, but the amendment goes further because it seeks to allow either House to propose amendments to regulations.

As the House knows, Parliament cannot normally amend under either positive or negative procedure—it can only approve or reject. If either House makes its objections clear, the Government can withdraw the regulations. Otherwise, under the affirmative procedure, either House can vote against them.

On the main issue of principle, the effect of the normal affirmative procedure and that proposed by the amendment could be similar in certain circumstances. For example, under the amendment, the House could vote to amend and under the affirmative procedure it could vote to reject. The Secretary of State would then have to take away the draft regulations and return with fresh regulations to seek approval once again.

Lords amendment No. 5 introduces serious practical complications, and that is why I shall urge the House to reject it. The first complication is that one House might propose an amendment conflicting with one proposed by the other House. What would happen in that case, and which view would take precedence? The amendment provides no mechanism for resolving such questions.

Secondly, the amendment would add undesirable delay to the making of the first regulations by imposing a 40-day period after the draft regulations are laid before Parliament, during which time either House can approve amendments. If an amendment were passed during that period, fresh regulations would have to be presented and a further 40-day period would apply. That process could continue indefinitely. I have already made it clear that it is desirable to have the loan scheme in place at the earliest practical moment so that students can take advantage of it. Undesirable delay should not be agreed to.

Amendment (a) to Lords amendment No. 5 would keep this cumbersome arrangement in place for all future regulations as well as for the first set, and would apply the affirmative resolution to them as well. For the reasons that I have given, I would not wish to see this unnecessary and wasteful process of amendment applied to future regulations. The Government accept Lords amendments Nos. 2, 3 and 4, but we invite the House to disagree with the Lords on amendment No. 5 and to reject Opposition amendment (a).

7.30 pm

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): We had much debate in Committee on the need for the affirmative resolution procedure on the regulations. I do not intend to repeat the arguments that were advanced there. It is worth underlining that that matter is especially important when debating a Bill such as this, which contains so little detail about the administration of the scheme. Much is being left to regulations and that makes it all the more important that the House and the other place should have a meaningful opportunity to shape those regulations.

The Lords amendments represent a Government concession made under acute pressure. They conceded to the arguments that we advanced in Committee, in the House and in the other place and that is welcome. However, they have not gone nearly far enough towards providing proper opportunities for democratic involvement and public input into Parliament's deliberations on the formulation of regulations that shape the way in which the scheme is to operate.

The affirmative resolution procedure should operate for each set of regulations and not merely for those introduced in the first year. The Government's proposal falls considerably short of the concession that Lady Young and her Conservative and Cross-Bench sponsors believed that they had won in the other place. In reply to Lady Young, Lord Caithness said:

> "We accept the principles behind the amendment of my noble Friend Lady Young."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 12 March 1990; Vol. 516, c. 1322.]

Lady Young had made it clear that those amendments were intended to cover three areas. Those were: the arrangements for the Student Loans Company to make loans, which were subject to no parliamentary scrutiny under the Bill as drafted; the making of any orders to amend in the first year the list of courses for which loans will be payable; and the financial regulations and other details that were already under the negative resolution procedure.

Despite the apparent concession by Lord Caithness, on the basis of which those amendments were withdrawn, his amendment brought forward on Report in the Lords covered only the second and third areas. It did not cover the arrangements for the Student Loans Company to make loans. Therefore, it was deficient in that respect.

The other Lords amendments result from the narrow and welcome victory secured in the other place by Earl Russell.

Mr. Jackson: By a majority of one.

Mr. Smith: That was a narrow majority but it was nevertheless a majority.

The amendments succeeded in inserting an ingenious procedure that has been used in the past. It would effectively give both Houses the opportunity to do that which the Under-Secretary of State in the debate on 5 December said that he thought that the House itself had the power to do. He said then that it would be open to the House to amend the regulations, but subsequently recognised his error.

The ingenious procedure proposed by Earl Russell would enable both Houses to amend the regulations by requiring the drafts to be submitted for a 40-day period, within which either House could pass a motion commenting on the terms of the regulations. If any motion were passed that would require the regulations to be amended, the Secretary of State would be required to withdraw the regulations and re-lay them. The procedure is a simple but effective way to scrutinise the detail of regulations without necessarily going as far as rejecting them in principle. There is considerable merit in that ingenious procedure and we think that it should apply not only to the first regulations but to all subsequent regulations. That is why amendment (a) to Lords amendment No. 5 proposes the deletion of the word "first".

The Opposition and many people outside the House regard the Bill as an affront to democracy, and the improvements that the Lords have succeeded in extracting from the Government would undoubtedly reinsert a small but welcome democratic opportunity for input from both

[Mr. Smith]

Houses and from the general public and interested parties. Therefore, we commend amendment (a) to the House. We welcome the Government's concession and ask hon. Members to vote to improve it so that we can improve democracy and remedy one defect in a very defective Bill.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): If I understood my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science correctly, he asked us to disagree with Lords amendment No. 5. That is a pity, because, although the Bill is extremely short, it gives enormous power to the Secretary of State and transforms the whole system of student financing. I have the greatest possible trust in my right hon. Friend as an individual. He is an extremely good Secretary of State and an honourable and sound man. I do not say that to flatter him because he knows that I do not go in for the flattering of Ministers. However, when passing legislation one must consider carefully that my right hon. Friend will not be Secretary of State for ever. I hope that he will go on to higher things; he merits them and I am sure that he will earn them in due course.

No Secretary of State should take to himself powers that he is not happy for others to have. That is why I have opposed several proposals during the past 10 years. There has been an unhappy tendency for Secretaries of State to take to themselves overriding powers and, in so doing, to tilt the balance of power between the Executive and the legislature.

It is important for Parliament to have a say in this matter. If regulations are to be brought forward, they should be ones that can be fully debated in every possible sense and changed, and there should be ample time to do so. Although it is difficult for the layman to understand, amendment No. 5, which was passed in another place, is an extremely ingenious way of constraining the power of a Secretary of State, whoever he or she may be. I know that my right hon. Friend has tried hard to meet the wishes and listen to the doubts of those who are doubtful about the Bill, so it is a pity that he should ask the House of Commons to reverse an amendment passed in another place with strong all-party support. Conservative peers were very much to the fore in the debate and in the Lobby. I hope that my right hon. Friend will have second thoughts about this, even at such a late stage.

The Bill transforms the system of student finance. There are people outside this place, not just students but vice-chancellors and others, who are concerned about it. Only this morning I received a letter from a vice-chancellor who felt that what the House of Lords had done had gone a long way to remove his fears and anxieties, although he still retained some. It would be most unfortunate if we rejected what the other place has done, bearing in mind the objective expertise there. Therefore, I hope that my right hon. Friend will not ask us to disagree. If he does, I fear that I cannot agree with him.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I declare an interest as an adviser to the Association of University Teachers, although I have had no communication with it on the subject of the amendment.

Like the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack), I am still hoping that the Government will be persuaded of the merits of the case put by the House of Lords on amendment No. 5. The reason for my hope is that, in time, the Government seem to come round to my view. Amendment No. 4, which the Government accept, is precisely the amendment I moved in this place on Report and which the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), stoutly resisted. His resistance bore all the marks of tactical resistance, not resistance to a principle.

I do not believe that, in the ensuing weeks, the Ministers suddenly became persuaded of arguments which had not been obvious to them in the first place. The arguments on the issue in amendment No. 4 are so obvious that the negative procedure of the House is a completely inadequate means of dealing with a major issue. It guarantees no debate or parliamentary proceeding. I believe that the Government decided that they had to have a tit-bit for the Lords and some concession that they could offer in another place. Therefore, with great dispatch, when Lady Young moved the amendment, the Government leaped to their collective feet and announced that they were willing to accept the amendment, which is a compromise.

The amendment ensures that the first time that the scheme is brought forward it is the subject of affirmative procedure, which guarantees that there will be a vote in this place and a debate, either in Committee or on the Floor of the House—I think that it would be on the Floor. It was a compromise, in that I and others, including the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), believed that all the regulations should be subject to affirmative procedure. It was a reasonable suggestion in the spirit of compromise, and I am glad that the Government accepted it. It means that, the first time that this major scheme comes forward, we are guaranteed at least a vote on it.

7.45 pm

At that time, all of us said that we needed more than merely a vote. When something so major, which one would expect to be the substance of a Bill, appears before the House in the form of regulations, we should have the opportunity to amend anything that is wrong with it. That was the reason for amendment No. 5, which was moved in another place by Earl Russell. Although it was a Liberal Democrat amendment, it attracted wide support from Members of all parties and it carried the day, albeit with a small majority. If the Government get a majority of one tonight, they too will be satisfied because a majority of one is enough.

Amendment No. 5 is important because it ensures, not just for this House, but for the other place, that when the scheme is brought forward, if there is something wrong with it, the fault can be put right. The Minister is not talking about the real world when he suggests that the amendment is unnecessary, because the scheme can be brought forward and, if there is something wrong with it, Members can vote it down and the Government can take it away, make changes and bring it back again. Can the Minister remember when that was last done? I certainly cannot.

I know what will happen: the Minister will come before the House with a scheme which will be shown to be defective, at least in some particular—it may be a small but important one. The Minister will say, "I recognise that hon. Members have raised an important point, which we would like to get right, but if the House does not pass the proposal tonight some students who do not get a grant will not receive a loan. If the scheme is not put on the statute book straight away, hardship will be caused. It is too late to take away the regulations and bring them back, amended, another day. We shall look at it for next year. However sensible hon. Members think their points are, it would cause undue delay and hardship to introduce an amendment at this stage."

Mr. Cormack: The hon. Gentleman sounds as if he is rehearsing.

Mr. Beith: Indeed, I am offering the Minister the script which I know he will have to use on that occasion. I guarantee—if I were a betting man, I would put money on it—that he will have to say something like that when the scheme is brought forward.

Anyone who has experienced the recent poll tax debates will know that Ministers have had to make changes on specific issues. An announcement has been made in the past few days that the Government will have to introduce retrospective legislation on caravan rating because, within the legislation they have put forward, they will be unable to achieve the effect which they intended. That sort of thing happens all the time, and it will certainly happen in this instance, when it will be not just the details but the substance of the scheme that is put forward in regulations.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Before my hon. Friend came into the Chamber, there was a debate on the guillotine, in which just such an argument was anticipated. The Secretary of State's greatest argument for the guillotine and for curtailing debates on the amendments was that we should get on with the legislation if the students are to receive their grants by the end of this financial year and the beginning of the new student year. That was exactly the argument used today, and the Secretary of State will undoubtedly be told to use that argument again if the amendment is rejected by the House.

Mr. Beith: My hon. Friend is right, and I know that other hon. Members agree. How much better it would be to have a procedure for amendment there and then. The Minister says that it is not possible to build in such a requirement, but it is possible and it is done. I have moved amendments to census orders arising from the Census Act 1920, under which orders providing for a census are subject to amendment. I have moved just such an amendment, and the procedure set out in the Lords amendment is on similar lines.

If the procedure were in place, the regulations would be much more likely to be properly drafted in the first place. I do not think that the Government will want them to be amended. If the Minister wants to induce a spirit of efficiency and care among his civil servants on this issue, he will find no better mechanism than the certainty that the Government will face the amendment of their regulations. He will find that I have been his ally when he discovers that his civil servants are far more zealous than ever before in their attempts to get the regulations right and consult everyone because they know that there is a serious risk that the Goverment will be exposed to the embarrassment of having the legislation amended.

There is a great deal at stake: the nature of the scheme, the manner of the repayments, the problems that will be faced by students having to repay these loans, and the rules of eligibility—not to mention all the administration. It is important that we be given the opportunity to get those things right. The procedural difficulties are not insuperable obstacles. On previous occasions this House and the other place have had to work out mechanisms for dealing with amendments to orders. A whole passage in "Erskine May" on page 546 points out that

> "If the two Houses differ in their amendments, machinery must be improvised for reconciling the differences".

So such amendments have been successfully dealt with in the past, and the procedural obstacles are not real.

The overwhelming case is that we are are enacting by regulation a major scheme that will affect the lives of large numbers of young people. If we are to get that right, it is surely far better that we be able to do what we can do with normal legislation—bring forward amendments. They might even be Government amendments. During the passage of this Bill we have seen how the Government have had to recognise as they go along that some of the legislation was wrong, or how they have wanted to respond to advice that they have received. It would be open to the Government to use the amending procedure that we are recommending here.

I do not see how we can go on showing parties of east Europeans around the House and sending out people to eastern Europe, where countries are developing new democratic Parliaments, telling them to see how we run the show, given our legislative arrangements under which we cannot amend a scheme as fundamental as that for student grants. My noble Friend the Earl Russell proposed a perfectly sensible and well precedented way of allowing amendments, and the Government should accept his method. If they are unwilling to do so, I shall invite the House to affirm its support for this principle——

Mr. Simon Hughes: I invite my hon. Friend to reflect that, above all in the context of this Bill, the Government should be minded to accept the amendment. The Bill was launched on the basis that it would be supported by the banks. Something went wrong and the Bill's proposals had to be completely rethought. I hope my hon. Friend agrees that the Government should have understood by now that it is rarely possible to get such measures right first time —the more so on this measure.

Mr. Beith: I have never thought that the Secretary of State was the sort of Minister who thinks that he always gets it right first time. He has always struck me as the sort of man who is prepared to listen to arguments. So I have put an argument to him, and I ask him to reflect on his own experience in this and other matters and to realise that a subject as large as this should come to the House in amendable form. That is the substance of the amendment, and I believe that he and the House should accept it.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): During the debate on the timetable motion, I argued that our debates should be allowed to continue because they would touch on issues that will affect people in future. This debate would have had more sense if it could have gone on longer. The ideas that we need to thrash out and formulate should be legitimately debated, and we should be allowed a procedure which was not only subject to affirmative resolution but allowed amendments.

I almost missed this debate because I slipped out after the timetable motion and the debate on Lords amendment No. 1 lasted only five minutes, which made me wonder why we had spent three hours discussing the guillotine motion when, instead of skipping through some of the

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

amendments, we might have had more time to deal with others and find out the Government's attitude to them. It would be interesting to hear the Secretary of State explain the Government's attitude to the various proposals in the amendments and to hear what they accept and what they reject. It would have done us no harm to hear such an explanation on the timetable motion.

Earlier, the Under-Secretary of State shouted out that a Lords amendment had been carried by just one vote. That was indicative of the Government's attitude—they have a vast majority, but they do not like admitting to the weight of opinion behind decisions which go against them. One vote is perfectly adequate—if it were not, we might as well pack up and disappear.

Mr. Cormack: As the hon. Gentleman will well remember, Lord Callaghan's Government fell on one vote.

Mr. Barnes: I remember that very well. The Government fell because Tom Swain, the former Member for Derbyshire, North-East, was killed in a motor accident in the constituency that I now represent. But for that accident, the vote would have been tied and, in accordance with precedence, the Government could have carried on for a while—although for how long is another matter.

Mr. Jackson: I made the point about the majority of one not to disparage a majority of one, which is perfectly acceptable, but as an ironic comment on arguments advanced earlier during the guillotine motion debate when the Government were reproached because our majority fell on occasion to 40.

Mr. Barnes: That is significant because the Government have a majority of 150 over the Labour party and a majority of 100 over all parties combined. It would be of great significance if this amendment were agreed to by a majority of one—it would say something about the Government's position in connection with the Bill, and about their general difficulties.

We need an amendment of this type because of the nature of the legislation. This terrible measure of enabling legislation does not enable us properly to debate the items that will form part of the scheme. The legislation is so empty that, when the scheme was turned upside down by the banks' withdrawal, it did not cause a ripple in the Government. That proved, not that the Government had it right or that the Bill was compatible with anything, but that the Bill had run into serious constitutional, parliamentary and procedural problems.

The Secretary of State said that there could be some difficulty with the Lords amendment if the two Houses differed in their attitude to proposals that the Government brought forward. But "Erskine May", on page 546, points out

> "If the two Houses differ in their amendments, machinery must be improvised for reconciling the differences".

So we should not be perpetually bouncing back and forth waiting for fresh proposals from the Government; the Government could get together with their Lordships—the other place is not so far away—to try to resolve such issues. If that proved cumbersome, awkward or unusual, it would be due to the Government's having brought forward legislation of this sort. The other place has attempted to overcome some of those considerable difficulties and its efforts would be further assisted by our amendment.

The affirmative procedure, which can be amended, is essential, for example, in relation to Northern Ireland measures, and this measure is particularly important to Northern Ireland. Nowhere in the United Kingdom will be more affected by the measure than Northern Ireland because of the percentage of the population there involved in higher education and its higher participation rates for people with working-class backgrounds and women compared with other parts of the United Kingdom. Therefore, Northern Ireland has a significant interest in the measure.

But when the House debates measures which extend legislation to Northern Ireland we are allowed only one and a half or three hours. When we debated the extension of the Education Reform Act 1987 to Northern Ireland we were allowed only three hours. Yet that measure contained 167 clauses and 10 schedules and its principles went beyond the Education Reform Act—for example, in its measures encouraging education for mutual understanding. Without those new principles it could have been dealt with by a negative procedure and there could only have been a debate on a prayer which would have dragged it on to the agenda for us to discuss. We do not want to be in that situation in this legislation which makes the position of Northern Ireland worse. For them we should learn from some of the procedural niceties to be found in "Erskine May", some of which were employed in the other place and gave rise to the amendment.

Enabling legislation which requires measures only to be rubber-stamped makes it essential that the two Houses of Parliament should between them try to discover procedures whereby the Government can be put on the right track even if the measure itself is not correct. I hope that the Government will change their mind on the amendments.

8 pm

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) referred to exchanges that took place in another place on whether or not the affirmative resolution should apply to administrative arrangements. We took the view that we were amply fulfilling the commitment that the noble Lord gave in relation to making the affirmative resolution apply to the regulations.

The administrative detail of the scheme is subject to the normal processes of scrutiny by various other parliamentary methods. The Secretary of State will be responsible and accountable for the use of the funds that are required for the administration of the scheme, and he must secure them through estimates agreed to by Parliament. The Public Accounts Committee will be able to inquire into the efficient administration of the scheme, and we have also promised to publish the company's annual report.

The Bill deliberately makes the terms of the scheme which affect individuals enactable through regulations and subject to the usual form of parliamentary scrutiny, which we are discussing now. It is right to leave the details of administration, which is a different matter, subject to the mechanisms that I have just described, and not to go into the need for a further layer of scrutiny that would be involved in the affirmative procedure on administrative issues. If we start to think about some of the administrative issues, we see that they are inappropriate for the affirmative procedure. They include such things as contracts of employment for employees and so on. Therefore, we rightly fulfilled our commitment.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) referred to amendment No. 4. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State and I listened carefully to the debate on that amendment, which we thought was rather ingenious and which dealt with the point that on the first set of regulations there was a greater issue than in subsequent amendments. We were tempted to respond positively during that debate, but we felt that we needed some time for reflection to see whether there were any snags that we had not thought of before we agreed to the amendment. Therefore, we took it away and used the opportunity of the debate in the other place to accept the principle of it. It is a tribute to the hon. Gentleman that he clearly impressed us with the arguments in the debate.

I regret that I cannot say the same about the arguments that we have heard tonight on amendment No. 5. There are a number of problems. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) for his kind words and I want to make a point that I hope he will make to his vice-chancellor who felt that the Bill had been considerably improved in the other place. It is important to note that we are accepting most of the amendments from the other place, so if they are improvements, as we agree they are, they have been included in the Bill.

My objection to amendment No. 5, in addition to those that I have stated, is that it would involve a considerable change to the normal affirmative procedure that deals with regulations. The Census Act is unusual. The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed made an interesting point when, by a slip of the tongue, he referred to student grants and the negative resolution procedure. In fact, the negative resolution procedure does apply to the regulations for student grants. We are going further in having the affirmative resolution for the first set of regulations. We were originally basing our approach on the student grant system, and the student loan arrangements have pretty well the same implications for a large number of students —the changes in regulations that one might wish to make from time to time—as student grants. There is a clear and direct precedent for what we are doing.

The hon. Gentleman made the point that it will be necessary from time to time to make changes to regulations, and I accept that. We have said clearly that we shall be reviewing the scheme each year and we would expect to make changes to regulations from time to time. But that is a normal process. The flexibility that we have to do it through regulations gives us, as I have constantly said, the benefit of being able to make those changes quickly.

Mr. Cormack: My right hon. Friend is dealing with the matter with his customary courtesy, but does he accept that much hardship can be caused in a year? I believe implicitly that my right hon. Friend wants to improve on matters that have gone wrong, but how much better it would be to improve them before they went wrong.

Mr. MacGregor: We shall obviously be looking carefully at all the reviews and listening to many points made by colleagues in the House as well as others outside before we make any regulations. I hope that there would not be real hardship as a result of a delay from one year to another. I am not persuaded that having a special procedure, as this would be, to apply to those sets of regulations, allowing amendments to be made as they go through the House, would necessarily make that any less likely to occur. I hope that it will not. But it is not unknown for regulations to be wrongly drafted and for other regulations to follow quickly. I have myself, sometimes with some irritation, seen that happen.

But the most important point, apart from the one that I have already made, is that the amendment involves a considerable change to the normal affirmative procedure. Some hon. Members may like to see that. That was the point made by the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) in relation to Northern Ireland. But it would involve a significant change in the normal procedures of the House, which we should not make lightly in one Bill.

The regulations that we shall be carrying through are similar to a range of other Government schemes where affirmative or negative procedures apply to regulations. In my previous capacity as Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food I had to take regulations through the House on a considerable number of Government schemes. That is a perfectly normal process and that is what should apply here. Therefore, I stick to my view and invite the House to accept Lords amendments Nos. 2, 3 and 4, but to disagree with amendment No. 5 and amendment (a).

Question put and agreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 3 and 4 agreed to.

Lords Amendment: No. 5, in page 2, line 18, at end insert—

"(7) A draft of the first regulations to be made under this section or Schedule 2 to this Act shall be laid before each House of Parliament; and if either House of Parliament passes a resolution requiring the draft to be amended the Secretary of State shall withdraw the draft and shall prepare a draft in substitution for the one which is withdrawn.

(8) No resolution shall be passed by either House of Parliament under subsection (7) above in respect of a draft after the expiration of the period of 40 days beginning with the day on which a copy of the draft was laid before that House; but for the purposes of this subsection no account shall be taken of any time during which Parliament is dissolved or prorogued or during which both Houses are adjourned for more than four days.

(9) If, on the expiry of the period of 40 days mentioned in subsection (8) above, no resolution requiring amendment of the regulations has been passed by either House of Parliament, the draft shall not come into force until it has been approved by resolution of both Houses of Parliament.

(10) Where the Secretary of State withdraws a draft under subsection (7) above, he shall lay an amended draft before Parliament and the amended draft shall not come into force until it has been approved by resolution of both Houses of Parliament."

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House doth disagree with the Lords in the said amendment.—*[Mr. MacGregor.]*

The House divided: Ayes 256, Noes 198.

Division No. 160] **[8.10 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, W.

Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick

Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve

Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Sackville, Hon Tom
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis

Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Sydney Chapman.

NOES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann

Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cormack, Patrick
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin

Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hardy, Peter
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Knox, David
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McGrady, Eddie
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Rhodes James, Robert
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and
Mr. Matthew Taylor.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 4

SHORT TITLE, CITATION, INTERPRETATION AND EXTENT

Lords amendment: No. 6, in page 2, line 38, after "2" insert

"and, as respects institutions in Northern Ireland, the power to make regulations under paragraph 2 of Schedule 2").

Mr. Jackson: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker Miss Betty Boothroyd): With this, it will be convenient to consider the following: Lords amendment No. 11, in page 4, line 13, leave out from first "to" to "loans" in line 15 and insert

"take such steps (whether by the issue of certificates or otherwise) as may be prescribed by the regulations for the purposes of, or in connection with, applications by those students for".

Amendment (a), to amendment No. 11, at end insert

'but before doing so shall consult any persons with whom consultation appears to the Secretary of State should be desirable; and subsequent changes to these regulations shall be subject to paragraphs (4) and (5) of Schedule 1 to the Northern Ireland Act 1974'.

No. 12, in page 4, line 15, at end insert

"including the provision of information when a person ceases to be an eligible student."

No. 13, in page 4, line 28, leave out "discharging functions" and insert

"having the function of making loans".

No. 14, in page 4, line 43, leave out "discharging functions" and insert

"having the function of making loans".

No. 15, in page 4, line 45, leave out "functions in relation to" and insert "the function of making".

Mr. Jackson: Amendments Nos. 6 and 15 concern the role of the academic institutions in the scheme. In practice that role is limited—but knowing the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) and his taste for detail, I shall specify what it is.

The institutions will identify students, certify their eligibility for loans, certify the level of loan to which the student is entitled, hand forms to students, keep copies of documents for audit purposes, and inform the company if a student leaves a course prematurely. Institutions are not to be involved in the application process. Students will apply for a loan direct to the company, by post. All further communications will be between the student and the company.

We aim at ensuring that loans reach eligible students quickly and efficiently and at striking a balance between the work involved for the institutions, the responsibilities that rightly fall to the individual student, and proper protection for public money—which is a very important consideration. We believe that the proposed certification and application process meets those objectives.

I recognise that Parliament is interested in the question of payment to the institutions. Education departments are discussing certification and application processes with the institutions. An initial meeting was held yesterday at which payment was on the agenda, and we shall make an announcement to the House in due course. We shall work closely with the institutions, as we always do.

The company and the institutions have a mutual interest in developing an effective working relationship that benefits students and taxpayers. It is correct to take a general power on the face of the Bill. We were invited to do so by the vice-chancellors and directors of the polytechnics, and we have done so in a form that gives us flexibility to make minor changes if they are needed in the future.

It is correct also to set out the precise role of the institutions in regulations, and to let Parliament debate those regulations when they are first made. Therefore, I commend those amendments to the House.

I cannot do the same in respect of amendment (a), which the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) will

[Mr. Jackson]

speak to. Discussions are already taking place between education departments and representatives of institutions, and the Government have already said that they are willing to make payments to institutions. Costs were discussed at yesterday's meeting with representative bodies, so amendment (a) is unnecessary. I urge the House to reject it.

Mr. Straw: I am glad to see that we are joined for this part of the debate at least by the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson), who is campaign organiser for the leadership aspirations of the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine). I am only sorry that the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West was absent from our earlier debate on the timetable motion, when I was able to quote his sage words about the comparisons between this fandango of a scheme and the poll tax.

The Secretary of State referred at the end of his speech on the timetable motion to remarks by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, and tried to insinuate that it supported the scheme.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): It supports the principle.

Mr. Straw: I presume the hon. Lady means the principle, not principal—but in no sense does that committee support the principle of the scheme.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Willl the hon. Gentleman at least admit that the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals is in favour of a loans scheme, supplemented of course by grants?

Mr. Straw: The committee has spoken only in general terms about a scheme under which those who benefit from higher education should make a contribution towards it. That is not the principle of a loan, but it is a principle to which we can all subscribe. I happily subscribe to such a concept, which is why I support the principle that people who earn more should pay more through taxation.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The hon. Gentleman is wriggling.

Mr. Straw: I am not wriggling. I am standing firm. It is the Secretary of State and his Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), who are wriggling. They both tried to insinuate that the Commitee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals is behind the scheme, but in fact it fully opposes the scheme. That is why the Government had to introduce amendments in another place.

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman could not have been listening, because I was careful to say that the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals subscribes to the principle of what I quoted from the Committee's own document. I agree that it was not the student loans scheme, but the principle. It had been advocating a form of graduate tax, and I have set out on several occasions why I think that that is not an acceptable way forward.

8.30 pm

Mr. Straw: I am not surprised that the Secretary of State is in trouble with the scheme, if he does not understand the difference between this loans scheme and a scheme of graduate tax, and there is a world of difference between the principles involved. The principle of a graduate tax is that what people pay back is not related to what they receive by way of maintenance support while they are at university or college. It is related solely to their income after they have graduated.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Even if they graduated abroad?

Mr. Straw: I leave aside the question whether they graduated abroad. Even if they graduated at Lancaster university, they would, under a graduate tax, receive grant support related to their income position and that of their parents at the time when they went on that course. What they paid by way of a tax would relate to their income thereafter. The two would not be related. There is a complete distinction between a graduate tax, which the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals is supporting, and the Government scheme, and the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West—the same can be said of his choice of leadership candidate—is aware of the difference.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals does not distinguish those who—such as a couple of sons of mine—graduated abroad. They would be paying graduate tax although they had not received the benefit of a university education in this country. That could happen to any number of people who went abroad, who would still be paying, unjustly, not having received the benefit of a university education in this country.

Mr. Straw: Should a graduate tax ever come before the House, I would agree with the hon. Lady that she had a strong point. Although I would have to think about it, I would almost certainly be on her side in saying that those who received their higher education completely outside this country, and for whom the taxpayers here had not paid a penny piece, would find it unjust if they then had to pay the graduate tax.

Dr. Keith Hampson (Leeds, North-West): I want to be clear about what the hon. Gentleman is supporting. I thought, from what he said on an earlier amendment, that he was supporting the position of the vice-chancellors. The principle of their scheme is related to income—the fact of having higher education means that one will have a higher tax rate because one has had the privilege of higher education. Is the hon. Gentleman in favour of that?

Mr. Straw: I am not supporting the position of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals. I was offering some education and illumination——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Ah.

Mr. Straw: —to the Secretary of State and his Under-Secretary about the difference between what the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals was proposing and the Government loans scheme, because it is dissembling in the extreme to suggest that the vice-chancellors are supporting even the principle of the Government scheme.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The position of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals has been clear from before the Bill until now. It is that the vice-chancellors have always accepted the principle that those who graduate should contribute to society consequentially. But they have always strongly opposed the principle that people should have to borrow, in whole or in part, before and during the time that they undertake their education at universities and colleges. They take that view because they regard the latter as a deterrent and the former as no deterrent but, rather, as a fair way of recompensing for academic rewards attained.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point. The best sign of the fact that the vice-chancellors do not support the Bill is that they have refused to co-operate with the Bill unless forced to do so by law. The provisions that the Government have been forced to put into the Bill are in amendment No. 11 from the other place. That gives the Secretary of State power to require institutions to administer part of the scheme. The vice-chancellors, polytechnic directors and other college directors have made it crystal clear in terms, in writing to the Secretary of State, that they would not co-operate unless they were forced to do so, and that is why we have the Government proposals now.

The Under-Secretary tried to give what he described as some detail about the administrative arrangements that were being proposed by his Department, with the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, and he said that in due course the House would be informed. He said that because of that, and because it looked as if a hunky-dory scheme with the vice-chancellors was on the road, there was no need for our amendment, which picks up the wording of amendment No. 11, but adds that it should not operate

> "before consultation with, and the provision of full compensation for, the institutions concerned."

As his Department has already given more detail to the press than the Minister has given to the House, it might be helpful if I read out the detail that is being offered.

It is proposed that for each student who fills in, and has certified by a university or college administration, a Student Loans Company form, the institution concerned should receive the princely sum of £3·50. Whether that is an adequate sum for all the training of staff that will be required and for the administration of the system and the certification remains to be seen.

I have with me a wonderful letter from the chairman of the Student Loans Company—the chairman of a nationalised board; I hope that it is being reported to the Prime Minister that she has presided over the nationalisation of a body that was to be wholly in the private sector—with a most felicitous choice of wording. Mr. Vereker writes:

> "I also explained that Ministers have decided that the maximum payment per eligibility certificate will be £3·50, but that this will be subject to an incentive regime."

What a choice of words—a regime involving incentives. He continues:

> "I offered you a choice of incentive regimes . . . a regime rewarding a high rate of correctly completed forms, whereby institutions would receive £3·50 for each form if 80 per cent. of the forms received in a given period were correct, but £2 per form if the 80 per cent threshold was not met, or . . . a regime rewarding correct completion and penalising incorrect completion, whereby institutions would receive £3·50 for each correctly completed form and nothing for incorrect forms."

After that choice of incentive regimes, the veritable Mr. Vereker goes on:

> "We agree that you and the others represented would endeavour to reach a consensus as to which of these incentive regimes you would prefer, and let me know in writing by the end of the week . . . But"—

to make it clear that it is a fatuous choice—in other words, no choice at all—

> "I stand ready to convene a further meeting if that would be helpful . . . I recognise that institutional representatives may not reach agreement among themselves on which incentive regime is to be preferred, in which case Ministers reserve the right to decide."

It is clear that the time of senior officials is wasted, as a result of this crazy scheme, on devising incentive regimes by which institutions shall receive £3·50 for each form if 80 per cent. of them are received in a given period, but £2 for those which are incorrect, or £3·50 for each correctly completed form, and nothing for incorrect forms.

One wonders whether a standard assessment test will be established, to decide whether a form is correct or incorrect, and whether true facts will be specified in an order laid by the Secretary of State, with attainment targets—Mr. Vereker says that there probably will be attainment targets for the completion of forms. Probably, the view of the School Examinations and Assessment Council will be sought before final decisions are made on whether a form has been filled in correctly.

We believe that if this onerous requirement is to be placed on institutions, they must be adequately compensated for it and they must be properly consulted. The Secretary of State cannot deny that people should be consulted. Indeed, the letter from Mr. Vereker says——

Mr. Jackson: We are consulting people.

Mr. Straw: The Under-Secretary says that the Government are. I expect that he also does not wish to deny that there should be proper compensation. If he denies neither, why can we not have a requirement for consultation written into the Bill?

One other aspect of this set of amendments, which has vexed Opposition Members a great deal, is the reference in the Bill, through amendment No. 6, to Northern Ireland. It is well known in the House—it is not necessary for me to repeat it now—that large chunks of legislation have to be pushed through by affirmative resolution. Measures that would take days, weeks or months if they referred to England, Scotland or Wales are allowed an hour and a half. For example, we had the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, which was discussed for one and a half hours on 30 December——

Mr. Simon Hughes: Three hours.

Mr. Straw: Yes, three hours. That order contained 167 paragraphs and 10 schedules and was almost as large as the Education Reform Act 1988, but it was pushed through the House in less than an evening. All that can be said for the present statutory provisions on Northern Ireland is that there have to be affirmative resolutions before legislation relating to Northern Ireland comes into force. In the Bill, the provisions, including amendment No. 6, mean that the Secretary of State is able to introduce the student loans system into Northern Ireland simply by a negative resolution. That is wholly unacceptable and insulting to the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I am grateful to the Under-Secretary, as he anticipated that I would be, for giving us some information. One of the great battles during the

[Mr. Simon Hughes]

various stages of the Bill has been to obtain information. That we have had to wait until the last possible moment —literally—before we get some information is consistent with the practice of the Government.

I have two comments to make on the substantive administrative issues, and one comment on Northern Ireland in relation to this group of amendments.

As the Under-Secretary will probably acknowledge, it was just the sort of information he supplied on the involvement of institutions that we have demanded from the beginning. We asked what the work of universities, polytechnics and colleges would be. Clearly it took a long time to work that out. It is helpful that at least it has been recognised that there needs to be a framework for the work done by the institutions, and it would have been helpful if we had been supplied with that information at the beginning of parliamentary debate on the Bill.

The most important point that remains to be discussed is that alluded to by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw)—recompense for institutions. The institutions have consistently gone on record as opposing the Bill. They have never resiled from that position. They are against the Bill and they believe that it is detrimental to higher education. The parliamentary private secretary shakes his head, but he well knows that the institutions have consistently said that. *[Interruption.]* I beg the pardon of the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart)—he is not a parliamentary private secretary, but he was in Committee, and he is sitting behind the Minister. We have clearly understood that that is the case throughout proceedings on the Bill.

The Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals made it clear, none the less, that as they would be required by law to carry out certain duties obviously they have no choice but to obey. The Government responded by saying that they realised it was not a scheme that the Committee liked but that they were going to impose it, in spite of advice to the contrary, and that they would legislate to ensure that the institutions could not escape from it. Therefore, the issue of financial recompense remains. I hope that during the present negotiations—whether they are conducted by the Secretary of State, the Under-Secretary or another Minister—they will recognise that the institutions must be properly paid for the functions that they are to perform.

The hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) seems to think that academic Britain is wallowing in unusual and unique extravagance, but that is not the case. She thinks that it is suddenly the recipient of Government largesse, the like of which it has never seen before. One only has to ask. Any vice-chancellor or principal will say that they are particularly strapped and that there are many things that they cannot do, not least in research and postgraduate work. They cannot afford to make a contribution to the running of a student finance scheme, when in the past they have not had to make a contribution.

Under the present regime it is the local authority which administers grants that students apply for, and the institutions do not have to play a part in that. The Bill proposes a quango. One of the extraordinary features of the student loans scheme is that the Government are effectively setting up a nationalised company to carry out the scheme. The Bill will also require universities to carry out extra tasks. I hope that the Government will recognise that it is important that the institutions must be properly recompensed. My noble Friend Lady Seear and many others in the other place put that point across as stongly as they could.

8.45 pm

As the Department of Education and Science is thinking of compensating universities, it might be nice if they passed a message to their friends in the Department of the Environment suggesting that it might compensate local government which is having to administer the poll tax without being granted adequate money to do so, particularly in the light of yesterday's announcement.

One amendment in this group relates specifically to Northern Ireland. It is logical that there is an amendment that says that, if the Government want to legislate for Northern Ireland, they have the same facility to introduce secondary legislation for Northern Ireland as they do for the rest of the country. It would be illogical if that were not the case. There may be comments from colleagues representing Northern Ireland on this issue. Throughout the passage of the Bill in both Houses, there has been no enthusiasm, as far as I am aware, for the proposals in Northern Ireland from either institutions or students. Therefore, I expect that there will be opposition tonight to the idea that we should give Parliament and Government the wherewithal to legislate for Northern Ireland.

The view of the institutions, the students and all those consulted so far in Northern Ireland is as strong as it ever was. They believe that the scheme will be particularly harmful to them. Like Scottish institutions, they consider themselves as having a particular problem and in many ways being particularly vulnerable. It is a pity that the Government did not listen to their words of warning. I hope that institutions in Northern Ireland as well as in Scotland will not suffer too harshly as a result.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): I agree with what has been said about students from Northern Ireland. I say "from Northern Ireland" because many of them are educated on this side of the water and that interchange works in the other direction too, and the Ulster Unionists party has always encouraged that.

I reinforce the plea that students in Northern Ireland should not be further disadvantaged because of the peculiar arrangements we have for governing Northern Ireland from this place. This is not the time to engage in a history lesson on how we came to be in this difficult situation. When direct rule was imposed as a temporary measure 18 years ago, Northern Ireland legislation was moved down one peg. Primary legislation became secondary, and secondary went into third place and so forth. That has deprived Members of this House, whatever constituency in the United Kingdom they represent, of the opportunity to scrutinise Northern Ireland legislation in the way that we are entitled to do.

The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) properly drew attention to the vast volume of education reform legislation for Northern Ireland. He referred to the fact that it has to be dealt with in three hours and that it cannot be amended. Even if we had been able to convince the team of Northern Ireland Ministers on the Treasury Bench that there was a misprint in line 14, they could do nothing about it. That illustrates how futile the exercise is.

The hon. Member for Blackburn also said that if that volume of Northern Ireland legislation had been Great Britain legislation it would have taken weeks rather than just three hours to go through the House. However, I commend to Ministers a simple device. All that they need to do when they next introduce a Bill dealing with education or any other matter is simply to insert a clause which specifies that, when the Bill becomes an Act, it will apply to Northern Ireland. Then we should not have to sit up late at night debating an Order in Council which in most cases contains exactly the same provisions as those which have been passed by the House for Great Britain.

Some hon. Members, some of whom are here tonight, have written in their constituency magazines how frightfully boring it is to be have to here late at night listening to the Irish drivelling on about Orders in Council. If they were to apply a little pressure to the business managers, I suggest that they would be relieved of that tedium late at night. We should be happy to engage openly——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Who said that?

Mr. Molyneaux: I do not want to name names, but I can identify some hon Members who are present who have said precisely that.

Let us put an end to such nonsense. We shall not then need the admirable amendment which has been tabled by the hon. Member for Blackburn and his hon. Friends

Given the injustice that arises from such a peculiar system for governing Northern Ireland, I hope that the House will support the hon. Members for Blackburn and for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). We do not want to place a further hurdle in the paths of those who legislate for Northern Ireland and of those hon. Members who have the privilege of attempting to scrutinise the legislation.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware from his reading of the Standing Committee proceedings that we sought to incorporate the principle which he supports: that legislation should apply to the whole of the United Kingdom. However, in this case we tried diligently to ensure that the legislation did not apply to Northern Ireland because it is an unpopular measure. We succeeded on the first count but, unfortunately, not on the second. I think that the right hon. Gentleman will agree that it would have been better had we succeeded on both.

Mr. Molyneaux: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his explanation. I pay tribute to all hon. Members who served on the Committee and who did their best to look after our part of the United Kingdom.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: There are few hon. Members in the Chamber. I simply cannot believe that any of my colleagues who are here would have made the discourteous remark which the right hon. Gentleman has alleged. If he will not say who said that, he casts aspersions on us all.

Mr. Molyneaux: I undertake to convey in private to the hon. Lady the identity of the hon. Member whose article I resented.

I hope that the same diligence will be shown if any attempt is made to introduce the poll tax to Northern Ireland. The Government have not yet succeeded in applying it there. One of the reasons may be the difficulty of finding volunteers to collect it in Crossmaglen.

Mr. Harry Barnes: I should be surprised if Conservative Members criticised our debates on Northern Ireland. Among those who are here, I do not see any who attended the numerous hour and a half or three hour debates on Northern Ireland. I should welcome the involvement of more hon. Members in Northern Ireland debates, despite the fact that they are held late at night and that no amendments can be made to Northern Ireland orders. The position of Northern Ireland was dealt with in Committee and on Report. My hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Mr. Scott) introduced amendments on Report.

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that Conservative Members who have had some contact with Northern Ireland, perhaps as parliamentary private secretaries in the Northern Ireland Department, acknowledge freely the valuable contribution that Northern Ireland Members of Parliament make to our debates? We also acknowledge the quality of education in the Province—but there, of course, they have retained the grammar schools. We could learn a lesson from that.

Mr. Barnes: My point is that the quality of Northern Ireland debates and our understanding of its problems would benefit from the participation of many more hon. Members in our late night debates. If more hon. Members discussed economic and social developments in Northern Ireland and the daily bread-and-butter issues of Northern Ireland politics, we might be able to make a significant contribution towards the solution of the problems there. The House is full only when a dramatic terrorist outrage is being discussed. There is great concern about student loans because so many working class people and women in Northern Ireland take advantage of education. Their increased participation ought to be welcomed.

When the amendments were moved by the Minister, he did not refer to Lords amendment No. 6. It was a general introduction. Nevertheless, this is an amendment that deals specifically with Northern Ireland. Clause 4(4) refers to the fact that, apart from subsection (2), the Bill will not extend to Northern Ireland. Subsection (2) refers to the fact that Northern Ireland will not be allowed to use the affirmative resolution procedure, which would automatically lead to an hour and half debate. Only the negative resolution procedure will be allowed. It would therefore have to be forced on to the agenda, presumably by Northern Ireland Members of Parliament, if they so wished.

The Government intend to stick the student loans provision on to Northern Ireland. They said that a further debate on Northern Ireland matters would not be needed because Northern Ireland was already covered by the earlier measure. So quite a strange arrangement exists which just assumes that when a particular piece of legislation is passed it will go for Northern Ireland as well, although Northern Ireland is specifically excluded from the coverage of the Bill.

It is an unfortunate arrangement. Apart from the problems of not being allowed in the House to amend resolutions and orders on Northern Ireland, if there are to be certain areas that are just ruled out because it has already been assumed that the decisions coming from the

[Mr. Barnes]

Department of Education and Science on this occasion are exact replicas of what has been produced before, we will be in a strange procedural position as regards Northern Ireland. That is not unusual on this Bill.

When the amendment is added to the subsection that I read out earlier, it would read:

> "Except for section 2 and, as respects institutions in Northern Ireland, the power to make regulations under paragraph 2 of schedule 2, this Act does not extend to Northern Ireland."

So there is to be another bit that is to extend to Northern Ireland.

As I understand it, and as the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) outlined it, the problem was that it had not been realised that many students from Northern Ireland studying in another part of the United Kingdom would require student loans under these provisions and were not being catered for by the legislation. Someone had missed this out. It had been overlooked, despite the fact that we had had no timetable provision. We had gradual development through Committee and full debate and discussion in Committee, on Report and on Third Reading, and still it had not been discovered that Northern Ireland was not included. It should not have been for Opposition Members to produce an amendment on this.

Quite a good arrangement could exist whereby, if Northern Ireland students in Northern Ireland, perhaps temporarily, were not operating under this law but under grant provision, those who came to England, Wales and Scotland to study should maintain their grants under it as well.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): Does the hon. Member agree that it is a matter of regret that parents who pay full rates at the level deemed appropriate in Northern Ireland are adversely treated when their children attend universities on the mainland and, in addition, are now required to pay poll tax?

9 pm

Mr. Barnes: A very strange situation exists with regard to poll tax. We are talking about operations equivalent to local education authorities and their provision of grants and now also the operation of loans. We have a different system of funding local government, or the equivalent of local government, provisions that exist in Northern Ireland and in the rest of the United Kingdom. It may be that the Government will discover as they go along, if they are not going to give the advantages, as they see them, of the community charge to Northern Ireland, that they are in some kind of inconsistency. They may, therefore, not want to introduce exactly the same provisions for Northern Ireland students going to Northern Ireland universities as they are now placing on other Northern Ireland students attending universities in the rest of the United Kingdom. They could yet be in a constitutional conundrum.

What I strongly object to is the assumption that a measure to be brought before us on some future occasion will be an exact replica of the measure now in front of us and that therefore other amendments have to be made in order to fit in with the legislation at this stage, so that the whole thing will work together within some general pattern. There is something nonsensical in the way in which we deal with Northern Ireland measures, which I referred to on earlier amendments, when there was a possibility that we could have had in front of us a procedure for student loans where proposals put before us would not just be dealt with by affirmative resolutions but could be amended by us. There would be some sense in that being added to Northern Ireland legislation, and perhaps a useful start could be made with regard to student loans.

Mr. Jackson: May I first join the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) in welcoming the presence in the debate of my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Dr. Hampson). The whole House knows of his great interest in these matters. If I may take this opportunity, I would like to say how much I appreciate the support that he has given to our proposals.

Mr. Straw: I wonder if the Under-Secretary is trying to invite the hon. Member for Leeds, North-West to ensure that he is borne in mind under a Heseltine administration.

Mr. Jackson: I would not dream of allowing such considerations to enter my mind.

I was amused by the hon. Member for Blackburn's hair-splitting about the difference between principles and principals. It reminded me of the old crack about the collective noun for a collection of vice-chancellors being a lack of principals. The hon. Gentleman referred to the principle of loans, but the vice-chancellors are on common ground with the Government in affirming that graduates should make payments in respect of their maintenance over and beyond their normal tax obligations. We are all agreed—and Opposition spokesmen in another place were agreed—on the fundamental principle of the anticipation by students of some of their future earnings as graduates.

Northern Ireland has been the subject of some misconception during the debate in the remarks of the hon. Members for Blackburn and for Southwark and Bermondsey, the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) and the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes). Amendment No. 6 does not introduce the loans scheme into Northern Ireland as has been implied; it is purely and simply a consequential amendment which flows from the other amendments, but that is not what appeared to be understood by the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East.

Amendment No. 6 is consequential on the other amendments which introduce various conditions in relation to institutions. We are requiring Northern Ireland institutions to certify institutions originating from Great Britain. As the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey said, that is a logical implication of the votes in both Houses to include students at Northern Ireland institutions within the scope of the Bill.

Mr. Harry Barnes: If I have not understood what was being said, perhaps the Minister can explain a bit more clearly. I was arguing that if people from Northern Ireland study in England, Scotland or Wales, some institutional arrangements are needed in the same way as for other students. Is that the case?

Mr. Jackson: Having served with the hon. Gentleman on the Standing Committee, I am afraid that he tempts me to say that I am not sure that he would benefit from an explanation.

I noted the rather discouraging remarks from the hon. Member for Blackburn about the idea of incentive regimes. The hon. Gentleman should start to learn about such ideas. I understood that it was Labour party policy now to be converted to the idea of market economics. When he investigates that idea, he will find that the concept of income incentive regimes is a natural one.

Mr. Andrew Smith: While we are learning about incentive regimes, if the Minister thinks that it is worthwhile to pay £3·50 to institutions for every correctly completed certification form, how much will he pay institutions for each completed application for access funds and for the processing of those access funds, which will cost a great deal more than certifying students for eligibility loans?

Mr. Jackson: There were many occasions on which the Standing Committee went into seminar mode, but the House would not thank me for doing that now, because we want to press on with the amendments.

Mr. Straw: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jackson: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman.

I noticed that neither the hon. Member for Blackburn nor the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey, with whom it is always such a pleasure to debate, gave any ground for dissenting from our assessment of £3·50 per student account as an appropriate sum. The hon. Member for Blackburn also confirmed that the Government are consulting the institutions. In the circumstances, I construe that as an admission that the amendment is unnecessary and I recommend accordingly that the House rejects it.

Mr. Straw: I should like briefly to refer to our amendment to Lords amendment No. 11. If hon. Members were in any doubt about the need to write into the Bill a requirement for the Government first to consult and then to pay full compensation for operating the ramshackle scheme, those doubts would be allayed entirely by the complete failure of the Minister to answer a simple and direct question from my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith). I am not allowed to refer to the officials in the Box, but if the Under-Secretary looks to his left he will notice that someone is scribbling an answer to be passed to him. If he wishes to intervene, I shall allow him to read the answer.

Mr. Jackson: I did not answer the question because I am interested in making progress. The question related to a matter that is not the subject of any amendment before us.

Mr. Straw: The Under-Secretary is wrong. The matter relates to Lords amendment No. 11 and to amendment (a) to that amendment. The regulations will require the institutions to administer a scheme to which they object. Amendment (a) provides that there should be full consultation and compensation before the regulations come into force. The Under-Secretary showed that he has not even thought about the need for compensation in respect of one important aspect of the operation of the Government's new policies on student maintenance—the access funds. How will the universities and colleges be compensated for operating those funds?

Mr. Jackson: Of course the Government have thought about the point. Lords amendment No. 11 does not refer to consultation or to compensation for work connected with the access funds.

Mr. Straw: Amendment (a) to Lords amendment No. 11 refers to consultation on and compensation for operating the student loan scheme. Throughout all the debates, the Government have endlessly sought to provide a fig leaf for their indignity and embarrassment about the scheme by referring to the loans scheme. The Under-Secretary cannot have it both ways—parading the access funds when it suits him, but when it does not, pretending that they are not part of the scheme. The only justification that he has been able to give for the removal of housing benefit, which we do not accept, is the existence of some measly access funds, which will barely compensate for the loss of housing benefit at even one university.

I hope that the House will reject Lords amendment No. 6.

Question put, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment:

The House divided: Ayes 263, Noes 191.

Division No. 161] **[9.12 pm**

AYES

Adley, Robert
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*

Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
McCrindle, Robert
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Price, Sir David
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Irvine Patnick and
Mr. Tom Sackville.

NOES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Allen, Graham
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfedder, James
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McGrady, Eddie
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Marek, Dr John
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
O'Brien, William
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin

Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Rhodes James, Robert
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Walker, A. Cecil *(Belfast N)*
Walley, Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Wigley, Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Frank Cook and
Mr. Allen McKay.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Schedule 2

LOANS FOR STUDENTS

Lords amendment: No. 7, in page 3, line 40, at end insert—

"(1A) The maximum amount prescribed under sub-paragraph (1)(a) above for the loan to be made to a student in any year shall not exceed—

(a) the amount specified as the ordinary maintenance requirement for students of the class of description to which he belongs by regulations having effect for that year under section 1(1) of the Education Act 1962 (mandatory awards); or

(b) if no such amount is specified for students of the class or description to which he belongs, such amount as the Secretary of State considers appropriate for students of that class or description having regard to the amount specified as mentioned in paragraph (a) above;

but regulations, other than the first, made under sub-paragraph (1)(a) above may prescribe a higher maximum if a draft of the regulations has been laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament."

Read a Second time.

Mr. Andrew Smith: I beg to move, as an amendment to the Lords amendment, amendment (a), leave out lines 13 to 16.

With four debates to get through in one hour and 13 minutes, under the draconian guillotine procedure, I shall be brief.

Lords amendment No. 7 concedes that which the Government would not concede in Committee or in the House previously, that incorporated in the legislation should be the requirement that the loan amount should not exceed the operative amount of grant, thereby setting the 50:50 parity between loan and grant.

So far, so good. The bad aspect of the Lords amendment is contained in the lines which our amendment proposes to delete, which state that a higher maximum may be prescribed if a draft of the regulations is

"laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament."

That contradicts the concession given in the Lords by saying, albeit through affirmative resolution procedure, that the proportion of the loan could be increased. That is important, because we have always protested that the Government intend not merely to have a top-up loan scheme, but a loan scheme which supplements, and then supplants, grants.

The hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) gave the game away in the debate on the guillotine motion——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: She is very unrepresentative.

9.30 pm

Mr. Smith: She is about as unrepresentative as the right-wing lunatics who have been advising the Government all the way through this steady march towards education depending on ability to pay rather than ability to benefit.

It is because we believe that the ability to benefit should be the criterion for access to higher education that we wanted the Government to accept the full spirit and wording of the amendments initiated by our noble Friends in the Lords, and it is why we wish that they had not added in this opportunity for a higher proportion of loan to be brought in by secondary legislation under the affirmative procedure.

If this top-up loan scheme is truly a scheme, as the Government have said, based on parity between loans and grant, they should be prepared to accept that definition in the primary legislation and recognise that further primary legislation would be necessary to change it. By conceding only what they have conceded, the Government have given away their real intention to go further down this slippery slope and make access to higher education depend on ability to pay. That is wholly unacceptable to us and to most of the public.

Mr. Simon Hughes: The only comment I want to make about the sedentary disclaimer about the views of the hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) and their representatives of the Tory party is that Conservative politicians who represent Essex constituencies always seem to be the most hard-line brand of Toryism personified. If anyone wants to hear liberal views about education I suggest he stays away from the boundaries of Essex. I do not know what the poor people of Essex have done to deserve such a collection of right wingers as they enjoy now and have enjoyed in the past——

Mr. Pawsey: And they have huge majorities.

Mr. Hughes: Sadly, as the hon. Gentleman says, some of them do. As the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) reminded us, they include among their number another candidate for the Tory party succession—the right hon. member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit).

I support the Opposition amendment. The Lords amendment was passed because the Government would not concede the principle that, when the regulation was drafted, it would not allow loans to go up beyond 50 per cent. There is so much opposition to the principle that loans should exist at all, let alone that they should go up to 50 per cent. of total funding for students, that it would have been enough to hold the line at that. The consensus in another place was that, if it was Government policy to change the system of fully funded student grants so that only half of students' funding came from grants, that should at least be written into the Bill. It would have been preferable if the last lines of the Lords amendment had been amended to take account of that.

One of the great concerns that has not been allayed throughout all our deliberations is the fear that, if students are required to decide to go on to higher education but to borrow to fund it, that in itself will prove a disincentive; and the greater the borrowing, the more of a disincentive it will prove.

If the Government argue that applications this year are up, as they are, those who do not believe that loans will be a disincentive should remember that that increase is on the basis of a grant system and that, even if there is only a small, although noticeable, effect on the scheme at the beginning, it could become more damaging the higher the percentage of money loaned in relation to the grant.

No member of the Committee, including Ministers, could discover one country that has gone from a grant system to a grant and loan system. Therefore, there is no precedent for the argument that a loan system, even in part, would not be a disincentive. If our argument that it will be a disincentive proves wrong, we shall admit it, but Ministers should not take the risk. That is why the proposal is flawed.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): As my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) said, it is strange that the Government should accept the need to write into the Bill that, in the fulness of time, the 50:50 parity proposal will come into being, yet in the same amendment provide to allow that to be changed without going through the process of primary legislation.

We are talking about a significant number of students who would be affected if the legislation were in place today. I elicited from the Department of Education and Science the fact that almost 40 per cent. of all students currently studying received the full mandatory award. Some 151,000 students in universities, polytechnics and other higher education institutions will be dramatically affected by the proposal.

Mr. Jackson: They will have more money.

Mr. Griffiths: Some will have more money, but they will have to pay the money back. Moreover, the Minister and his colleagues have consistently refused to tell us how many students currently receive housing benefit of more than £420 a year, as the loan is planned to be in the first year, and the £310 it is planned to be in the last year. They have refused to give that information, because the likelihood is that thousands upon thousands of students will be worse off.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The hon. Gentleman says that students will have to pay back the loans, but he omitted to mention that they will not have to pay back anything until they are earning £11,500, which, compared with the income of some of those who will be contributing to their education, is a substantial income.

Mr. Griffiths: The hon. Lady is leading me down a path which is not covered by the amendment. However, anyone who chooses to study for a degree, given that they have reasonable qualifications at GCSE and A-level, will have already sacrificed earnings in excess of £50,000 at current rates by the time that they receive their degree. That is the sum that they could have earned by taking a job at 16 or 18. In British Steel, British Gas, Marks and Spencer plc, W. H. Smith and Son, Ltd. or local government, between 16 and 22 an employee would have earned over £50,000. Therefore, people studying at university will experience a loss in real income because they will lose the full grant.

With the passing of time, the grant will have only 50 per cent. of its value, and the rest will be made up by a loan which they will be expected to pay back. That is an additional burden which students have not had. Given the fact that the Government will place an additional burden on students when they go into employment after university——

Mr. Pawsey: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. His courtesy is always appreciated; I mean that sincerely. Does he not accept that the global value of social security payments in one form or another is about £68 million, whereas the total value of the loan is about £200 million? Therefore, students will receive a substantial additional amount in resources. While I acknowledge the fact that some students will be worse off, we have the access funds. As we have heard from my right hon. Friend, £20 million will be available to help students who are in difficulty because of the loss of housing benefit. Students will be much better off in real terms because of the amount of resources being made available to them, so the hon. Gentleman's argument is threadbare.

Mr. Griffiths: The trouble with the hon. Gentleman's point is that, at the moment, it is all hypothetical. We do not know exactly how students will be affected. We do not know how many students who currently receive the full mandatory award will be deemed to be eligible for money from access funds, nor do we know how much they will get, or what the difference will be between the mandatory award which a student currently receives, plus payments like housing benefit, and what he will get in future. The Government cannnot even tell me how many students will be worse off——

Mr. Pawsey: The hon. Gentleman is not denying the figures.

Mr. Griffiths: I am not denying any figures. All I am saying is that it amazes me that a Conservative Member can talk with such confidence about the number who will be better off because of the increase in access funds, given that over 150,000 students receive the full mandatory award, when the Government cannot tell us how many students will be adversely affected by the introduction of the loan scheme and the loss of housing and other benefits.

The lack of information gives us no confidence in what the Government are trying to do. It is an experiment for a large part of the population on whom we will depend for our well-being and our success in world markets. I am surprised in one way that the Government insist on including in the amendment the ability to vary the figure later without primary legislation. In one sense it astonishes me; on the other hand, when I remember that, previously in his ministerial career, the Secretary of State was in the Treasury, it does not surprise me.

In the White Paper, there was a wonderful catalogue of tables based upon an inflation rate of 3 per cent. into the next century. We remember too that all the calculations were done on the basis of a student population which did not alter. Given all that, we wonder why this provision is in the Bill. It can only be to make it easy to vary the amount later.

It is as though, last June or July, at a private meeting between Treasury and Education Department officials, the Treasury said, "The scheme is costing much more than the Department ever thought, and the Treasury cannot really afford it. You will have to cut, and the only way of doing that is by increasing the size of the loan, and thereby get more money back from the students as soon as their course is finished."

Mr. Beggs: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the country as a whole has a serious problem with growing debt, and that we should as a matter of principle oppose encouraging young people to incur debt for any reason?

9.45 pm

Mr. Griffiths: I entirely agree. Given that the Prime Minister herself has said so much about how bad it is for people to get into debt, it is surprising that she now encourages them to do so.

That part of amendment No. 7 that allows the Government to vary the limit without recourse to primary legislation must have the purpose of allowing the Government to reduce the grant, increase the loan and cut costs—which are already running headlong out of control.

I hope that the Government will have the good grace —I know it is late, and that everyone wants to go home —to withdraw the amendment. The Under-Secretary has a gentle smile on his face, and I hope that it is one of agreement.

Mr. Jackson: I hope that I may be allowed to chide the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths). He made an excellent contribution in Committee, becoming very involved in all the debates, but he seems to have forgotten about annex D to the White Paper. If he studies that annex, he will find that his arguments about income forgone are completely refuted. At one stage, it seemed as though the hon. Gentleman had learnt that White Paper off by heart. That was a noble exercise on his part. If he will return to it, he will see that his point is met.

Mr. Andrew Smith: Is that the same annex that suggests that there will be no increase in student numbers past the year 2000?

Mr. Jackson: The hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) is mixing up his annexes. Annex D presents economic analysis of the difference between personal and social rates of return from higher education.

The Government amendment places on the face of the Bill the provision that a student's maximum loan facility should not exceed his or her maximum grant. It is similar to a probing amendment tabled in Committee by the hon. Members for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), Oxford, East and Manchester, Blakeley (Mr. Eastham), so I inferred that it would be generally acceptable. In any event, the Government have always made it clear that, when the loans scheme reaches maturity, the value of the loans and the grant will be broadly equal.

We recognise the concern expressed in another place that statutory provision is required to lend weight to the Government's intentions. We have produced an amendment that meets that concern and retains sufficient flexibility to allow future Governments to respond to changing circumstances without fresh primary legislation. If one assumes an inflation rate of 3 per cent. between now and then, that point will not be reached until 2007. If inflation reaches 6 per cent., that point will be reached a couple of years earlier. We shall not reach the 50:50 stage until a long time ahead—several Governments away from the present Government. In fact, we may get to it at about the time of the first Smith Administration—by which I mean, of course, the Andrew Smith Administration.

The amendment allows the loan and grant balance to be altered beyond the 50:50 ratio, but only subject to explicit parliamentary approval. The loan regulations, which would otherwise require the negative resolution procedure beyond the scheme's first year, would be subject to the affirmative resolution procedure if they were to involve a loan facility exceeding the value of the grant. That, we believe, would allow that first Andrew Smith Administration the flexibility to build on the success of our student loans scheme if it was felt appropriate to do so, but to do so in line with proper parliamentary scrutiny.

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): Does the Minister accept that, if the scenario that he is suggesting comes to pass and the loan accounts for more than 50 per cent. of maintenance, the Government will effectively have misled the House and the general public by calling the scheme top-up loans for students? They will not be top-up loans, because they will be more than 50 per cent. He cannot have his cake and eat it.

Mr. Jackson: I refuse to join the hon. Gentleman in speculating about this long-distant horizon. I believe that the scheme will be a great success and that it will be possible for that Smith Administration, in perhaps the middle of the first decade of the next century, to consider how to take the matter further forward.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Are the Government ever surprised when people accuse them of wanting to do things that they pretend they do not want to do—in other words, of having a hidden agenda? It is not surprising that people do not believe the Government when they say that loans will be only 50 per cent., and then write into the legislation a provision saying that they can be more than 50 per cent. Why do Governments bite off more than they can chew and always ask not just for the cake but for something in addition?

Mr. Jackson: I am not surprised. After all, Opposition Members are ingenious in finding hidden agendas, even if they have to invent them. The electorate are more sensible and see through such contentions. They saw through them at the last three general elections, and they will do so again.

The Labour amendment to the amendment would remove the element of flexibility which we wish to leave in place for the benefit of the Smith Administration by requiring primary legislation before the loan facility could exceed the grant value. We think that that would be a waste of parliamentary time. We are thinking about the situation down the track. The affirmative resolution procedure is, we believe, sufficient and ensures that the regulations that would be found unsatisfactory by either House could be voted down.

Question put and negatived.

Lords amendment No. 7 agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Because, for reasons given at the start of the debate, Lords amendment No. 8 imposes a charge on the public revenue not authorised by a resolution of the House, under paragraph 3 of Standing Order No. 76, the Lords amendment is deemed to be disagreed with.

Lords amendment: No. 9 in page 4, line 10, at end insert—

"(4) Regulations made under this paragraph shall allow special conditions to be set in respect of repayment of loans for disabled students or graduates."

Read a Second time.

Amendment proposed to the Lords amendment, amendment (b) at end insert

'taking into account the loss of social security benefits to deaf students whilst eligible for loans'.—*[Mr. Andrew Smith.]*

Mr. Speaker: It will be convenient at the same time to discuss amendment (c) to the Lords amendment, at end insert

', and shall be subject to approval of both Houses of Parliament'.

Government amendment in lieu of the Lords amendment, in page 3, line 40, at end insert—

'(1B) Regulations under sub-paragraph (1)(b) above shall make such separate provision as the Secretary of State considers appropriate with respect to the repayment of loans by borrowers who are disabled.'.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): The Opposition amendments are designed to strengthen the Lords amendment, not least in respect of some of the most needful of students who are deaf. I congratulate the other place on its achievement in carrying out the intentions of the amendment to which I spoke for the Opposition on Report in the House of Commons.

In this House, the Minister expressed sympathy and gave a half-promise of eventual support. The Lords were no more content with ministerial statements than my hon. Friends and I were here, but they were able to vouchsafe the interests of disabled students in the Division Lobby.

I know that Baroness Darcy de Knayth and Lord Henderson of Brompton were especially instrumental in winning the day and I thank them, as well as my noble Friends in the other place, for both the humanity of their concern and the success of their advocacy.

One financial consequence of disability is the reduced earning power of many disabled graduates, compared with their non-disabled colleagues. In some cases, disabled graduates will remain unemployed and will be unable to repay a loan. Others will earn less and may be burdened by a loan for longer than their non-disabled colleagues. Sadly, all too many disabled graduates fail to find work or succeed in finding only low-paid employment.

The report on disability in Great Britain from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys shows that only 31 per cent. of all disabled adults of working age are actually working. That compares with 69 per cent. of the population as a whole. The ratio for men is even worse —33 per cent. compared with 78 per cent. Those findings shout the need for the action taken by the other place.

The Government's own record, in terms of jobs offered to people with disabilities, is among the worst of all employers. How many registered disabled people does the Department of Education and Science employ? Again, is the Secretary of State aware that the earnings of disabled people who find work, in whatever employment, are substantially lower than those of non-disabled employees? Even many disabled people in better financial circumstances have to spend all their disposable income on the extra costs arising from their disability.

The Government tend to dismiss the claims of organisations of and for disabled people about the extra costs of disabled living. Yet there are right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House who know, from close contacts with their disabled constituents, that the Government's own estimates of the extra costs of disabled living do not match the real costs of disabled people. The fact is that they find it extremely difficult to make ends meet. It may well be that a disabled person will never be able to repay a loan because of the generally lower earnings of disabled graduates. If their earnings are never likely to exceed the 85 per cent. threshold, it is not fair to expect them to have an increasing debt, in cash terms, held against them until it is cancelled when they reach the age of 50 or 60.

There is another important matter that I must raise in the debate. It concerns the Government's intentions in regard to young people who have become disabled after they graduate. How does the Minister intend to approach their problems? Are they to be pursued for the repayment of loans? I have been approached by a number of organisations whose members are deeply concerned about the Government's intentions in regard to people who become disabled after they leave places of higher education. I hope that the Secretary of State, in his reply, will state clearly the Government's intentions as they affect such people. They will suffer the same difficulties, in terms of employment, as other disabled people. They will have the same financial problems. What assurance can the Minister give about the problems that they face?

Time is strictly limited, due to the guillotine. I ask the Secretary of State to appreciate that there is still some uncertainty about his intentions about disabled students. They are looking tonight for a reassuring ministerial statement. I press the Secretary of State to respond positively to their concerns.

10 pm

Mr. Alistair Burt (Bury, North): When the Bill was in Committee, both I and other hon. Members moved a series of amendments relating to disabled students. I listened with great care to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris). I disagree with his suggestion that the Government did not listen to the views of those who represent disabled people. The Minister with responsibility for higher education was at pains to speak to those who put forward the case on behalf of disabled students, in particular deaf students, and suggested that further consideration would be given, either in the other place or at another stage, to the points that they had made.

I have made a note of several things that have been done since the Committee, which have given effect to those promises. First, the disabled are now specifically recognised in the Bill. That is provided for in Government amendment (a) to Lords amendment No. 9. Secondly, we asked that the access funds should be increased. We recognised that disabled students might want to have access to those funds for their own purposes. A recent announcement has boosted the access funds. That will help disabled students. Thirdly, on 19 March 1990 my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made a number of announcements about increases for disabled students. The basic disabled students allowance is to be increased by 30 per cent. in 1990-91.

In addition, another £3,000 will be made available for specialist equipment and £4,000 will be made available for non-medical helpers. That is a direct result of the pressure applied by the Royal National Institute for the Deaf, to which I pay tribute for the care and concern with which it presented its case on behalf of disabled students. The Government also responded to the representations that were made by hon. Members on both sides in Committee, on this difficult and sensitive subject.

We were deeply impressed by the case put to us by deaf students about the difficulties that they face when they enter higher education. They have to overcome considerable hurdles. Those difficulties are not faced by other students. Deaf students also experience difficulties while going through higher education because of the equipment and non-medical assistance that they need, such as interpreters. I believe that the Government have listened to their case. I very much welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement.

Mr. Alfred Morris: I did not say that the Government refused to listen to the organisations representing disabled people. However, they have refused to respond to their concerns. The Lords amendments were carried in spite of, not because of, Ministers' attitudes. I hope that tonight there will be a statement which will reassure those organisations. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman joins me in making that request to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Burt: I go part of the way with the right hon. Gentleman, but I still hold that the Government's response was a little more genuine than he is prepared to concede. The Government's response in the other place showed that more clearly than the right hon. Gentleman has suggested.

Mr. John Hannam (Exeter): My hon. Friend may recall that, on Report, I tabled amendments to help disabled students throughout their period of study and during the repayment period. The Minister with responsibility for higher education accepted the purpose of the amendments and gave an assurance that he would take the necessary steps when the Bill was considered in the other place.

Mr. Burt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will comment on that when he speaks.

I understand that draft regulations relating to disabled students' social security entitlement are presently being considered by the Social Security Advisory Committee. That gives us a further opportunity to press our case on behalf of disabled students. I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House will want to do so.

I should like to thank my right hon. Friend for the attention that he has given to this particularly sensitive matter. Perhaps he has not given us everything that we should have liked, but the Government have moved a long way from the Bill's starting point, when rather too little consideration seemed to be given to the needs of deaf and disabled students. These concerns were raised in Committee, however, and my senior colleagues have listened, and I believe that the Bill will provide the reassurance that the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe genuinely requests. I hope that he will be reassured when my right hon. Friend comes to answer.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Like others who have spoken on this group of amendments, I intend to be brief because, like the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) and the hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam), I have spoken previously on the needs of disabled students, not in Committee because I was not a member of the Committee, but as far back as 20 October when we discussed the White Paper, and on Report in the House.

In welcoming the announcements made by the Government, we must all pay tribute to the strength of feeling on both sides of the House and to the work of the organisations based outwith the House, which so effectively represent the needs of disabled people everywhere.

If certain hon. Members tend to sound grudging, it is perhaps because many of us would have expected the Government automatically to give consideration to those students in the initial drafting of the Bill. It is sad that we have had to get over so many hurdles to ensure that those genuine needs are recognised.

I have some brief questions to put to the Secretary of State, which I hope that he will be able to answer, particularly in view of the fact that we have not yet had detailed statements of the exact workings of the figures that have been announced. Can he tell us exactly how the funds will be administered? There is an important issue at stake. In Scotland, for example, will the regional education authorities, along with the Scottish Education Department, be involved in deciding how the funds are administered and how disabled students will have access to the extra money? It is not clear whether there will be a cash limit on the amount made available to disabled students. How will the priorities be decided? Who will take those decisions? That is vital to our students, because disability comes in many forms and requires different attitudes and treatment.

I should like again to refer to housing benefit as it affects some of our disabled students. As you know, Mr. Speaker, we have been unable to discuss amendments Nos. 8 and 10, which relate specifically to this issue, because of privilege. However, it has been pointed out, both in the other place and in letters that many of us have received from the Royal National Institute for the Deaf, that, while housing benefit has been defined as continuing to be available to some disabled students, it will certainly not be available to all. A large number of disabled people who are

[Mrs. Margaret Ewing]

not eligible for disability premium or severe disability premium will therefore not be eligible for housing benefit; yet housing benefit could be of key importance to disabled students in helping them to enter higher education or to continue their studies. Can the Minister clarify whether all students suffering from deafness, blindness, dyslexia, arthritis or any recognised disability will have the right to apply for housing benefit during the course of studies? Such a guarantee would receive a broad welcome from all the organisations involved in representing the needs of the disabled.

While welcoming the announcements, I hope that the Secretary of State will give us further details, and perhaps tell us when the social security offices will be able to spell out in more detail the exact implications of previous statements. Will there be an opportunity for right hon. and hon. Members to discuss them with the Secretary of State? I certainly hope that he will make a public statement and allow us to debate the matter.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Does the hon. Lady agree that income support and housing benefit are in no way intended to meet the needs of disability, but are intended to meet the basic needs of living? Those benefits do not in any way meet the needs of deaf or otherwise disabled students, so additional benefits are required.

Mrs. Ewing: The hon. Gentleman makes a clear point, and given his recognised knowledge of disability, I am sure that the Secretary of State will take it into account.

I urge the Secretary of State to ensure that the House is given full details so that we can consider the matter with clear minds and a determined attitude, to ensure that no disabled students are disadvantaged.

Mr. Win Griffiths: I, too, shall be brief.

I join other right hon. and hon. Members in welcoming the Government's moves to help disabled students, but let us not give the impression that it was an easy process. There was considerable debate in Committee and much lobbying behind the scenes, and, perhaps because of the way in which it is worded, the Government amendment, perhaps unintentionally, provides that the special conditions will apply only to borrowers who are disabled and not to those who were able-bodied when they borrowed the money but became disabled later, a point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith).

I should like to mention a case to illustrate the essential need to consider disabled students and to take a decision, and to seek an assurance from the Secretary of State that, when assessing the income of disabled graduates, the Government will take fully into account that part of their income which is needed to cover the cost of disablement. The case also illustrates the inadequacy of the disabled students allowance. It involves a social work student in her second year at a midlands university. She is seriously contemplating giving up her studies and her ambition to become a social worker working with disabled people. She is 25 years old, she has cerebral palsy, is physically unable to write and has severe mobility problems.

At the beginning of her course she had to spend £2,500 on an adapted computer with twin disk drive and original commands plus an adapter printer. In addition, she has had to find £90 a month to pay two part-time carers to drive her to the campus as that is the only feasible means of transport available. Out of a maximum of £765 disabled students allowance, which is now going up to £1,000, she has had to pay £350 a year out of her maintenance grant towards those extra costs. She will have those extra costs after she graduates and, hopefully, finds the employment to which she aspires.

Will the Secretary of State assure us that disabled students' extra needs are taken fully into account when assessing their disposable income and the level at which they trigger off their repayments?

Mr. Simon Hughes: I join the tribute paid to the concessions made by the Government and to the work of those who represent the disabled. They have made strong representations to all concerned and have persuasively made their case.

It is sad that the amazing disadvantages in education faced by many disabled people have not been recognised. Anyone who has looked into the additional costs and disadvantages experienced by disabled people knows that considerable financial prejudice is suffered by anyone who is deaf, blind or physically or mentally disabled.

10.15 pm

I hope that the Secretary of State will answer hon. Members' questions, but I have a further question. Two issues arise from Government amendment (a) and Lords amendment No. 9 which I hope the Secretary of State will address. First, what are the implications of Government amendment (a) for people who become disabled later in life? Secondly, what does he intend by the phrase

"Shall make such separate provision"

as he considers appropriate?
Separate provision may mean that mobility or attendance allowance is excluded from a disabled person's income for the purpose of calculating the method or time of repayment. If that is so, separate provision should be automatic, because attendance and mobility allowance should not be included. They compensate for other needs and should be discounted, as they are for tax purposes.

I hope that that is not the meaning of Government amendment (a), because if it is it means that no concession is being made. I hope that it means that substantial other improvements will be made in the financial terms for disabled people. Unless the Secretary of State sets out the details, we shall be sceptical. I hope that he will give detailed answers and thereby allay the continuing concerns of those for whom this is probably the most important debate on the Bill

Mr. MacGregor: I shall be brief, because I know that the House wishes to move to the other debates, but in so doing I shall endeavour to answer all the questions that have been asked.

The Government accept the principle of Lords amendment No. 9, which was made on Third Reading in the other place. Government amendment (a) is essentially a tidying amendment.

Lords amendment No. 9 is intended to enshrine in primary legislaton the requirement that regulations shall set out conditions for disabled people repaying loans, which are separate from the conditions set out for the generality of borrowers. There are, however, difficulties with the drafting of Lords amendment No. 9, which Government amendment (a) tidies. First, it clearly imposes a duty on the Secretary of State. That was no doubt intended by the other place, but the wording did not quite achieve that. The amendment needs tidying in other respects to remove the unnecessary reference to students who will not be repaying loans and to make it clear that the regulations should contain this separate provision. Those points are covered accurately by the Bill and do not affect the substance of what we are trying to do.

I am grateful to my hon. Friends the Members for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) and for Bury, North (Mr. Burt) for pointing out that the Government have already responded. In a parliamentary answer on 19 March, I responded to several points that had been made about disabled people. The right way to proceed was to listen carefully to debates and then to respond. That partly answers the point made by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris). He referred to disabled people not working in subsequent years or receiving low incomes, but they will not have to make repayments during those years. Those on low incomes will be fully covered by the arrangements that apply to everyone else.

On 19 March I announced particular provision for disabled people: that there will be separate repayment arrangements for borrowers, which will take the form of a disregard of disability-related benefits for the purpose of assessing a disabled graduate's income for deferment.

Mr. Wigley: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacGregor: I shall answer the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe first. He and other hon. Members asked about people who become disabled after graduation. The plan to disregard the disability-related benefit income of disabled repayers will apply at the time of the repaying if at that time the individual is disabled. Therefore, it will apply to those who become disabled subsequently.

Mr. Alfred Morris: How will a young man or woman cope if, after graduation, he or she gradually becomes deaf or blind or suffers from a progressive disease? Will they be expected to repay their loans, although for the reasons I gave in my speech their financial problems increase as their working life proceeds?

Mr. MacGregor: Such people will be expected to repay the loans if they have incomes which, after netting off the disability-related benefits, would take them into the income brackets where loans are repaid. They will have the advantage of netting off the disability-related benefits, which will make the appropriate difference.

Mr. Wigley: Will the Secretary of State tell the House whether he has had any discussions with the Department of Social Security about the definition of disablement and say whether it includes those who are deaf?

Mr. MacGregor: I know that this subject is being discussed in the Department of Social Security and that draft regulations relating to student social security entitlement are being considered by the Social Security Advisory Committee, which is consulting widely. If hon. Members wish to make representations or points about these matters, they should make them to my right hon. Friend.

The amendment does not affect the provision, because it will be included in regulations which will be subject initially to the affirmative resolution procedure. We are putting in the Bill a requirement to consider the needs of the disabled. Given the safeguard of inscription in the Bill, there is no need for the lesser safeguard contained in Opposition amendment (c), whereby such regulations would continue to be subject to the affirmative resolution procedure. The provision in the Opposition's amendment (b) for deaf students would be misplaced in regulations applying to the timing and manner of repayment. Entitlement to benefit will have no bearing on the arrangements for top-up loans.

The key points are these. Deaf students will have particularly extensive resources available to them, especially in view of our decision to enhance significantly the disabled students allowance, payable with the mandatory grant. That is my immediate rebuttal to the point made by the right hon. Member for Wythenshawe. That allowance will go to deaf students. It has been increased by 30 per cent., as I announced on 19 March, and I hope that the House feels that that is a generous response to the previous requests and shows that we have taken note of points made during debate. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North said, not only is that an increase up to £1,000 for everyone, but in addition we have introduced allowances up to £3,000 for specialist equipment during a course and up to £4,000 for non-medical helpers. I hope that the House feels that these are important additions.

I assure the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) that the administration of the disabled students allowance, including the additional allowances, will be as now. They will be administered by the local education authority in England and by the Scottish Education Department in Scotland. There will be no cash limit. The disabled retention of benefits will be based on the disability premium criteria, subject to parliamentary scrutiny of the DSS regulations. Those regulations will come before Parliament in due course, which will enable further discussion to take place.

Taken together, these are significant advances to help the disabled, including deaf students. They will enable deaf students to avoid building up additional debts as a result of disability, and I hope that the House will welcome them. I ask the House to accept the Government amendment in preference to that from another place and to reject the two Opposition amendments.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Amendment (a) in lieu of Lords amendment agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: I rule, as I ruled previously in respect of Lords amendment No. 8, that Lords amendment No. 10 imposes a charge upon the public revenue not authorised by resolution of the House; therefore, under paragraph 3 of Standing Order No. 76, it is deemed to be disagreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 11 to 15 agreed to.

Lords amendment: No. 16, in page 4, line 51, at end insert—

"(8) No document sent in connection with loans under the arrangements by any such person or body as is mentioned in sub-paragraph (1) above shall be regarded as sent with a view to financial gain within the meaning of section 50 of the Consumer Credit Act 1974 (circulars to minors)."

Mr. Jackson: I beg to move, That this House doth agree with the Lords in the said amendment.

This is a technical amendment for the avoidance of doubt. It allows the Student Loans Company to make information about the scheme widely available, including schools where pupils are thinking about undertaking

[Mr. Jackson]

higher education and higher education institutions where, of course, some students are minors. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) made this matter of conveying information to everyone a top priority in his speeches in Committee. The amendment also enables the company to send loan agreement forms to students who are under 18 and who have applied for a loan.

The Government always intended that students under 18 should be eligible for loans. We also intended that the scheme should satisfy the requirements of the Consumer Credit Act 1974. Section 50 of that Act prohibits the sending of documents to minors with a view to financial gain, inviting them to borrow money or to apply for information or to get advice on borrowing money. That section is untested. The words are lucid, but the application is unclear. The crucial words in the amendment are

"with a view to financial gain".

The common-sense view, which I know hon. Members and the other place will take, is that the Student Loans Company Ltd. could not be construed as operating with a view to financial gain from loans. However, we have been advised that the courts might conclude that section 50 technically prevented the company from disseminating information about the scheme and from sending loan agreement documents to applicants. Of course it would have been quite wrong to allow the scheme to proceed in conditions of such uncertainty, and it is right to put it beyond doubt that, in sending information or invitations——

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Minister is talking about sending out information. Has the law been broken by sending schools student loan information leaflets, thereby disseminating the information to people who are under 18?

Mr. Jackson: I do not think that that could possibly be the case. We are talking about information on legislation that has not yet been enacted. The information was quite properly sent out under the rules that govern the provision of information following Second Reading. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey was rightly eloquent about that matter. I can remember Opposition Members arguing in Committee that such information should be provided, and we have provided it.

It would clearly be wrong to allow the scheme to proceed with such uncertainty and it is right to put it beyond doubt that, in sending information or invitations, the company is not acting with a view to financial gain. That is why I commend Lords amendment No. 16 to the House.

Mr. Andrew Smith: The amendment is part of the shambles that results from the fact that the Government have not given proper thought to the Bill. We have come to a new matter for discussion, and the Minister introduced an amendment on that important matter 13 minutes before the guillotine motion expires. That is an indictment of the Government and shows the incompetent way in which they have handled the Bill from beginning to end.

While the Government amendment from the other place attempts to get round the problems posed by the operation of the Consumer Credit Act, it does not really resolve the issue. It raises as many questions as it answers and, in the limited time available I shall list some of them.

Are the information leaflets being sent out by the Government, and distributed through the schools, breaking the existing law? I have just put that question to the Under-Secretary, who did not answer it. The Government need to reconsider that matter. If someone signs up for the loan before they are 18, are they obliged to pay it back afterwards? I do not know, and the Government need to tell us.

What of the position in Scotland, where many students commence their higher education before the age of 18? In the Bill, the Government have shown a despicable lack of regard for the Scottish interest in higher education—a disregard which they have shown from the outset, and show on all matters relating to Scotland. Is parental consent required for those under 18 to engage in the loans, and what is the position of students for whom it might not be forthcoming? Are guarantors required for those students taking out loans when under 18, and what provision is the administration of the scheme making for that?

10.30 pm

These are not minor administrative details, but important questions. It says a great deal about the incompetence and shambles which have characterised the Bill that they were discovered only at the last minute in the Lords and we are having to discuss them just nine minutes before the guillotine descends. In the Lords, Lord Peston said that such matters were all part of the danger of starting on the slippery slope of encouraging, virtually obliging, young people to go into debt to see themselves through higher education. It is shameful, and what is wrong here—and wrong with the Bill as a whole—is that it turns education into a matter of ability to pay and borrow. It gets young people into debt, when education should be available to them as of right.

Will the Minister give a straight answer to the questions that I have put this evening? As it stands, the amendment is one more sign of the shambolic nature of a Bill that has been characterised by incompetence throughout.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): As usual, my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) makes the telling points. He raised the question of Scotland, in which my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Central (Mr. Watson) and I have an interest. In Scotland, a higher proportion of students go to university at 17—a number go to university or college at 16. The amendment appears to encourage them to circumvent, if it needs to be circumvented, the Consumer Credit Act 1974, to ensure that credit can be offered to people under the age of 18, and the Government can induce such people to take out credit.

The Minister said that he was moving the amendment for the avoidance of doubt. He certainly was not moving it for the avoidance of debt, because debt is what the amendment is all about. It is clear that the country is already awash with credit, yet the Government wish to unload even more on people and, in so doing, unload their responsibility to fund students and their education.

Consumer credit has doubled in the past year, and more than £3 billion-worth is now given. The Minister wants to add to that credit among the crucial category of young people under the age of 18. Two thirds of the 21 million households in this country have a total of more than 40 million transaction commitments to credit companies and other credit organisations. In moving the amendment, the Minister seeks to add to their burden.

One million people already have difficulty keeping up with their consumer credit agreements. Two million people already have problems repaying their debts. Four million already have four or more financial credit agreements, and the Minister is asking students under the age of 18, as well as those older than that to take on one more agreement.

When the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said that he saw nothing wrong with giving credit cards to children, we did not know that the Government would move so quickly to amend the law to permit that type of practice. I urge the Minister and the Government to think again on this inappropriate clause.

Mr. Jackson: I was asked two questions by the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith). First, the leaflet certainly does not breach the Consumer Credit Act, because it is in no sense an invitation to borrow. Secondly, he asked about the enforceability of loans to minors——

Mr. Straw *rose*——

Mr. Jackson: I shall not give way.

The leaflet is a description of a system that would enable—if it is approved by our two Houses—the possibility of borrowing. In no way would that be construed as contrary to the Consumer Credit Act.

As for the enforceability of loans to minors, I have been informed that in Scotland, which is always in a special position, these loans probably are enforceable against minors. In England and Wales, they are probably not enforceable unless the minor ratifies them on reaching his majority, as they are not made for the purchase of necessities. When appropriate, minors who have received loans will be asked to ratify them on reaching their majority. If they refuse to do so, no action will be taken against them, but they will not be entitled to receive further loans under the scheme.

This strikes an appropriate balance between the interests of the students and those of the taxpayer. Meanwhile, this is merely a technical amendment, for the avoidance of doubt. It embodies the common-sense view that the Student Loans Company Ltd. will not act with a view to financial gain. Section 50 of the Act is clearly difficult to interpret. The courts have not yet had occasion to examine it, and we believe that it would be wrong to leave minors or the company in a position of uncertainty. It seems sensible to the Government, therefore, and to the noble Lords in another place, to clarify on the face of the Bill what most people would in any case have thought: that the company will not operate with a view to financial gain from loans. I hope the House will join me in supporting the Lords amendment.

Mr. Simon Hughes: As we are driven towards the fall of the guillotine, I merely point out that the debate has revealed how inappropriate it is to start trying to mix the worlds of education and of credit. The Minister's last answer showed that it is impossible to reconcile the two interests. We should never have had to exclude students from the provisions of consumer legislation. As an epilogue to the Bill, the Government are introducing the marketplace to education, where it never belonged.

Mr. Straw: It was apparent from the remarks of the Under-Secretary that the Government intend, and have already carried out the intention, to send circulars to minors inducing them to borrow money. The House also heard how the Under-Secretary could offer no proper answer to the detailed questions that my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) asked him.

In the closing seconds of this guillotined debate, I should like to place it on record that, because of the guillotine forced on the House by the Secretary of State and his hon. Friends, the House has been denied the chance properly to debate major issues of principle [HON. MEMBERS: "Where are the Opposition?"] They are not here because they cannot debate the issues; if they could, they would be.

This procedure represents an abuse of Parliament by the Government.

Question put and agreed to.

It being six hours after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. SPEAKER *proceeded, pursuant to the Order this day, to put the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

Question agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 17, in page 4, line 51, at end insert:

"*Restriction on disclosure of information*

3A.—(1) No person or body having by virtue of paragraph 3 above the function of making and recovering loans shall provide or make available to anyone else (whether for consideration or not) any information held for the purpose of discharging those functions if the information is to be used for soliciting custom for goods or services.

(2) As respects information constituting personal data for the purposes of the Data Protection Act 1984 sub-paragraph (1) above is without prejudice to the requirements of that Act but applies irrespective of any consent given for the purposes of that Act by the person to whom the information relates." —*[Mr. MacGregor.]*

Ordered,

That a Committee be appointed to draw up reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendments Nos. 5, 8 and 10.—*[Mr. MacGregor.]*

Ordered,

That Mr. Sydney Chapman, Mr. Robert Jackson, Mr. Secretary MacGregor, Mr. Andrew Smith and Mr. Jack Straw be members of the Committee.—*[Mr. MacGregor.]*

Ordered,

That three be the Quorum of the Committee.—*[Mr. MacGregor.]*

Ordered,

That the Committee do withdraw immediately.—*[Mr. MacGregor.]*

Mr. Simon Hughes: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. One of the amendments which was passed in the other place, and with which we have disagreed, was moved by my noble Friend Earl Russell. Is it not inappropriate that no colleague of his can take part in the Committee proceedings that you have now put in motion? Is it not an exclusion of an opportunity for hon. Members in this place, of my party—[HON. MEMBERS: "Where are they?"] —and of others, who have been here all evening, to participate in its proceedings? I speak for the nationalists as well as for the Ulster parties. We are allowed to take part in debates in both Houses, but we are not allowed to participate in a procedure that results in us telling the other place that we disagree.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is late in raising his point of order. The motion to which it relates has already been agreed to, and the Committee should withdraw immediately.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. When you moved the remaining amendment at the end of our consideration of the Bill, you did not refer to my amendment *(a)* to Lords amendment No. 17, which related to the privacy rights of students, over which the Bill will ride roughshod. It is an important matter——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot advance that argument. He was caught, sadly, by the guillotine. It was not possible for him to move his amendment to the Lords amendment.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

That the draft National Code of Local Government Conduct, which was laid before this House on 20th March, be approved.—*[Mr. Goodlad.]*

Question agreed to.

Lakeside Health Centre

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Goodlad.]*

10.44 pm

Mr. David Evennett (Erith and Crayford): I am grateful for this opportunity to draw to the attention of the House the difficulties that are facing Lakeside health centre, which is located in my constituency. So often in Adjournment debates on health centres, the focus is on hospital facilities, and there is a tendency for the important role that is played by general practitioners to be taken for granted. I am pleased, therefore, to be able to draw attention to the valuable work that is being done by Lakeside health centre, which provides a comprehensive range of primary care services to those of my constituency who live in Thamesmead, a 1970s development which includes many system-built high-rise properties. Thamesmead has suffered from the misguided housing policies of successive Greater London council administrations and has more than its share of problems.

The practice is housed in system-built accommodation which was designed to be a health centre for 6,000 patients. Lakeside now has 12,000 registered patients. As the practice was designed to deal with half that number, an additional burden has been placed upon those who work at the centre.

Despite the difficulties, Lakeside is a good example of how a health centre should operate and it provides an extremely comprehensive range of services to the local community. The six-partner general practice based there offers the full range of additional services which general practitioners are being encouraged to provide, such as ante-natal care, minor surgery and diabetes and well woman clinics. In addition, district services such as dentistry, chiropody and speech therapy are provided at the clinic, as well as out-patient clinics held by consultants in a wide range of specialties.

The senior partner of the practice when it first opened in 1969 until his retirement in 1988 was Professor Peter Higgins, professor of general practice at Guy's hospital. He has now retired, but he continues to take a keen interest in the work of Lakeside health centre and of other groups in Thamesmead, and I should like to place on record my gratitude for all that he has done in the area and continues to do.

Peter Higgins forged a strong link between the centre and the education and training of general practitioners, and that link continues. Currently, all six partners hold part-time teaching posts with the united medical schools —Guy's and St. Thomas's—and medical students, both undergraduate and postgraduate, are regularly in attendance at the centre.

The link with professional education also has an influence on the way that services are provided at Lakeside health centre. As one would expect of doctors who are involved in the education of general practitioners, the practice at Lakeside is already pursuing policies which other practices are now being encouraged by the Government to adopt.

The doctors at Lakeside have worked hard to educate their patients and make them aware that good clinical practice does not require patients to be given a prescription every time they visit the doctor. As a consequence, the practice's prescribing costs are some 20 per cent. less than the average for other practices within the Greenwich and Bexley family practitioner committee area and about 25 per cent. less than the national average. Similarly, over 50 per cent. of prescribing is of generic alternatives to brand name drugs.

The practice has also embraced the use of information technology for a wide range of applications, and has appointed a practice manager to ensure efficient delivery of patient care.

The partners at Lakeside are committed to putting the needs of the patient first and their success in doing so is borne out by the comments of my constituents. I often hear the doctors and other staff at Lakeside praised by constituents, and I have never yet received a single complaint about the quality of health care which the centre provides.

In 1987, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security, who was then Minister for Health, visited Lakeside health centre as part of a visit to Bexley health district. His comment at the time was that Lakeside

> "was an inner-city practice serving an inner-city population but in an outer London borough."

His view was, and still is, entirely correct and neatly sums up the situation in Thamesmead.

A large number of Thamesmead residents are from the inner city, having been decanted from areas of south London, designated for slum clearance and compulsory purchase, to Thamesmead in the early 1970s. In addition, a number of local authorities took advantage of the opportunity which Thamesmead offered and moved some of their tenants with social difficulties to Thamesmead.

Because the practice has all the problems associated with an inner-city practice, the work load of each doctor is high. With 12,000 registered patients, each doctor has a list of around 2,000. That is not particularly large for many practices, but it would be difficult for the doctors at Lakeside to expand their lists beyond that number without reducing the quality of the health care that they provide given that the consultation rate per patient at Lakeside is around 30 per cent. higher than average. A measure of the effect that that high consultation rate has is that the practice can expect to see over 90 per cent. of all female patients at least once a year.

The difficulties that the practice faces are not helped by the building in which it is located. The design of the health centre is such that effective use cannot be made of the space available. There is no proper storage facility for patients' medical records, which are simply kept on open racks behind the reception desk. The number of consulting rooms is insufficient for a large and busy practice which offers a wide range of services. Until recently, these problems were made worse by the need for some of the partners to keep buckets on their examination couches to catch the rain water coming through the roof, although I am pleased to say that the roof has now been repaired.

Because of all the problems associated with the building, the partners asked the district health authority to carry out repairs and alterations. It was agreed that a programme of work would be carried out in three phases at a total cost of £100,000. Phase 1 was the repair of the roof which, as I have already said, has been carried out. Phase 2 was internal structural alterations to make better use of the existing space by providing a proper storage facility for records and three much-needed additional consulting rooms. Phase 3 was minor general repairs and decoration. I regret to say that phases 2 and 3 have been halted by Bexley health authority because of a lack of funds for capital projects.

When the partners first brought the matter to my attention, I naturally raised it with the Brian Hord, the chairman of Bexley health authority. While he was sympathetic to the needs of Lakeside, and hoped that the district would be able to complete the work in the next financial year, he told me that there were no guarantees that the work would proceed, because Bexley health authority had not received capital resources of £300,000 which it had expected from South Thames regional health authority. As a consequence, a number of projects had been stopped, including the remaining work at Lakeside.

I am extremely concerned that the work has been abandoned because it is not simply a question of making the centre look better, although I believe that the partners, as tenants of the district health authority, are entitled to expect their landlord to keep the premises in reasonable decorative order. The delay in carrying out alterations affects the treatment which is being provided for patients, because the changes are necessary to ensure the effective delivery of service to patients. Until such time as the additional facilities are available, the pressure on existing consulting space will continue. The partners are asking not for lavish suites of room, but simply for the provision of enough consulting rooms to enable them to provide a proper service for their patients.

I have no doubt that the district and the regional health authorities have prepared their arguments as to where the money is, why it was not available and who is to blame, although from my point of view all that is unimportant. My immediate concern is that some of my constituents are not receiving health care in an appropriate manner because essential work has not been carried out. The work must be done. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to take whatever steps he can to ensure that the work is carried out with all possible speed.

The other major issue which has caused considerable concern at Lakeside health centre applies equally to practices in other areas similar to Thamesmead. None the less, it has specific implications for Lakeside. I refer to the criteria for eligibility for deprivation payments under the new general practitioner contract. My hon. Friend will already be aware of some of my concerns from our correspondence on the issue. As I have already said, Thamesmead suffers many of the problems normally associated with inner-city areas, with possibly one exception—that there is little overcrowding because of the modern housing stock, although living in high-rise, system-built dwellings can bring problems of a different kind.

As a consequence, the electoral ward of Thamesmead, East, which is in my constituency, has a score of over 27 on the Jarman index of deprivation, the measure of deprivation used to determine eligibility for payments under the new contract. To put that score into perspective, we must remember that only 15 per cent. of the population live in areas where the Jarman score is over 20. Thamesmead, East is certainly different from the other wards in my constituency. Of the other wards, the next nearest score is 18, and the remainder are much lower, mostly in single figures. That further confirms my earlier remarks about Thamesmead.

The deprivation allowance paid since the beginning of this month is given only to practices in areas with a Jarman

[Mr. David Evennett]

score of more than 30—not on a sliding scale or taper of any kind, but based on a once-and-for-all threshold of 30. The difference in the problems experienced by practices in areas that score between 29 and 31 must be negligible, yet one will receive the allowance in full while the other will receive nothing. That is illogical and unfair. As the Jarman score for Thamesmead, East is "only" 27, Lakeside does not qualify for the allowance.

That is unsatisfactory, not only because Lakeside is the kind of practice that should receive additional help but because it is likely that the Jarman score would be higher if it were based on up-to-date statistics. The current figure is based on information from the 1981 census, but Thamesmead has changed significantly since then. For example, a Vietnamese community of about 600 has moved into the area since then, and its specific problems are not reflected in the Jarman scale.

Lakeside is not the kind of practice that is able to generate additional income beyond the basic allowances. Despite the determined efforts of the centre's doctors, meeting immunisation and cervical cytology targets is a difficult, if not impossible, task. Doctors in a practice such as Lakeside can expect to work harder and to earn less than they would elsewhere—and with the high cost of living in the south-east, recruitment is always a problem.

Deprivation payments should be made to practices such as Lakeside which have problems that they cannot alter or overcome by adopting a different approach, because the problems are beyond their control. There is no logic in the present system, which stipulates that if an area does not have a Jarman score of more than 30 it does not qualify. Given that a small percentage of the population live in areas having a Jarman score of more than 20, it would be logical to pay the allowance on a tapering scale, at least to areas scoring more than 25. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister, who I know is always concerned with the quality of health care, to give that suggestion serious consideration.

Lakeside health centre does a first-class job in difficult circumstances, and its situation has not been helped by the delay in making vital changes to the centre's fabric, or by the current system for paying deprivation allowances. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to exert what pressure he can to remedy the situation there. The doctors and staff at Lakeside do what is asked of them and the rest of the NHS, by putting the needs of their patients first. We must help by providing the resources that they need to continue providing my constituents in Thamesmead with health care of a standard that they are entitled to expect.

10.57 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Roger Freeman): I congratulate my hon. Friend for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) on his good fortune in securing this Adjournment debate and on the able way in which he presented the case for Lakeside health centre. My hon. Friend is a valiant and persistent defender of and advocate for his constituents. He is a Member of Parliament whom the Department of Health knows well and much respects for his activities in the south-east region and in his constituency.

I had the pleasure of visiting my hon. Friend's constituency on 16 January in relation to Erith hospital—an issue that has not yet been resolved, although I hope that it soon will be. In any event, that is not the subject of tonight's debate.

My hon. Friend alluded to the fact that my right hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Newton) was much impressed by Lakeside health centre when he visited it in 1987. It provides a wide range of services, and my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford touched on some of them. They include audiology, dental care, dietary and speech therapy, family planning, child care, chiropody—an excellent range of services assisting his constituents, provided by a range of staff, including six general practitioners, a practice nurse, two qualified nurses, the equivalent of four and a half whole-time employees who act as receptionists and another four and a half whole-time equivalents acting as clerical and secretarial assistants. I was interested to hear my hon. Friend refer to information technology in use at the centre, a development that we are anxious to encourage.

How great the local need is for health care services, primary services in particular, of that quality was graphically described by my hon. Friend. Those needs, arising from social deprivation—one-parent families, limited employment opportunities and the arrival of new communities from as far afield as Bangladesh and Vietnam—were much in the mind of Professor Peter Higgins when setting up the general practice at the Lakeside health centre in the mid-1970s.

As professor of general practice at Guy's hospital, Professor Higgins was in the vanguard of those who believed that a health centre should play a positive social, as well as medical, role in [illegible] community, and for almost two decades he has guided young trainee GPs in that philosophy.

Professor Higgins, as well as being the vice-chairman of South East Thames regional health authority, has done much valuable work in developing funding for general practice and is currently advising the Department of Health on the general practice implications of the White Paper. Indeed, Lakeside health centre could hardly have two more formidable champions than Professor Higgins and my hon. Friend. I join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to Professor Higgins for his long service in the South East Thames regional health authority area. I recently had the pleasure of being with him when I visited the Medway towns.

My hon. Friend raised as his first issue the question of deprivation payments. The Government believe that it is right to reward GPs for the extra work involved in caring for patients who live in areas of deprivation. As part of the GPs' new contract, a capitation payment has been introduced from 1 April linked to an index of deprivation developed by Professor Jarman of St. Mary's hospital medical school.

The British Medical Association's general medical services committee agrees with the Government that the Jarman index provides the best means currently available. The index is made up taking into account a number of factors, including unemployment, the numbers of elderly people living alone, household overcrowding, the number of children under five, the number of unskilled, single-parent households, the number of residents in ethnic households and the numbers who have moved house, giving an indication of the mobility of the population.

My hon. Friend mentioned the census of 1981. We will shortly have a fresh census, in 1991, and I am the Minister responsible for its preparation. The index figures will be updated once the new statistics from the census are available.

Our policy objectives are to target deprivation payments on those practices that serve areas of highest deprivation. We have therefore chosen a cut-off point of 30 index points, although I accept that this means that some practices—for example, those to which my hon. Friend referred—which fall just short of that figure will not receive payment.

That is not to say that we do not recognise the hard work and dedication put in by such practices in providing general medical services to their patients. As my hon. Friend will recognise, the question where to draw the line is a matter of judgment. Under the scheme, about 9 per cent. of patients in England will generate a deprived area payment for their general practitioner. That seems to us very reasonable.

If we had chosen a much lower cut-off point—say, 16 on the Jarman index, which would then certainly include my hon. Friend's general practice patient lists—we would be including about 25 per cent. of the population in England, a much broader number, and we would, if we were not to provide additional resources by deducting them from some other part of the NHS, have to spread the £25 million, which it will cost in 1990-91 to make those payments, much more thinly.

Therefore, I strongly believe that that would have been to the detriment of the existing scheme. In areas where the deprivation index is between 30 and 39, it amounts to £4·90 per head on the patient list; for an index of between 40 and 49 it amounts to £6·40; for an index of more than 50 points—that is very severe deprivation, such as in some of the inner-London wards—it amounts to a payment of £8·50. Therefore, as my hon. Friend will calculate, for an average patient list of 2,000 patients, that means £17,000 extra to the general practitioner to help him to develop his services.

The Government believe that we have got the concentration and the targeting right, but I can give my hon. Friend the assurance—we shall study the *Official Report* of the debate with care—that the Government will monitor the GPs' new contract to ensure that it is achieving the Government's objective of raising standards and extending services. We shall bear in mind what my hon. Friend says about the consequences of a cut-off point at 30.

On the second point that my hon. Friend made, I can perhaps give him greater encouragement and assurances than I have been able to give him so far—the building at Lakeside. It is perhaps a product of the 1970s— a glass and concrete design with flat roofs. There is so much glass that in cold weather the building has been too cold, and in sunny weather the staff and patients have been too hot. The Lakeside centre was an award-winning architectural design but technical problems have arisen and, sadly, vandalism has also defaced the building.

In modern designs for such health centres, we would concentrate more on energy conservation; we might use brick, which is certainly a more friendly medium for a building; we would certainly have pitched roofs; and we would try to make buildings more vandal-proof.

It is of course the roof that has been the cause of most recent problems but, as my hon. Friend has tellingly pointed out, other structural renovations are sorely needed. Bexley health authority and South East Thames regional health authority are both very much aware of this. In fact, a £100,000 renovation programme was planned for 1989, which would have brought the centre up to a generally acceptable standard. Unfortunately, after £40,000 of that sum had been spent on roof repairs, the programme had to be frozen. The reasons for that, although complicated in financial terms, can be traced back, link by link, to the primary cause of a fall in land values.

Apart from capital money from regions, most district health authorities, particularly in the south-east, have planned to supplement their funds from capital derived from land sales. Bexley health authority was no exception. I understand that genuine expectations were held by Bexley health authority of selling a plot of land adjacent to Bexley hospital for more than £350,000. Of this sum, £100,000 was earmarked for the renovation of Lakeside health centre. South East Thames regional health authority had in fact advanced £350,000 to Bexley in anticipation of the sum being raised. Unfortunately, the sale has not been completed because of issues involving planning permission, particularly tree preservation orders.

I recall that, as a Back Bencher, I introduce a private Member's Bill, which eventually became law, dealing with the protection of trees and the prevention of the removal of trees subject to preservation orders when planning permission was required. To that extent, I apologise to my hon. Friend if I have in any way caused problems to him and to his constituency.

Bexley health authority hopes to find a way round those problems, but is not in a position yet to give any guarantee. In view of this, and in the light of its own serious shortfall in capital resources—another consequence of falling land values—South East Thames regional health authority had reluctantly to withdraw its bridging loan to Bexley.

Bexley health authority's capital programme for 1990-91 stands at £1·1 million. The authority does not yet know how much of the programme it will be able to fulfil until it learns what uncommitted capital it can expect to receive from the regional health authority. Negotiations are taking place. I am sure that my hon. Friend will understand if I do not say anything further here which may prejudge them. I can say, however, that Bexley health authority is optimistic that, from one source or another, it will have sufficient funds to complete the programme for Lakeside health centre during 1990-91. Thus rejuvenated, the centre will, I am sure, provide as fine a service for future generations of Thamesmeaders as it has for almost two decades past.

As for my hon. Friend's point regarding deprivation allowances, although by targeting the resources we have omitted the ward in which the centre is placed, I can assure him that we shall monitor carefully the effect of the scheme. Where changes are necessary, we shall certainly consider them.

I am as confident as I can be that the problems with the building to which he alluded will be put right. I plan to visit Lakeside, upon my hon. Friend's invitation, in the spring of next year—by which time I hope that Bexley's plans will have been brought to fruition—to see progress for myself and to see a fine health centre in operation.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at ten minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 5 April 1990

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITION

Human Embryos

9.34 am

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I have the honour to present three petitions containing many signatures—up to 2,000—from my constituents. They come from Our Lady of the Visitation church, Greenford, in the name of Mrs. J. Balaam of 358 Greenford road, Greenford; Father Phil Barry and his clergy at St. Bernard's church, Northolt; Father Antony Brunning of 17 Mandeville road, Northolt, his clergy, supporters and many others; and the Abbey church of St. Benedict, Ealing in the name of Isabelle Glover of 70 Claremont road, W13, supported by Dom Francis Rossiter, Abbot of Ealing and Benedictine Abbot of All England, Father Michael Hopley and the communities of St. Benedict, Ealing.

The petitioners call for the protection of the human embryo, which they believe to be seriously threatened by the proposals shortly to be placed before the House. They believe, and I share their belief, that there is human life from the moment of conception, that that life is made in the image of God and that it should not be violated under any circumstances by experimentation. I strongly support that view and hope that the House will reject any move to allow experimentation on the human embryo in the Bill shortly to be discussed in the House.

The humble petition of the parishioners of our Lady of the Visitation church, St. Bernards church, Northolt and the Abbey Church of St. Benedict, Ealing showeth that we affirm that the newly-fertilised embryo is a real, living human being:

Therefore, we welcome the statement in the report of the Committee of Inquiry into Human Fertilisation and Embryology (the Warnock Report) That "the status of the embryo is a matter of fundamental principle which should be enshrined in legislation", and its recommendation that the embryo of the human species should be afforded protection in law; and therefore we oppose all such practices as are recommended in the Report which discriminate against the embryo or violate his/her human dignity and right to life.

Wherefore, your petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which (a) forbids any procedure that involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding or freezing of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned); and (b) forbids all forms of trans-species fertilisation.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc.

I beg to present the petition.

To lie upon the Table.

Irish Republic (Extradition)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[Mr. Goodlad.]

9.38 am

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): Mr. Deputy Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Ross: I apologise, Mr. Speaker. We usually debate Northern Ireland business so late that you are not present. However, I am sure that you, as the chief commoner of England, are so interested in this matter that you will stay. I would like to extend that to the whole United Kingdom. The matter that I wish to discuss is of great importance to the common people of this Kingdom, and their rights and privileges under the Crown, especially with regard to their desire to remain under the rule of the Crown.

I should be far happier if I were speaking to a crowded House, but a debate such as this gives one a chance to place on record the views of the Unionist people of Northern Ireland.

I have no doubt that the few hon. Members present, and the many more people outside, will remember the euphoria when the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed. In our debates, arguments and questions, time and time again the Government Front Bench gave two reasons why the United Kingdom had entered into that agreement. Briefly, they were that for the first time the position of Northern Ireland was recognised by the Irish Republic and that extradition of members of terrorist organisations—to be more specific, of the IRA—from the Irish Republic was assured.

At the time, the ordinary folk of the Unionist community said, through their representatives, that the Government's view on the first reason was incorrect. I am amazed that, even after the Dublin Supreme Court judgment in the case of McGimpsey, the Government will still not admit that the Unionist population was correct in believing that the words in the constitution of the Republic have their normal, everyday meaning. That matter will be covered in the next debate. I do not want to pre-empt what the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) will say on that matter, but I should put it on record that the Unionist population got it right and the Government got it wrong.

I last spoke on this subject in an Adjournment debate at Christmas in 1987 when I drew attention to the requirements of the Irish Extradition (Amendment) Act 1987 in the Irish Republic. Those requirements were important then and they are even more important today, as the judgments in the cases of Finucane and Clarke relate to offences before that Act came into force.

In that debate I pointed out that, under Irish law, a full book of evidence must be available to the Republic and that some of the evidence that might be needed would be available only after the RUC had questioned the people concerned. In Irish law that requirement applies only to United Kingdom requests for extradition.

In the same debate I also said that the treaty made extradition impossible unless we paid a constitutional price and the price of interference with the judiciary in Britain. We have not paid that price and we may now be seeing the outcome of the blackmail inherent in what was being said in the Irish Republic at the time.

[Mr. Ross]

The plain truth is that, in the Irish Republic, judges take an oath to uphold the constitution and the institutions of the state. They have now clearly spelt out what they are meant to uphold. I do not take issue with them on that, but I do take issue with my Government for being so foolish as to believe that they could weave their way round the straightforward language of the Irish constitution.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): Does my hon. Friend agree that many right hon. and hon. Members would like to know whether Her Majesty's Government have yet considered the full implications of recent decisions in the Irish Supreme Court, and whether a policy has been decided with regard to future requests from the Government of the Irish Republic for the return of Irish citizens who, according to Irish law, are now deemed to have been unconstitutionally extradited to the United Kingdom?

Mr. Ross: Many of those people are serving or have served prison sentences in the United Kingdom. My hon. Friend makes an interesting point and I hope that the Minister will provide him with an answer, as I hope that he will provide me.

The debate to which I referred in December 1987 followed two questions to the Prime Minister on 1 December. In reply to one of them the right hon. Lady said that she regretted that,

> "notwithstanding our representations, the Irish Government are taking additional measures that could make extradition more difficult . . . It is essential that we maintain effective extradition arrangements so that there is no hiding place for terrorists. I agree with my hon. Friend that what the Republic is doing by taking this step is making us the least favoured nation in this matter."

Therefore, the Government cannot now say that they were unaware of the implications of the 1987 Act. Perhaps they hoped that those who committed offences before that legislation came into operation might still be extradited. However, that hope has been holed and fairly thoroughly sunk.

On the same day, in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, North (Mr. Walker), the Prime Minister said:

> "There is a risk that extradition could become more difficult because of the new measures taken by the Irish Republic and that they would be a step backwards from the existing arrangements".—[*Official Report*, 1 December 1987; Vol. 123, c. 762.]

Twice on the same day, the Prime Minister said with great clarity that the Government were fully aware of the Irish bog of deception and mistrust into which they were wandering and in which they now find themselves up to the neck. Surely we shall not be told today that this has all come as a great surprise. They knew in 1987 that that would happen.

In answer to my right hon. Friend the Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor), on 14 December 1988 the Attorney-General clarified the position of the 1987 legislation. He said:

> "In cases unaffected by the Irish Extradition (Amendment) Act 1987, the only documents required of United Kingdom police forces by Irish law are warrants of arrest and affidavits and certificates supporting them. No further explanation of such cases ordinarily is required."

That was pre-1987. He went on:

> "In cases to which the 1987 Act does apply, sufficient information has to be given to the Irish Attorney-General to satisfy him that the relevant United Kingdom prosecuting authority has a clear intention to prosecute and that this intention is founded upon the existence of sufficient evidence."—[*Official Report*, 14 December 1988; Vol. 143, c. 569.]

That brings me back to my earlier point that the Irish authorities need the full book of evidence. That, as I pointed out in the previous Adjournment debate, is probably impossible to provide unless the RUC has an opportunity to question in depth the individual concerned.

All that shows clearly the increased difficulties that would arise. But just how great they are is perhaps only now becoming clear to the ordinary citizen in this land as the current reasons for not sending back criminals from the Irish Republic to face justice in the United Kingdom become apparent. Finucane and Clarke are the most recent cases, but they are not, by a long chalk, the first, and they will not be the last. The Father Ryan and the Glenholmes cases stand out in people's memory in Britain, but there are many others of lesser note and we shall see many more in the future.

The reasons for such cases not being sent back differ in detail. Sometimes for the tiniest of technical reasons, extradition requests were refused. As a result, known members of the IRA are still walking round as free men in the Republic. Because of the words used in the judgment to which I referred, they will never be returned to justice in the United Kingdom.

Two reasons were given in the Finucane and Clarke cases. First, it was said that there would be ill treatment by prison officers if they were returned. In that case, the evidence that was used of ill-treatment was the Pettigrew case. But is there any evidence of ill-treatment of persons who have been extradited to Northern Ireland from the Republic? If there is, I am not aware of it. No doubt the Minister will tell us.

I am also curious to know whether the Government would like to contemplate the probable attitude of the Irish courts if they were faced with a request to extradite the persons popularly known as the Birmingham Six, had they ever made it to the Irish Republic. One might also consider what would happen if the British authorities were now to apply for the exrtradition of those who have recently been named as the real Birmingham bombers. Can one imagine any Irish court extraditing such people to the United Kingdom? Twenty-one people were killed in Birmingham and 160 suffered injuries. No doubt many of those injuries were horrific and their effects remain with the people who are still alive. I do not believe that there is any chance of getting any of the people responsible back to the United Kingdom for questioning or trial under any circumstances.

The events of last weekend provide the Irish Republic with another excuse for not returning suspects into the hands of British justice. Given the attitude of the Irish courts, how likely are they to extradite to this country a terrorist who has created murder or mayhem of any kind, when they can point to the events at Strangeways and say that there is no way in which an Irish suspect would be safe? I refer to ill-treatment not by prison officials but by other prisoners. That is a second course that the Irish courts will undoubtedly pick up and use very soon.

One is also seeing the revival of the political offence as a let-off for terrorists of every description. In the Shannon case, one justice held that an offence—which is shorthand for murder or brutal maiming at the hands of the IRA

—could be political even if it went beyond reasonable political activity. At the same hearing, another justice held that political immunity depended on the motivation of the individual to be extradited, his intent, and the true nature of the offence—and that all were to be assessed by their closeness to the alleged political objective. That was the reason used in the most recent case to let a suspect off the hook.

My hon. Friend the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) recently drew the attention of the House to the Irish Supreme Court judgment that political exemption from extradition should apply to persons accused of politically motivated offences when the object of such offences was to secure the ultimate unity of the country. That confirms what has long been the practical outcome of the decisions of the Irish courts.

If the Minister will refer to questions on extradition that I have asked down the years, and to the answers given by his right hon. and hon. Friends and by himself, he will see that between 1971 and 1987, the Irish Republic made 159 requests to Northern Ireland for extraditions. Only two were refused. One hundred and seventeen were granted, and 49—just under three per year—were not granted for various reasons. Over the same period, extradition requests made by Northern Ireland numbered 411. Fifty-seven of those were refused, 118 were granted, and 237 were not granted—presumably because the suspects were either in prison or could not be found. Another parliamentary answer confirmed that between 1971 and 1989, 110 people were extradited for non-terrorist offences from the Republic to Northern Ireland, and only seven for terrorist offences. Those figures tell it all.

Where does that leave the people who formulated, signed, welcomed and defended—and still defend—the agreement of 15 November 1985? The hope of extraditions has been exposed for the shabby, bloody deception that it was. The figures reveal the spider's web into which this nation's leaders wandered, against every word of advice offered by the Members of Parliament who sit on this Bench. Those figures are proof of the fruits of the 1987 Act and of previous legislation. The evil consequences of the Anglo-Irish Agreement are only now beginning to blossom, and will continue to do so in a dreadful fashion over the next few years.

The two Irish Supreme Court decisions—the second growing out of the McGimpsey case—mean that those who have murdered, bombed, maimed and destroyed will never be extradited. An excuse will always be found by the Republic for not doing so, not least because its constitution does not recognise the validity of the extradition provisions. There is no way that the Irish courts can ever permit extraditions, because they do not acknowledge the existence in law of Northern Ireland. It is not going too far to say that extradition to Ulster from the Irish Republic could be deemed by the Republic as unconstitutional. I have listened carefully to the Government over the past few weeks, and their words show that they are still fogbound or lost in a time warp some time before the McGimpsey, Finucane and Clarke cases. But Ministers are far too clever and well advised by the Law Officers of the Crown and by their own officials to really be so lost. My belief is that the Government realise how much things have gone wrong.

What will the Government do about that? Will they allow murder to continue in Ulster? Will they go on shutting their eyes to the real world of terrorism that contaminates our land and blights our lives? Will they for ever close their ears to the counselling they receive from these Benches and from others, when ignoring it has led them into the bog in which they now find themselves? The Government know what must be done, and they know how to do it. Will they make a start? The Irish Republic, because of its written constitution, is frozen in its attitude and will never or can never deliver on the recognition of Ulster or the extradition of those who pursue the concept of a united Ireland through violence.

9.56 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr. Brian Mawhinney): I congratulate the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) on obtaining this Adjournment debate on a subject that is both complex and important. Extradition is a vital weapon in the fight against crime of any sort, be it of terrorist or non-terrorist.

I do not question that right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House are united in the desire to see terrorist offenders in particular brought to justice. That having been said, extradition is a matter fraught both with practical and political difficulties, and any failure of the system is given a far higher profile than are the successes that are achieved.

The hon. Gentleman's first concern, rightly, is with the recent cases of Finucane and Clarke, in which the Irish Supreme Court refused extradition to Northern Ireland. I will return to those cases shortly. Before I do so, the House may find it helpful if I say a few words about the mechanics of the system.

Extradition is an arrangement designed to prevent criminals escaping justice by crossing national frontiers, and it therefore plays an integral part in the criminal justice process of modern states. Extradition between the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom is operated under a system known as the backing of warrants. This arrangement does not for the most part involve the two Governments but is operated on a police-to-police basis. The original and underlying premise of the system is that the two jurisdictions are sufficiently close, in terms of the workings of their criminal justice systems, for a warrant issued in one country to be acceptable in the other, without the full extradition proceedings that either would require of a third country.

The procedure is, at least in principle, relatively simple. Despite the apparent simplicity, however, almost all cases now involve lengthy appeals, the outcome of which has been, and remains, unpredictable. Any individual case can throw up difficulties on a number of levels, but, broadly speaking, there are three categories of difficulty—administrative, legal, and political.

On the administrative side, the mechanics of processing a request involve a number of different agencies in both the requesting and requested states and co-ordination is thus complex. In past cases, problems have arisen over the immensely detailed scrutiny which the Irish courts have applied in the United Kingdom warrants. A good deal of work by lawyers skilled in this specialist field is often required. We believe that the resulting problems have now largely been solved as a result of a considerable investment of effort by the authorities on both sides, and the production of a detailed checklist.

[Dr. Brian Mawhinney]

So far as extradition between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland is concerned, there are two particular problems which have figured largely in recent cases. One is the provision of the Irish constitution which requires the Irish courts to protect Irish citizens from the threat of attack to their life, liberty, or property. That provision is the key on which fugitives have hung defences against extradition based on the argument that their life, person or property will be liable to attack if they are returned.

The second problem which commonly arises is where the defence case rests on the claim that the offence in question was political. That is a particularly sensitive issue in requests for fugitives to be returned to Northern Ireland. Close examination is made by defence lawyers of political issues in Northern Ireland which can be used to seek to justify fugitives' assertions that their offences were legitimately politically motivated. Extradition hearings have often, in the past, turned into debates on Irish history and political conditions in the Province, and the fairness of the administration of justice in Northern Ireland is often put unfairly under the microscope.

The backing of warrants system is a most important means of bringing to justice terrorist offenders who have escaped to the Republic, not least because it is right in principle that, whenever possible, fugitive offenders should be brought to justice in the jurisdiction where their crimes are committed. However, we do have provisions in our law, and in Irish law, whereby persons charged with the commission of certain serious crimes in Northern Ireland can be tried in the Republic, and vice versa. To date, 12 persons have been convicted in the Republic for crimes committed in Northern Ireland, and three acquitted. Four persons have been convicted in Northern Ireland for crimes committed in the Republic.

Let me turn to specifics. Our utter dismay, bordering on disbelief, at the widely reported decisions of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Ireland not to return to Northern Ireland two convicted terrorists is a matter of public record. I shall return to them shortly. First, however, I should like to set them against the background of the generally improved working of extradition arrangements in recent times.

Since January 1988, 14 persons have been returned to the United Kingdom. A further seven persons are currently before the Irish courts. Of those 14 returned, three were returned to Northern Ireland in connection with terrorist-related offences, two of whom were Maze escapers. One further person was returned to Northern Ireland for a non-terrorist offence.

As far as Dermot Finucane and James Clarke are concerned, both men were convicted in Northern Ireland of serious terrorist offences: Finucane was serving 18 years for possession of firearms and ammunition and Clarke 18 years for the attempted murder of a member of the Ulster Defence Regiment. The lengths of those sentences speak for themselves; people are not sentenced to 18 years for trivial misdemeanours. Both were involved in the mass break-out from the Maze prison in 1983. They were subsequently arrested in the Republic where the district court made orders for their extradition.

Appeals on behalf of both men were quashed by the High Court in the Republic. They were, however, upheld on 13 March in the Supreme Court, their last court of appeal. As a result, these two convicted terrorists are now at large in the Republic. That was a judicial decision, but I, like many members of this House, and many people throughout the country, find it baffling and deplorable. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, among others, has made those feelings very clear. That dismay was also expressed by some in the Republic of Ireland.

The judgments were lengthy and complex and are still being studied closely. Their full implications for future cases may become clear only in the light of experience. In both the Finucane and Clarke cases, the Supreme Court found that extradition should be refused on the ground that the men's constitutional rights might be breached if returned because of what the court called a "probable risk" that they would be assaulted on return to the Maze. In addition, it was found that Finucane, but not Clarke, was entitled to take advantage of the political offence exception.

The slur cast on the professionalism of the Northern Ireland prison service by the first of those findings is deeply offensive and wholly unjustifiable. I believe firmly that the prison regime offered in Northern Ireland is both innovative and constructive, administered by dedicated, trained, and professional staff providing a service of which we can all be proud.

No one who has been returned to Northern Ireland, whether from the Republic or elsewhere, has subsequently taken any sort of action alleging physical ill-treatment in prison. I do not for a moment believe that had Finucane and Clarke been returned they would have suffered such ill-treatment; nor, I believe, does anyone else who knows anything of the present Northern Ireland prison system. It is the Government's view that the Supreme Court's opinion in this part of its judgment is completely unjustified on the known facts about today's prison regime.

What is even more disturbing, however, is the Supreme Court's acceptance in Finucane's case that he was entitled to lay claim to the political offence exception. The implications of that finding are extremely serious and could, potentially, affect future cases.

I shall not rehearse the history of the political offence exception in extradition from the Republic of Ireland to the United Kingdom. It is in some respects a sorry story, but I believe that, before those judgments, we had reached a position where those sought for terrorist crimes in Northern Ireland could lay claim to the political offence exception only with difficulty. The judgments have now rolled back from that position. They are a step in a very unhelpful and regrettable direction, following on from some previous very positive moves in the Republic.

The hon. Gentleman referred several times to the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and he rightly pointed out that following this debate there will be a debate initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow). Like him, I do not wish to trespass into the territory of that debate, but I must make one or two comments because the hon. Member for Londonderry, East, raised the issue and because they are relevant to the question of extradition. Since the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, we have made progress on extradition. We are pleased with that, but we cannot be satisfied with things as they are.

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): The hon. Gentleman has made a statement that I do not understand.

He has said that, since the signing of the Anglo-Eire agreement, the Government have made progress with Dublin on extradition. Surely, however, the rules were changed by the Dublin Government after the signing of the Anglo-Eire agreement, to the detriment of ease of extradition.

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Member for Londonderry, East made a similar point and quoted my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, but things have improved. Arrangements have been brought up to date in a way that has made it easier to pursue the extradition process, not least in terms of what I said earlier about the detailed arrangements that now exist. However, my hon. Friend will have heard me say just before he rose to his feet that I am not satisfied with things as they are—nor are the Government.

We shall be pursuing urgently with the Government of the Republic of Ireland our concern that the system as a whole should work effectively. I do not underrate the difficulties caused by these recent cases, but by close co-operation with the Irish Government we must find ways to overcome them.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement was never an agreement to agree about everything, but it does offer a framework for discussion of such matters. The agreement provided a firm framework for our discussions with the Irish Government about ratification of the European convention on the suppression of terrorism, without which we would now be in a much worse position than we are today. It will also provide a framework for our future exchanges with the Irish Government about the implications of the Finucane and Clarke judgments and the urgent action which needs to be taken in consequence of those judgments. These functions are vital.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull, North): During the discussions with the Irish Government under the auspices of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, will the Government also be pursuing the need to extend the role played by the Criminal Law Jurisdiction Act? According to the figures that the Minister has given, in so far as it has operated it has been reasonably successful.

Dr. Mawhinney: The hon. Gentleman knows that that Act is one of a number of ways in which we can consider these various matters and seek to make progress. It is a consideration in each of the cases. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will certainly bear in mind the hon. Gentleman's comments during the conference meetings. I shall specifically draw them to his attention.

Let me finish by reiterating how important extradition is. Both the British and the Irish Governments have pledged themselves to ensure that effective arrangements are in place for dealing with fugitive offenders. Extradition is a vital factor in this. The importance attached to it by the Irish authorities is easily demonstrated. It was they who originally sought the extraditions of Finucane and Clarke on our behalf and who continued to make strenuous efforts, throughout their judicial system, to bring the cases to a successful conclusion.

Convicted terrorists and those facing charges for terrorist offences must not be allowed to take refuge from justice in any civilised country. I believe it to be self-evident that people of good will throughout the world should regard terrorists as their common enemy, as we do, and should be committed to take whatever steps may be necessary to bring them to justice. That truism alone must give all right-thinking British and Irish people cause for concern at the present position on extradition in the Irish Republic. But, further to that, the Irish Government are committed in the context of the agreement, and particularly in the context of the recent review, to ensuring, with us, fair and effective extradition arrangements between our two countries. We will strive, with them, to ensure that such arrangements are brought about in future.

Anglo-Irish Agreement

10.14 am

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): Apart from the Republic of Argentina, which lays claim to part of Her Majesty's dominions—what it describes as the Malvinas—the only other country which lays claim to any part of Her Majesty's dominions is the Republic of Ireland. That was highlighted in the debate to which he have just listened.

I want to remind the House of the terms of articles 2 and 3 of the Republic's constitution. Article 2 says:

> "The national territory consists of the whole island of Ireland, its islands and the territorial seas."

Article 3 says:

> "Pending the re-integration of the national territory, and without prejudice to the right of the Parliament and Government established by this Constitution . . . the laws enacted by that Parliament shall have the like area and extent of application".

In the McGimpsey judgment, given in the Irish Supreme Court last month, these words appeared:

> "The reintegration of the national territory is a constitutional imperative."

The recent decision of the Supreme Court in Dublin to refuse the request for extradition followed after the judgment in the McGimpsey case. Many who are expert in the law of the Republic of Ireland believe that the decision to refuse to grant extradition—not in the case of two suspected terrorists but in the case of two convicted terrorists—depended to a substantial degree on the earlier judgment in the McGimpsey case.

It was possible because my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister had in mind the profoundly objectionable terms of articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution that she said in this place:

> "no commitment exists for Her Majesty's Government to consult the Irish Government on matters affecting Northern Ireland. That has always been our position. We reiterate and emphasise it, so that everyone is clear about it."—[*Official Report*, 29 July 1982; Vol. 28, c. 1226.]

On 17 May 1984, again speaking in this place, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said:

> "The constitutional future of Northern Ireland is a matter for Northern Ireland and this Parliament, and for no one else."—[*Official Report*, 17 May 1984; Vol. 60, c. 503.]

However, the year after that last quotation appeared in the *Official Report* on 17 May 1984, the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed. That agreement gave to the Government of the Irish Republic—to the Government of the only country whose constitution laid claim to Northern Ireland—the right to put forward views and proposals about how Northern Ireland was to be governed and laid upon Her Majesty's Government an obligation, if they disagreed with those views and proposals, to make determined efforts to resolve differences.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement specifically said that the Government of the Irish Republic were there to represent nationalists. You know, Madam Deputy Speaker, that four nationalists have been elected to this Parliament. Three of them have taken their seats. The proper people to represent nationalists in dealings with Her Majesty's Ministers are those who have been elected to this place, and not the Government of a foreign power. To confer upon the Irish Republic responsibility for the representation of some of Her Majesty's subjects when those subjects have at least in this respect an equal right with all other of Her Majesty's subjects to elect their own representatives, was intensely divisive.

If right hon. and hon. Members think that I am going too far when I say that Her Majesty's Government accepted that the Government of the Irish Republic were to represent nationalists, article 4 of the agreement, states:

> "The Conference shall be a framework within which the Irish Government may put forward views and proposals on the modalities of bringing about devolution in Northern Ireland in so far as they relate to the interests of the minority community."

I shall return to article 4 later in my speech.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): Surely what the hon. Gentleman said about the Irish Government representing only nationalists is the only position that that Government could take, as their Supreme Court has clarified the matter. We can all see the reasoning behind it, which was that they have a legal claim to Northern Ireland and a constitutional imperative to pursue the objective of a united Ireland. As Unionists object to that, there is no way in which the Irish Government could legally, within their own constitution, represent a Unionist viewpoint.

Mr. Gow: I agree entirely.

There are some Members of Parliament, among whom I am not to be included, who believe that Her Majesty's Government entered into the Anglo-Irish Agreement in something other than good faith. I have never doubted the good faith of Her Majesty's Government or of the Government of the Irish Republic in entering into the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Despite the words of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister which I read to the House, I believe that she, above all people, was appalled, as we all were, by the continuing violence in Northern Ireland and that she, above all, was mindful of the misery caused to wives who were turned into widows and children who were turned into orphans. She was as appalled as any Member of Parliament by the misery caused by the terror, by the continuing division between the communities in the Province, and by the fact that at that time unemployment in Northern Ireland was worse than in any other part of the United Kingdom. She and Her Majesty's Ministers wished genuinely, sincerely and honourably to redress those evils in Northern Ireland. They really believed that the agreement would bring the Province peace, stability and reconciliation. To my deep regret, I was not able to share that belief, but of course the Government believed that the Anglo-Irish Agreement would be acceptable to nationalists.

The Foreign Office, which was the principal Department involved in the protracted negotiations, advised the Government that the agreement would be welcomed in Dublin, in the Vatican, in Roman Catholic Europe, and, above all, in Washington, where it was believed that the signing of the agreement would lead to a diminution of financial and material support for terrorist organisations in the Province. Of course, when they heard that that agreement, if signed along the lines of the final draft, would be widely welcomed and would restore the confidence of the nationalists, Her Majesty's Ministers asked one other question. They said, "You have told us how pleased all these other people will be and how the capitals of Europe and even the most important capital of all, Washington, would be pleased, but what will be the reaction of Unionists?"

That is where the Government were so badly advised. They were given the answer, "Paisley will huff and puff, but on the whole Unionists will be well satisfied with the agreement." The argument ran that the Unionists would be well satisfied because, it was claimed, quite wrongly, that the Irish Government had acknowledged for the first time in article 1 of the agreement that there could be a change in the status of Northern Ireland only if a majority of the people of Northern Ireland wanted it.

However, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State will recall the opening words of the Sunningdale communiqué in 1974. For the sake of accuracy, I have a copy of the text of the declaration made at Sunningdale in 1974, 11 years before the Anglo-Irish Agreement was signed. It stated:

> "The Irish Government fully accepted and solemnly declared that there could be no change in the status of Northern Ireland until a majority of the people of Northern Ireland desired a change in that status."

The British Cabinet genuinely believed when it sanctioned the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement that the Republic had taken a great new step forward in acknowledging that for the first time. But it was not so.

The second reason why it was claimed that the Unionists ought to be well satisfied with the agreement was that it would lead to a new era of co-operation in the defeat of terrorism between the Government of the Irish Republic and Her Majesty's Government and between the Garda and the Royal Ulster Constabulary. But the Anglo-Irish Agreement was not necessary to secure co-operation in the defeat of terrorism.

There is no such agreement between France and Spain whereby France is allowed to put forward views and proposals on how the Basque country should be governed. That is not necessary to secure co-operation between Spain and France in the defeat of terrorism. Relations between France and the United Kingdom, in regard to anti-terrorist measures, could not possibly be better, happier, or more effective, and we are able to achieve that without giving France the right to propose how Alderney, Sark or Jersey should be governed.

It is a myth to say that a precondition of co-operation was the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. If that were the reality, and if the Republic had told Her Majesty's Government that they would co-operate only if they were given the right to put forward views and proposals about how part of the United Kingdom should be governed, that would be the most massive indictment of the honour, integrity and commitment of the Government of the Irish Republic to ending violence.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State looks puzzled at my assertion that that was the advice given to the Cabinet. He has no need to take my word for it. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave an interview to the *Belfast Telegraph* just five weeks after the agreement was signed. For the sake of accuracy, I have a copy of the interview which she gave to Mr. Desmond McCartan. She was asked about the reaction of the Unionists to the agreement, and she replied:

> "the reaction has been much worse than I expected. One is trying to find out why."

She did not say that the reaction has been "worse than I expected", but "much worse".

The Prime Minister said that she was trying to find out why. What does that mean? It means that the Prime Minister was told that the reaction of Unionists would be one of support, whereas it turned out to be one of hostility. The Prime Minister and the Cabinet had been misled and had not been properly advised. We can readily understand why that was. The Government of the Irish Republic had taken the SDLP into their confidence, but Her Majesty's Government had had no discussions with Unionists beforehand, although anyone with the slightest knowledge of Northern Ireland would not have had to have discussions with Unionist Members to know the views of the people of Northern Ireland.

The way in which the Anglo-Irish Agreement is viewed by the overwhelming majority of people in Northern Ireland in April 1990 is no more favourable than it was on 15 November 1985. There is a sense of disbelief that we could confer that place of special privilege on the Government of the Irish Republic, whose constitution still lays claim to Northern Ireland; a sense of disbelief that we should ask another Government to represent some of Her Majesty's subjects when those subjects have the right to elect their own Members.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson (Newbury): Does my hon. Friend agree that the fact that the Irish Government are enabled to represent the nationalist community in the north implies that Her Majesty's Government do not seem to feel able sufficiently to represent the interests of those citizens of the United Kingdom in a way that is fair and even-handed in relation to other United Kingdom citizens?

Mr. Gow: When dealing with any of the four countries that make up the United Kingdom, Her Majesty's Government have a duty to take account of the interests of all of the people in each of those four countries. For example, the Secretary of State for Scotland must ensure that, in the administration of Scotland, nationalists, socialists, liberals and those who, like myself, believe in the Union are all governed under a fair and just law. He must ensure that each citizen, whatever his or her political or religious beliefs, shall be treated in the same way under a just law.

It is the duty of Her Majesty's Ministers to safeguard and protect nationalists—and republicans—in Northern Ireland. I am wholly opposed at all times, and in all circumstances, to any discrimination in Northern Ireland on the ground that a citizen is a Roman Catholic, a nationalist or a republican. I shall make only one caveat: that nationalists in Northern Ireland, whom I acknowledge, honour and respect, must accept their responsibility to behave as responsible citizens, obeying the law at all times. That means doing their utmost to defeat terrorism. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Sir M. McNair-Wilson) that the Government in every part of the kingdom must protect all their citizens, whatever their views, under a just law.

The Anglo-Irish Agreement did not get off to a happy start, because it was in two versions—the Irish text and the United Kingdom text. The Irish text did not refer to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. That is not very surprising, in view of recent judgments from the Supreme Court, and in view of articles 2 and 3. It was not a happy start to a solemn treaty and agreement when the texts did not coincide.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary on the robust reply that he gave to the previous debate initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross). The words that fell from his lips were carefully fashioned—and were approved by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. His description of the judgments of the Supreme Court was "baffling and deplorable", and I agree entirely with that choice of words.

[Mr. Gow]

However, my hon. Friend's efforts, and those of the Government, to secure much better—indeed, proper—extradition arrangements will be wished godspeed by every hon. Member. It is a terrible commentary on the evils of terrorism that on a supposedly friendly country, with whose Government we have entered into a treaty, should be conferred a special provision which means that that country above all others—a country that has suffered from terrorism—is now perceived, with justification, to be a safe haven for terrorists.

In the cases of Finucane and Clarke, we are referring not to suspected terrorists but to people who were convicted of grave terrorist crimes. During their escape from the Maze prison, further grave crimes were committed. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will accept that it is not impossible that those two, whose extradition was refused, will now engage in further terrorist activity, and that is greatly to be deplored.

No one who believes that the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement will fail to bring to the Province that peace, stability and reconciliation that we all want to see, and no one who is critical of the agreement, should criticise it without offering an alternative. Clearly the agreement can be changed or amended at any time with the consent of both parties. If my right hon. Friend the Minister of State makes an agreement with my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury, however solemn its terms—whether it is registered with the Comptroller of the Household, the United Nations, Mr. Delors or anyone who is now in fashion—it can be altered at the request of the two parties who made it.

I have submitted to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and to the then Foreign Secretary—now Lord President of the Council—the text of a revised Anglo-Irish Agreement. When my right hon. Friend the present Secretary of State for Northern Ireland arrived at Stormont or Hillsborough, he also was a beneficiary—I am not sure whether he regarded it in those terms—as I sent him the text of my alternative to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. That alternative could have been fashioned with the consent of the two contracting Governments. The revised agreement did not give the Republic the right to advance views and proposals about how one part of the kingdom was governed—or, as article 4 says, the right to put forward proposals on behalf of nationalists as to what form of devolution there should be. It envisaged something that had been fashioned earlier by the Conservative and Unionist party.

Shortly after my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was elected leader of the Conservative party on 11 February 1975, she appointed as shadow Secretary of State her friend and mine Airey Neave, who held the post from February 1975 until he was assassinated in the precincts of this House on 30 March 1979. Just before he was assassinated, the shadow Cabinet had agreed—you, Madam Deputy Speaker, will not be surprised to learn that it had done so without much discussion—the Conservative party's policies for Northern Ireland. The manifesto stated:

> "In the absence of devolved Government, we shall seek to set up a regional council or councils with widely devolved powers over local matters."

I am still waiting for Ministers to implement the policy that had been fashioned by Airey Neave with the consent and concurrence of the leader of the Ulster Unionist party and, if I am allowed to say this without any presumption, with the concurrence of the hon. Member for Eastbourne.

We are still awaiting the implementation of that policy. The conclusion that Airey Neave had reached in his four years of stewardship as shadow Secretary of State was that the least dangerous and most hopeful way forward was to treat Northern Ireland as closely as possible to the way that we treat the rest of the United Kingdom. That did not mean identical treatment, because England, Wales and Scotland are governed differently, but it recognised the most important truth that the House can learn—that the most important factor in prolonging terrorism in Northern Ireland is uncertainty about the constitutional future of the Province. Ministers have not yet understood that truth.

The uncertainty about Ulster's constitutional future was not diminished but increased by the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The certainty about Ulster's constitutional future has not been increased by the two judgments in the Supreme Court in Dublin last month; it is the uncertainty that has been increased by those judgments.

It is perfectly possible, despite the commitment in article 4, for Ministers to confer modest additional powers on the 26 district councils in Northern Ireland. Dublin would not like us doing so, but we do not need its consent. Nothing prevents my right hon. Friend the Minister of State from trying to set up a regional council in Northern Ireland with some of the powers enjoyed by regional councils in Scotland and county councils in England and Wales. Nothing stops him bringing to an end the absurdity that we legislate for 1·5 million of the Queen's subjects in Northern Ireland by unamendable Order in Council, which we would not accept for our constituents.

Sometimes, the policy that I am advocating is described as integration. It could perfectly properly be described as administrative devolution. The time will come when Ministers realise that the surest protection for the minority and the greatest guarantee of stability in Northern Ireland is to adopt that policy, of which the late Airey Neave was the principal architect. The sooner we do so, the greater will be the prospect of peace, stability and reconciliation which all decent men want to see.

10.43 am

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. John Cope): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) on securing this debate and on the manner in which he has pursued and promoted his views on the subject since his resignation, which I much respected, from the Government. In diverging from my hon. Friend, as I will, he knows that I have every respect for his parliamentary and political manners. Once again, he clearly set out his views. I observed that he dwelt a little more on the past of the agreement. The debate was advertised as being about the future of the agreement, but I read from one to the other.

Mr. William Ross: Has it a future?

Mr. Cope: Perhaps that was the point that my hon. Friend was making.

It is my task to make it clear that the Government remain committed to the Anglo-Irish Agreement and to the principles that underline it and are embodied in it. The agreement was intended to address how the legitimate interests of the Irish Government in matters within Northern Ireland, particularly regarding the minority community, could be acknowledged without diluting United Kingdom sovereignty or the status of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom. In his closing remarks, my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne demonstrated the sovereignty of Parliament and the Government's advice to it on various matters.

More important, article 1 of the agreement provides a formal acknowledgement by both Governments of the factual status of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom; that that status would be changed only if and when a majority of the people of Northern Ireland wished it; and that if that should occur, both Governments would facilitate it. As my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Dr. Mawhinney) said in the House on 14 March in replying to an Adjournment debate, that firm bedrock has not been shaken by the McGimpsey judgment.

The agreement provides a structure in which views and proposals can be put forward by the Irish Government, in particular in the absence of a devolved Government, and a framework in which the differences that inevitably arise between us from time to time can be resolved in a constructive and co-operative fashion, with the minimum, although not always with the absence, of acrimony. Such differences are inevitable and it is better to try to resolve them through such a framework.

I hope that all hon. Members will agree that a close relationship with the Irish Republic, as provided by the agreement, is an essential component of our efforts to ensure that terrorism does not succeed in Northern Ireland. This morning's earlier discussion on extradition emphasised that point.

The conference, supported by the secretariat, has provided the forum in which Ministers and senior officials on both sides can maintain close and frequent contact. That has inevitably given each side a greater awareness of the political and other realities against which the other side has to operate and has helped to reduce the risk of misunderstandings arising over particular incidents and has increased the possibility that problems will be resolved in a constructive and co-operative spirit. It has enabled each side to take decisions within its jurisdiction with greater knowledge and awareness of the likely impact on and reactions of the other side. That does not mean that we do not disagree with out Irish colleagues on some issues, but it does mean that we have a way of trying to resolve them.

The agreement has been, and continues to be, widely welcomed internationally, where it has been recognised as making a very positive contribution to addressing the fundamental problems of Northern Ireland.

My hon. Friend has criticised the agreement again today, because it treats Northern Ireland differently from the rest of the United Kingdom. However, we must recognise that, in Northern Ireland there are two distinct communities and that in that sense, it is not like any other part of the United Kingdom. The two communities have different aspirations, traditions and allegiances. There is, regrettably, as the House knows all too well, a history of animosity and conflict between them. The agreement provides a means of giving recognition to the identities of the two communities in a framework that ensures that the wishes of a majority shall prevail. Their wishes are, of course, that Northern Ireland should remain part of the United Kingdom.

Mr. William Ross: The Minister is now talking about the interests of the majority. Does he remember that, a moment ago, he was talking about the input of the Government of the Irish Republic? Will he, on behalf of the Government, now give the House an assurance that, on all future occasions when Ministers happen to be speaking to the Government of the Irish Republic, they will keep firmly in the forefront of their mind the fact that the Government of the Irish Republic have been instructed by their own Supreme Court that at every opportunity they must pursue the objective of a united Ireland and use whatever constitutional or other means are available at the time?

Mr. Cope: In seeking to balance the interests of the majority and those of the minority on different occasions, which it is our responsibility to do, we try to keep in mind all relevant considerations, including the views of the Irish Government and the factors that may have led them to present those views to us.

For the avoidance of doubt, I should just add that it is my wish also that Northern Ireland should remain a part of the United Kingdom. I hope that it does, but it is the wish of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland rather than my own wish which matters and should be paramount, as the agreement recognises.

In addition to enshrining the principle of consent as the basis for determining the future of Northern Ireland, the agreement has provided a valuable forum in which cross-border co-operation in security and other matters can be pursued. There is absolutely no doubt that close co-operation in security is essential to our efforts to defeat terrorism. Nor is there any doubt that there have been improvements since the signing of the agreement, and there is now a much more effective level of co-operation between the two police forces. However, there is no room for complacency and I do not say that all is perfect. There remains much work to be done at the political level to ensure that security co-operation is as effective as it can be. The advantage of the agreement is that it provides us with the mechanism through which the two Governments' shared interest in bringing terrorism to an end can be advanced.

The British Government have always made it clear, of course, that they do not regard the agreement as a panacea which provides the solution to all Northern Ireland's problems. Although, as I have said, it provides a valuable framework in which relations between the two Governments on Northern Ireland matters can be conducted, we do not regard it as immutable or as incapable of improvement.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Does the Minister agree that, apart from the co-operation between Ministers in the Irish Republic and in the United Kingdom, which I fully endorse, there is a strong case for continuing co-operation, now that it has started, between Members of Paliament in the Republic and those in this country? Like the hon. Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Porter), I participated in the first session of the new British parliamentary body. I look on that as a welcome initiative. Does the Minister agree?

Mr. Cope: It is a helpful development. A review of the working of the Anglo-Irish Conference——

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): I appreciate that the Minister has a full speech there in justification of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. He has stated that the agreement has provided great benefits to the people of the United Kingdom—forgetting the Irish Republic at present. We had good relations with Dublin over security and there was a degree of co-operation. If anything, it has worsened since the signing of the agreement. Will the Minister now list the benefits that have accrued to the United Kingdom as a result of signing the agreement?

Mr. Cope: I have already given my opinion, which is that benefits have accrued in security co-operation, and I shall talk about some of the other ways in which I believe benefits have accrued and in which co-operation has improved.

A review of the working of the intergovernmental conference, as prescribed under article 11 of the agreement, was completed in May last year. The communiqué recording the outcome of that review and a document setting out developments that have taken place since the signing of the agreement are available in the Library of the House. The two Governments reaffirmed, in paragraph 27 of the review communiqué, the fundamental objectives of the agreement in promoting peace and stability in Northern Ireland, diminishing the divisions between the two traditions, creating a new climate of friendship and co-operation between them and improving co-operation in combating terrorism.

Mr. Barry Porter (Wirral, South): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Cope: No, as I have given way several times.

The two Governments concluded at that stage that the conference had proved its value and that no fundamental change was necessary in its role. They also agreed that if in future it were to appear that the objectives of the agreement could be more effectively served by changes in the scope and nature of the working of the conference, they would be ready in principle to consider such changes. That is relevant to one of the fundamental provisions of the agreement, article 4, to which hon. Members have already referred, which refers to the British Government's policy—which has the support of the Irish Government, too—that responsibility in respect of certain matters within the powers of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland should be devolved within Northern Ireland on a basis that would secure widespread acceptance throughout the community.

It remains the Government's view that it is desirable for locally elected representatives in Northern Ireland to have a greater say in the decisions that affect the lives of the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Barry Porter: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Cope: No, as I have given way several times.

In order for this to happen, it is essential for dialogue to take place between the Northern Ireland political parties and with the British Government. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has, as the House knows, been having a series of meetings with Northern Ireland political leaders to explore what scope there is for making progress.

The judgment of the Irish Supreme Court in the McGimpsey case should not be allowed to block the path to political progress in Northern Ireland. We are offering talks on political progress without preconditions. Unionists may, therefore, legitimately seek change in articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution as part of their list of objectives to be achieved from any talks. I draw their attention to a speech made by an Irish Minister in the debate in the Irish Senate on the McGimpsey judgment, in which he did not say that the Irish would never change their constitution, but said that they did not want to change it in a vacuum and that they would be prepared to examine and review the articles in the context of new political arrangements that might emerge in these islands. Few would doubt that the amendment of articles 2 and 3 of that constitution would have a most important and positive effect on the atmosphere within Northern Ireland and on relations between the Republic and the United Kingdom.

There can be differing views about the form and extent of any devolution of powers, but there appears to be common recognition that devolution is the basis on which widespread acceptance is most likely to be achieved and that both sides of the community must play a proper role in any future institutions of government in Northern Ireland. The achievement of devolution on a basis that will secure widespread acceptance is a central part of the agenda set by the agreement. That does not mean devolution within the agreement, but it does mean that we look to the Irish Government to support our efforts to facilitate the process. As any political progress within Northern Ireland will have implications for relations with the Republic of Ireland, we have kept in close touch with the Irish Government about ways in which progress might be achieved. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State expects to meet his Irish co-chairman of the conference again in the near future to continue that discussion.

The British Government hold fast to the view that a close and co-operative relationship with the Republic of Ireland is essential. For our part, we shall seek to sustain and develop the relationship. Equally, we shall seek to heal any damage to the relationship caused by external factors and to resolve disagreements between the two Governments in an amicable, if sometimes forthright, manner.

It being Eleven o'clock MR. SPEAKER *interrupted the proceedings, pursuant to Resolution [16 March].*

Strangeways Prison

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Waddington): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I think that I ought to make a further statement to the House about the serious events at Manchester prison over the past few days before we rise for the Easter recess.

Since I reported to the House last Monday, prison staff have continued progressively to regain control of the buildings. During the same period, a large number of prisoners have surrendered. But 12 prisoners can be seen inside the prison, who have been identified by name. Pending a final check of our records, I cannot say whether there might not be more.

Negotiations are continuing in order to bring this appalling incident to a close, and I know that the governor and his staff, who throughout have conducted themselves with great courage and professionalism, will continue to do so. I should also like to thank the police and the fire and ambulance services for the work that they have done.

I am very sorry to have to inform the House that a Manchester prison officer died in hospital this morning. He had been on duty on Sunday 1 April, and, although he suffered no injuries during the disturbance, he was admitted to hospital later that day. I wish to express my deep sympathy to his family in their loss. The House will already be aware that a remand prisoner, Mr. Derek White, who suffered serious injuries in the course of the events of last Sunday and who was admitted to hospital on that day, died as a result of those injuries on 3 April. Again, I offer my sympathy to his relatives.

During the past few days a number of prison officers have also been injured, but all but one have now been discharged from hospital.

The Greater Manchester police have opened a murder inquiry, following the death of Mr. White, and other criminal investigations into the incident.

A special telephone number for the use of relatives concerned as to the whereabouts of individual prisoners in Manchester prison at the start of the incident has been available since Sunday. It is 061-817 8178. All governors receiving prisoners from Manchester have also been asked to enable them to make a telephone call to a relative or friend without charge.

Urgent consideration is also being given to the new arrangements which will need to be made to accommodate people committed from the courts in the Manchester area.

I have already expressed my intention to set up an inquiry into this incident as soon as it has been resolved. It will be conducted by Lord Justice Woolf. The terms of reference will be to inquire into the events leading up to the serious disturbance in Her Majesty's prison, Manchester and the action taken to bring it to a conclusion. I intend that the report, which will be separate from, and will not conflict with, the criminal investigation, should be published.

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): I express my thanks to the Home Secretary for making his statement. I know that he had rightly hoped to make it after the riot had ended, but it is absolutely correct that he should come and tell the House how things stand on this, our last sitting day before Easter.

Once more, I expressed our gratitude to, and admiration for, the police, fire officers, ambulance staff and prison officers who have risked their lives and safety in Strangeways this week. I offer our condolences to the family of the prison officer whose tragic death the Home Secretary has just reported and to the family of the inmate who died. The fact that the dead prisoner was on remand awaiting trial, and therefore innocent before the law, adds to the tragedy of his death.

The Home Secretary has told us nothing about the reported disturbances in other prisons. Has he anything that he feels he should tell the House on that subject?

I welcome the right hon. and learned Gentleman's announcement that an inquiry is to be set up. Today, I want to do no more than to ask the Home Secretary for assurances about the issues that the inquiry will consider. The Home Secretary will know that both the Prison Officers Association and the Prison Governors Association attribute the extent of the riot to understaffing. The prison governors have been explicit in relating the riot to what they call

"taut staffing levels . . . since the introduction of Fresh Start".

May we be assured that the inquiry will be empowered to make a wide-ranging examination of staffing levels?

The Home Secretary will recall that last Monday I asked him about the warnings of riots in Strangeways and he told the House that no significant warnings had been received. Reports continue of warnings which, at least to the layman, appear to have been significant, and recklessly ignored. May we again be assured that the inquiry will examine the significance of the alleged warnings and the appropriateness of the authorities' reaction to them?

I make no comment and ask no question about operational matters as the siege continues and none of us wishes to do anything that might prevent its speedy resolution, but will the inquiry examine the general principle of containment, rather than forcible entry, on occasions such as this, especially given that it is reported that inside the prison a number of prisoners are being assaulted and other criminal acts are therefore taking place? Perhaps the Home Secretary does not want to comment even in the most oblique way on the subject this morning, in which case I shall understand the absence of an answer, but I hope that the inquiry will examine the principle, because there is great concern throughout the country that bestial and appalling acts are going on inside the prison and the thought of stopping them immediately ought to be in the public mind and under public examination.

Mr. Waddington: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for the thanks that he expressed to all those who have had to carry a heavy burden in the past few days and who have performed magnificently. I am grateful also for the condolences that he expressed to the families of the prison officer who died and the prisoner who died.

I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that the disturbances that broke out at other prisons are not continuing.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the terms of reference of the inquiry. Of course, it will be up to Lord Justice Woolf to interpret the terms of reference, but he will be concerned to deal with the events leading up to the disturbances and also with the way in which the problem was tackled once those disturbances broke out.

On the question of the reports of warnings, I advise the House and those listening outside to leave these matters now to Lord Justice Woolf. I hope that hon. Members and others will put any evidence in their possession before

[Mr. Waddington]

Lord Justice Woolf. It is far better that it should be done in that way rather than that reports of one sort or another should be leaked to the press.

Mr. Robert Litherland (Manchester, Central): May I, in turn, offer my sincere condolences to the bereaved families in this awful affair? It is estimated that prison officers have recaptured more than 50 per cent. of the prisoners. If that is so, surely they must have witnessed signs of the barbaric scenes that have been described, especially in the tabloid press. Will the Home Secretary comment on that?

Mr. Waddington: The prison officers at Strangeways have not seen the result of any barbaric acts. What we do know is that violence must have occurred on the very first day because violence was done to one prisoner, who, unhappily, has since died. I cannot invite anyone in the House to accept a picture of violence occurring since then. Certainly there have been no macabr[illegible]iscoveries by prison officers during the past few days.

Sir John Wheeler (Westminster, North): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that there is great respect for the police, prison officers and others who have been concerned with this disastrous emergency in Manchester? Does he also agree that there is admiration for the tactful way in which the authorities have sought to bring the matter to a peaceful conclusion with the minimum of violence? Does he accept that it is welcome news that there is to be a thorough inquiry by a respected judge into the circumstances and that it is important to await the conclusion of that inquiry before determining the cause of this terrible tragedy? Will he separately bring forward his review of the management structure of the prison service in England and Wales and give further consideration to the plight of overcrowding in the old, inner-city Victorian prisons?

Mr. Waddington: As my hon. Friend knows, we have made considerable inroads into the overcrowding problem, but that problem is undoubtedly concentrated on the old local prisons. That is the trouble. However, one of the tragedies with Manchester is that it is a setback to all the plans that have been put in train and the progress that has already been made to get rid of overcrowding in our prisons.

I heard what my hon. Friend said about the efforts that have been made to bring this terrible event to a peaceful conclusion. Again, all those matters are for Lord Justice Woolf, but many might take the view that, in this kind of incident, one should bend one's efforts towards bringing the matter to an end peacefully, because any other course, when other lives are not imminently in danger, could result in more injuries, if not deaths.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): My right hon. and hon. Friends and I would like to join in with the sympathy that has been expressed for the families of the prison officer and the prisoner who have died.

Can the Home Secretary tell us how many prisoners from Strangeways are unaccounted for following the dispersal to other prisons?

I welcome very much the appointment of a very distinguished lord justice of appeal to undertake the inquiry, but will the Home Secretary confirm that Lord Justice Woolf will, as part of his terms of reference, be able to review how rule 43 is operated, because it appears that one of the problems that has arisen is the juxtaposition of rule 43 restricted prisoners—protected prisoners—with other prisoners who have sought to commit violence against them?

Mr. Waddington: Of course we do not know at this juncture whether we have seen all those inside the prison. The figure that I gave earlier relates to the 12 people who have been identified and seen by prison staff. My latest information is that all the rule 43 prisoners have been accounted for.

Lord Justice Woolf will interpret the terms of reference as he thinks right. Obviously, he is likely to consider where the rule 43 prisoners were. The difficulty in a local prison such as Strangeways is that the young offenders must be separated from the old offenders and those on remand have to be separated from those who have been sentenced. Carrying out that exercise is quite a problem while at the same time separating all rule 43 prisoners not only from their colleagues, but from everyone else.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): Will my right hon. and learned Friend ask the inquiry to consider whether it was more than just coincidence that this ghastly riot broke out on the same weekend as the serious riots in London? May we use this incident as a turning point to consider a new gaol with a new name, thus putting ghastly Victorian conditions behind us?

Mr. Waddington: It is too early to decide what we should do now after the terrible damage to Strangeways. Clearly I cannot say whether there was any element of copying what might have been seen on the television screens. I do not think that it is helpful to speculate about that.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Does the Home Secretary agree that if Lord Justice Woolf is to carry out a full and detailed inquiry, it might be wise, bearing in mind the fact that evidence already exists of criminality within the prison, that the inquiry should stretch beyond any prosecutions in respect of the criminality, because those who were there at the time could be granted immunity from subsequent prosecution and perhaps their evidence to the inquiry might be more detailed and valuable?

Mr. Waddington: Any question of immunity is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General and the Director of Public Prosecutions. However, there is no reason why the inquiry should touch on the criminal investigation.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): I want to express my admiration for those involved in dealing with the riot including the police, the fire brigade, the ambulance men and the prison officers, many of whom are my constituents.

Can my right hon. and learned Friend say how wide the inquiry is likely to be? My hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) referred to overcrowding in prisons. Many practising lawyers and I are concerned that so many prisoners are inactive in prison. I believe in the old saying, "The devil finds work for idle hands to do." Many prisoners enter gaol without ever having done an honest day's work, and they come out in the same state.

Mr. Waddington: My hon. Friend may recall that I quoted some figures the other day. One of the sadnesses of this affair is that great improvements had taken place in the regimes at Manchester during the year or so before the disturbance. The House will forgive me if I repeat the figures that I gave the other day. The hours of activity for convicted adults were 12·79 hours a week last year, but 22·73 hours this year.

There is no doubt that the governor deserves our congratulations on the progress that has been made in Manchester. The other day I referred to the report of the chief inspector of prisons, who had a great deal to say about the progress that has been made in Manchester. He said:

"'life at Manchester is a great deal nearer what it should be, both for staff and inmates, than it was some two years ago . . . There was much more to praise than to decry in an establishment clearly going in the right direction and with an optimistic momentum.'"—[*Official Report*, 2 April 1990; Vol. 170, c. 904.]

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): How many prisoners have been transferred to Armley prison, in my constituency, which is already recognised as the most overcrowded prison in Britain? Problems of understaffing have been rumbling on in that prison for some months now. Can the Home Secretary give us positive assurance that additional overcrowding pressure will not simply be transferred from Strangeways to Armley prison in Leeds?

Mr. Waddington: Obviously prisoners had to be transferred, because it was an emergency. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman realises that that had to happen and that there are unfortunate consequences as a result. However, we will do our best to keep the hon. Gentleman informed. If he will get in touch with my office, I will give him what information I can about the transfer of prisoners to Armley.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): My right hon. and learned Friend has said that there have been no fatalities beyond the two that he mentioned. Will he comment on an extremely disturbing report on the "Today" programme this morning, in which a solicitor acting for one of the prisoners reported that the prisoner had said that he had seen two men who had been hanged and men who had been thrown over balconies? I understand that some of those issues are matters for the inquiry, but it is important to establish the extent of the brutality because the public should be aware of it. Will my right hon. and learned Friend comment on that?

Mr. Waddington: My hon. Friend will recall that a very short time ago I said that all the rule 43 prisoners had been accounted for. So far, no bodies have been found. Obviously one does not want to say categorically that we will not come across a tragedy, but that is the position at present.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Does the Home Secretary accept that prison officers in various prisons that have accepted people from Strangeways should also be praised because of the difficulties that they face? In Liverpool, they accepted the situation with proper discussion and so on.

Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman satisfied that people are getting information as quickly as they should when they find that relatives in prison are perhaps missing and they do not know what has happened to them? They are anxious, particularly when they read in the gutter press horrific stories of 20 bodies being seen and so on. Such reports may or may not be right, but they worry people.

The telephone number that the right hon. and learned Gentleman gave is all right, but the authorities cannot always give the answers. When prisoners are identified and their whereabouts and what has happened to them are known, I should have thought that it was the responsibility of the Home Office to let their relatives know as soon as possible so that worry is lifted from the people concerned.

Mr. Waddington: I appreciate the importance of what the hon. Gentleman has said. I certainly echo his thanks to the staff of other prisons who have had to bear a considerable burden in the past few days, and have borne it extremely well. The telephone number I mentioned has been available since Sunday. Obviously, we shall do our best to inform people , but people in prison now have the facility to ring their relatives, and people with members of their families in prison are invited to ring that number.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Will my right hon. and learned Friend pass on my congratulations to the governor and prison officers? Having an aging prison in my constituency, I know just how difficult conditions can be for them. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that his twin-track approach to sentencing is the long-term answer to overcrowding? It combines the need to protect the public from more violent criminals with much longer sentences and the need to reduce the prison population by getting as many people as possible back into the community.

Mr Waddington: My hon. Friend is entirely right. I make it plain that our White Paper was not the beginnings of a policy; it was the culmination of it. In recent years, more and more people have been dealt with by punishment in the community, and that has helped greatly towards the reduction in the prison population over the past two years.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): Will the Home Secretary assure the House that the inquiry will examine the efficacy of keeping remand prisoners in establishments such as Strangeways? Does not the effectiveness of the emergency services and the prison staff signal the end of discussions on the privatisation of prisons?

Mr. Waddington: There never has been any question of the privatisation of prisons. On remand prisoners, there is a difficulty and a balance is to be struck. We want remand prisoners to be near their legal advisers and their families, and not too far from the courts before which they must appear. We shall never see the day when all remand prisoners are in establishments miles from city centres where the courts sit.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that many hon. Members think that some irresponsible comments have already been made in this matter, which also affects other prisons? Is it not a fact that warnings are nearly always given when violent men are mewed up in prison? It is nonsense to continue to say that the governor was especially warned—he must always be warned. Is it not also a fact that there are 2,700 fewer prisoners now and that there are 3,000 more prison officers than there were three years ago? It is entirely unhelpful to give the

[Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark]

impression that prisons are overcrowded and understaffed, because that affects the morale of prison officers and people outside, and that irresponsibility should stop.

Mr. Waddington: Over the past 10 years there has been a 50 per cent. increase in the number of prison officers and only an 11 per cent. increase in the number of prisoners. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to make the point that, sometimes in the past few days, people have overlooked the very big increase in the staffing of prisons that has taken place in recent years. My hon. Friend is absolutely right about warnings, but, now that the inquiry has been set up, the best thing is for people who have any information that they think is relevant to give that information to the inquiry.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that this is a private Members' day. I shall allow questions to continue for another five minutes, and then we must make progress.

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): Bearing in mind the difficulties of this sad incident, the fact that many prisoners have been transferred to other gaols where subsequent incidents have occurred and that other incidents have been happening at other gaols anyway, will the Home Secretary comment, albeit briefly, on the practice of containment? Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman say whether, bearing in mind the violence and everything else that has occurred, containment is in the best interests of people who may be left in prison for a considerable time?

Mr. Waddington: That is a matter for decision by governors. It would be rash for politicians to tell governors how best to make such difficult decisions.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): Will my right hon. and learned Friend ask Lord Justice Woolf to look not only at the problem of rule 43 prisoners but at the problem of HIV-positive prisoners and prisoners with AIDS who have their own problems in prison and are not at all the same as those who are under rule 43 conditions, even though they are often segregated?

Mr. Waddington: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Clearly it is not for me to tell Lord Justice Woolf what to look into. No doubt he will consider all those matters and will look at his terms of reference and then decide how he should approach the task that he has been set.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Are not the public entitled to know why only five prison officers accompanied 300 prisoners to the chapel last Sunday, a matter of 12 hours after a prison officer at Strangeways logged the fact that he believed that there would be violence the following day? Does that not show that inadequate manning inevitably leads to trouble?

Mr. Waddington: The hon. Gentleman's figures are wrong. I stated the other day that there were 10 prison officers inside the chapel, and there were also more prison officers outside. In any event, those matters are for Lord Justice Woolf's inquiry. I do not think that it helps when hon. Members propagate various rumours. All those matters can be established in due course by the inquiry.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Upminster): Although I enormously admire the way in which my right hon. and learned Friend has handled this extremely difficult tragedy, I was slightly disappointed with his reply to the hon. Member for Worsley (Mr. Lewis) about remand prisoners and privatisation. It is essential that remand prisoners, many of whom may be guilty of no crime whatever, are segregated from those who have been convicted. One way forward may be to have privatised prisons in which remand prisoners can be held separately.

Mr. Waddington: There never has been any question of the privatisation of prisons. The matter that was raised by my right hon. Friend the present Foreign Secretary was whether the private sector could play any part in remand centres. That matter is under consideration.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Will the Home Secretary assure the House that the proposed Home Office reorganisation, which was deprecated by a number of prison governors, including the one at Strangeways, and its effect will be taken into account by the inquiry? Will he assure hon. Members that that reorganisation was not a prelude to privatisation of sections of the prison service, as many people thought? Will he, as a matter of urgency, review the proposed reorganisation to make sure that it is halted before any further adverse effects occur?

Mr. Waddington: It is not for me to express a view on that matter now because it goes wide of the statement, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that it is up to Lord Justice Woolf to look at his terms of reference and decide what matters are relevant and what matters are not relevant.

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): I join hon. Members on both sides of the House in paying tribute to the courage of all those who have worked so hard to bring the matter to a conclusion. It should not be forgotten that they did not allow one prisoner to escape into the general public. Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that the Home Office has plans to redevelop Manchester prison? Is it not important that any decision in the area should take account of the lessons to be learned from the distressing events of the past week?

Mr. Waddington: I said in my statement on Tuesday that, only days before the incident broke out, arrangements had been made for the purchase by the prison service of land adjoining the prison. My hon. Friend is right to congratulate all those involved. He has drawn attention to something that I should perhaps have mentioned earlier: not one prisoner escaped.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Whatever repugnance we may rightly feel for those convicted and gaoled for crimes involving sexual violence and abuse, they nevertheless deserve to be placed in circumstances governed by the highest degree of segregation. In the understandable haste surrounding the transfer of prisoners from Strangeways, was the need for protection of rule 43 prisoners maintained?

Mr. Waddington: Rule 43 prisoners were segregated. The trouble was that access was obtained to the part of the prison in which they were held. How any rule 43 prisoner is dealt with at the receiving establishment is a matter for the governor.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): I too thank my right hon. and learned Friend for his wise handling of this tragic matter and for the Government's largest building programme this century for prisons which may bring an end to the disgusting circumstances in which prisoners have often been held hitherto. Does he agree that too many prisons are potential tinder boxes, because they are repositories of violent men, which are contained and made secure only through the bravery of prison officers? Will he make sure that not only the governors and the prison service but prison officers always have easy access to the constant support of his Department, and that their views are listened to?

Mr. Waddington: I would be the first to pay tribute to the bravery of prison officers, as many hon. Members from both sides of the House have done, for the way in which they responded to the emergency. I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend for his remarks about the prison building programme. It is a great tragedy that this incident will set it back.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I am sorry that it was not possible to call every hon. Member who wished to speak. I sought to call those who have a direct interest in the matter and those who were not called when the previous statement was made.

Iraq

Question again proposed, That this House do now adjourn.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) and for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) must divide their time between them—they have 29 minutes each.

11.32 am

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I accept that Britain has diplomatic relations with several dictatorships with deplorable human rights records. I am aware of the criteria by which recognition is given and which successive Governments have followed. There are instances, however, when outrages against British interests or nationals lead to the conclusion that we should break off diplomatic relations in peace time. Hence, at present, Britain does not have relations with the authorities in power in Libya, Iran and Syria. I think that I am right in saying that that has the approval of the whole House.

The Government have told us that, despite recent events in Iraq affecting Britain, they intend to continue diplomatic relations with that country. No doubt the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, who will reply to the debate, will reaffirm that position today. Leaving aside the matter of diplomatic relations, the House should take an interest in events in Iraq. That country was the subject of statements and private notice questions recently over the long detention and then execution of Farzad Bazoft. The case turned the spotlight on the nature of the dictatorship in Iraq. Mr. Bazoft was there by invitation of the authorities and was with a group of other journalists. We should remind ourselves that he had previously visited that country, again by invitation, on five occasions. Mr. Bazoft was stateless, but he travelled on British travel documents.

The regime seemed to take a sheer delight in Mr. Bazoft's execution. In Britain, the reaction was one of widespread dismay and anger. As the Minister will probably remind us, two other British citizens—Daphne Parish and Ian Richter—are still being held in Iraq. We all want to see their return to Britain as quickly as possible. No doubt those two cases will be the subject of continuing questions to Foreign Office Ministers.

What about the dictatorship itself? What sort of a country is Iraq? How has it been led in the past 10 or 15 years? Such questions are important and relevant to the United Kingdom and should be taken into account by the Government in their relations with the regime. Many British people believe that the Government's mild reaction to the execution of Mr. Bazoft was not appropriate. The contempt that the regime showed for British protests and representations demonstrated again that when one is dealing with totalitarian regimes, mild protests or appeasement of any kind simply do not work.

As I said yesterday during Foreign Office questions, terrorist dictatorships work on the basis that democracies are unlikely to act tough and will find all kinds of excuses for not doing so. The reaction of totalitarian regimes is simply to show contempt for what they see as weakness. That was the lesson of the 1930s and the continued criticism of the Opposition towards the dealings of the British regime with Nazi Germany and Mussolini's Italy.

[Mr. David Winnick]

I have referred to Iraq as a terrorist regime. I certainly believe that that is an accurate description. It is one of the most notorious and bloodstained dictatorships in existence. That is saying a great deal when one thinks of the other dictatorships in various parts of the globe. In Iraq there is constant spying on and intimidation of its citizens, mass arrests, prolonged and savage tortures, show trials and large-scale executions, including public hangings. Those are all part of the way in which Saddam Hussein has ruled Iraq in recent years.

One of the worst crimes of the regime, and there have been many, was the use of chemical weapons in March 1987 against Kurds in a town in northern Iraq. Thousands died from the effects of the poison gas used. The regime denied that chemical weapons were used, but does anyone in the House or outside believe a word of what it says? The recent comments of the regime about a possible attack using chemical weapons against Israel give us even more reason to disbelieve it. By any standards, the attack using chemical weapons was a crime against humanity.

All the abuses in Iraq have been well documented in reports by Amnesty International. In 1989 that organisation referred to other crimes carried out by the terrorist regime. It dealt with the hundreds of executions of those considered to be opponents of the Government and army deserters. It said that routine torture and ill-treatment of prisoners continues to occur and that many are tortured to force them to sign confessions or to renounce their political affiliations. It said that political prisoners are reported to have been beaten, whipped, sexually abused, subjected to electric shocks and deprived of food. It also mentioned the cruel and sadistic tortures that have been inflicted on women prisoners. That is all part of the regime ruled over by Saddam Hussein in that unhappy country, as it has been for so many years.

Another report from Amnesty International devoted entirely to the detention of children documents the brutal treatment of young people, many of them very young, held in Iraqi prisons. Some of those children are executed once they have reached 16 or 17. Children in Iraq are frequently arrested and held as hostages in lieu of their parents or other relatives.

Some hon. Members, particularly Conservative Members—I emphasise that they are not present now—may say that what goes on in other countries is not our concern, that we should not worry unduly about that and that we should mind our own business. Twenty-two years ago, I had an Easter Adjournment debate on the military regime in Greece. A year had passed since the colonels had taken over and I protested strongly about the dictatorship and the brutalities occurring there. I quoted then from Amnesty International reports. On that occasion I was sitting on the Government Benches and I did not receive much support, if any, from Conservative Members.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): I place on record my concern, and that of many Conservative Members, that Iraq may, in the near future, have nuclear weapons which could have a destabilising effect on the middle east.

Mr. Winnick: I shall come to that point in a moment. The House of Commons should always be concerned with brutality and torture in other countries. If we as a House refuse to show such interest, we shall lose one of our important roles and one of our most honourable traditions. That is my view and I am not likely to change my mind.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the possible manufacture of nuclear weapons by Iraq, and the events of last week at Heathrow airport were a timely reminder of the determination of Iraq's criminal regime to manufacture nuclear weapons. I know that the argument of British domestic policy is that we should have nuclear weapons because other countries have them. I shall not go into that controversy today. No doubt Saddam Hussein would use the same type of argument. But that undoubtedly shows the immense dangers to humanity of nuclear weapons of any sort being in the hands of a criminal regime with a bloodstained record such as I have been describing. I hope that the possible manufacture of nuclear weapons by Iraq will be the subject of much interest not only in Britain and the western world, but among Arab countries, too.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Would not that also be relevant to our attitude towards the protection of the state of Israel, because what happens in Iraq must be of direct concern to the democratically elected members of a state which is at risk?

Mr. Winnick: Yes. I am critical of the policies pursued by Israel, certainly in the occupied territories—the Minister knows my view—but I agree with my hon. Friend.

I strongly urge that the banning of all export high-level technology to Iraq should be given the highest priority and that every effort should be made urgently to seek co-operation on that, certainly from the countries of western Europe, but also, as I pointed out yesterday, from the Soviet Union and other countries of eastern Europe. One of the most significant things about the renewal or the beginning of the democratic process in eastern Europe and, I hope, in the Soviet Union, is that those countries will no longer wish in any way, directly or indirectly, to support terrorists or criminal regimes.

The sanctions that I have just been urging should be applied against Iraq as soon as possible. Trade credits to the regime should also be ended. I know all the arguments about the benefits to Britain of such trade, but the more that we can isolate such a regime the better it will be, not only for our well-being in Britain, but for humanity as a whole.

We also need the support of Arab states in spotlighting the dangers to their countries. That is not directly a matter for the British Government. My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) mentioned Israel, and that is clearly a matter which will deeply concern the Israeli Government. But Arab countries in the region—Muslim countries—will recognise the dangers of Iraq acquiring nuclear weapons and, in particular, the territorial ambitions of Saddam Hussein. I hope that such dangers will be recognised by countries such as Egypt.

When we raise such matters, it is sometimes argued that we are being critical of Muslim countries. It should not be forgotten that the large majority of victims of the regime that I have been describing have been Muslims. In the main, the Kurds are Muslim. One should also remember that Iraq started the Gulf war. Perhaps at that time it was in western interests to see Iran defeated, but it should not be forgotten who started the war. The millions of casualties which resulted from those two ruthless dictatorships fighting for years were all Muslims. That was a needless and senseless war and I am only too pleased that it has finally come to an end. The leaders of Iraq may welcome a new war to divert attention from domestic problems. I have already referred to the territorial ambitions of Saddam Hussein.

I have chosen this subject because, following recent events, including what happened at Heathrow, it is necessary to spotlight what has been happening. I hope that this subject will continue to interest the House when we return after the recess. I hope that every opportunity will be taken by the Government to pursue the line that I have urged—not appeasement and not a show of weakness, but a recognition of all the dangers involved in the criminal regime in Iraq, to try to isolate it in every way possible and to seek the utmost international co-operation in pursuing that course.

11.46 am

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. William Waldegrave): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) for giving the House another opportunity to express, as I am sure it will wish to, its horror at the execution of Farzad Bazoft, and I agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman has said about that case. I shall make one or two comments on the wider issues of our relations with countries whose regime we abhor and whose human rights records we know to be dreadful. Both those things, I am sad to say, are true of Iraq at the present time. We have made that clear in recent years.

I am responsible, under my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, for relations with the middle east, Africa, eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. With the wonderful exception of events in eastern Europe, there are —with one or two honourable exceptions—few countries among those for which I am responsible whose human rights record or commitment to democracy would meet the approval of this House. If this country's diplomatic relations, let alone trading relations, were to be dictated as our hearts would like to dictate them, and if we were to maintain relations only with countries of which we approved, our relationships around the world would be few.

The hon. Member for Walsall, North is justified in saying that Iraq is among the nations having the worst record of human rights—although I could put others in that dismal competition.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Does the Minister accept that few other countries have taken action against someone travelling on a British passport, or at least with British travel documents, in the way that Iraq did recently?

Mr. Waldegrave: Mr. Bazoft was not travelling on a British passport, but, like many displaced people, used travel documents issued by the country in which he was staying.

The list of executions that have taken place in the countries for which I am responsible is very long, and there are many competitors—alongside the catalogue of those who have been tortured and wrongly imprisoned.

It is the duty of all countries which are signatories to the United Nations convention, and certainly the duty of this House, to protest whenever possible. When a case comes close to us, such as that of Farzad Bazoft, who was working for a British employer at the time of his arrest and travelling on British travel documents, it is right that the House should do what it can. My Government made major efforts to save Mr. Bazoft, aligning a huge international protest. Tragically, that effort failed, but I am sure that the hon. Member for Walsall, North acknowledges that Britain did all that it could to save Mr. Bazoft. Those of us working in the Foreign Office were as distressed as anyone by the terrible outcome of that affair.

Farzad Bazoft's confession, which was about the only document put before the court, is a pathetic document, because it clearly tells the truth about a number of rather low-level contacts that Mr. Bazoft had with special branch officers in this country when he was trying—as journalists do—to swap information with the police about Iranian dissidents and about demonstrations in London some years ago. Whether deliberately or in ignorance, that admission was taken by the Iraqis as evidence that Mr. Bazoft was in touch with the British secret services, and so on. The horror is complete because, from what I have read of his confession, Mr. Bazoft told the truth. By telling that truth, which was entirely innocent, he was taken as condemning himself.

As to the remarks of the hon. Member for Walsall, North concerning chemical weapons, at the chemical weaponry conference in Paris last year, Britain was the only country, not only in Europe but the world, to name Iraq as having breached its 1925 obligation. We were in the forefront of protests about that breach and welcomed the commitment given by Iraq at the conference that it would not recur—a commitment that we hope will be honoured.

As the hon. Member for Walsall, North rightly said, we were deeply involved in the desperate attempt to stop the export of nuclear weaponry technology not only to Iraq but to other countries, as was our duty under the non-proliferation treaty and the missile technology control regime. I join the hon. Gentleman in emphasising that one of the most hopeful developments is the new, genuine adherence to those measures by the Soviet Union, which is making it known that, although it is not willing at present to join the missile technology control regime, it will act as though it has done so and in parallel with its requirements. That is a most helpful and hopeful development.

Another hopeful development in the whole area of terrorism is that a number of former safe havens in eastern Europe have gone for ever. The countries that formerly served as safe havens are now taking steps to join those of us who act against terrorists, which is most beneficial.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is it true, as reported in *The Independent on Sunday*, that the same capacitors as were allegedly brought into the United Kingdom are available in university laboratories in London? Are efforts being made in the United States to monitor the production of the capacitors to ensure that they do not enter the export chain?

Mr. Waldegrave: The answer to the hon. Gentleman's first question is no. The success of our extremely succesful joint investigation with the Americans over several months answers the hon. Gentleman's second question.

I have little argument with the hon. Member for Walsall, North about our horror at many practices of the Iraqi regime and of many others. He asked us to consider taking further steps against them. However, I genuinely

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believe that it would be wrong for us to break diplomatic relations with all those countries whose human rights records fall short of what we desire.

Mr. Winnick: I agree.

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman concurs. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has pointed out that we broke off relations with a number of countries that took steps against our citizens either from their diplomatic premises in Britain—as in the Libyan or Syrian cases—or in their own country, as in Iran. We maintain diplomatic relations with a range of other countries whose practices, I am sorry to say, we deplore.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has pointed out that if we were to withdraw from Iraq, where there are 2,000 British business men and British prisoners—the hon. Gentleman was right to refer to the cases of Mrs. Parish and Mr. Richter, on whose behalf we continue to work hard—we would leave British citizens without such help as our diplomats can provide. We would be left with a swathe of countries, from the Khyber pass in Afghanistan, across to the Mediterranean and Syria, without any British diplomatic representation. We must avoid that if we can.

The trade argument is one point on which I disagree with the hon. Member for Walsall, North. It suggests that we are granting the countries concerned a privilege by allowing them to buy things from us. However, it is worth remembering when horrible cases arise that we ask our business men to earn this country's living by going to some of the most unappealing places in the world, and by living often in constrained and unpleasant circumstances, to help keep people employed in our country. A Conservative Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, once remarked, "Exporting is fun." I am not sure to what extent that sentiment would be echoed by business men who have to operate in some of the countries that I have mentioned, to win orders to keep their factories running at home.

It is argued that Britain should cut off trade credits. Nothing would please Treasury Ministers more, for they are always against lending money to anyone. However, if British business men are to be sent in to bat against the Germans, Japanese and Italians without even the minimal support of trade credits, one might as well not send them at all. We are not granting Iraq a privilege but are competing against all the industrial countries in earning our living as a trading nation.

There is no question of isolating Iraq. The Arab League unanimously supports Iraq on the Bazoft case. A number of our friends in the Arab world asked for clemency beforehand, but the Arab League afterwards passed a motion supporting Iraq, and a further motion supporting Iraq against the media campaign on nuclear matters which it alleges has subsequently taken place.

Therefore, I fear that it is being hopeful to have the idea that cutting off British trade credits and trying to prevent British business men from going to that market—not that we could legally do it—would isolate Iraq. That could create satisfaction among our industrial competitors and it would lose us jobs and orders in Britain. It would have no other effect.

Like the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), I would have much preferred to stand at the Dispatch Box in the times of Lord Palmerston or perhaps even of Mr. Anthony Eden—although I doubt whether the hon. Lady would have supported his exercise of power in the middle east. However, those days are not with us now and it is no good pretending that they are.

Mr. Winnick: Although I was around at the time, but not in this place, no one could have been more opposed to that criminal Suez adventure than I was.

As I tried to emphasise in my remarks, is there not a need for co-ordinated action, or is the Minister of State telling us that other democracies are so short-sighted that they do not recognise that to take advantage of any actions we take would not be in their interests?

Mr. Waldegrave: I pay tribute to the European Community, which protested strongly, and to those countries in the Arab world which asked for clemency on our behalf—as a good many did, including King Hussein.

If the hon. Member for Walsall, North thinks that it is possible to arrange a trade boycott of Iraq because of these events, he is whistling in the wind. It is completely impossible. I fear that those are the facts. We have to live with them and to recognise the limits of our power.

However, that does not mean that we should not protest—we should. It does not mean that we should not conduct relations with a country that behaves in such a way, although it will obviously be in a different style than with those countries with which we are friendly.

Mrs. Dunwoody *rose*——

Mr. Waldegrave: I have only one more minute.

It is not sensible to pretend to our people that we have powers that we do not have. Nor is it sensible to pretend that we have the luxury of living as a self-contained island that does not have to trade with, potentially, hundreds of regimes round the world which do not meet the human rights standards that we seek to defend in the House. That is the truth of the matter.

The tensions and dangers in the middle east ultimately derive from the unsolved problems of the region. If the Iran-Iraq war was not still suspended, those countries would not be seeking to arm themselves with terrible weapons. If the Arab-Israel dispute was following the course of a peace process—which the hon. Member for Walsall, North and I would both like—tensions would diminish.

As diplomats, that is where we should put our primary effort—to trying to remove the underlying conditions that give comfort to and produce those dreadful regimes, because it is the tensions within that region that help the maintenance and growth of the dictatorial regimes about which the hon. Gentleman so rightly protests. That is where our principal effort should be directed and that is where the Government's diplomatic efforts are still directed in the Iran-Iraq and Arab-Israel conflicts. If we can help to get those on their way to a solution, we shall have done something, in the longer term, to dissolve the conditions that produce the regimes against which we have to protest all too often.

Baltic States

12.3 pm

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): I am grateful for this opportunity to discuss the current situation in the Baltic states at such a timely moment.

I am sure that the House, if not the entire free world, including or course central and most of eastern Europe, have been watching developments from Lithuania with bated breath; with sympathy for the demands that its Parliament has made for independence, so recently and so clearly endorsed by the elections in February; with understanding for its declaration of independence and President Landsbergis's appeal for western recognition and support; with admiration at the cool and courageous way in which he and his colleagues are responding to the psychological pressure that is increasingly being applied by Moscow; with alarm at the intervention of the Red Army and its occupation of public buildings and of the free press, the expulsion of foreign correspondents and the closure of the border with Poland; with fear that the situation will lead to a classic confrontation in the tradition of the Breznev doctrine, which the world had understood had been abandoned; and with distress at the consequences of such an intervention for the remarkable progress that has been made to end the cold war and to improve east-west relations, and in arms control, and for President Gorbachev himself and his progress towards political and economic reform, which we fully support—provided, of course, that he means what he says.

That is where the matter rests at the moment, perhaps awaiting a further turn of the screw to encourage negotiations on the Kremlin's terms.

I have no doubt that all that was discussed by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister with President Gorbachev during their telephone conversation last week and is being discussed by Mr. Baker and Mr. Shevardnadze in Washington and that the limits beyond which it is unacceptable for both sides to go are being clearly spelled out.

To date, the line that western Governments have taken in public, including Her Majesty's Government, has been that the future of the Baltic states is an internal matter for the Soviet Union and the republics concerned. That is a lie which I cannot accept any more, and I do not believe that the House will accept it either.

As I said to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on Tuesday, the secret protocol of 1939 makes the Baltic states a special case. Their problem is not just a Soviet problem; it is a European one. Like German unification, it is the legacy of the last war, which can and should be resolved only by the four powers in a European context within the forums that already exist for the resolution of such matters, peacefully, securely and in a spirit of co-operation. That is what the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe—the Helsinki process—is all about. That is the principal argument of my debate today, and I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, will respond to it.

Perhaps at this point it would be helpful for us to recall the events that led to the occupation and annexation of the Baltic states into the Soviet Union in 1939 and 1940. In 1918, the Baltic states gained independence of the Russian empire amid that turbulent period which saw the German advance, following the withdrawal of the Bolshevik forces, turn into a retreat in November.

The Russian civil war that followed became a war of independence for the Baltic peoples. Eventually, in 1920, peace treaties were signed with the Soviet Union which unreservedly recognised the independence of the new republics from Russia, which renounced all former rights of sovereignty "voluntarily and forever".

In 1921, the League of Nations recognised all three states to which de jure recognition had been extended by most countries and they became member states of the league. Further independently negotiated treaties with the Soviet Union confirmed the legitimacy of the new states.

Liberal democratic constitutions were adopted. Minority rights were guaranteed by law, and no one group exercised significant political influence. Tragically, proportional representation led to a plethora of small parties, which in turn led to cabinet instability, parliamentary paralysis and a series of largely pre-emptive coups d'etat and the setting-up of largely authoritarian regimes.

With the resurgence of Germany, the Soviet Union became concerned about its security in the event of German aggression against the Baltic states, and saw an opportunity for territorial expansion. On 23 August 1939, Ribbentrop and Molotov agreed a treaty of non-aggression. That was the public document published at the time. On the same day, however, a secret additional protocol concerning their respective spheres of influence in Poland and the Baltic area was signed. That was amended by a further secret protocol on 28 September transferring Lithuania to the Soviet sphere.

Following the German invasion of Poland, all three states were forced to conclude military alliances with the Soviet Union. All three treaties assured the Baltic Governments that their sovereignty would be fully respected, but it was not long before Soviet troops entered the Baltic states. They were incorporated into the Soviet Union behind a facade of ligitimacy.

When the Soviets returned in 1944, following the German occupation, there was a large-scale flight to the west which was not surprising. They knew what to expect: enforced collectivisation, industrialisation and integration into the Soviet economy, and persecution of the church and of all nationalist consciousness. Six hundred thousand people were deported to Siberia; hundreds of thousands of people were killed in Soviet prison camps. The process of Russification, through the immigration of Russian peoples, was designed to swamp the Baltic majority.

During the 40 years of apparent acquiescence to the Soviet occupation that followed, it is clear that Baltic nationalism was barely affected. At every level of society, people used their official positions to preserve national identity and integrity. However, it is only during the past two years that there have been more changes in the Baltic states than at any time since Stalin—in response to unprecedented popular demands, themselves in response to glasnost and perestroika, that have led so dramatically to today's circumstances. The establishment of the popular fronts in Latvia and Estonia and Sajudis in Lithuania provided the impetus and the channel for national self-assertion, the adoption of national flags and symbols and the more recent demands for independence and a democratic parliamentary system.

Not far behind have been the Communist parties of all three states which, either through conviction or for

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survival, declared their own independence from the Communist party of the Soviet Union in support of national self-determination. Perhaps one of the most impressive and moving peaceful demonstrations in history of solidarity between peoples against an occupying power took place on 23 August 1989 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, when more than 1 million people linked hands in a human chain across all three republics.

In its initial response to such clear demonstrations of nationalism, Moscow postponed environmentally sensitive projects, restored Vilnius cathedral to the Roman Catholic Church, granted economic sovereignty and decentralisation and proposed the prospect of limited sovereignty. In addition, the Yakovlev commission was established to inquire into the status of the secret protocol. Throughout last year, and into this, the Parliaments of all three states seemed to outdo each other in declaring ever-more daring acts of defiance in pursuit of independence, with Lithuania making the running in declaring Soviet annexation invalid and adopting laws to pave the way for a referendum on independence and ending the party's leading role.

Given the fact that such unprecedented demands for nationalism were being emulated elsewhere in the Soviet Union, it became clear that it could not be allowed to continue unchecked without undermining President Gorbachev's position and authority. In December, he appealed to Lithuania to reject the idea of an independent state outside the Soviet Union, although in January, during his visit to Lithuania, he promised legislation to permit an orderly secession. The Yakovlev commission declared the secret protocol to the contrary to international law but claimed that that did not invalidate the incorporation of the Baltic republics into the USSR in 1940.

In February this year, the terms of such secession became clearer, including the requirement that three quarters of the population must participate in a referendum, which would be followed by a transitional period of five years—endorsed this week by the Soviet Parliament. If that was designed to discourage demands for immediate independence, it has failed. In last month's elections to the Lithuanian supreme soviet, Sajudis obtained 97 seats out of 141 and Gallup reported 63 per cent. in favour of full independence. Its supreme council has adoped a declaration of sovereignty and a resolution reinstating the constitution of 1938.

More recent elections in Latvia and Estonia have also produced majorities for independence candidates, despite the influx of Russian troops to influence the results with their votes. In response, the USSR's Congress of People's Deputies, which I attended last month, appointed a commission to review the position, since when the Government have refused to accept the Lithuanian declaration of independence and have sent Soviet troops to occupy party buildings in Vilnius and to arrest deserters.

As the whole world knows, President Landsbergis has refused to withdraw the declaration and has appealed for international recognition and support. It is an appeal reminiscent of Dubcek's in 1968 and of Nagy's in 1956. We must all hope and work for a solution that does not end in similar tragedies. President Gorbachev, of course, is cleverer than that.

Surely the events of the past two years have proved beyond all reasonable doubt that the Baltic peoples have demonstrated, demanded and voted for nothing less than a return to independence. There is even evidence that their ethnic Russian populations would opt for the prospect of the greater prosperity that would result from being in control of their own destiny. Moreover, we know from their previous independence that they are capable of economic self-sufficiency and would—like Finland, whose economy was much weaker after the war—have become fully integrated into the western economy by now. Indeed, they argue that it is in the Soviet Union's interests for independent Baltic states to act, as Finland is now, as entrepots for trade and technology with the west.

It seems to me that the way is now open for Her Majesty's Government to take initiatives to resolve the future of the Baltic states in a way that should not threaten President Gorbachev's position. First, let us confirm that the secret protocol of 1939 and its implementation in 1940 was a clear breach of international law which determines the Baltic states as a special case. Secondly, it is no longer good enough to regard this matter as one for the Soviet Union as the de facto power and as one for negotiation between the parties concerned. The fact that we withhold de jure recognition of Soviet annexation implies that we will recognise, de facto, a return to independence. If Soviet occupation remains illegal, as it does, current events mean that we can no longer remain silent as to what we would regard as legal. To do so would encourage Moscow to intensify its intimidation.

Does not article 12 of the Soviet constitution as it stands allow for secession? Does not article 1 of both the international covenant on civil and political rights and the international covenant on economic, social and cultural rights proclaim the right of peoples to self-determination? Does not principle 8 of the Helsinki Final Act guarantee the right of people to self-determination and also their wish, in full freedom, to determine when and as they wish their internal and external status, with the Act itself providing for change in frontiers by peaceful means and agreement?

As they do, do not these international obligations, entered into by the Soviet Union, by us and by all other members of our European community, now require us to seek a solution to the Baltic problem in the wider framework of east-west relations and within that common European home to which President Gorbachev gives credence, which is the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe process?

Let us now consult our council of Europe and CSCE colleagues to agree to raise the future of the Baltic states at the forthcoming summit under the Helsinki process, which is already planned to take account of the irreversible events in central and eastern Europe, including, in particular, the forthcoming unification of Germany and the signing of a peace treaty? To ignore the consequences of the secret protocol in seeking to resolve, once and for all, the consequences of the last war, would be a lie.

I accept that these consequences go beyond the Baltic states. They apply to the western Ukraine and Moldavia too, but we should not be put off by that. Any solution must be a freely negotiated one, but it must be on Europe's terms, not those of the Soviet Union. Since no referendum was held in 1940 to determine the Baltic peoples' wish to nullify their independence, we certainly should not support any suggestion of a referendum to put right what international law has found to be illegal. The recent elections have confirmed the people's choice. As President Gorbachev said to the United Nations in December 1988:

"Freedom of choice is a universal principle which allows no exceptions."

The situation in the Baltic states today determines that these questions must be resolved, and resolved soon. The CSCE is the means. The forthcoming summit is the opportunity. Her Majesty's Government can be the initiator. I look forward to my right hon. Friend's response.

12.19 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. William Waldegrave): It give me genuine pleasure to respond to my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson), who has raised an extremely topical subject, and I congratulate him on his success in being able to introduce the debate. I shall comment on his extremely comprehensive and learned speech. My officials could find no fault with the history that he set out. I share with the House the fact that my hon. Friend did me the courtesy of showing me a copy of his speech in advance.

My principal points are in agreement with my hon. Friend. First, he is right to recognise that the progress that has already been made in the Baltic states must owe a great deal to perestroika and glasnost and to the much more liberal policy followed by Mr. Gorbachev and his colleagues in recent years. The response of previous Soviet regimes, let alone Stalin, was very different.

It is worth recognising that the fact that the Baltic people are now, we hope, on the way to recovering their legal rights of independence is another of the beneficial side effects of the general improvement and loosening up in the Soviet Union. That gives us and the Soviet Union the responsibility of doing nothing as any action would give such succour to the enemies of the process of liberalisation in the Soviet Union—and there are many of them—as to bring that process to an end. That is the tightrope which the Baltic peoples—with skill and restraint so far—are walking.

Secondly, I agree with my hon. Friend that the danger is extremely close to the surface. It is easy to imagine incidents as a result of provocation or accident which could lead to disaster. The mature behaviour of people in Lithuania—of whom we have seen most in our newspapers and electronic media—in Estonia and in Latvia deserves tribute.

My hon. Friend gave an interesting account of the passage of history, making passing reference to the usual disasters that follow from proportional representation. He made a rather pregnant remark when he reminded us of the disasters in Hungary and Czechoslovakia in 1956 and 1968. Everyone of our generation remembers the poignant way in which the radio stations said, "Remember us," when they were closed down. That also reminds us of our responsibility.

The history books now show that many young people in 1956 and 1968 believed that in some impossible way the west would physically come to their rescue. Right until the end they were asking where were the American marines, the British and the French.

We should do nothing in any physical sense—and I am sure that the passage of history has made the Baltic people much more aware of the truth—to raise any expectations that we cannot meet. I am not saying that we should not bring other pressures to bear and enter into the diplomatic process, but it is worth putting it clearly on record that the questions and propositions at the end of my hon. Friend's speech when he talked of the CSCE mechanisms and discussions and the process leading to independence. That is the path we must follow.

However, I must correct my hon. Friend on one point. Britain does not regard the matter as an internal one for the Soviet Union. Our position, like that of most of the principal western countries, is that the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact was illegal and that there has never been a legal incorporation of the Baltic states into the Soviet Union. Therefore, it is not pari passu with events in other parts of the Soviet Union; it is important to make that distinction. That is one of the elements that may lead to a solution. Clearly there must be many in the Soviet Union who fear any movement on the Baltic states as leading to a precedent that would make things extremely difficult for the Soviet Union.

We do not believe that that issue has to be addressed in relation to the Baltic states. They already have a ring around them, given the fact that we and the Soviet Union now believe that the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact was illegal. There is a ring of legality and separateness around the Baltic states, and it is worth drawing attention to that.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister put that clearly on record in the House on 27 March when she said:

"we have never recognised the annexation"

of the Baltic states

"to the Soviet Union as being legal."—[*Official Report*, 27 March 1990; Vol. 170, c. 205.]

I should like to raise a number of points about what will happen next and what we should be seeking to do, which was how my hon. Friend finished his excellent speech. We have taken a number of steps to make it clear that, although we have been urging restraint on the people of the Baltic states and congratulating them on their exercise of that restraint, we should be urging the same restraint on the Soviet Union. We made that clear at the Dispatch Box yesterday. The European Community has twice made it clear in authoritative statements that we do not approve of the threats that have been made. That is not the way to solve the problem.

There has been sabre rattling—with modern technological means rather than with sabres—and, in a repeated statement by the Twelve issued yesterday, we have all deplored that. The Twelve stated that the situation remains difficult and that we are concerned about the potentially serious consequences which an aggravation of the situation might have on the improved climate prevailing in Europe and that the Twelve expressed the hope that a purposeful dialogue between Vilnius and Moscow—they were talking about Lithuania—will commence in the very near future. They call for good will on both sides and the maximum restraint on all sides so as not to aggravate an already delicate situation. Therefore, the message goes very clearly to both sides.

Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Does the Minister agree that it is important for the Twelve, as part of their common foreign policy process, to take that a little further and to take some firm initiatives directly with Moscow to facilitate those negotiations?

Mr. Waldegrave: That leads me to what steps Britain can take. There will be continuous discussions with our European partners and at the recent General Affairs Council meeting and other informal meetings it has been, and will continue to be, near the top of the agenda. We now have a series of high-level contacts starting with my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary going to Moscow on Monday, followed not long after by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister talked to Mr. Gorbachev at length on the telephone in the spirit in which I am now addressing the House. The Secretary of State had a meeting with the Soviet ambassador in London on 28 March. We shall be pressing for dialogue and discussion, and a peaceful solution to the problem.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East rightly pointed out, everyone seems agreed about the long-term goal. Mr. Gorbachev has implied that he does not rule out independence; what concerns him is the legality of the process, and who are we to argue against legal processes? Nevertheless, we must be careful. I suspect that the Lithuanians would not fear any test of genuine opinion in their country. What worries us are the provisions in the new secession law agreed yesterday and published under article 72 of the Soviet constitution.

We can argue with some of the provisions concerning tests of opinion, but at least they are genuinely aimed at finding out what opinions are held in the Baltic states. The requirement for a two-thirds majority in the Congress of People's Deputies, however, is a different kind of hurdle, as it effectively gives two or three of the biggest republics a veto on secession, whatever the majority opinion in the Soviet Union—let alone that in the Baltic states, whose right to independence should be guaranteed by the legal background.

We shall discuss that problem with the Soviet leadership. Nothing could be worse than the development in the Baltic states of the idea that they will be tricked into a cul de sac; it would be difficult to control the resulting frustration, and that would lead to dangers.

We should not concern ourselves too much with tests of opinion, or with the length of the transitional period. I suspect that we know what the opinion is, and a transitional period of some years may be necessary in any event to disentangle the economy. We must, however, try to ensure that an impossible hurdle is not placed before the people of the Baltic states in the guise of legality, thus vitiating the welcome guarantee from Mr. Gorbachev and Mr. Gerasimov that independence—legally secured—is on the cards. That means concentrating on discussion and representation: we must not pre-empt the good will that can surely be engendered by the willingness to talk that the Soviets have expressed over the past few days.

A disaster is easily possible. The Government urge restraint on the Soviet Union, and also on the people of the Baltic states. What we want is a dialogue about how they are to achieve their legal right to independence.

Rail Services (North-West)

12.31 pm

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): I have already pursued all the points that I wish to make with the Minister and with British Rail. Let me make it clear at the outset that I am not criticising or attacking British Rail. I do, however, criticise some aspects of Government policy: in my view, the Government fail to recognise the importance of public investment in the railway system—and, indeed, in public transport generally. There is a much better case for subsidising rail and bus services than they believe.

What I have to say is relevant not only to transport but to energy. Investment in public transport should commend itself to a Government who claim to be interested in the environment, as it is one of the best ways of dealing with some of our environmental problems.

Let me deal first with rail connections with the Channel tunnel, and services to the north-west as a whole. The service on the west coast line, which was the first long-distance rail network in the country to be electrified, does not remotely match that on the east coast. Prior to electrification, the service from London to York took two hours, whereas the best service journey from London to Preston takes about two hours 40 minutes. I accept that that is partly because junctions and curves restrict speed, but investment is needed to achieve the standard of service that the north-west deserves.

The north-west deserves not second best but the best. It has a large population and is a major manufacturing region. The Minister should take account of the important fact that since 1979 jobs in manufacturing in the north-west have declined by 30 per cent. Investment and output are also down by more than 30 per cent. in real terms. One of the reasons for that is that the north-west does not have the road and rail communications necessary to encourage investment.

The Channel tunnel offers British Rail one of the best opportunities for investment and improvement in services that it has had this century. However, it is restrained by section 42 of the Channel Tunnel Act 1987, which restricts public investment in international services using the Channel tunnel. The Government should review that section.

There is a case for a link for passengers and freight that bypasses west London to the west coast main line and the Channel tunnel. The proposed links with Euston and King's Cross are second best and are not an acceptable solution.

Lancashire county council is concerned about those issues. In a letter dated 12 March, Brian Hill, its chief executive, said:

> "The passenger proposals underestimate the likely demand for Channel Tunnel services and, as a consequence, fail to provide the North West, and Lancashire in particular, with the level of service which is justified, and the freight proposals fail to acknowledge existing freight terminal facilities in the County and ignore the County Council's call for a freight depot in central Lancashire, and do not provide sufficient details about the services which will be provided when the Channel Tunnel opens."

That letter refers to British Rail's proposals under section 40 of the Channel Tunnel Act, which it had to publish last year. The county council's views are right, and I hope that the Government will have second thoughts about those important proposals.

The Channel tunnel offers us an opportunity to get freight off the roads and on to the railways. Even if rail freight were to increase by 50 per cent., road freight would decrease by only 5 per cent. The current growth in road freight is 5 per cent., so it will be extremely difficult even to stand still.

All people who use roads know that, even if the Government meet the proposed investment in the roads programme, there will still be major traffic problems well into the next century unless we get some of the long-distance freight back on the railways. If the north-west is to have jobs and a future as a manufacturing region, which is so important to the future of this nation, we need rail investment to encourage people to use railways.

I and many colleagues have long campaigned for the link to Manchester airport. In a letter dated 17 August, Greater Manchester passenger transport authority confirms that the former Secretary of State indicated that it should be operational by 1993. I hope that that timetable is adhered to and that the rail link is operating by that date. I hope that the Minister will agree that, although the link improves the service from the north side of Manchester airport to the airport, we need to consider whether there should be rail access from the south side of Manchester airport for people who use that great international airport.

It would be wrong for me not to welcome some of the improvements made by British Rail to local services in the north-west in recent years. The improvements to some stations in Lancashire, in co-operation with Lancashire county council, are most welcome, although only last week, while travelling on the line, I saw that there had been damage to some of the new panels of the shelters. The shelters cost a considerable sum and it is a matter of great regret to me, to Lancashire county council, to British Rail and, I am sure, to the Minister that money has been wasted in that way.

Another example of a change for the better is the Windsor link, which has improved services between the north and south of Manchester. The Roses line, which runs from Preston, through Bradford and on to Leeds, was opened only about six years ago. Next month, it will provide an hourly service, which shows the potential for development of that line.

There is a case for electrification of some of the services within the region. It is ludicrous that Blackpool, one of the major tourist resorts of this country, does not have an electrified service. The line from Preston to Manchester should also be electrified, and there is a strong case for electrification of the Roses line. There is tremendous potential in linking east and west, and there could be an electrified service from Blackpool via Preston, Burnley and Bradford to Leeds. The Minister should consider that seriously, If that scheme were carried out, it would be stupid not to include the electrification of the east Lancashire line to Colne.

Another matter of concern to north-east Lancashire, part of which I represent, and especially to Burnley and Pendle, has been the service to Manchester. At present, one has to go to Blackburn and change for a train to Manchester, which takes a considerable time and is not a satisfactory solution. A link could be provided by going through Yorkshire, which would not involve great new investment in line, but only a small spur. That would give us a more direct and speedy service which would attract people. At present, few people from Burnley, Nelson or Colne use the rail service to Manchester because it is too slow and inefficient. Electrification of those services would bring about considerable improvement and benefits, and is worthy of consideration.

I know that the Minister will say that he and the Secretary of State are prepared to consider any case for electrification from British Rail if it can meet the Government's criteria and if it can justify it to the Government. The purpose of this debate is to say to the Minister that the Government's criteria are not satisfactory and that Government policy should change to enable British Rail to consider the electrification and development of services in a more positive light under new Government guidelines.

The removal of staff from stations is another important matter. I have here a letter from Sir Bob Reid, the chairman of British Rail, dated 26 February. He says that, at Burnley Central station,

> "a single member of staff can encompass ticket issuing as part of his duties and a permanent booking clerk's position will no longer be a feature of Burnley Central."

That is not acceptable to me, to Burnley borough council or to those who use the station. We want staffing levels not only to be maintained but to be improved. When we do away with staff, whether on buses or on railway stations, we discourage elderly people, women and those who fear vandalism and violence from using the services. We must recognise that it can be short-sighted to save on staff wages, because the cost of the increase in damage and vandalism that results from destaffing, and the fact that it discourages passengers, can lead to a net deficit.

Preston station is a major interCity station, and a number of local Lancashire services also run from it. Lancashire county council and British Rail have done much work to improve the station. Incidentally, they are also to improve some aspects of Burnley Central station, where the improved access on one level will be a welcome development for disabled people. At Preston station, however, there remains a great problem for disabled people who need to use platforms 1 and 2 because the only access is by means of very difficult stairs. In a letter dated 3 April, Brian Hill, of Lancashire county council, wrote:

> "I would, however, point out that, despite improvements to other parts of the Station, British Rail has failed to come up with a solution for improving access to platforms 1 and 2 for passengers with a mobility handicap. These are the main platforms for British Rail's provincial services at Preston."

We are seeing the end of an era during which the railways declined. In the past few years, there has been a move in a different direction. If the Government rethink their policy and accept that public investment in public transport—in particular, in the railway system, locally, nationally and internationally—they will improve transport and will bring environmental advantages that will certainly be welcome in the north-west.

12.47 pm

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Michael Portillo): I have great pleasure in responding to the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) and I congratulate him on having secured the opportunity to talk about rail services in the north-west, which is an important subject. I enjoyed his speech greatly. He took us rattling around the north-west and covered a lot of ground.

However, I found a number of contradictions in what the hon. Gentleman said. He began with an attack on the

[Mr. Michael Portillo]

Government for their lack of investment and then, with a generosity that is typical of him, paid tribute to the improvements made to stations, services and rolling stock in the north-west. He is absolutely right about that: there have been many improvements and the Government's investment programme has been substantial. The hon. Gentleman and I are not as far apart as he may think. I certainly echo the sentiments with which he ended his speech. I, too, believe that there is considerable scope for the revival of the railways in Britain—not least in the north-west.

At one point, the hon. Gentleman set about predicting what I might say in my speech, and he was accurate in that, too. I shall indeed be talking about the investment that has taken place. Investment in the railways is now at its highest level for 25 years—since the conversion from steam to diesel. We are looking at an investment in British Rail of £3·7 billion over the next three years. Investment in public transport over the next three years will be about the same as central Government investment in roads. I recognise the environmental advantages of investment in public transport, although where we have slow-moving traffic on congested roads, investment in roads can also bring environmental benefits, and we have a balance in Government policy between public transport and roads.

Mr. Pike: I in no way oppose investment in motorways. I am fighting for the extension of motorways in my own area, so I do not dispute the Minister's point.

Mr. Portillo: That is marvellous. We are even closer together than I supposed; we share our balanced policy.

The hon. Gentleman was generous enough to mention some of the new services available in the north-west. The Windsor link became fully operational last year. It is now possible for through journeys to be made, for example, between Bolton, Blackpool and Stockport, without the need to transfer between Victoria and Piccadilly stations. Manchester Piccadilly station has benefited from a successful remodelling and resignalling scheme to improve the approaches to the station.

Manchester airport will have a direct rail link which is due to be operational in the financial year 1992-93. I am happy to confirm that that is my information to the hon. Member for Burnley. That link will provide direct services from such places as Leeds and Hull as well as from Manchester. I know that the hon. Gentleman is looking for access from the south as well. The frontier always moves on when the Government do what they are asked to do. However, I know that he welcomes the decision on that link.

British Rail is also considering other cases for electrification around the north-west, including Hooton to Chester and Blackpool to Manchester. The hon. Member for Burnley was concerned that there were no electrified services to Blackpool. The north-west is also benefiting from investment in modern diesel rolling stock. Pacer, sprinters and super sprinters are in service in that area and they will be joined in due course by the new class 158 express vehicles which will offer inter-city levels of comfort, air conditioning and 90 mph running.

By 1993-94, the whole of British Rail's provincial sector fleet will be either electric multiple units or the new generation diesels, apart from some stock kept on hand for special requirements such as football special excursions. To achieve that, more than £400 million has been invested in the provincial sector rolling stock over the past few years and a further £340 million is planned over the next three years. That is a story of Government support for British Rail investment, and investment is the keystone to the strategy in the provincial sector.

New investment means greater reliability, lower maintenance and running costs, an enhanced quality of service and an opportunity to increase the receipts and revenue from the passengers attracted on to the services. Reduced costs and increased revenue mean that services can be maintained with a reduced call on the taxpayer in the way of subsidy. However, I recognise that large subsidies will continue to be needed for the provincial services for the foreseeable future. Indeed, even at the end of British Rail's current corporate plan in 1992-93, we are looking at public sector subsidy of £300 million to the provincial sector.

However, I recognise that some services in the north-west are not nearly as good as they should be, not least because the class 158 express units have been late in delivery. Therefore, some services have not been as good as they should have been because the life-expired diesels running on some routes have been breaking down. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman's constituents, among others, have probably suffered as a result of that.

None the less, it is worth noting that currently revenue is 15 per cent. to 20 per cent. above the corresponding period in the previous year. There has been an increase of about 11 per cent. in Manchester PTE, and it appears that there has been considerable growth, mainly in off-peak periods. The conclusion that I draw from that is that services are at least attractive enough to bring in new customers. Otherwise, people would be voting with their feet.

As we are considering rail services in the north-west, I am proud of the fact that the Government have now approved the grant to be made to the Manchester Metrolink scheme. That £110 million scheme will provide a new rail-based public transport system within the Manchester area. It will offer services between Altrincham and Bury and will run on on-street track linking Manchester's two main railway stations. That will be an innovatory public transport system, and I am pleased that it will be designed, built and operated in the private sector but with a large subsidy from the public sector.

Moving a little outside the area to which the hon. Member for Burnley referred, we have issued credit approvals that will allow the Merseyside PTE to modernise the signalling and information systems on the Merseyrail network. The total cost of about £24 million will be staged over four years. British Rail will be able to cut running costs, and passengers will benefit from more reliable services and information.

Following the King's Cross fire, we have also given priority to a programme of works, costing initially about £14 million, to update the underground parts of Merseyrail for the better protection of passengers, staff, infrastructure and equipment. Credit approvals have been issued, and also, exceptionally, capital grant of £376,000.

The hon. Gentleman referred to inter-city services. He talked about the service on the west coast main line. As he knows, the fastest journey time to Manchester is just under two and a half hours, to Liverpool just over two and a half hours, and to Carlisle about four hours. From May, most services from London to the north-west will be operated with trains that are capable of running at 110 mph, and there will be an hourly service between London and Liverpool. The line will benefit over the next year from additional rolling stock and extra trains released by the electrification of the east coast main line.

The hon. Gentleman made an interesting point when he said that the east coast main line already provides higher speeds than the west coast main line. He is right, but the crucial factor in determining the speed of the line is not so much whether it is electrified, as the layout, the straightness of the tracks and the number of flat junctions that trains encounter. The Government are looking for good economic cases that show that electrification justifies itself. There is often a misunderstanding, which is not shared by the hon. Gentleman, that electrification is the key to speed. Electrification may be the key to more reliable services and lower operating costs, and it is on that basis that it tends to justify itself.

The hon. Gentleman referred also to Channel tunnel services. Section 42 of the Channel Tunnel Act 1987 does not prevent public investment in Channel tunnel rail services. It prevents the Government from subsidising that investment. In other words, it must be an investment that justifies itself with a commercial rate of return.

The hon. Gentleman referred to section 40 of the Channel Tunnel Act which sets out British Rail's current views of commercially viable services through the tunnel. As he knows, BR's proposals were based on extensive regional consultation prior to drawing up the plan. For passenger services it is important to recognise that people from places with fast, frequent inter-city services to London will find it convenient to change to inter-capital trains, so BR plans comparatively few daytime trains from the regions.

Notwithstanding that, BR plans a daily service to Paris each morning from Manchester, calling at Stockport and Crewe, where there will be connections with Liverpool services, and a return service each evening with a similar daily service to Brussels. There will also be an overnight service calling at Carlisle, Lancaster, Preston and Crewe.

On the freight side, British Rail recognises that about 70 per cent. of traffic will pass beyond London to the regions. It is anxious to compete in that important market, but clearly it can run only commercially viable services. It is planning a regional freight terminal for the north-west, but it has not yet decided on the site. I understand, though, that British Rail hopes to announce the locations of the terminals during this year. A train operating centre is also planned at Crewe.

Although I recognise the hon. Gentleman's impatience for decisions to be made, there are three years to go. Decisions are being taken in a timely way. Certainly British Rail's section 40 plan will be kept under review and it will be the subject of further consultation. BR would certainly welcome information from the hon. Gentleman's local businesses and other concerns that would enable it accurately to assess the developing demand for international services.

The hon. Gentleman was concerned also about some particular points. I share his ambition that Preston station should be made ever more accessible to disabled people. I very much hope that a way can be found to achieve that.

I was pleased that the hon. Gentleman welcomed the change from the two-tiered structure of Burnley station to a single-level facility. All facilities will be merged at platform level. That will enable British Rail to reduce the number of staff required, but no exact decisions have yet been taken on the details of that. British Rail has made it clear that it intends to maintain the opening hours of the booking office to at least the present level.

I also hope that the refurbishment of Burnley station can proceed in a timely way. There has been a joint operation between Lancashire county council, which has provided some of the finance, and British Rail, which has provided the bulk of it. I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman has welcomed some of the results. I share his disappointment that vandals have been at work to destroy some of the good work that has been done. British Rail has had to defer some of the work that it hoped to do but, providing that Lancashire county council can come up with its part of the finance in the coming year, I understand that British Rail will be able to improve Burnley Central station and one other station. Despite the disappointing news that the programme of refurbishment will move more slowly than we would have hoped, it seems that there is a good chance that Burnley station and one other will benefit from the improvement programme in the coming year.

It has been a great pleasure to debate these matters with the hon. Gentleman. The review that I have given shows that a great deal of work is being done in the north-west area to improve services and stations. That is possible only under a Government who are committed to public transport and are prepared to see the railways invest massively for the future.

Rutland Water

1 pm

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): Rutland water in my constituency is the largest man-made lake in Europe. It is a reservoir which provides the water supply of 450,000 people. It provides recreation and enjoyment for many walkers, cyclists, horse riders, sailors, fishermen and wind surfers and is an internationally famous bird sanctuary and nature reserve. It provides employment and a living to several small businesses and is a major amenity for the east midlands as a whole.

On 7 September last, Anglian Water announced an immediate ban on sailing and warned people to keep away from the water's edge and especially to keep animals away. The reason for the ban was the weird blue-green algae which had been building up progressively on the surface of the water and at the water's edge over the previous few weeks.

I had only just returned from holiday that day, but the following morning, 8 September, I went to Rutland water with the district manager of Anglian Water, Mr. John Green. At that time fishing was continuing, but by the afternoon of that day it had been banned. A major competition scheduled for that weekend was cancelled. The closure remained in force until 18 October and resulted in great financial hardship for the small businesses and clubs which depend on the water. As far as I am aware, they have not been compensated in any way.

The closure of the reservoir was sparked off by the death of 23 lambs and at least 15 dogs. It is worth examining the chronology of the death of the lambs owned by my constituent, Mr. Renner, at Normanton Lodge farm. The first eight deaths occurred on 21 August. Mr. Renner collected a sample of algae which was then very visible and took it with two dead lambs to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food veterinary centre in Lincoln. All the lambs that died had blue-green algae on them. There were further deaths over the weekend of 26 to 28 August and on 4, 5 and 6 September.

The death of the dogs was also spread over several days. Some vets originally thought that they had eaten the rat poison warfarin because the horrible symptoms were similar to those which occur with such poisoning. There have been persistent local rumours since that that remains the cause. As recently as last month, a local councillor passed to me an allegation that someone had seen warfarin on the ground round the edge of the water. I have asked the water company about that allegation, but it was specifically denied in a telephone call to me last Friday by the managing director, Mr. John Simpson.

On 8 September, the day after the closure, the *Leicester Mercury* reported the affair. It quoted a spokeswoman for Anglian Water as saying that the public water supplies were not affected by the algae. She added:

> "The treatment process deals with the blue-green algae. It will have no effect on the drinking water."

The same day, the newspaper quoted Dr. Garry Whitelam of the university of Leicester saying that several forms of the algae were toxic, that it was a worldwide problem, and that there were three different kinds of cyanobacteria, one of them a liver toxin which had caused catle deaths in other countries, another a neurotoxin which had caused convulsions and spasms in mammals and another a skin irritant known as swimmer's itch. If that was known to Dr. Whitelam, it should presumably have been known to Anglian Water.

On the day I visited the reservoir, I was specifically assured by Anglian Water that there was no danger to public water supplies and that the algae had been caused by the long dry spell of weather. I was told that it was an entirely natural phenomenon resulting from nutrients in the rivers which were pumped into the reservoir interacting with the sun.

However, I was not fully satisfied by those explanations, and directly after the weekend I wrote to Lord Crickhowell, the chairman of the National Rivers Authority, asking him to undertake an investigation. I also spoke on the telephone to his chief executive, Dr. John Bowman. I questioned Dr. Bowman closely about whether the problem had been made worse by discharges of phosphates into the rivers Welland and Nene or by the sewage being discharged from Okeham sewage works. He confirmed that discharges of that kind would certainly add to the process of eutrophication and thereby to the nutrient content of the water.

Since then I have been in continual correspondence with the chairman of Anglian Water, Mr. Bernard Henderson, with Lord Crickhowell of the NRA and with Ministers. I have been to see two Ministers, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), and my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Mr. Trippier). I made a brief speech in the House on 13 November and I have asked numerous oral and written questions. However, I am still completely dissatisfied with the co-ordination and scope of the investigations.

When I went to see my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe, I felt great unease about the co-ordination between the NRA, which did not know the result of the post mortems on the sheep or the dogs, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, which had not supplied information from its veterinary service to the Department of the Environment, and the Department of the Environment itself, which did not seem to know much at all, even about the important researches of Professor Geoffrey Codd at Dundee university.

However, a number of facts have emerged. First, the post mortem on Mr. Renner's lambs carried out by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's veterinary service confirmed that microcystin toxin has been found in the liver and rumen contents.

Secondly, a substantial amount of scientific materials about algal poisoning is available in learned journals, mostly in the United States. For example, a note on algal toxins in Wisconsin waters experiencing blue-green algal blooms, written by three water scientists, appears in the 1988 edition of *Lake and Reservoir Management*. That is all on public deposit in the United States and it is widely available. The 1976 edition of "Black's", the standard veterinary dictionary in Britain also has an article on algal poisoning and is available in the library of MAFF's veterinary service with which MAFF vets are familiar, as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food admitted to me on 24 January in a parliamentary answer. The recent learned paper by Professor Codd has five pages of references to other works on the subject.

Thirdly, I have not seen any post mortems on the dogs, but the Parliamentary Secretary told me on 11 January that two dead dogs had been examined by MAFF vets and that their deaths may have been linked to the ingestion of blue-green algal toxins.

Fourthly, the NRA, which is conducting an investigation which I hope will be published shortly, has confirmed that the principal species associated with the toxic blooms on Rutland water was microcystis acruginosa, which produces the toxin microcystin.

In the past few days, Anglian Water has sent me two reports which I intend to treat as public and which I understand have been given to the Department of the Environment and to Rutland district council. One of them hums and hahs at considerable length about the causes of the disaster last August and September and refers to the work of Professor Codd at Dundee university. It admits that the first report about the scum from toxic blooms was published as long ago as 1878, following the death of domestic animals. It says that none of the post mortems on the animals that died at Rutland water is conclusive, but it admits:

> "the symptoms described are consistent with microcystin poisoning."

It accepts that phosphate and nitrate are key nutrients and that phosphate concentrations rose slightly in Rutland water in 1989 because of increased pumping from the Rivers Welland and Nene during a dry summer.

The report suggests that there must have been special factors at Rutland water to account for the heavier scum than at other reservoirs, which it blames on local physical features such as the prevailing winds or water movements. It adds that additional biologists and biological technicians are being recruited and that extra treatment is being installed at Oakham sewage treatment works

> "to remove the minor load of phosphate."

However, the report admits:

> "it is therefore possible that given similar climatic conditions, blue-green algal blooms could develop during the interim, including the coming summer."

There follow three extraordinary sentences:

> "It seems likely from the evidence that healthy fish caught at the time of a microcystin bloom are probably safe to eat. However, if an angler has any doubts, it is open to him or her not to eat the fish. If more specific advice can be given at the time of an incident such advice will be made available."

Not many people will regard those statements as helpful or reassuring.

Anglian Water's second report concerns water supply. It is worth remembering that, at every stage, Anglian Water said that the drinking water was safe. The report is hard to understand and is full of endless qualifications about the difficulty of comprehending data and whether the scientific results are satisfactory. According to the report, there was a brief period, from mid-October to 1 November 1989, when some possible microcystin in the filtered, final water was measured at up to 16 mg per litre on one particular day, compared with less than 1 mg in late September 1989.

The scientists seem unsure whether their experiments are valid, whether the element really was microcystin or what they call pseudo-microcystin, or why some of the treated water had a higher concentration of it than the untreated water. Clearly, the experts are very sceptical about the findings. They say that there remains a strong possibility that the compound reported as microcystin was wrongly identified, and report that work is continuing. They conclude that the water did not contain—this is the vital point—microcystin at levels harmful to health. They make proposals, including the use of granular activated carbon, for an additional form of treatment if another major problem arises in the future.

There is no need to be alarmist about those vague, confusing and possibly incorrect findings, but my constituents and I are entitled to a specific answer—yes or no—from my hon. Friend the Minister to two simple questions. First, was the treated water at all times absolutely safe to drink last autumn, as the Anglian Water spokesman said publicly on several occasions? Secondly, has the water been absolutely safe to drink at all times since, including now? I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will answer unequivocally yes to both questions. If he cannot do so, the chairman of Anglian Water should resign immediately.

The very fact that I have to ask such questions shows how unsatisfactory the whole affair has been. It has revealed indecisiveness, defensiveness and inadequate research and action by Anglian Water. The Department of the Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food have shown nothing like enough energy or determination in getting to the bottom of this disgraceful affair.

The Government have a duty to take action in five respects. First, they should establish an independent public inquiry under a High Court judge to determine whether that environmental disaster could have been prevented, its causes, whether the company was negligent or blame worthy. That inquiry should begin as soon as possible and report by the autumn. Last summer, 38 animals died—supposing a child had fallen out of a boat?

Secondly, the Minister should offer the full resources of Government scientific knowledge and advice, and if necessary fund additional research facilities at Dundee university or elsewhere. Department and NRA scientists should be sent at once to the United States to discuss findings with their American colleagues, who have great expertise in the subject.

Thirdly, the National Rivers Authority should be instructed to produce its own reports by the end of this month at the latest with specific recommendations.

Fourthly, the Minister should demand a full checklist for action from Anglian Water as to how it intends to prevent a repetition of the disaster this coming summer.

Finally, Anglian Water should immediately pay ex gratia compensation to all those people who lost animals and to business men who lost money because of the closure. If the commission of inquiry which I suggested finds Anglian Water blameworthy, the ex gratia sums could be augmented by the courts.

I hope that it will be clear to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary that I have a deep sense of frustration and anger about this affair. Before I leave the House at the next general election, I intend to ensure that the matter has finally been settled and that public concern is fully allayed. I look to my hon. Friend for a full response today.

1.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham) on securing this debate and on pursuing this issue with his characteristic persistence and vigour. I fully understand his desire to protect his

[Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory]

constituents and to try to get to the bottom of this complex issue. I hope during my remarks to answer the points that he put to me.

It might be helpful to the House if I first say a few words about the nature of the algae of concern here, and recap on the events of last year.

As my hon. Friend knows, algae are minute aquatic plants which grow naturally in all surface waters. Their growth is determined by combinations of environmental factors such as sunlight, the length of day, temperature, nutrients and so on. With the constantly changing conditions in a lake, a succession of different species will thrive. There are more than 1,000 species of such algae in Britain. Towards autumn, the species which often dominate are of the blue-green type which is the subject of today's debate.

Although this succession rarely causes problems, under some conditions a so-called "bloom" of algae will occur. That is what happened at Rutland and in some other lakes last summer. Most algae are completely innocuous and are necessary for the life of the lake, but a few individual species of blue-green algae produce a toxic substance which can be released to the water. Microcystis is one of those algae and the toxin microcystin is sometimes, although not always, produced. We do not yet know of the mechanism by which this toxin is produced, nor the conditions favourable for its production.

Last year's problems of blue-green algae became apparent when reports were received in September of a small number of deaths in dogs and sheep following contact with Rutland water in my hon. Friend's constituency. Before 1989, we were not aware of any recorded incidents of adverse effects within the Anglian region.

Anglian Water's account of events shows that its biological monitoring of Rutland water in July and early August showed relatively low algal numbers in the main body of the reservoir. But following the reports of those animal deaths at the end of August and in September, Anglian Water carried out further sampling of algal scum, which was identified mainly as the blue-green algae microcystis. It then sought advice from Professor Codd at Dundee university on its toxicity.

By 7 September, Anglian had decided that there was sufficient circumstantial evidence available to show that the scum was toxic and could be hazardous. It therefore closed the reservoir to recreational activities and sought advice from veterinary specialists on the cause of the animal deaths.

For its part, the National Rivers Authority responded quickly. The Authority carried out extensive sampling of some 750 reservoirs and similar waters in England and Wales, to test for the presence of toxic blue-green algae; 53 of them in England were found to contain algae of toxic forms.

Secondly, having identified the areas at risk, the NRA suggested to site owners that they should consider taking a number of precautions, which they did. Apart from advising site owners on the action to take, the NRA of course informed local environmental health officers of its findings and advice. Finally, the NRA instituted a detailed analysis and review of last year's events.

As for the public health effects, Anglian Water concluded, on the basis of the evidence available that there was no hazard to public health from drinking water supplied from the two treatment works fed by Rutland water. Our medical advisers are unable to give definitive advice because of the unreliability of the analytical information available and the absence of any reliable toxicological data for algal toxins. They agree, however, that water from Rutland put into supply for drinking after treatment is extremely unlikely to pose a threat to health. No adverse human health effects have subsequently been reported as arising from Rutland water's problems.

The algae were concentrated at the shallow margins of the reservoir. Water for treatment is drawn from 15m deep in the main body of the reservoir, where algal concentrations were relatively low. Furthermore, the comprehensive water treatment facilities, which include the use of granular activated carbon filtration at the two Rutland treatment works, are likely to have removed any algal toxins which may have been present in the raw water.

My hon. Friend has drawn attention to the report just issued by Anglian Water Services Ltd. which sets out its views and analysis of last year's problems and what needs to be done in the future. A number of Anglian's comments will be echoed in my remarks today. One of the report's main conclusions is that more data are required to produce a reliable determination of the longer-term significance of algal blooms and the production of toxins.

The detection of microcystin in water is a complex analytical process all of its own. That is why conclusions and recommendations must be qualified and must not go ahead of the available scientific evidence. Anglian Water Services Ltd. also concluded that, so far, post mortems have proved inconclusive, although circumstantial evidence strongly suggests that algal toxins were the cause of death of the animals concerned.

The report also concluded that no significant increases in nutrients occurred last year, so it suggests that climatic conditions were the major contributory factor for algal growth.

On the available evidence, the report concludes that drinking water did not contain toxin at levels which cause harm to health, although it draws attention to difficulties in interpreting uncertain analytical information about the presence of microcystin in drinking water.

Finally, the report set out Anglian Water's future proposals, which include an improved monitoring programme, investment to reduce the levels of phosphate inputs into Rutland water, greater use of granular activated carbon treatment for drinking water and suitable arrangements for warning local people of the risks if algal blooms recur. This report is both constructive and helpful.

It was against that background that the National Rivers Authority set up a task group last year to investigate the blue-green algae problem. The terms of reference of the group are very wide. They are to assess the problems that occurred last year at Rutland water and elsewhere; to assess the extent of the problem, not just in the United Kingdom but abroad; to review the influence of nutrients; to review the influence of water quality management techniques; to review the influence of biotic factors; to identify the research and development requirements; to assess the staff resource implications; and to make recommendations for monitoring and eutrophication control to minimise the problem in future.

The task group is being chaired by Mr. Pearson of the NRA's Anglian region. It also includes Professor G. A. Codd of the university of Dundee, a leading expert in blue-green algae, Dr. Reynolds of the Institute of Freshwater Ecology and Mr. Fawell of the Water Research Centre, who is a toxicologist. My hon. Friend will agree that it is a wide-ranging inquiry conducted by experts.

The group intends to produce its report by early summer, but I cannot accede to my hon. Friend's request that it should be accelerated and produced by the end of the month. It will be produced before the main season for the development of blue-green algae. The group has contacted all NRA regions, water plcs and water companies that operate lakes and reservoirs.

In addition, since similar problems have been reported in a number of other countries, information is being collected from sources overseas and, as part of the NRA's research effort, the WRC is carrying out a full literature search and review.

I hope that that meets the point made specifically by my hon. Friend. I promise him that the group will aim to collate and review the problems and recommend future action to be taken. Research needs have to be indentified and budgeted within the NRA's programme to investigate the problem and produce effective systems for monitoring and control.

My hon. Friend will understand from my earlier remarks that it is simply not possible to prevent the growth of algae, as they are a naturally occurring phenomenon. Nevertheless, the task group considers that it is possible to take preventive action to reduce risk. It is therefore preparing a scheme to identify those lakes with the potential for problems. The group is devising a sampling programme which will categorise lakes used for public supply and immersion sports according to the risk of algal blooms occurring. A proportion of high-risk lakes will be subject to routine sampling and, by applying criteria for phosphate levels and algal content, it will be possible to inform owners when it would be advisable to take stock of the situation in the waters under their control and to make plans to minimise the risks.

As I have said, there is no record of damage to health via drinking water, despite the widespread occurrence of algal blooms. Nevertheless, I consider that there is an urgent need to improve our knowledge of the toxic effects of microcystin and to develop a reliable methodology for the detection and analysis of the toxin. Research is currently being carried out by Professor Codd for the water industry to develop improved analytical techniques for microcystin. We shall build upon his work to investigate the potential risks to consumers' health from the occurrence of algal toxins in drinking water.

These are vital steps in broadening our knowledge of the subject which, together with the work that the NRA is already undertaking, will provide a valuable base from which to consider the development of standards for algal toxins in drinking water.

I recognise my hon. Friend's concern about the issue. I entirely agree that we need to obtain the best possible picture of what took place last year. However, it is a complex matter. We must rely on good science to produce the answers. We must not rush ahead with hasty conclusions that are not supported by research. We are determined to get to the bottom of what occurred and, perhaps more importantly, what can be done if the problem recurs. In the light of that, and the fact that the NRA investigation already under way, I am satisfied that all possible steps are being taken to inquire into that unfortunate and tragic incident in my hon. Friend's constituency, and that the necessary follow-up action is in hand.

Royal Assent

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified Her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Act 1990

Nottingham Park Estate Act 1990.

Child Abuse

1.30 pm

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): I wish to raise a serious aspect of child abuse that has caused increasing anxiety. I refer to ritualistic sex abuse, which certainly causes concern within the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and which was raised by it at a recent press conference. The matter is of significant social importance, as I am sure the Minister will recognise.

As a member of the central executive committee of the society, I felt that I should seek an opportunity to pursue the matter. In some quarters it may be rather fashionable to take a relaxed view about aspects of child welfare: that view was illustrated in an article in *The Evening Standard* last Tuesday week, which suggested that the NSPCC should take care that it does not harm people's liberties in the relentless campaign against people's vices. However, if there is a real or potential abuse of children, are not the society, the House and the Government under an obligation to take a serious view? It seems that that rather dismissive view of the society's record of vigilant concern was expressed in response to the recent press conference.

I was alerted to the problem two or three years ago when the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe considered a report from the legal affairs committee. It was a factual report, restrained in its approach, but nevertheless entirely horrifying. It contained information about the abduction and misuse of children internationally, and about the trade in obscene video films involving children. I was astonished to learn of the scale of the trade in western Europe and the United States.

From the report, I learned that people took holidays to places such as Bangkok, where wealthy citizens from countries such as our own could satisfy their paedophilic tastes. Children could be purchased as sexual objects and holiday sex toys. Against that awareness of evil, I was not so shocked about the matter aired by the NSPCC, and by others concerned about the development of ritual sex abuse.

What has been revealed is intolerable. The purpose of my debate is to ensure that the Administration perceive the evil and are committed to respond to it. I trust that the Minister will consider the view that the incidence of ritualistic sex abuse is likely to be significantly larger than the number of cases so far established. Perhaps he will accept that those involved, while perverse and evil, are likely to possess a degree of cunning to disguise their practice and to operate securely.

The article to which I referred earlier mentioned the society's fear that some parents were compelling their children to watch video nasties, and suggested that the evidence was entirely anecdotal. Evidence is difficult to secure, and it has often been difficult to present it within the context of prosecution. Perhaps the new arrangements will make the pursuit of legal action more meaningful. Although evidence about ritualistic sex abuse is not easy to obtain, sufficient is available fully to justify the society's anxiety, to justify my raising the matter here and to justify the call for adequate recognition by the Government.

There have been at least five successful prosecutions in the past couple of years, which were referred to in a serious article in *The Independent on Sunday* on 16 March. One parent, described as a devil worshipper, was sentenced at the Old Bailey to imprisonment for the ritual abuse of seven children, including his own son or daughter. In another case, nine adults were imprisoned by the court in Nottingham on 53 charges of incest, indecent assault and cruelty against 21 children. One child was cut and the rest were required to drink his blood during a period that the children spent in what was described as a vortex of cruelty.

At the Old Bailey in 1980, an old lady was sentenced after she had imprisoned a girl and forced her to engage in black magic and sexual activity. Three men and a woman were sentenced at Chester about 18 months ago for vile activity involving children aged between three and 12. Last year, at Winchester, two men, one described as a practising Satanist, were imprisoned for incest, indecent assault and gross indecency with children from their own families. Those cases are not anecdotal.

Nor can one wholly dismiss the views of a clergyman mentioned in the article to which I have just referred, who said that he knew of girls who had been impregnated to serve ritualistic purposes, or the views of a woman involved in Childwatch, who was reported as having said that she had spoken to 40 children from various parts of the country who had been victims of such abuse. Others from different localities appear to have encountered child victims or other evidence of abuse. That is mentioned in the growing anxieties of experienced officers of the NSPCC.

The society has conducted a survey of its child protection teams. A questionnaire was sent from Saffron Hill, the society's headquarters, last autumn. As the Minister will be aware, the respondents are experienced, responsible and qualified men and women of considerable ability. They noted that it is difficult to secure information, that the practices are necessarily carried out in secret, that the children are fearful of punishment or sanction should they give information and that they may have been almost brainwashed to ensure no disclosures.

Some of the responses from the NSPCC's officers have led to serious concern being expressed. Nine teams have worked, or are currently working, with children who have been subjected to ritualistic sexual abuse. In recent months, four cases have been referred to the society by the police or local authority social services departments. Responses specify that one, two or 15 or 16 or more children have been involved in a group practising these rituals. One respondent said that up to 20 children could be involved in such ceremonies at any one time.

The reports from the society's officers provide some information about the sick activities that are involved. Five of the responses refer to children drinking blood or urine, five to the killing or abuse of animals, and five to the invocation of supernatural powers and the use of masks and costumes. In four cases, faeces were smeared on children's bodies, and in some cases children were held under water. There have been seven reports of threats made to maintain control of children. In several cases, dolls have been mutilated as part of the ritual. Other bizarre elements are recorded. Some children were made to eat what was said to be part of a human heart, while others were shown what was said to be a baby in a microwave oven.

Seven NSPCC teams said that they had worked with sexually abused children who had described symptoms or given reliable accounts of ritualistic activities, including attendance at events where adults had sex before them or where they had been made to eat faeces or to take part in other disgraceful activities. The work of the NSPCC officers and others involved in helping such abused children is not easy, because the abusers tend to have a psychological hold on the children involved which may make them extremely fearful to talk about their experience to others.

It is likely to be extremely difficult to secure factual evidence. It may be rather more difficult than in many activities to establish the facts and to obtain evidence. More children may face such experiences than has been fully established so far. I hope that the House will bear that suspicion in mind as a serious aspect of the matter. I have been told that an NSPCC officer was recently threatened when he was seeking information about activities which he felt should be obtained to assist the child with whom he was concerned.

I am not about to suggest that we are now seeing the tip of an iceberg, but there are grounds for suspicion that such abuse is more frequent than one would have imagined a few years ago. The fact that there have been prosecutions of such cases of evil in different areas seems to justify my suggestion. As able and active officers of the society in various areas are concerned, it suggests that it would be foolish if there were to be a public assumption that the incidence of this evil is slight. I am also sure that the House will agree that even one case is too many. The experience of some children is so horrifying that society cannot readily allow any incidence of such experience to be ignored. Recent evidence suggests that child sex abuse is far more extensive than would have been assumed only a few years ago, and there is no reason for anyone to consider that ritualistic abuse is so odd, extreme or evil that it can exist only in fevered imagination.

These rituals may relate to satanism, to black magic or to devil worship. Such practices may involve ritual, ceremony, fancy words, mumbo-jumbo, strange equipment and weird activities. They may have no general appeal and they may be seen as neither sensible nor tasteful. However, we live in a free country and it would be inappropriate for Parliament or society to seek to interfere with or to outlaw such activities when they involve consenting adults. Such activities may be regarded as ridiculous, and if they became widespread it might be regarded as sad for the nation. However, we may be confident that there is sufficient common sense in this country to ensure that such activities remain a minority taste. Yet common sense must also apply to the protection of children.

There is evidence of evil practices involving children, so society and the House must make it clear that the abuse of children as part of such activities must not happen and that, if it does, resources will be made available to ensure that society provides a proper response.

I hope that the Minister will accept that I have taken a view which, although it might properly be regarded as stern, has not departed from balance. Whatever may be said of my view, I hope that those of the society and of the public and the voluntary organisations involved in child welfare will command respect.

In many ways, our society is nastier, greedier and more violent than it was in the earlier post-war period. I could give reasons for that, but I should not stray too far from the subject before us. Perhaps some of the possible causes of these undesirable developments will one day receive rather more attention. I hope that it will be one day soon. At this stage, I merely make the point that children—perhaps in larger numbers than might have been expected—have been abused or are at risk of abuse from these ritualistic sources and the public response needs to be clear and adequate.

I also want to put it on record that organisations such as the NSPCC—there are other deserving and responsible bodies serving the same cause—and the various professional people and volunteers involved in societies that care for children are fulfilling an essential role. Such groups must continue to receive that priority of public esteem and support that is necessary to enable them to provide the services, help and protection that so many of the nation's children sadly require.

Children are not only their parents' obligation; they are the nation's children as well, and I trust that the Minister will acknowledge that. Governments, parties and politicians may believe that people must stand on their own feet and take responsibility for themselves, but it would be negligent folly if such a rule were applied to children. I hope that the Minister will recognise that public responsibility is substantial, that decency in the treatment of children will continue to be firmly required, and that the abuse of children for perverse purposes of satanism and ritual must lead to firm sanctions being applied.

1.47 pm

The Minister for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): The House owes a debt of appreciation to the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) for raising this important subject. It is a constant source of horror and shock that, in a modern society, children continue to be abused and neglected.

The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children has played a central role in the evolution of services for the care and treatment of children who have been abused and their families. It has once again identified an area which may have seemed inconceivable to some members of the public but on which sufficient attention needs to be focused. Over the past 106 years, the NSPCC—like many other voluntary organisations—has developed services and earned itself a proud name. It is greatly respected by us all.

In congratulating the hon. Gentleman, I should like to take him back five years, to the time when I introduced an Adjournment debate on precisely this subject, motivated in large measure by the increasing amount of information that was being produced by the NSPCC. I referred then to what the enlightened founder of the NSPCC, Benjamim Waugh, said at the turn of the century:

> "It is better to remove evil from the home than to remove the child."

That view is part and parcel of modern thinking on child abuse.

Mr. Hardy: The Minister referred to her own debate on the subject. That leads me to comment that concern for children's welfare stretches to hon. Members on both sides of the House, as evidenced by the fact that the hon. Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) has been a member of the central executive committee of the society for longer than me and has given it distinguished service.

Mrs. Bottomley: Yes. My hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) continually raises subjects of this nature.

Frankly, there can be no room for party division in respect of child abuse, and that was borne out during the

[Mrs. Bottomley]

passage of the Children Act 1989. All hon. Members believe strongly that children should be entitled to a childhood free of sexual or physical abuse or of neglect. All that we know about the long-standing effects of abuse in childhood leads us to conclude that it is a thoroughly vile crime. We should not be satisfied until we have stamped it out.

The hon. Member for Wentworth raised the disturbing issue of the ritualistic abuse of children. The Government are aware of the concern about ritualistic abuse expressed by those handling child abuse cases. Through the social services inspectorate, the Department is monitoring the situation to assess the scale of the problem. I will consider at length the particular points raised by the hon. Member for Wentworth.

In November 1989 the Department arranged a meeting with representatives from the NSPCC, with whom we work closely, Childline, the Children's Society and the Association of Directors of Social Services. It became clear from our discussions that there is a need to obtain more information about ritual child abuse and child abuse networks in general. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that that work is being carried forward.

The Department is well aware of the difficulties facing the statutory agencies when they handle such cases. Where networks have been discovered, close co-operation has developed between social workers and the police. Joint co-operation in investigations is always central to child abuse cases where obtaining evidence and establishing the facts is fraught with difficulty. That co-operation ensures that children can be interviewed sensitively and protected effectively.

So often, a child's abuse can almost be exaggerated or consolidated by the effects of the investigation. The sensitive handling of the investigations and the court hearing process, while protecting fair justice, must also give proper regard to the child's needs.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): Will the Minister ponder the fact that in many cases the simple fact that a child has received attention from the abuser highlights that that is probably the only form of positive attention that some children receive? In some instances, the neglect has been so great that the only care, even though that care was misplaced, vile, vicious and criminal, came from the abuser. It is difficult to get a child to realise then the iniquity of the incident and to appreciate that it should not have happened.

Mrs. Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman shows a profound awareness of the details of child abuse cases. Such cases on the whole do not occur in isolation. They are part of a pattern of family interactions. The child must be considered not simply with regard to one traumatic incident, but in the context of his or her life and experience. It is important that handling abuse cases does not inadvertently consolidate the disadvantage that the child has suffered. So often that is borne out in the summary removal of a child.

The Children Act 1989 makes it clear that a child should not be removed from home unless it is essential for the child's safety and welfare. Very often the preferable course is to remove the perpetrator or potential perpetrator of the offence rather than the child, who frequently is left feeling responsible or guilty. That may sound perverse, but those involved in child abuse would recognise those responses.

We appreciate that we must give further consideration to ritual child abuse. However, it should be seen as part of the wider problem of child abuse in general. Once a new area of concern is identified, so often the professionals involved, the families and the public begin to identify and piece together parts of a jigsaw puzzle that was sometimes previously too horrific even to be contemplated. Once again, the NSPCC has served the public well by placing on the agenda an aspect that some people previously thought did not even bear contemplation.

Regrettably, there is little new about child abuse and neglect. The use of pathological terms to describe its roots, causes and effects and the media's preoccupation with horrific cases should not obscure its long-standing nature or delude us into thinking that its incidence and characteristics are any different now from what has been described in literature over the years. Descriptions of barbarous treatment are widespread in literature and popular culture. There are frequent tales of infanticide, ritual sacrifice, mutilation, starvation, flogging and exploitation. It is only relatively recently that a child has been thought to have any right not to be abused or neglected.

I notice that dogs are among the hon. Gentleman's interests. He will be aware, as we are all aware, that the legislation to protect animals was on the statute book decades before the first legislation to protect children.

Mr. Hardy: I was aware of that, but the Minister might care to note that the people who were responsible for the legislation to protect children tended to be the people who had sought to protect animals. There was no distinction in the early days.

Mrs. Bottomley: I accept the hon. Gentleman's point. Those who combined the protection of dogs and children in their interests clearly had sympathetic, kindly and sensitive personalities.

The Government attach high priority to the problem of child abuse and in recent years have embarked on a comprehensive programme to tackle it. The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the important part that is played by the Children Act. We had on the statute book a motley number of laws concerned with children. They were built up piecemeal over the years, and they were complex and confusing for professionals and familes alike.

My hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State, Home Office, steered through the House the important Children Act, which sets a framework that integrates and provides a coherent set of laws to clarify the welfare of the child and the role of the parents and of the local authority, and it sets a much better framework for partnership. Above all, it maintains that the child's interests must always be paramount. All hon. Members would endorse that.

The Department is involved in a major training programme. The establishment of legislation on the statute book is not sufficent to ensure that the law turns into good practice. Before October 1991, we must be satisfied that all those involved in child protection and child care and all those in the judical system are aware of the detail and the implications of the new legislation.

We have a training support programme for social workers, currently giving training in child protection to more than 70,000 social workers, and general child care training for more than 40,000 social workers. That amounts to more than £19 million this year. We are also producing guidance and detailed regulations on the Children Act. There has been a process of discussion and collaboration with the many organisations involved in child care. The NSPCC has certainly always been one such organisation with which the Department of Health has worked closely.

We are all aware that, in appalling cases in which tragedy has occurred, lessons must be learnt. Not only are the Department and agencies involved required to produce their own report for the area child protection committee; in extreme circumstances the Secretary of State will set up an inquiry, often with the great assistance of the social services inspectorate, to which I pay special tribute because of its work in investigating, advising and guiding. The inspectorate is universally respected and trusted. We are also examining the treatment of families, including abusers.

Hon. Members and Ministers may condemn child abuse, and many of us recognise that it often takes place in a family context. Facilities for the treatment of those who have been abused or who abuse are important. The Department provides assistance to the NSPCC. We are pleased to have done so over several years. We recognise its vital contribution and we respect it and continue to work with it.

I repeat my appreciation that the hon. Gentleman has raised this important issue today. It deserves our further attention. By working with him, the NSPCC and other organisations, we hope to create a society in which children grow up free from abuse and neglect.

Energy Conservation and Energy Efficiency

2 pm

Mr. Tony Speller (Devon, North): It is always a pleasure to see my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Energy on the Front Bench ready to answer on behalf of the Government all the questions that I shall ask. The Government must give some sensible answers soon on energy conservation and efficiency. This is not a usual subject for debate in Parliament because by and large this nation, like this Parliament, has totally neglected all the sensible measures that can be taken on energy.

It is perfectly fair for British Gas or any other utility to seek to sell more of its product. The only problem comes when selling more of the product does nasty things to the environment, which we now all recognise as important. I have every respect for all the utility companies. Under their new plc logos I believe that at long last they will become energy-sensitive, whereas in the past they were simply sales-sensitive. That is in no way to detract from the excellence or efficiency of the utility companies, but as a nation we have never sought to be energy-efficient.

If one buys a refrigerator in the United States, there will be a label stuck on the side saying how much it will cost to run. In this country a label will probably be stuck on the side telling us how much more exciting, how much sexier and how much bigger it is. No one tells us the obvious truth that a big fridge costs more to run than a small fridge. We have always been hell bent on the search for turnover in the hope of a profit. Meanwhile, as we increase the sales, so we increase, for example, the greenhouse effect.

It is my happy view that the campaigner for energy efficiency and conservation—indeed, the energy environmentalist of the future—will not be seen as some pleasant woolly lady with a bobble hat on her way to Greenham Common, who is in favour of energy efficiency on the side. Instead, it will be the hard-headed, indeed perhaps hard-faced, business man with long-term plans who says, "I must plan for the future, and because I am building something"—perhaps a nuclear power station, although I hope not—"I must also think of the cost in 20 years' time of closing it down and getting rid of the waste." I am not having a go at the nuclear industry, but British industry has never been charged with the eventual cost of cleaning up its products.

We are aware of the costs of cleaning up now. We see it in the smog in the Antarctic and we all say that we are greener than thou. But we should be clean before we are green. The first place to do the cleaning is in our own industry—literally, in our own back yard—before we pollute the back yards of other countries. There is little distance between that and energy efficiency or conservation. Every time that we require a utility, whether the gas, electricity or oil industry, to produce more, we must also ask what else it will produce more of besides that which we want to buy.

In Barnstaple, youngsters are pushed around in pushchairs, at just the level for all the nasty vapours given off by the motor cars. Youngsters go swimming off our coast and when they have goggles, they do not like what

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they see below the surface. Our environment and its conservation and pollution are all part of the same matrix which, thank heavens, we have at last recognised.

I pay tribute to the Department of Energy, which has shaken off the sloth of some years, first under—I was about to say the premiership of, but it did not work out that way—my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales when it first took an interest in the alternatives, then under my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities, then under the Minister of State Department of Energy, who is now carrying on that work. I hope that the Under-Secretary of State will follow the same line and say that it is not enough to produce energy or even to produce it cheaply; we must first produce it cleanly and only then cheaply because the environment costs are so high. We do not yet have any idea how or whether we shall be able to pay that particular piper.

I am the chairman of the all-party alternative energy group and it has been my great pleasure for the past six or seven years, along with the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) who is vice-chairman of the group, to work on a non-partisan basis. I am on the extreme right and he is on the extreme left, and we have met in the middle. Party political persuasion does not matter; what matters is how we persuade the globe that the search for more and more is not the answer; we must first ask at what cost.

We all talk of the unified market and the European Community. Happily, the EC appears to be facing up to some of its responsibilities. For example, it has been agreed by the Council of Ministers that the EC should improve energy efficiency by 20 per cent. between 1985 and 1995. That is a huge percentage increase, but no one has said how much that will cost. However, we must be talking of billions of pounds, all because, whether internationally at European level, nationally, or even locally in our communities, no one bothers about how much power we use because it is relatively so small a part of our total costs.

I am one of the few shopkeepers in Parliament. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Walker) was Secretary of State for Energy and used to have his breakfast meetings around the countryside, I arranged for some of my people to attend. The only problem is that the cost of heating and lighting in our shops is relatively so small that they thought it would not be worth saving those costs. We all know the cost of our rent and various community charges, but we have never got down to the cost of energy in one's shop or business.

As we go home from the mother of Parliaments in the evening, we see great office blocks twinkling with light. Someone somewhere has given no thought to the cost of the energy that is being used or the implications of its use. We should start in the House. It may be boiling in summer and freezing or boiling in winter, but somewhere along the line we in this Chamber must give a lead and say that it is not enough to preach energy efficiency—we must practise it, too.

How do we do that? In some ways it is cheap. We can label appliances. I mentioned refrigerators in the United States. Will the Government consider, if only as a code of practice, telling manufacturers and importers of such equipment to stick a label on their goods telling the customer how much each unit will cost to run? That would be simple and easy.

I have one particular hate. This is the only country in the world that I know of where a new electrical appliance, whether a hair dryer or a toaster, never has a plug on it. People may wonder what that has to do with energy efficiency, but it has a lot to do with it. Why are we so backward in telling manufacturers to label their goods and put a plug on them? I wonder how many accidents happen when people like me do not know what wires go where because we remember the old colours.

What about lighting standards? We are probably all aware that the new soft, more expensive lights use only about 25 per cent. of the energy used by the old lights. Such bulbs will be paid for halfway through their lifetime and, thereafter, money is being saved.

We have never promoted the simple idea that energy conservation need not be expensive, and that the cost of insulating one's home properly will probably be recouped in the first year or certainly in the second. The money saved by the house owner over 10 or 15 years is almost as important as the environmental savings enjoyed by the community, in avoiding the unpleasant by-products of generating energy.

People who are buying a house are willing to pay for a structural survey, but no one considers the cost of heating it. The Department of Energy is keen on promoting energy audits, but perhaps more can be done. In the United States, an energy audit costs about $25, and for another $150, simple measures can be taken to improve insulation and to stop draughts. They are simple improvements of a type that we never get around to—like mending the staircase that always creaked in grandad's day. If energy can be conserved, fewer power stations will be required.

Whenever we want more of something, we build new capacity. The consequence is that we have more houses in this country than families even though they happen to be in the wrong place—but that is the subject of another debate. It would be a simple matter to require the vendor of a property to notify a prospective purchaser of its energy efficiency. Vendors would be likely to give more thought to that aspect before putting their property on the market—perhaps commissioning an energy audit and making improvements that they had hitherto neglected. If they did so, they would achieve a higher price for their property, and its value would also be enhanced in environmental terms.

There is a maintenance office within this building, but we should also have an energy efficiency and conservation office—as should many other major buildings. The cost of the staff would be saved many times over. Once a proper system is established, savings continue for ever.

Financial assistance always presents a problem, and I generally support the Government's view. Why should we give financial assistance for improvements that will help the owner to make money? Why should the state pay for insulation from which the householder will benefit financially in the long term? However, I should be happy to see loans made available for energy conservation purposes. Last night, we were arguing over student loans to be repaid over a number of years. It would be as good or even better to invest in insulating our housing stock.

There are many elderly people, most of them ladies on low incomes not enjoying any pension payable on their late husband's former employment, who cannot afford to live in reasonable comfort. They have to make do with the warmth provided by only one bar of an electric fire. There is no need for that. A little expenditure would provide for better insulation and allow a person to enjoy his or her remaining years in warm comfort.

The Building Research Establishment estimates that a 25 per cent. reduction could be achieved in energy consumption and in carbon dioxide emissions. The other side of excessive energy production is excessive production of carbon dioxide and of the other toxins produced by industrial processes. One cannot blame a vehicle manufacturer if the car that we all want pollutes the atmosphere with the oil and petrol that it must use. However, one can blame him if he does not take every possible step to reduce the volume of that pollution.

There have been market barriers and Government failings in not redefining the market so that there can be greater energy efficiency, but unlike in the United States, which normally leads us in energy efficiency, unleaded petrol is cheaper in this country than leaded. We have already said that we are prepared to tax petrol logically. Perhaps we should also impose less tax on other products that are more energy-efficient.

The Association for the Conservation of Energy would like value added tax removed from energy-saving products. Perhaps that is going too far, because it is likely that VAT will be with us for ever. Nevertheless, there is some logic in that argument, and we have already made something of a breakthrough in establishing the precedent of lower duty on unleaded petrol. We have said that we will tax less those things that are less damaging.

Let us consider the other side of the question. One sad example is British Gas—I have mentioned that company before, but not because I do not like it—whose tariff structure encourages customers who use less than 25,000 therms a year to waste gas. The bulk discount for the next level is such that it is worth burning and wasting power. The bulk tariff brings the total price and the unit cost down. These days that should be culpable. It should be legally wrong to be able to say, "The more you waste, the cheaper the price." That subject is also worthy of consideration by Government.

The other side of the equation is pollution produced by that vast excess of energy. We all know about carbon dioxide and I shall not insult the intelligence of hon. Members by going on about its bad effects. We know what they are. We are scared of the greenhouse effect, although we do not know why, and we are scared of nitrous oxides. We know that something is wrong and we know about global warming—or we think that we do. Perhaps, as is the case with AIDS, after a while we shall say that it probably is not as bad as all that.

The relative contribution of greenhouse gases to global warming in the past 10 years is straightforward—carbon dioxide is 50 per cent., methane 18 per cent., CFCs from our careless aerosols 14 per cent., nitrous oxides—NOs —6 per cent. and surface ozone 12 per cent. Let us just consider the 50 per cent. Half our global warming problems are caused by carbon dioxide, most of which comes from industrial Europe, using machines that it uses to produce the wealth to afford such things as studying the greenhouse effect. We can go further, as 80 per cent. of carbon dioxide is caused by the burning of fossil fuels. It is now estimated that in United Kingdom 92 per cent. of carbon dioxide is caused by fossil fuel burning, even though most of us do not have a coal fire in the house —although we may have a log fire for show. Basically we have stopped using open coal fires and that is why the house looks so pleasant and clean, and why the fogs of my youth are no longer with us.

Fossil fuel divides into coal—with the largest share—oil and gas. Unless specific action is taken, fossil fuel consumption—we largely produce our energy from coal —and carbon dioxide emissions will rise dramatically.

My other sorrow is that every European Community country except the United Kingdom has shown willingness to commit itself to working towards a 20 per cent. carbon dioxide reduction as part of the initial global goal. An agreement was signed in 1988. It is a shame that our country is not a signatory.

My thoughts are not of great significance nationally or locally, but they are of some significance. We are a relatively little country and if every little country took a good look at how it wastes or saves energy, we could also make many people more comfortable. We should consider the by-products of energy and clean them up—the Secretary of State is keen to do that and may be talking soon about the alternative energy sources that are so dear to me.

We should reverse the cuts made in the Energy Efficiency Office and reinstate energy service schemes. We should study building regulations—although the new ones are good. We should say, "What about clean, alternative energy sources?" What about the wind? It causes no pollution—it causes damage, but the sheer power of it is wonderful. What about the waves? They can cause damage, but again the power is vast. I shall not say too much about solar power in Britain, but we should think of the power that exists around our coast. We must think about the potential for energy conservation and the need for energy efficiency.

2.18 pm

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): The hon. Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller) has already described to the Minister the alliance in which we jointly conspire—that is, the all-party alternative energy group.

I congratulate my colleague on winning the slot today and commend him for raising this issue. I also commend his comments to the Minister for serious consideration because much of what he says makes sense.

The hon. Gentleman touched upon the financial aspects of energy efficiency and technology. I shall briefly mention employment and the benefits that can be gained there.

The hon. Gentleman and I went to Norway where we saw two semi-tech pilot plants at Toffteshallen. One is a multi-resonant oscillating water column. The other is a tapered channel. Each is experimental, but they are producing electricity for less than 2·5p per kWh. That is better than our best nuclear and our best fossil fuel plants. Each of the plants uses British technology. The turbines were developed at Queen's university in Belfast. Each plant is producing electricity reliably, efficiently, cleanly and cheaply.

Why do the Norwegians want to do that when they have hydro-electric power coming out of their ears? The answer is simple. They do not need electricity; what they need is employment for their skilled technicians, men and women, who will come on to the labour market after North sea gas and oil have run out. The Norwegians are planning ahead, using British technology to put together

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generating stations that are cheap, manageable and easy to control. They can be introduced one at a time. One does not have to wait the 20 years necessary for the completion of a nuclear power station. Wind and wave electricity-generating stations can be built for several tens of thousands of pounds. They use labour for whom employment in this country is needed. It is what I call the City and Guilds type of labour—not boffins walking around in white coats with masks on their faces but honest-to-goodness blue-collar people.

Apart from the efficiency and cost-saving that such plants represent, they would provide immediate employment for people on the Clyde, the Tyne, the Tees—from where I come—and the Mersey. The European Economic Community believes that Britain has the best wave climate in the world. That would also benefit the Third world. If we developed alternative cheaper, safer and more efficient forms of renewable energy, the Third world would be able to manage them. People there would be able to understand such forms of energy. Above all, we should provide them with something that they could afford. They could have them tomorrow, if only the political will were there.

2.22 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Tony Baldry): I congratulate the chairman and vice-chairman of the all-party alternative energy group, my hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller) and the hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook), on their contributions to the debate. It is an important but large subject, and in the time available to me I shall be unable to respond to all the points that have been raised, or to deal with the subject as it ought to be dealt with. However, I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy welcomed the opportunity that was afforded to him recently to address the all-party group. I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North and the hon. Member for Stockton, North that Ministers in the Department consider with great care everything that the all-party group puts forward. We are grateful to it for all the work that it does.

Energy efficiency can make a significant contribution to alleviating the problems of climate change. The Government believe that climate change could represent the greatest world challenge to sustainable development. We shall do whatever is necessary to meet that challenge. However, to act alone would be pointless. The United Kingdom alone produces about 3 per cent. of the world's carbon dioxide. So all nations must act together. A global problem requires a global solution.

The analyses of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change will help us decide on the actions that we should take, and we shall fully meet our responsibilities once the necessary actions are determined. We shall also need to consider how climate change will affect different areas of the world so that affected regions can adapt in the future. The United Kingdom is taking a lead. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced at the United Nations General Assembly last November, we are establishing a new centre for the prediction of climate change.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister also proposed that the work of the IPCC should continue in order to provide a proper scientific base for any protocols setting targets for restrictions on greenhouse emissions. Global targets have to be broken down for each country. I am sure that that is the right approach and that the Prime Minister has wide international support for that initiative.

However, international consensus is still some months off and in the meantime we would clearly be foolhardy to do nothing. Nothing is not an option. The widespread international concern about climate change is clearly felt here. The Government share that widespread concern and are fully committed to protecting the environment. Energy production is a major contributor to greenhouse gases and we have been taking positive steps to do what we can now to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. One of the obvious ways to do that is to obtain whatever contribution we can from renewable sources of energy. Direct electricity producers such as wind and tidal energy give no gaseous emissions, and biofuels, although they involve combustion, recycle the carbon dioxide so there is no net increase.

Our policy, therefore, is to stimulate the development and application of renewable energy sources wherever they have prospects of being economically competitive and environmentally acceptable. We are doing that via an extensive research, development and demonstration programme in collaboration with industry and by ensuring a legislative infrastructure which allows renewable energy sources to compete equitably in the market.

The research and development programme on which £161 million has been spent to date is identifying the markets and developing and promoting the technology where appropriate. A prime example of a project to promote renewables was a recent joint study with the North-Western electricity board, which identified a potential of 400 MW with good prospects of commercial development in the next decade or two. Our earlier success story was the use of landfill gas as a fuel, which has additional benefits, as methane is a much more potent greenhouse gas than CO_2. The technology was researched and demonstrated within departmental programmes and the first 300 commercial applications are under way with a further 30 planned or under construction.

The Electricity Act 1989 provides for a private sector market in which renewable sources of energy can compete equitably when they are fully developed. In the shorter term, however, they will need some market protection while experience is gained and a manufacturing industry built up. We have therefore also provided the non-fossil fuel obligation, which should enable renewable energy to develop during the 1990s with a premium price being paid for the electricity. Renewable energy, however, will be able to contribute on a significant scale only in the somewhat longer term and we must therefore also look to shorter-term measures.

One item that all Governments will include in any internationally agreed response strategy is promoting energy efficiency. My hon. Friend outlined the need for that. We are already doing it. Energy efficiency is worth while in the economic and in the wider environmental sense. But the community as a whole, not just the Government, has to act and the community as a whole gets the benefit. We must all take action and make an immediate impact. The consequences of our inefficiency are felt not just in environmental pollution but in the bills that we pay each quarter, as individuals and as businesses.

The economic beauty of cost-effective energy efficiency improvements is that they do not really cost anything; savings of up to 20 per cent. of energy costs can usually be realised through simple, effective measures. Some cost literally nothing. On others we get our money back through lower energy bills in about two to three years. Savings after that come free.

At the end of the day, the efficient use of energy is the responsibility of each one of us. Where the Government are directly responsible for energy costs, we are taking positive action: Government Departments are looking to save 15 per cent. of our annual £300 million energy bill within five years, which is expected to involve a doubling of investment in energy efficiency measures.

However, the Government cannot force people to use energy more efficiently. The Government can offer advice and information to consumers on which they can base their decisions on investment and energy management, but the initiative to make the savings ultimately rests with the individual. In both the economic and the environmental sense, energy need not cost the earth. It is up to all of us to ensure that it does not.

Rural Communities

2.30 pm

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): I am an urban dweller and an urban representative. However, I am aware from my travels around the country and from friends and constituents who have relatives in rural areas that rural life is not quite the comfortable picture given by the glossy magazines so beloved of city dwellers.

Over the past few years, there has been a massive population shift in England. The adult population of the shires, which contain most of the rural communities, has increased by 2·7 million since 1976, whereas that of London and the metropolitan counties has decreased by 500,000 during the same period. Yet the institutional framework of our nation remains overwhelmingly urban dominated.

That has led to the ignorance and neglect of rural problems, and has affected housing, health care, transport, jobs and poverty. Even play facilities for children are affected. The idea that the country is so much better for the children does not work when one realises that skateboards do not run on grass. A rural child's first bike can be a parental nightmare.

Villages should be vibrant communities with a variety and richness equal to those in our urban villages. They should not be pushed into single-class pieces of detached suburbia surrounded by fields. Fewer than one in 10 now have a bank, a pharmacy or a permanent library.

Progress is sometimes measured in our society by economies of scale—a concept that is the scourge of small shops, small schools and small hospitals. If we do not come to terms with changes taking place in rural areas, we will have a two-tier rural society: well-heeled, middle-aged and elderly people in holiday and retirement homes making use of urban rather than rural services, and the rural poor locked into poverty, long hours, no choice, no transport and poor housing.

On health matters, I cite the joint survey last year by the Maternity Alliance and the National Federation of Women's Institutes, which found that pregnant women in rural areas face restricted choice, hospital closures and long journeys to clinics. Two thirds of rural maternity units in England have closed since 1960, yet those units are crucial. Some 32 per cent. of births in rural areas are in GP centres or community hospitals, compared with 9 per cent. nationally. Home births in rural areas are 6 per cent., compared to 1 per cent. nationally. A report was recently issued by the National Audit Office on maternity services, on which the Public Accounts Committee—of which I have the honour to be a member—will take evidence after the Easter recess.

Women in rural areas risk long journeys during labour, with the attendant risks. Most litigation currently in process relates to births in larger hospitals, not small units or home deliveries. Local maternity units do have good safety records. However, it is the fear of litigation that is behind the idea that local units cannot cope, so putting pressure on women in rural areas to travel to larger hospitals.

It is clear that the closure of local shops, and particularly of post offices, which are little used by wealthier rural dwellers, is most likely to hit those on low incomes. Fewer than one third of the rural population use local shops, but a survey commissioned a few years ago by

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the Department of the Environment found that those who did were the poorest. The same survey by Brian McLaughlin and his team found that public transport networks were thinly spread. Since that time, they have been spread even thinner.

The most deprived poor in rural areas are those on low incomes who have no car. They cannot get to "competitively" priced rural supermarkets, which are not as low-cost as urban supermarkets. Nevertheless, for some, the car is so essential as a means of transport that other household essentials—I emphasise "essentials"—are forgone. I freely accept that car ownership in rural areas, even two cars, is not a luxury.

Transport problems in rural areas are so serious that they have a direct effect on health care. The McLaughlin study found that a higher proportion of the rural population had medical needs, yet compared to national equivalents they made less use of general medical services such as opticians and dentists, to name but two examples.

One in seven mothers living in rural areas do not attend baby clinics after giving birth. That must be a cause for concern, and it certainly was for those who wrote the report for the Maternity Alliance and the NFWI.

I briefly mentioned the forthcoming crisis, if there is not one already, for England's 8,500 village halls. Most of them—I think about 70 per cent.—are run as charities. Much depends on the location, but the potential for the extended use of those halls to help to create employment by using new technology and all the advances in communication, in addition to being used for committees, youth groups, playgroups, the elderly, doctors' surgeries, libraries and even post offices, is quite enormous. They are under pressure and will be snuffed out if we allow the European Community—these days, I support its general purposes—to impose VAT on charities from 1992. We have a major problem on our hands and a major threat to British rural life.

If we are serious about tackling deprivation and social isolation, which is prevalent, particularly of women in rural communities, who suffer from poor transport, we need action not only to secure and to improve existing facilities but to improve access to them by better transport. I receive enough complaints about the lack of buses in my heavily built up constituency, where the only blades of grass are in three or four public parks, but bus frequencies of more than 30 minutes are 77 per cent. in urban areas, but only 14 per cent. in rural areas. Bus frequencies of one per day or fewer are only 6 per cent. in urban areas but 62 per cent. in rural areas. We know that that causes massive problems for the millions of people who live in rural communities,

With transport—I do not put these in any order of importance because the people directly affected are aware of the importance of the problems—housing is by far the biggest problem in rural communities. I understand and share the concerns about development pressures and the environment, which must be addressed, but one in five of the population in England live in rural communities. That is millions of people and they are entitled to jobs, homes and a decent quality of life, but that is under attack because of the lack of "affordable" housing.

I well understand the changes in policy and emphasis, particularly through the Housing Corporation, but they are too slow. When I was shadow housing Minister—I took professional advice on this—I could see the sense in the geographical "rounding off" of villages and small towns with extra homes to stop sprawl. I was accused of wanting to build right across the south downs. However, as a result, I support Lord Vinson, the chair of the Rural Development Commission, who said recently that the housing needs of rural people would need, on average, only

"a handful of houses in every sizeable village".

Those homes must, of course, be affordable homes.

I want to illustrate the seriousness of the housing problem with two examples of real people. I do not intend to give the real names or locations. Barry and Judy, both in their 20s, started married life a couple of years ago in the third bedroom of Judy's parents' council home. They both come from old-established families in the village. They have been on the council list and have received no offers. Barry's ancestors are listed in the county records as farmers and his great-great-grandfather was a wheelwright —there may have been more than one all those years ago.

A cottage in the next village, just two miles away, came up for sale. It was two up and two down with no bathroom, and was priced at £30,000. They could just afford it if they both kept working. They started negotiations with the estate agent, but he advised the vendor to withdraw from the offer and to increase the price to £50,000. That was the end. Barry and Judy now live in a council flat seven miles away with no hope of returning to their local community.

My second example concerns Ian, the son of a farmer. He is getting married next year and wants no future other than to remain in his rural community and to work the land. He has no hope of a rented home in the area, so he wants to build a small bungalow on his father's farm. It will not be a mansion or an executive pile in the middle of a meadow, but a small bungalow set among the other buildings on the farm. The local community agrees that it would be a sensible thing to do, but permission to build there has been refused.

I began by saying—and I do not apologise for this—that I am an urban dweller and representative. I have no ready-made solutions to what I know are serious social and economic problems in rural areas. I know that part of the reason for the political neglect is that our current electoral system discourages the political parties from campaigning equally throughout the country. No one has ever contradicted me on that. It is a fact of life that in our system, votes cast in urban and rural areas do not have equal value in the link with elected representation.

The failure of rural communities to stop the closure of small schools and hospitals and to ensure that young adults can live in the same community as their families shows that under the present system the rural voice has no clout. However well intentioned the policies emanating from the centre—where most policies emanate—the people they affect remain without influence.

Most people—including myself—do not like change, but change happens whether we like it or not and we cannot opt out, wherever we live and whatever our position in society. The closure of a rural coalfield causes change to the rural community and that change is devastating and negative, especially if the closure is unplanned. Commuters moving into villages and taking them over, sometimes to stop others joining through new development, causes change. I read of an example yesterday in the midlands. One aspect of that change has been the closure of 20 per cent. of local banks and 100 post offices a year for several years. We must attend to the consequences of such change.

No one seeks a policy for rural communities that would turn villages into living museums. Those who visit the villages, those who have friends and relatives there and those who live there do not want such a policy. We require a policy that allows local communities greater control over their own lives than hitherto. We need active balanced communities for the next century, but if shops, schools and hospitals continue to close, and jobs to disappear, and if local people are forced to move away to find a home, there is no way that the problems of rural communities can be solved. Our urban-dominated nation should and must address those problems because they affect millions of people.

I gave my debate the title "The Problems of Rural Communities". I am humble enough to admit that I do not have the solutions. I hope that I have put the problems across positively, rather than negatively, but I admit that I have referred only to the problems and not to the solutions. I invite the Minister to reflect upon them.

2.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): I congratulate the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) on securing the debate and on his choice of subject. He represents an urban constituency—a very urban constituency—but he clearly has a considerable knowledge of rural issues and has thought carefully about them. I was brought up in the country and I represent a rural constituency, so I value the opportunity to debate these matters and to explain how the Government are creating a framework with the dual objective of preserving an attractive rural environment while at the same time creating a healthy rural economy.

Before I go into detail, let me put the problems of rural areas into context. At the end of his speech, the hon. Member for Perry Barr said that change was constant. I agree with that. In the past 20 years or more, we have seen huge changes in Britain as a whole. Old traditional industries such as steel, coal and shipbuilding have declined somewhat and certainly shed labour. Agriculture, too, now employs fewer people. Those industries have been replaced by others—particularly in the service sector—which have grown up and now employ more people. The age profile of the population has also changed. We have more elderly and retired people, many of whom wish to retire away from their place of work. Our attitudes to home ownership have also changed and that has led in part to increases in house prices in some areas and the consequential difficulty for people living in villages in affording local housing.

These changes are not exclusive to rural areas; they are common to the economy as a whole. Rural areas are affected by the trend and they have their share of the problems, but in some areas the problems are no greater than those in other parts of the country, and in some they are less severe. Rural areas suffer some disadvantages. The hon. Gentleman touched on some of them, including greater distances and problems of access. But they can be compensated for, perhaps, by the fact that rural areas have fewer problems of overcrowding and environmental dereliction, which are probably more acute in urban areas.

I agree that there is a considerable amount of misunderstanding about rural issues. There is no such thing as a rural idyll. That is an illusion and perhaps the result of Britain being a urban society. Surprisingly few people have first-hand experience of the countryside. People do not understand the complex social and economic forces at work. The same is true of countryside issues; people often take a simplistic view of conservation and environmental matters. I therefore welcome any opportunity to increase mutual understanding between country and town. One of the reasons why I support greater access to the countryside is that it gives city dwellers an opportunity to get out and experience the countryside, to meet people in the countryside and to improve their knowledge and understanding of it.

I want to list some of the ways in which the Government are taking a range of steps to tackle some of the problems to which the hon. Member for Perry Barr referred. We are having some success, but we are keeping the situation under review. In an evolving and changing economy, new problems arise as old ones are solved or become less acute. We are certainly not working towards a two-tier rural society with well-heeled, middle-aged and elderly people in holiday and retirement homes while the rural poor are locked into poverty and poor housing.

We are aware of the dangers of creating such a stratum in our rural areas. However, to some extent, that would be a caricature. When I was elected, many people were concerned about our villages dying. It was said that young people would move away to the more exciting towns where recreational facilities were better. Now some people are expressing the opposite fear that our villages are being overwhelmed by people moving to them after retirement or using them simply as bases from which to commute. However, that is not a realistic picture and the issues are not polarised in that way.

Newcomers to villages are often essential. If we are worried about the fact that there are not enough people to keep the local post office open or about the village shop not having enough customers or the village school not having enough pupils, we must welcome newcomers. As the hon. Member for Perry Barr said so perceptively, we do not want to create or preserve living museums in our rural areas.

The Government are aware of the problem. Our main task in rural Britain is to encourage the enterprise of those who live and work in rural areas and to increase activity by the private sector. Another task is to make the best possible use of public money—which must always be limited—in the pursuit of those aims. We also want to make full use of the opportunities to influence others to use the money to the best ends by concentrating that money in areas with the greatest need. The picture is varied and not all areas suffer from the same problems.

In general, we want to create a climate in which small businesses can flourish. The Government act through legislation or by providing pump-priming finance. To do that we have set up and are funding a range of agencies. The chief agency in England, and the best known, is the Rural Development Commission, which is sponsored by my Department. It is the main agency for diversifying the rural economy.

[Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory]

courseThe RDC's tasks are to highlight rural problems, to create a climate in which rural businesses and services can prosper and to initiate action to improve the economic and social development of rural areas. It achieves that by harnessing the voluntary and private sectors in the knowledge that the public sector cannot do everything on its own. Similar tasks are undertaken in Wales primarily by the Development Board for Rural Wales and the by the Welsh Development Agency. In Scotland, the Scottish Development Agency and the Highlands and Islands Development Board fulfil broadly similar functions.

Those agencies have achieved a great deal. For instance, the RDC estimates that it assisted in the creation or retention of some 3,900 job opportunities through its workshop programme in the financial year 1988-89. The Development Board for Rural Wales holds 474 factories and has sold a further 87. Together, they provide 8,500 jobs in rural Wales. Many other agencies also help to diversify the rural economy, by stimulating the flow of resources into more remote rural areas. They include the English and regional tourist boards, English Heritage, the Sports Council, the Countryside Commission and the Nature Conservancy Council.

The hon. Gentleman talked with some knowledge about rural housing problems. Of course many people want, when they can, to buy rather than to rent a home. We have been very successful in giving council tenants the right to buy, and it would certainly be wrong if council tenants in rural areas were to be denied that opportunity. We are concerned to maintain the viability of rural communities. We recognise that affordable housing for local people to rent or buy has a key part to play. Our rural housing initiative, which was announced in July 1988, set out for the first time a specific policy on low-cost housing in smaller villages. Over the past two years we have introduced a series of measures to promote the provision of low-cost housing in rural areas.

We are increasing the level of investment in rural areas through housing associations, which have a major role to play in providing affordable housing both for rent and for low-cost sale, in particular through shared ownership. We have greatly increased the public funds available to the Housing Corporation, so enabling it to establish a special rural programme aimed at villages with a population of fewer than 1,000. When fully up and running, the programme should provide 1,500 homes a year for rent in small villages and 350 a year for low-cost sale.

We are introducing a scheme in some rural areas whereby housing associations can repurchase former shared ownership dwellings when the occupier moves on, thus ensuring their retention as low-cost housing. The Housing Corporation will guarantee to make the necessary funds available without reducing its rural rented or shared ownership programmes elsewhere.

Of course, public sector provision is not enough. We are also taking steps to encourage landowners and developers to help in providing affordable housing for local people. In particular, in February 1989 we announced changes to planning rules whereby local planning authorities may, in exceptional cases, release small pockets of land, not previously designated for housing, for low-cost schemes to meet local needs, subject to conditions that ensure that the houses remain available to local people.

Rural areas can also expect to benefit from the encouragement that we have given to private investment in the rented sector through deregulation and the tax incentives available under the business expansion scheme.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned health. General practitioners are the first line of health care. I remind the House that in England there are special rural practice payments for general practitioners when at least 10 per cent. of their patients in a rural area live four miles or more from the main surgery. In Scotland, there are similar provisions.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned maternity services. I understand that the clinical view is that women should be encouraged to have their babies born in hospital when possible. That must usually mean the larger and fully staffed consultant units of district general hospitals which can provide the full range of services, including those necessary in any emergency.

It is a trend of modern medicine to have larger units providing that full back-up, and hospitals of that size are inevitably located in urban areas, and it is not feasible to provide smaller community hospitals with the full range of staff and equipment. District and regional health authorities are alert to the problems experienced in rural areas, and they make provision for travelling and try to ensure that mothers living in rural areas nevertheless have proper access to such hospitals. In order to minimise the risk, provision is made so that during ante-natal care a woman who lives in an isolated area and is judged to be at risk from labour can be admitted to hospital before the expected date of confinement. I do not accept that the NHS is unresponsive to the needs of rural areas or that the standards of service that they receive are necessarily inferior to those provided in towns and cities.

We cannot expect public transport in sparsely populated rural areas to be as good as it is in towns and cities. Nevertheless, under the Transport Act 1985 we opened the way for operators to provide flexible bus services in rural areas on a commercial basis. When it is not possible to provide a service commercially, local authorities have continuing powers to subsidise such services. We have also introduced the rural transport development fund specifically to assist in the provision of rural bus services.

I am aware of some of the problems raised by the hon. Gentleman. We are not complacent about them. We are also aware that future changes will throw up new problems, and we are keeping the matter constantly under review. Our aim throughout is to protect the historic and valuable countryside that is our precious heritage, while providing excellent facilities and services for those who live and work in those areas.

Professional and Executive Emoluments

3 pm

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): Mine is the last but not least of the Easter Adjournment topics. Perhaps I have the credit of having chosen the most obscure title. Hon. Members may wonder what the title is getting at. I hasten to add that the construction of the words in the title was not my own, quite rightly according to the usual procedure and custom. I wish to raise the question of top executive salaries that top directors of companies pay themselves and the need for them to show self-restraint.

I declare an interest in several business activities outside the House, which are listed clearly in the Register. I do not need to go into them in detail and take up the time of the House. I am second to none among my colleagues in being a champion of the virtues of free enterprise, good business, business success and commercial activity. I pay tribute to the way in which the Government have encouraged that by their philosophy and been successful since 1979 in bringing about a dramatic transformaton in business practices and attitudes, and in running companies. That has stood the country in good stead and achieved for it a considerable reputation abroad.

I thank my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Employment for coming to the House for the last of these Easter Adjournment debates. I hope that I have not delayed him in going to his constituency. I am grateful to him for coming from the Department to give some answers to my comments.

It is apposite that this subject should be raised from the Conservative Benches because we have a record as a business-oriented party, and the Government espouse free enterprise. I have never been so partisan in politics that I believed that trade union reform could come only from the Conservative party and business reform only from the Labour party in a divided political society. I also pay tribute to the Government for the way in which they have taken side by side the reform of trade union abuses—particularly in the earlier years of this Government—with the need for companies to put their house in order and indulge in better practices, and for stronger legislation on directors' responsibilities. All the companies legislation in recent years has created the necessary balance.

It is particularly interesting and relevant to raise this matter on the Conservative Benches because of growing anxieties about the excessive amounts that some chief executives, chairmen, managing directors and leading executives of companies pay themselves. I deliberately say "some" because of the way in which mechanisms work on company boards of directors and the generally welcome and impressive self-restraint that most directors have displayed, particularly those in charge of fixing their own emoluments.

I have noticed that, in recent years in particular, that has become a matter of great concern to the Government. I remember my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's dramatic response to complaints about the excessive remuneration—if that is a fair phrase—of, for example, the chairman of British Airways. She specifically referred to that before Christmas in a notable utterance.

In the past few years there have been an increasing number of comments in the press and in journals rather than in the House. That is one reason why I am raising the matter today. There have some references to it in the House, but only usually from the more stakhanovite Labour Members on the Bench below the Gangway.

Many recent press articles, which I shall not quote because of the lack of time, have shown the growing concern about the subject. On 1 July 1989 *The Guardian* had an article entitled "How Britain's bosses are taking the rise", with details of the huge pay increases of top executives, chief executives and so on, in the largest 100 companies. On 23 July 1989, a newspaper well known for its support for private enterprise and the free market, *The Sunday Times*, had an article entitled, "How bosses justify £534,000 a year". It compared the salaries of the 30 highest-paid executives in Britain with the performance of their companies measured by profits and the change in earnings per share.

We know that highly paid executives, to some extent with justification, justify large salaries in terms of what they describe as the international demand for their expertise, but that is often more imagined than real. I do not detect an enormous international movement of senior executives all over the world according to the exact scientific market measurement of the best emolument and remuneration.

There is a growing abuse whereby directors and chief executives give themselves large contracts of three, four or five years at the outset of their tenure of office, or when they are threatened by a takeover bid, so that if the worst comes to the worst and they are ousted, by whatever means it might be, they know that they will be protected. That produces acid comments on the shop floor among junior management executives, the public and the admittedly rather docile shareholders who seem to be the norm even in our large plcs.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley (Mr. Cran) who was one of the first of our colleagues to express anxiety about the matter. He asked the Chancellor whether he agreed that British management must continue to resist excessive wage claims and ensure also that their own snouts are not too deeply in the pay trough. The Chancellor rightly replied that he would not put the second part of my hon. Friend's question in precisely that way, but he would agree with the underlying sentiment. Similar references have also been made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and others.

On 19 January 1990, *The Times* referred to the salary of Sir Ralph Halpern, which came under fire from shareholders at the annual meeting. It referred to the fact that, once the company's profits and turnover had begun to turn down in the current recession, an additional undisclosed payment was made to Sir Ralph Halpern as the head of the Burton group, which he did not even have to reveal to shareholders. We see the difficulties that arise when shareholders assert themselves only when it is too late and the company faces a grave crisis.

We should move to a system under which such contract arrangements are established only after a chief executive, managing director, or executive chairman, has begun his or her successful remodelling or expansion of the company, rather than from day one in any given period, usually fixed—a disturbing phenomenon of modern times —through the rather phoney mechanism whereby the so-called independent sub-committee of non-executive directors on the board fix the salary of the leading

[Mr. Hugh Dykes]

executive directors. Sometimes—surprise, surprise—I then notice from the annual report that those non-executive directors have an increase in their fees.

The public are not fools and they will not be beguiled too easily into thinking that such increases are right. They compare them with the Government's fully justified exhortations to wage earners of one kind or another—including Members of Parliament—to show restraint by not making too heavy a wage claim. There is a big difference between one highly paid individual running a company with his team of directors and managers, and large numbers of the work force. The difference between the two is self-evident, but in a society that not only takes pride in the net, proven results of economic success that we hope to develop further in the future but bears some semblance still to being one nation, with fairness, balance and self-restraint by those in a position to fix their own rewards, there is a need for the Government to take a growing interest.

That is easy to say, but it is much harder in a free enterprise society and free market country to determine how the Government should involve themselves other than by exhortation. I make no apology for saying that there is no magic answer, particularly for an Administration who believe that it is not the place of Government to intervene in private matters.

The Government deliberately promote all kinds of specific and sometimes esoteric savings mechanisms and a commercial climate that encourages personal success and incentives. Above all, they have helped the higher-paid in society by reducing income tax. Those are all spectacular achievements, and the Government are entitled to ask senior executives of large companies and of publicly quoted plcs answerable to their shareholders, both institutional and private, to show self-restraint.

Earlier, I referred to the attack made on Lord King of Watnaby, who received a 116 per cent. pay rise in 1989, with the consequence that he was confronted by angry shareholders at the British Airways annual general meeting in the Barbican. It was asked whether the turnround by British Airways justified a doubling of Lord King's salary. An article in *The Sunday Times* of 23 July 1989 asked:

> "what sort of example does it set for the British workforce as it is being asked to accept wage increases in single figures? BA justifies the increases on the grounds that King's salary only puts him on par with his opposite numbers in American airlines".

Again, there is the conundrum of international salary comparisons, which in reality is somewhat exaggerated.

The example of self-restraint set by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is regarded by many people as being unfair on herself. She is perceived as very underpaid. She has a very modest salary by comparison with the huge incomes earned today that I could quote were sufficient time available.

What else can the Government do apart from set good examples of that kind? It is important for them to take an active role in pronouncing on such matters, even if they take no direct action in terms of imposing pay restraint, be it institutional or legislative. That would be totally alien to our philosophy as a Government, and I am not suggesting it as a solution.

However, Government utterances can be an important influence. When there are examples of huge increases of £1 million-plus for some directors of leading plcs capitalised at more than several hundred million pounds, or for directors who have run their companies into the ground but continue to receive huge payments while everyone else is suffering or being made redundant, the Government have a role to play in making their views known.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider the importance of monitoring statements, and so on, from his Department from time to time. If the Department merely exhorts wage earners to show restraint when making claims for higher pay, be it in the public or private sector, and does not pay attention to practices that create envy and jealousy among the lower-paid in society, it can unwittingly and innocently serve as an agent in the creation of an unfair society.

The lower income tax introduced by the Government means that the need for wage restraint among executives of leading public and quoted companies is even stronger. I pay tribute to the notable restraint shown by a number of chief executives, such as Lord Weinstock of GEC. Above all, it is important that the Government, the City, and others encourage shareholders not to remain docile but to be difficult and demanding.

I particularly call upon institutions in the City to show that they intend to play an active role in those matters, not only the matter of excessive pay levels manifested here and there and in quite a few other companies, but in these unwelcome contract developments which seem frequently to be a development of our commercial and industrial society.

I deliberately conclude my remarks—and once again I thank my hon. Friend for coming to answer the debate—by paying tribute to the number of exceptions which, if time had allowed, I would have mentioned in detail. I shall not do so today, for obvious reasons.

A total contrast is shown in Japan, which is the most successful economic system in the world, where 110 million people are creating a giant, highly successful, high-technology exporting economy and commercial system. It is interesting for us to consider the remuneration figures of the chief executives of Japanese companies which are successful worldwide. With a number of small exceptions, and not allowing for the separate question of perks and emoluments of a non-financial type, almost exclusively the picture is one of considerable restraint. The ratios are between six and 10 times the wages and salaries paid to management trainees on entry into those huge Japanese enterprises which export worldwide—and if we think of all those famous Japanese names, in almost all cases that is true—unlike the ratios of between 20 and 50 times that we find in this country, where chief executives pay themselves £1 million in comparison with a manager who may earn £40,000 for a senior executive post.

Although we accept the natural effect of inequalities in our society, and although we believe that it is part and parcel of what we hope will be a continuing economic success, we have to consider the other side of the coin, which is the Government's obligation to create a healthy economy and a moral economy. I hope I say that without showing any naivety or indulging in excessive wishful thinking. I think that the two can go together. We can create a fair society where the person on the shop floor feels part of the team and identifies with the chief executive and does not regard him as an overpaid prince of industrial and commercial society.

3.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Patrick Nicholls): I acquit my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) of having caused me any inconvenience by requiring me to be in the House today. I accept that the subject which he has chosen for debate is perhaps not debated often enough, and, even though the House is not entirely packed on this occasion, my hon. Friend knows that Adjournment debates often receive wider attention when they are printed in *Hansard*.

Before I turn to specifics, I should like to make some general observations. Few subjects in industrial relations generally generate more heat—and less light—than senior executives' pay. It is, unfortunately, all too easy for some commentators to act as though the factors which determine the pay of senior professional and executive staff are in some way different from those which determine the pay of all other workers. That is just not the case.

The plain—and no doubt to some unpalatable—truth is that the pay of all workers is determined ultimately by the interaction of supply and demand. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said on a number of occasions that the determination of pay levels and remuneration packages has to be a matter for the companies concerned and their employees. When arriving at those determinations—usually, although by no means always through the mechanism of collective bargaining—firms should obviously take into account four cardinal principles: affordability, or their ability to pay; the need to recruit staff; the need to retain staff; and the need to motivate staff.

For firms in the private sector, particularly those providing internationally traded goods and services, it does not make any sense to give—or to allow themselves to be forced to concede—wage and salary increases which, after taking associated productivity gains and investment needs into account, make them uncompetitive in the marketplace. To do so will spell, sooner or later, the decline and ultimately the demise of the firm. And of course that means the loss of jobs.

The second cardinal principle is the need to recruit staff, and it is the individual firm which is best placed to assess the conditions in the labour markets in which it operates. Only it, therefore, can know what type of staff it needs, in what numbers, and with what qualifications. Only it can assess what salaries it needs to provide to attract them.

Simply to recruit staff is not enough; they have to be retained, or the firm will face continual disruption as its staff turns over, as continuity and experience are lost and as the considerable costs of training and recruitment have to be incurred over and over again, with little return in terms of high quality and reliable production and service to customers. Remuneration packages—pay, hours and other conditions and benefits—are a major means of retaining staff. That is the third cardinal principle.

The fourth is the motivation of staff. In one sense, it is perhaps the most important of all. Staff who lack motivation and commitment cannot provide the basis for a successful and competitive enterprise which is capable of surmounting the challenges of the marketplace.

Remuneration levels and conditions of service, such as holiday entitlement and hours of work, can be a powerful motivating force, if used imaginatively. Those principles apply just as much to the managing director as to the process operator, the chief executive and the delivery driver.

To try to build a ring fence around the upper management and to claim thereby that they are either more or less important than any other worker simply ignores the fact that a company's success is built on everyone in it, from the top down and the bottom up. Everyone has to be recruited, retained, motivated and rewarded.

So what are the Government's views on this crucial interaction between the individual and the firm for which he or she works? As my hon. Friend anticipates and, I think, agrees, the Government believe that pay has to be a matter for those who negotiate and determine it. We saw only too starkly between 1975 and 1979 what happens when Governments attempt rigidly to control incomes. Job-destroying economic distortions are introduced; spurious productivity deals are cobbled together; and industrial relations are harmed. Above all, the policy fails to deliver the goods: the long-term rate of growth in incomes is not moderated. None of us, therefore, would wish to return to those bad old days.

Companies, however, need the best management available. In sectors where managers are internationally mobile, their remuneration needs to be competitive, at least to some extent, internationally. It is not for the Government to decide what is or is not an appropriate remuneration for key managerial jobs. The Government have never tried to defend, nor will they now, wage or salary increases that are unjustifiable, either for management or for the work force as a whole.

The justification for pay increases for chief executives and managing directors are affordability and the need to recruit and retain appropriate talent. It is a matter entirely between companies and their shareholders how that is done. No Government can judge what damage would be done to a company's prospects by the loss of key staff who were the architects of its corporate strategy.

To turn to more specific issues, I must first remark that, typically, directors' and management salaries show extremely wide variations, depending on the size of the business, its profitability and turnover. According to a recently published survey, United Kingdom managing directors' salaries range from about £30,000 a year upwards. The average chief executive's pay in the United Kingdom is £62,820 which, according to a recent survey, is considerably lower than the average in West Germany, France and Switzerland.

It is fruitless and distorting to quote but not qualify the widely known salaries of a very few key individuals as proof that, across the board, our managing directors are overpaying themselves. We rank seventh in a recently published international league table of chief executives' remuneration, when all benefits are taken into account. On these figures we should not criticise ourselves for paying, as a general rule, overly high salaries. It may be that we are actually underpaying some key players in the fight for greater business efficiency, enterprise and trading success.

It might be worth saying a word or two about non-pay benefits. They, too, are part of the remuneration package. Contrary to popular belief, the company car, medical insurance, help with the house buying, share purchase or

[Mr. Patrick Nicholls]

option schemes and performance bonuses are no longer the sole preserve of the company chairman and the board member. These benefits are spreading extensively to more junior employees, to smaller companies and to many more sectors of industry and commerce, including parts of the public sector. The wider spread of those elements is attributable to their effectiveness in recruiting key staff at all levels.

We must also take into account the fact that calculating meaningful average annual increases for this particular group is difficult. Recently, three respected management consultancies came up with quite different answers to the question: by how much have directors' and managment salaries increased over the last year? One answer was 9·7 per cent., one was 11·4 per cent. and one was a massive 27·8 per cent.

I suspect that consistent, clear and accurate figures will be well-nigh impossible to obtain because of the extremely high variability within the group, and the fact that a tiny minority of very high increases will seriously distort the average figures. Be that as it may, and accepting that any figures likely to be bandied about should be treated with the greatest scepticism, we must also take into account the fact that, while some directors are highly rewarded, many of them also suffer cuts in remuneration when their businesses run into difficulty. In 1988-89, for instance, directors' total pay fell in four major companies by 18·1 per cent. 32·9 per cent. 11·1 per cent. and 21·1 per cent.

Many directors and chief executives are much more directly exposed than their work forces to fluctuations in the performance of their companies. Therefore, I agree with the remarks that my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer have made in the House on a number of occasions. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East usefully drew attention to that.

Because time is short, I shall not quote any of those remarks at length, but when my right hon. Friend the Chancellor was Chief Secretary to the Treasury, he said:

> "I have never justified wage or salary increases that are unjustifiable, and I do not do so now. It is not, however, for me to determine what is or is not justifiable in that respect."—[*Official Report*, 8 June 1989; Vol. 154, c. 352.]

It must be accepted that the right salaries are not automatically synonymous with accepting unrealistically low salaries to satisfy the complaints from some hon. Members—not my hon. Friend—who believe that anyone earning more than they do has something to answer for.

Setting a good example must involve demonstrating real leadership; high levels of commitment to the company, at times with considerable cost to family life; high levels of expertise and experience; an enterprising and vigorous approach to expansion; a willingness to embrace change; and the continuous striving for more efficient business practices. All those valuable characteristics deserve appropriate reward, but it must be up to the businesses themselves to judge what they can afford to pay their key executives.

Paying an executive less than what is needed to recruit, retain and motivate, merely to counter some of the objections that might be made by others, simply will not set a good example. In the final analysis it might set a thoroughly bad one. It is as distorting to the internal economy of a business to pay chief executives too little as to pay them too much. It might be distorting to the point of disaster if the Government were to interfere directly with those crucial decisions. By paying too little, important skills and talents will be lost. Just as much for the work force, the need to recruit and retain good management is absolutely essential for business success.

My hon. Friend and I probably agree far more than we disagree. However, I should like to mention two points. My hon. Friend mentioned the possibility of my Department conducting monitoring statements and said that it was easier to identify irresponsibility than to know how to deal with it. I have tried to give examples of some of the sources that are available to us. There is obviously a fair degree of variation, even on what commentators say. The only point that would trouble me about any formalised monitoring is that it would be difficult to know whether one was getting a comprehensive picture.

It is even more fundamental that, if one found that there had been a steady or perhaps dramatic increase in particular directors' salaries, knowing that in a formalised way would not enable my Department or any of my hon. Friends to say that those increases must have been unjustified merely because they were at such a level. It would not be possible to go so far.

I accept that that would be a more difficult argument for my hon. Friend and me than for the Opposition, who would take a more traditional and formalised attitude. It is difficult for us to debate the matters in the context of a society which my hon. Friend said should be economically and morally healty.

The problem with trying to lead by example is that those whom we expect to be impressed by our example are not impressed at all. I am sure that my hon. Friend, like me, will sometimes have been attacked at public meetings on the subject of the salaries of Members of Parliament. When I compare them with those of, for instance, civil servants or the senior chef in the Members' Dining Room, and point out that we have exercised considerable restraint over the years, my words are usually greeted with hoots of derision, the implication being that a Member of Parliament who is paid £24,000 a year is grossly overpaid. People's attitude is that, if they only had the time, they could do our job more effectively. I do not know whether that solves the conundrum, but at least it means that I can finish on a note that unites my hon. Friend and me.

I value the opportunity to consider the subject that my hon. Friend has raised and—I hope—to respond to some of his concerns.

Mr. Speaker: Before I adjourn the House, may I wish hon. Members and our officials and staff a very happy Easter recess?

It being half-past Three o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Order [27 March] and the Resolution [16 March] till Wednesday 18 April.*

House of Commons

Wednesday 18 April 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Manufactured Goods (Exports)

1. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the level of exports of manufactured goods to Japan in 1989.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): The level of United Kingdom exports of manufactured goods to Japan in 1989 was £1,938 million, an increase of 29 per cent. over 1988.

Mr. Hughes: Does not that welcome answer show that the standards and quality of British manufacturing are very high? Is not that why we sell so well to countries such as Japan? Is it true that the British kitemark on British products is taken as a symbol of that quality? Would not those who are trying to export to Japan be well advised to have the kitemark on their products because people recognise it throughout the world?

Mr. Ridley: My hon. Friend is right. The great growth in our exports to Japan is gratifying and, I believe, based on greatly improved British quality—which was not the case some time ago. The more that can be done to underline that quality in the way that my hon. Friend suggests, the better.

Mr. Skinner: Is not it true that Japan has a massive trade surplus with Britain, and has had for many years? The amount to which the right hon. Gentleman referred is a flea bite compared with the amount of Japan's trade with Britain. Is not it also true that the meeting of Finance Ministers last week discussed ways to try to coax Japan to take more British and American goods? Did not Japan refuse to take skis manufactured in Britain because it has a different sort of snow? Did not it refuse——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that we can start this new part of the Session with hon. Members asking single questions; otherwise it is not fair for other hon. Members who have questions on the Order Paper.

Mr. Skinner: Is not it true that Japan refused to import cosmetics from other countries because the Japanese have a different sort of skin? Did not it refuse to take oranges from the Third world because it says that Japanese stomachs are too small?

Mr. Ridley: We are on course to meet our target of doubling our exports to Japan in the three years to 1990. That is quite an achievement. We have a trade deficit with Japan, but so does practically every other nation. Of the European countries, Britain has the second highest rate of export growth.

Mr. Michael Morris: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the British leather industry would like to enjoy the 29 per cent. increase to which he referred? Is he further aware that ever since trade with Japan began, there have been artificial barriers to such exports? Will my right hon. Friend, on a personal basis, make the strongest possible representations to the EEC to ensure that those artificial barriers—which prevent the best leather in the world from being exported to Japan—are lifted?

Mr. Ridley: I agree with my hon. Friend. This is one of the areas in which the Japanese have failed to liberalise their markets, and I intend to raise the matter with them when I visit Japan in the summer. I shall make my hon. Friend's point with such force as I can command.

Mr. Gordon Brown: What impact is the policy of high interest rates having on investment and therefore on our long-term ability to export to Japan and elsewhere? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that receiverships have increased by 109 per cent. over the first quarter of 1989? What help is it to exporters to have, in addition to high interest rates, cuts in export services, cuts in research and development help for firms, and even cuts in the consultancy service that was set up only a few months ago?

Mr. Ridley: The hon. Gentleman must know that investment is coming into Britain from Japan at ever greater rates. That helps us to increase our exports. We are now exporting motor cars to Japan. I do not understand how interest rates affect that process. The hon. Gentleman quoted figures, which he also gave in a newspaper recently, for alleged cuts in services provided to industry by my Department. He probably does not realise that last year there was a shortfall in take-up of those services. The demand for them fell, so it was not possible to meet the budget for that year. There have been no budgetary cuts. The hon. Gentleman should do his homework before he makes silly allegations.

Mr. David Martin: On a recent visit to Japan I was impressed by the Department's initiatives, through Opportunity Japan, and by the calibre and quality of the British embassy staff, from the ambassador downwards, who were implementing that policy. I hope that during his visit my right hon. Friend will do all that he can to promote structural changes which will advance the steps that have already been taken and will make clear to British business the opportunities in Japan which did not exist as recently as a few years ago.

Mr. Ridley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, in particular for the tribute that he paid to staff in our embassy in Japan, and during my visit I shall pass on his tribute to those concerned. I agree that the Opportunity Japan campaign has been a great success. I will take every possible measure to increase that success in the time ahead.

Steel

2. **Mr. Austin Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the future of the steel industry in the United Kingdom.

The Minister for Industry (Mr. Douglas Hogg): I have every confidence that there is a bright future for the United Kingdom steel industry now that all of it is in the private sector and free from Government interference.

Mr. Mitchell: A declaration of confidence from the Government in their present state is more a kiss of death than an endorsement. As domestic demand for steel is likely to be depressed because of what the Government are doing to deflate the economy, will the Minister have a word with the Chancellor of the Exchequer and tell him that the only way to encourage exports and to stop capacity being closed in this country is to get the pound down to a competitive level so that industry can compete effectively in Europe?

Mr. Hogg: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman's continued contact with the non-socialist world—he is, of course, a valued and I think well-paid employee of one of Mr. Murdoch's companies—has enabled him to ask the kind of question to which I am extremely happy to respond. As the House will know, as a result of Government policy there has been a transformation in the British steel industry. In the 1970s and early 1980s, the industry made huge losses and required vast subsidies. I am glad that it is now among the most profitable and productive steel industries in the world.

Mr. Holt: Will my hon. Friend take it from one who has a steelworks in his constituency that the steel industry is doing extremely well and that one thing that would set it back would be for the Government once again to start interfering in the running of that great industry?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is entirely right. There are various ways to measure the transformation, but one way is in terms of productivity. In 1980, the United Kingdom produced 84 tonnes per man year. I am happy to say that by 1988 that had increased to 347 tonnes per man year —a staggering transformation which has made the United Kingdom steel industry among the most productive and efficient in the world.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: If there is such confidence in the steel industry, and if such a transformation has been wrought, why has Sir Robert Scholey of British Steel twice refused to meet shop stewards from the Ravenscraig and Dalziel plants in Scotland? As there is every likelihood of a £700 million profit this year in steel, will the Minister monitor the level of investment in that industry in Scotland and ensure that meetings take place between Scottish representatives and the chairman?

Mr. Hogg: There are no ifs and buts about the transformation. It is certain. Let me give the House some more figures which might also help the hon. Lady. In 1979-80 British Steel lost £1,784 million, which transferred into current terms is £3,359 million. I am happy to say that in 1988-89 British Steel made a profit of £593 million. In the first half of 1989-90, it made a profit of £423 million. The transformation is real; there are no ifs or buts about it.

Manufactured Goods (Exports)

4. **Mr. Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the growth in exports of manufactured goods to the European Community since 1979.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs (Mr. John Redwood): Exports of manufactured goods to the European Community have risen from £13 billion in 1979 to £38 billion in 1989, an increase of £25 billion.

Mr. Harris: Will my hon. Friend confirm that in the last three months for which figures are available visible exports from Britain to the European Community increased by 11 per cent., whereas imports increased by only 0·5 per cent.? If those figures are correct, do not they show that the trend is very much in the right direction?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is right. The trend is certainly in the right direction. The figures relate to all our visible trade with EC and non-EC countries. It is most encouraging to see the trade balance improving, as forecast by the Treasury and by a variety of external forecasters. It is a pity that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) did not remain to hear the rest of these questions. He has been saying that the trade balance is not improving. How wrong he is, but how right it is that the trade balance is improving, as we expected, because British industry is responding well.

Mr. Win Griffiths: Will the Minister give the figures for 1979 and 1989 of imports from other European countries to the United Kingdom and compare them with the figures that he gave earlier?

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman is right that imports from the European Community have risen. As one would expect, there has been a big increase in imports and exports as we benefit from more trading patterns with Europe. Comparing the figures for 1979 and 1989, the balance is not much different. The proportion of imports from the European Community in 1989 was similar to the proportion in 1979.

Eastern Europe

5. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the outcome of his trade mission last month to Poland and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Mr. Ridley: Together with a group of business men, I visited the Soviet Union and Poland from 10 to 17 March.

Poland is making rapid progress towards replacing socialist economic policies with a free market. There are good opportunities for British investors. In the Soviet Union, the pace of change is slower.

Mr. Field: A principal reason for my right hon. Friend's visit to Russia and Poland was to urge them to introduce a commercial and legal framework to reassure entrepreneurs and businesses that they could invest with confidence. How did he succeed on that and on currency convertibility and the ending of import licensing? Does he agree that, with only £197 million of exports to Poland last year, it is much too important a market to be left to West German business men?

Mr. Ridley: My hon. Friend is right. We need a proper framework of law and rules on pricing, insolvency payments, debt collection, monopolies and subsidies controls before they can become full market trading countries. The prospects of anything transpiring are less in Russia than in Poland, which is trying as hard as possible to put in place the essential commercial infrastructure. That will help us greatly to invest, to Poland's benefit as well as to ours, and to increase trade. At the moment, the Poles have a shortage of hard currency and are unable to purchase much from the west. It will be much better when Poland has achieved convertibility. We urged it to achieve fully convertible currency at the earliest possible date.

Mr. Hood: During his mission, did the Secretary of State discuss with the Polish people the failure of the British free market capitalist system? Did he explain why we have a massive trade deficit and high interest rates and why small businesses are going bankrupt by the day? The Government have introduced the uniform business rate, which will bankrupt even more. Did the right hon. Gentleman hold that up to the Poles as an example for their future economic strategy?

Mr. Ridley: I do not know which country the hon. Gentleman is talking about. He might like to know that since 1981 manufacturing output in this country has gone up by 32 per cent.; manufacturing productivity has gone up by 51 per cent.; profits have increased by four times; and manufacturing investment has been growing at a real rate of 5·5 per cent. a year. The hon. Gentleman seems to have mixed up the two countries. Anyone would have thought that he was talking about Poland. It would be a disaster to try to apply east European methods of economic management, as they have been hitherto, to the very successful British economy. It should be the other way round.

Mr. Ward: Will my right hon. Friend join me in condemning the Opposition for underselling this country at every opportunity? Does he agree that should the Soviet Union and the Polish nation seek help in setting up free economies on the lines of our banking and business world, we will give them every possible assistance, despite the efforts of the Opposition?

Mr. Ridley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Britain is viewed everywhere—except among Opposition Members—as one of the world's most successful economic transformations. We are sufficiently well off to be able to provide a £50 million know-how fund to help the Poles to set in place the essential infrastructure to which my hon. Friend referred. At the same time, we have made generous contributions to various funds, including £15 million for agriculture, £190 million towards EEC assistance and $100 million to the stabilisation fund.

Mr. Beith: Will not the Secretary of State have to have further discussions with his counterparts in the Soviet Union if events in Lithuania move towards some kind of economic blockade? Will not he need to make it clear to his Soviet counterparts that he will facilitate any trade arrangements that may be necessary to ensure that essential supplies and commodities can be made available to the people of Lithuania?

Mr. Ridley: It is not for me to answer for foreign policy towards Lithuania. All that I can say is that we are watching the situation very carefully and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will take any action that he deems to be correct at the right time.

Trade Barriers

6. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to discuss trade barriers with Switzerland and other European Free Trade Association countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend and I will be meeting the ambassadors of Switzerland and other EFTA countries on 2 May when there will be an opportunity to discuss a range of subjects.

Mr. Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that since the EFTA countries trading together form the European Community's largest trading partner, the creation of a European economic space must be the main objective of the British Government's relations with EFTA?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is right. Between 1972 and 1984 tariff barriers came down and from 1984 onwards, under the Luxembourg declaration, there was progress to include EFTA in a number of market-opening measures to bring our markets closer together. My hon. Friend will be glad to know that negotiations will be under way to see whether we can bring EFTA into a common European economic space with the European Community, and Britain is at the forefront of member states urging that upon our Commission and Community partners.

Mr. Batiste: Does my hon. Friend agree that although it is desirable to extend the European economic space, alongside it must be mutual obligations on a wide range of issues, including non-tariff barriers, state aids and the openness of stock markets in countries apart from the United Kingdom?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is right, and some of those matters were already covered by the Luxembourg declaration. Many EFTA countries are making good progress in reducing state aids and implementing sensible economic policies. I wish that some Opposition Members would begin to learn from those economic policies. They still seem to be wedded to massive interventionism, which is illegal for a member of the European Community and which is no longer practised by many EFTA states. The Government are determined to see the European Community police those disciplines of fair trading within the Community and throughout EFTA where we have the necessary agreements so to do.

Stock Exchange

7. **Mr. Doran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next plans to meet the chairman of the stock exchange; and what will be discussed.

Mr. Ridley: Ministers meet the chairman of the stock exchange whenever appropriate to discuss topics of mutual interest.

Mr. Doran: When the Secretary of State next meets the chairman of the stock exchange, will he discuss with him fraud and investor protection in the City? As we move towards 1992, with the present high levels of fraud and lack of investor protection in the City, is not business likely to flow from Britain rather than to come here?

Mr. Ridley: I do not accept what the hon. Gentleman says. The Government have put in place four specific measures to provide a strong legislative framework to regulate the activities of the City. The previous legislation was woefully inadequate. Furthermore, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has abolished stamp duty on share dealing, which will help to make London remain the centre of European financial activity, and I am confident that it will.

Mr. Hanley: Will my right hon. Friend remind the Labour party that this Government introduced a criminal offence for insider dealing and for trading in investment business without a licence? It ill-befits the Labour party to complain about our form of regulation. Will my right hon. Friend also confirm his confidence in self-regulation as a principle in the City?

Mr. Ridley: I have never understood why the Labour Government of 1974 did not proceed with the previous Government's plans to put in place legislation on insider dealing and other matters and why, during all their six-year tenure, they passed no legislation to deal with that problem. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to point to that grievous omission. I also agree with my hon. Friend's latter remarks.

Rev. Martin Smyth: While welcoming the tightening up in the City, may I ask the Secretary of State to agree that there may be a need for a revision of the guidelines for the futures and options markets for the protection of investors?

Mr. Ridley: It will be for the Securities and Investments Board to consider whether changes are needed. With the system of self-regulation that we have in place, it is for practitioners, guided by the SIB, which has authority, to decide how best to ensure that regulation is of the highest standard but at the lowest possible cost.

Mr. Charles Wardle: When my right hon. Friend next meets the chairman of the stock exchange, will he ask what lessons could have been learnt from the ombudsman's report on Barlow Clowes? Will he ask him whether the class 1 circular issued upon the reverse takeover of Barlow Clowes by James Ferguson (Holdings) plc in April 1987 should have contained more information about the trading relationship between Barlow Clowes and Barlow Clowes International?

Mr. Ridley: All that I can say is that I will draw my hon. Friend's comments and questions to the attention of the chairman of the stock exchange. It is not for me to reopen those questions, as the Financial Services Act 1986 has transferred the responsibility elsewhere.

Post Office

11. **Mr. Boateng:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next intends to meet the chairman of the Post Office.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Eric Forth): I will next meet the chairman of the Post Office, Sir Bryan Nicholson, on 4 May.

Mr. Boateng: Will the Minister confirm the Government's commitment to the Royal Mail as a national public monopoly? Will he assure the House that he has not fallen prey to the predatory exercises of those who want to get their hands on the choicest cuts of the Royal Mail while leaving the ordinary consumer to the mercy of an inferior service? How much are the Government committed to the Royal Mail and to a service for all consumers?

Mr. Forth: The answer to the question is yes. We are convinced that the future of the postal service must involve a service that is universal in its coverage and operates at a standard price for all its users. We are confident that the management and employees of the Post Office are dedicated to a constant improvement in the service that they operate for the people of this country. That has the full backing of the Government.

Mr. Knapman: Does my hon. Friend agree that competition is good and monopoly is bad and that before any future European directives are issued those basic facts should be taken into account?

Mr. Forth: Yes, that is right. In this country and throughout the Community, we must try to establish that balance of universal coverage which is appropriate and necessary to provide a level of service with the maximum reasonable and available competition so as to give the maximum benefit to all our users and consumers. We are absolutely dedicated to achieving that.

Mr. Beggs: Prior to meeting the chairman of the Post Office, will the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry consult his colleagues, including his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, about the possibility of enabling constituents throughout the United Kingdom to purchase motor vehicle road fund licences from post offices, and will he then discuss that with the chairman of the Post Office?

Mr. Forth: That is as much, if not more, the responsibility of the Department of Transport and of my right hon. and hon. Friends there as it is of this Department. I am aware of the concern that the hon. Gentleman has expressed because it is something with which all hon. Members have to deal on a constituency basis. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are constantly seeking to ensure the best and most effective coverage for all parts of the kingdom. If the hon. Gentleman has a constituency case, I assure him that I and my colleagues will look most carefully at it.

Mr. Forman: Is my hon. Friend aware that his answer to the original question will be most welcome to the chairman of the Post Office and to all its employees? Will he confirm that there is a danger that the European directive on postal services could introduce barriers to new entrants to the market? Will he assure the House that it is Her Majesty's Government's policy to ensure that that does not happen?

Mr. Forth: First, I assure my hon. Friend that as yet there is no directive. A group of senior officials, including officials from my Department, are considering the possibility of publishing a Green Paper—a discussion document—to try to establish the correct place for the postal services in the single market of the European Community. That work is continuing. At the moment, we do not envisage that the Green Paper will emerge until later this year. At that point, it will have to be widely considered throughout the Community and by the Council of Ministers and even then, there will have to be a lot of consultation.

Secondly, I am aware that concern has been expressed about this matter throughout the United Kingdom. I assure everybody that the directive is at the very earliest stage. Although we agree that it is correct to identify the right place for postal services within the Community, equally it is the Government's intention to provide the maximum area of freedom of operation for those who wish to provide alternative services complementary to the postal monopoly.

Car Manufacturers

12. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will next meet the major car manufacturers; and what will be discussed.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Secretary of State and I regularly meet the major car manufacturers to discuss a variety of issues.

Mr. Clarke: When the Minister and his hon. Friend next meet the manufacturers, will they discuss Britain's huge £6·5 billion deficit in automotive products? Can the Minister offer any positive proposals to reduce that deficit and can he tell the House why such a huge deficit exists in such a crucial industry?

Mr. Hogg: It was perhaps a misfortune for the hon. Gentleman to concentrate so much on import penetration because he should know that import penetration occurred during the period of office of the last Labour Government. I will give the House the exact figures. In 1974, import penetration was 27·9 per cent., in 1979 it was 56·3 per cent., and at present it is about 57 per cent., so the process of import penetration took place under the Labour Government. Under the Conservative Government, however, there has been an extraordinary transformation in our indigenous capacity. Let us consider the past five years: in 1984 we produced about 909,000 units, in 1989 we produced 1·299 million units and by the mid-1990s we are likely to be producing about 2·2 million units.

Sir Dudley Smith: When my hon. Friend the Minister or my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State mext meets the major car manufacturers, will he press upon them the need to sustain and encourage the car component industry in Britain, particularly in the west midlands? Is my hon. Friend aware that although it is not how we do things here, in some countries there would be positive discrimination in favour of such an industry?

Mr. Hogg: I entirely agree with what my hon. Friend has said. Fortunately, we are seeing a huge increase in Britain's motor car manufacturing capacity. Inevitably, that provides a great opportunity for the automotive component industry and I am pleased to say that the industry is taking advantage of it. Whenever there is inward investment in relation to the motor industry, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I stress the importance of United Kingdom sourcing.

Mr. Henderson: In the light of yesterday's announcement by Honda of the details of its 20 per cent. stake in Rover, at a price of £104 million, which gives the Rover division of British Aerospace a market value of more than £500 million excluding property assets and the DAF investment, will the Government still be making representations to the European Commission to the effect that the £56 million in sweeteners identified by the National Audit Office on a sale price of £150 million were none the less necessary to sell the company?

Mr. Hogg: The figures just read out rather painfully by the hon. Gentleman illustrate the value and importance of putting such companies into the private sector. One thing is plain. When Rover was sold to British Aerospace it was not worth the valuation suggested by the hon. Gentleman. The transformation of Rover is entirely consequent on the fact that it is operated productively and prosperously in the private sector.

Mr. Roger King: Will my hon. Friend take time out to meet the car manufacturers trade unions, in particular those which represent Ford workers, so that we may never again see a Dundee or Bridgend where phase 2 of the development of the Zeta engine has been deferred and transferred to German factories on the continent? Is not it a fact that the trade unions at that company still have to learn that their rhetoric during the recent Ford dispute to the effect that they had the power to stop Ford throughout Europe did more damage to them, their jobs and their futures than to anyone else?

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point. The plain truth is that while Ford remains committed to the United Kingdom, it has the capacity to put work elsewhere. It made the decision not to put the Zeta engine phase 2 at Bridgend partly

> "because of the unreliability of supply experienced in recent years".

The Labour party must realise that if it supports industrial action or inflationary wage settlements, as it always does, that policy will be paid for in lost jobs.

Shipbuilding

15. **Mr. Galloway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the future of the shipbuilding industry in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The future of the United Kingdom shipbuilding industry depends on its ability to win orders in the face of international competition. The Government provide substantial support to the industry to assist its return to normal competitive conditions.

Mr. Galloway: Is the Minister aware that the cost of building a ship has doubled in the past few years, yet worldwide demand for shipbuilding is booming and shipowners are falling over themselves to place new orders? In the light of that, do the Government not regret having done in the past 10 years what the Luftwaffe failed to do and closed down the great majority of British merchant shipbuilding capacity?

Mr. Hogg: That was a foolish question, and an ignorant one. As for our shipbuilding capacity, there are now about 33,000 people in the shipbuilding industry. I am happy to say that the order books are good and the yards are not losing money. When the Labour party was in power, the industry lost vast sums of money and required huge subsidies. That is not the proper way to use economic resources.

Mr. Barry Field: Is not it a fact that my hon. Friend fought like a tiger for the retention of the shipbuilding intervention fund, thus demonstrating that he is not the British shipbuilding industry's enemy but its friend?

Mr. Hogg: I am flattered by the analogy. Some tiger! I should have said, "Some hog!" None the less, I will accept the compliment and I am grateful to my hon. Friend. It is our intention, in time, to return shipbuilding to proper market conditions, but at present we thought it right that there should be a 20 per cent. ceiling on the intervention fund. We are comfortable with that figure, but our policy is to reduce the ceiling.

Ms. Quin: Is not it the case that in the world shipbuilding league, the United Kingdom is behind not only Japan and South Korea, but West Germany, Italy, Spain, Denmark, East Germany, Poland, Brazil, Finland and Yugoslavia? Given that fact, is not it tragic that the Government connived at the closure of the Sunderland yards even when there were bidders prepared to operate those yards without subsidy?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Lady always runs down British shipbuilding—*[Interruption.]* I always try to be nice to her. I think that she does that because she does not know the facts. I will give her one encouraging piece of information. In the first quarter of 1989—the last period for which I have an exact figure—the proportion of world orders taken up by British shipbuilding yards substantially increased. I hope that the hon. Lady will be pleased at that.

We tried for 18 months to find a buyer for the Sunderland yards, and failed. Consequently, we put in place a closure package, of which we notified the European Commission and had it accepted. That package has greatly diversified Sunderland's economy and given the town a much better economic future than it would otherwise have had.

Cot Deaths

22. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he first became aware of Dr. Barry Richardson's research into cot deaths; and what action he then took to alert the public.

Mr. Forth: The Department of Health wrote to my Department about Dr. Barry Richardson's research on 7 June 1989. A copy of Dr. Richardson's report dated June 1989 was received on 12 June. As a direct result the laboratory of the Government chemist was asked to undertake a scientific assessment of this research work.

In a written reply on 9 March, my hon. Friend the Minister for Health stated that a group of independent experts had been asked to investigate further claims by Dr. Richardson about emission of toxic gases from soiled mattresses, taking account of the assessment still being carried out by the laboratory of the Government chemist.

I shall await the findings of the expert working group to see if there are any implications for the use of fire resistant treatments in the manufacture of nursery furniture.

Mr. McFall: The Minister will know that the independent scientist, Barry Richardson, to whom he referred, tested 45 mattresses on which babies had died. All the mattresses were fireproofed and gave off potentially lethal doses of poisonous gases. In the light of that, why did the Minister force through legislation on fire retardent material without conducting tests? Why was no warning given to parents of the risk, however small? Is that not an indication of the Government's laxity with regard to such measures?

Mr. Forth: One of the problems in relation to this difficult subject is shown by the fact that one of the hon. Gentleman's parliamentary colleagues came to argue exactly the opposite case with me when I had to make that difficult decision. On the basis of the information known to us then, we maintained our views about fire resistance for nursery furniture. I am awaiting the findings of the work being carried out both by the laboratory of the Government chemist and by the expert working group set up precisely to examine Dr. Richardson's claims.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that it would be wrong of the Government to determine their policy on the basis of one person's findings, no matter how skilled or expert that person may be or how strongly he holds his views. Suffice it to say that both my Department and the Department of Health are looking into the matter carefully and responsibly, but with as much speed as possible and based on their findings we shall decide whether policy should be changed.

Sir Dudley Smith: I appreciate the problems, but is my hon. Friend aware that this man's evidence is very convincing and has been brought to my attention by constituents who are involved in the trade? In those circumstances, will my hon. Friend do everything to hurry up the research because, as he well knows, young lives are at stake every day?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend has made repeated representations to me on behalf of his constituent who shares the concern expressed by Dr. Richardson. I hope that he will accept that at this stage it would be best for all of us to wait until we have the findings of the laboratory of the Government chemist and of the expert working group that we have set up. Then we shall determine whether policy shall be changed. As a result of my hon. Friend's representations and others that I have received, we are more than prepared to change policy in this matter if it is determined that we should do so on the basis of the evidence of the further work that is being done. I assure my hon. Friend that we shall not allow that work to be unduly delayed.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: Is the Minister aware that there is almost no remaining doubt that there is an association, found by Dr. Richardson and his team, between cot death syndrome and the gases produced by the fungal infection of mattresses? Why has he delayed an investigation into the findings for two years? The chief medical officer put out a press statement on 9 March stating that he had been "advised that no case of cot death in this country had been reported due to these gases".

Why did not the chief medical officer seek such information? That is why the information was not provided. Moreover, the expert working party has met only once. This is not urgency—it is complacency.

Mr. Forth: I wish in some ways that I could share the hon. Gentleman's certainty. Faced with these difficult policy choices and with serious matters which cause great concern to many people, I believe that we are taking a responsible and measured view and responding in that way.

Dr. Richardson met the chief medical officer at the Department of Health, so there was no lack of a hearing for him on these matters. I can only repeat that I believe that the way in which we have responded to these submissions by an individual, however expert and concerned he may be, is the right way and that we cannot determine Government policy in these important areas on the basis of the views of one person, no matter how important he may be.

Mr. Speaker: I call Mr. Watson. Question 23.

Mr. Favell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It arises out of the last question——

Mr. Speaker: If it does, it cannot be a point of order.

Mr. Favell: Mr. Speaker, I wish to draw your attention to the fact that the reason why so many Opposition Members have not turned up to ask their questions——

Mr. Speaker: That is not a point of order for me. I call Mr. Watson.

Mr. Favell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I call Mr. Watson. [HON. MEMBERS: "Not here."] Mr. Frank Field. [HON. MEMBERS: "Not here."] Mr. Tony Lloyd. [HON. MEMBERS: "Not here."] Mr. Home Robertson. [HON. MEMBERS: "Not here."] Mr. Ronnie Campbell. [HON. MEMBERS: "Not here."] Mr. Rowlands. [HON. MEMBERS: "Not here."]

Mr. Favell: I wish to draw to your attention, Mr. Speaker, the fact that questions have been asked by Opposition Members according to their surnames. If the name is McCartney or McFall, the Member is interested in cot deaths. If the name is Mahon or McKay——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that that is not a matter for me. It is a point that he is consciously making across the Chamber. I call Mr. Snape. [HON. MEMBERS: "Not here."] Mr. Fisher. [HON. MEMBERS: "Not here."] Mr. Eadie. [HON. MEMBERS: "Not here."]

EC Trade and Industry Ministers

32. **Mr. Cunliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will next meet his counterparts in the European Commission; and what will be discussed.

Mr. Redwood: I am surprised that an Opposition Member has turned up to ask a question. I hold regular meetings with my counterparts in the European Commission on a broad range of issues.

Mr. Cunliffe: If and when the Secretary of State meets the European Commission, will he convey to it the impoverished state of the north-western region and the fact that it is imperative that the region should get more money from European grant sources to help clear up the industrial obsolescence, bad housing and bad environment caused by 10 years of neglect by the Conservative Government?

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman has obviously been trying to find a question to ask because he has asked one in which he is not interested. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is here and has heard the hon. Gentleman's remarks. My right hon. Friend will speak for the whole country when he speaks to the European Commission and the other member states. We shall ensure that we get our fair share of grants and assistance from the European Community, but we are also interested in sensible budget discipline because the best way to make people prosperous is to deregulate and to get out of their way—not to take their money away from them and then give it back with a deduction for handling charges.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: How dare the hon. Member for Leigh (Mr. Cunliffe) so cry down the north-west? Is my hon. Friend aware that the north-west is improving in terms of prosperity, that its employment rate is improving with every week that passes and that it does not assist our case when Labour Members constantly cry us down?

Mr. Redwood: I am delighted that my hon. Friend has made that powerful intervention. Many Members from the north-west are rightly proud of the achievements of the north-western economy. As I travel through the country I notice how much investment, employment and opportunities are growing in the regions—more so now than in the south-east where the slow-down is more marked than in the regional economies. We welcome that surge in prosperity and believe that it is the direct result of the policies being pursued to allow enterprise to triumph and inward investment to stimulate the industrial base.

Mr. Pike: When the Secretary of State has discussions in Europe, will he consider why there is longer-term investment in industry in Germany than there is here? There is still a lack of industrial investment in the north-west. Would not we do better if we followed the German example and our financial institutions made longer-term investments in our manufacturing industry?

Mr. Redwood: There is much good long-term investment going on in this country today if only the hon. Gentleman would use his eyes and see what is happening. British industry would rightly resent his idea that it is not interested in long-term investment. I see many factories going up, many new projects, and a rebuilding of the motor car industry. That is all too obvious to those who look at the figures and travel throughout the country. Real manufacturing investment is up by a third over the past five years. I welcome that and I am grateful for it. It shows that the enterprise policies are working.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: When negotiating with his counterparts a reduction in tariffs to be carried out by the Commission through the general agreement on tariffs and trade, will my hon. Friend draw attention to the position of Turkey vis-a-vis Europe? It is the largest importer of textile goods into the European Community and although we allow goods in tariff-free it has effective import barriers of 200 per cent. to our exports there. Although it has reduced its tariffs nominally, its special tariffs—for example, for contributions to its housing funds—remain in place and constitute an effective barrier against British exports.

Mr. Redwood: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that important question and I shall draw its substance to the attention of my noble Friend the Minister for Trade. It is a matter of concern if liberalisation does not progress on both sides and it is an aim of EC policy to see that barriers are removed against Turkish exports as and when Turkey reduces its barriers to our exports to that country. My hon. Friend can rest assured that my noble Friend will continue to make strong representations about any unfair obstacles to trade imposed by Turkey.

House of Fraser

33. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what latest representations he has had on his inspectors' report on the takeover of the House of Fraser; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received a large number of representations from hon. Members and direct from the public expressing a variety of views.

Mr. Nellist: How is it that crooks and charlatans can get away with things like that takeover while millions of ordinary, decent families in Britain are about to be pushed into a position of illegality because of their inability to pay the poll tax? Why cannot the Secretary of State, with his hands-off laissez-faire attitude towards the Fayed brothers, be transferred back to the Department of the Environment so that he can take the same attitude to the millions of families who cannot pay the poll tax?

Mr. Redwood: The Law Officers and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State have looked carefully into the case and a full statement has been made to the House about it. I have nothing further to add.

Mr. Dickens: Is not it a fact that legislation has now been introduced which will prohibit the same sort of thing happening again? But is it not also a fact that inspectors from the Department of Trade and Industry were appointed under a certain section under which it was not a criminal offence to tell untruths, whereas if they had been appointed under a different section, criminal action could have been taken?

Mr. Redwood: I do not think that my hon. Friend is right. He is right in the first part of his question in saying that the Government have recently changed the law to ensure that it is an offence knowingly to mislead the competition authorities, but on his second point I do not think that the issue was whether it was or was not an offence under a particular section.

Mr. Dalyell: Will the Department of Trade undertake to study the remarkable Channel 4 programme on Good Friday evening by John Plender—in particular, the position of Kleinwort Benson and John MacArthur—and consider the whole question of truthfulness at the highest level of commerce? Is lying now all right at that level?

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has heard the hon. Gentleman's remarks. I have nothing to add to the statement that he made to the House on the conduct of the case.

Mr. Charles Wardle: Does my hon. Friend appreciate that the very brevity of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's statement last month on the report of the inspectors of the Department of Trade and Industry on the House of Fraser takeover encourages the likes of the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) to make wild allegations? Would not it be far better to give the subject a thorough airing in a full debate in the House?

Mr. Redwood: There will be another opportunity to discuss the matter when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gives evidence to the Select Committee. Indeed, he has already done so. In addition, a statement was made which covered all the main issues that were relevant to my right hon. Friend and the conduct of his Department.

Mr. Speaker: I call Mr. Radice. [HON. MEMBERS: "Not here."] Mr. McAvoy. [HON. MEMBERS: "Not here."] Mr. Jack. [HON. MEMBERS: "Not here."] Ms. Short. [HON. MEMBERS: "Not here."] Mr. Ingram. [HON. MEMBERS: "Not here."] Mr. Steinberg. [HON. MEMBERS: "Not here."] Mr. Livsey. [HON. MEMBERS: "Not here."] Mr. Maxton. [HON. MEMBERS: "Not here."] Mr. Alex Carlile.

Mr. Alex Carlile *rose*——

Hon. Members: Hooray!

Information Technology

42. **Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to encourage investment in information technology for the benefit of industry.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I fancy that the hon. and learned Gentleman and I are a bit surprised to be where we are.

My Department is already encouraging the more widespread uptake and use of information technology in industry through programmes aimed at industry on the more effective use of information systems, technology transfer on open systems and advanced information technology and other related programmes. Investment by industry in information technology in hardware, software, systems and training would consequently follow as appropriate.

Mr. Carlile: I am grateful to the Minister for his reply, but what steps do the Government propose to take to ensure that the full range of information technology equipment is available to small businesses in rural areas which are attractive to those who can run businesses on the basis of information technology?

Mr. Hogg: The hon. and learned Gentleman requires a full and considered reply to such a full and considered question. That being so, I propose to write to him.

Mr. David Shaw: Does my hon. Friend agree that the information technology industry has greatly expanded under the present Government, whereas it was virtually at a standstill under the Labour Administration? Does he agree also that a full statement about the industry ought to be made? Will he consider publishing at the earliest possible opportunity a statement on the way in which the information technology industry has expanded?

Mr. Hogg: It is a subject which should be generally amplified and expanded upon, but as you, Mr. Speaker, will be aware, statements are not a matter for me. I therefore cannot give my hon. Friend a commitment in the terms that he seeks.

Securities and Investments Board

43. **Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next plans to meet the chairman of the Securities and Investments Board; and what will be discussed.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend and I meet the chairman of the Securities and Investments Board to discuss a range of topics concerning the regulation of financial services as frequently as is necessary. No date has been fixed for the next such meeting.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Does the Minister agree that now is an appropriate time to discuss with the SIB chairman whether the safeguards provided for small investors are even half-way adequate? It is clear that in this country it is all right to mislead or to reinterpret financial rules so long as one does it in terms of millions of pounds.

Mr. Redwood: I do not believe that the hon. Lady's question draws the right inference, but she is right in saying that now is a good time to discuss with the chairman of the SIB matters relating to small investors and their protection. I hope to arrange a meeting with the chairman soon for that purpose.

Gun Components (Iraq)

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Nicholas Ridley): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement on export controls in relation to Iraq.

On Tuesday 10 April, Customs officers at Teesport detained eight large steel tubes destined for Iraq, which they considered might require an export licence under the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1989. Subsequently, Customs obtained related documents from firms believed to be involved. Experts from the Ministry of Defence later inspected the tubes and documents and advised that all the indications were that the tubes were components of a large-calibre armament, albeit of a scale outside anything previously experienced. The tubes were therefore seized, and Customs are making inquiries to see if any individuals or firms within the United Kingdom have committed customs offences.

The House will want to know that, in the summer of 1988, the DTI was approached by two of the companies now known to be connected with the manufacture of those components. In June 1988, Walter Somers asked if licences were needed for the export of metal tubes to Space Research Corporation in Belgium. In July, Sheffield Forgemasters asked if licences were needed for the export of tubes to Iraq for use in the polymerisation of polyethylene, and in August, Walter Somers made a further inquiry related to that contract.

On the information available at that time, it was decided that the export licences were not needed for those goods. Until a few days ago, my Department had no knowledge that the goods were designed to form part of a gun. If my Department had known that purpose, then it would of course have advised that licences were necessary, and they would not have been granted.

The Government recently became aware in general terms of an Iraqi project to develop a long-range gun based on designs developed by the late Dr. Gerald Bull. The goods that were seized at Teesport, and related documents, are consistent with what is known of Dr. Bull's design. Subsequent to the seizure, the Government have also received information about further aspects of the gun's development. The Government are entirely satisfied that the tubes form part of a gun and that the Customs' action was correct.

I would like to congratulate Customs on last week stopping the export of those parts of the gun. I understand that it will not be possible to build a complete, full-sized gun from parts that have been supplied from the United Kingdom. I hope that the House will understand that, while Customs' inquiries are continuing into possible criminal offences, it is not possible to go further into the details of this case.

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): I hope that the Secretary of State will begin by not just congratulating Customs and Excise staff but making a full apology to them. They have been subjected to a week of hostile briefings, critical leaks, off-the-record criticism, and an attempt by the Secretary of State's own Department to walk away from its proper responsibilities for what has gone wrong. Will the Secretary of State confirm that 44 pipes have already been shipped to Iraq, and that they are part of a major armament being constructed by the Iraqi Government, that is, in his own words,

> "of a scale outside anything previously experienced"?

Will he confirm that the military equipment may be used for hostile purposes, and so should never have been allowed to leave this country? Will he futher confirm that, since 1988, his Department has had access to the specifications and the drawings, could have had access to the contract governing the export order and at any time has had the powers to investigate it in full?

Will the Secretary of State explain why his Department took no action during the months when it had access to the specifications and the contract? Will he confirm that his Department took no action, even when it was known in June 1988—as he has confirmed today—that the Space Research Corporation of Dr. Gerald Bull—known not for its petrochemical expertise but for its military interests—was involved, but told the companies that no export licence even needed to be investigated? Will he confirm that he took no action even when Walter Somers told his Department that it had evidence of the aiming and positioning of the devices being ordered for Iraq?

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that, even if his Department had made a mistake and judged that a licence was needed for military equipment, section IL 1142 in the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1987 could have required a licence for pipes for petrochemical use, and that a meeting should have taken place on that matter between his Department, the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office?

Will the right hon. Gentleman explain why his Department said nothing for an entire week, even after Customs and Excise seized the goods? Will he tell us who was briefing the media that it was merely a petrochemical order? Is it not the case that the Government have been deceived and duped on a grand scale, and that, but for the intervention of Customs and Excise staff, serious military consequences could have resulted? Will he confirm that it is not enough to admit that a mistake has been made, and that he should also accept responsibility for it? Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm, finally, that it is clear that, through slackness and complacency of almost criminal dimensions, the Government allowed through an order that could have made it possible for Iraq to acquire a weapon that he has himself described as

> "of a scale outside anything previously experienced",

and whose use could affect regional and even world stability? Which Department will accept the responsibility?

Will the right hon. Gentleman now announce that he will set up an independent inquiry to establish the degree of culpability, and tell the House what the Government's commitment is to the arms embargo with Iraq? Finally, will he tell the House what immediate changes he has ordered in export controls so that this deeply embarrassing and sorry episode, which has made the British Government the object of ridicule, will never be repeated?

Mr. Ridley: To coin a phrase, that was going over the top on a scale outside anything previously experienced. I seriously counsel the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) not to believe every word that he reads in the press. I can tell him straight that the Customs personnel have released no confidential information to the media. They have fully respected the confidentiality of material that they have obtained during their inquiries. There has been no statement until now, and, in the light of the fact that Customs and Excise is considering taking out prosecutions, I cannot answer detailed questions without prejudicing the rights of people who may be on trial. It would be wrong to pre-empt any such trial by what I should say in the House.

The hon. Gentleman seems to suggest that the gun has been exported, that it is a fait accompli. I emphasise that the gun cannot be in operation without all its parts, and it is a great success on behalf of this country to have prevented that. The hon. Gentleman should be paying tribute and congratulating the Customs and Excise on having frustrated this unpleasant export.

Sir John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): Is my right hon. Friend aware that Walter Somers is a long established and highly respected firm in Halesowen in my constituency? My understanding is that it has always acted in the closest co-operation with his Department. I do not agree with the absurd charges made by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). I am somewhat concerned to safeguard the good name of that excellent company and the jobs of its workers, yet when I sought reassurance from his Department and another Department, the replies were rather in the style of the television series, "Yes Minister". Surely this difficult matter should be cleared up as soon as possible; otherwise, many good men in the midlands will be deeply upset.

Mr. Ridley: I am aware of my hon. Friend's interest in that firm. However, it would be wrong to comment on the coctacts between my Department and the firm, for the reason that I have given twice already—that I must say nothing that would prejudice the possibility of criminal proceedings at a later stage.

Sir David Steel (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Should the Secretary of State not only give the Customs and Excise department thanks, but apologise for the press briefings that were given throughout the week saying that it had got it wrong? Could he enlighten the House by explaining exactly what is polymerisation of polyethylene —*[Laughter.]* The reason I ask that is that the wider issue is why the Government are allowing the export of high technology of any sort to a regime that engages in chemical warfare.

Mr. Ridley: No apologies are needed. I have answered the question about what the Customs and Excise department has said and done, and the right hon. Gentleman should accept that. However, he does not have to accept every word that he reads in the press. The polymerisation of polyethylene is, I understand, a chemical process that takes place in petrochemical activities under very high pressures. It is possible to export material for petrochemical works freely, and no export licence is required.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): Is not the alertness of Customs and Excise officials in interrupting this sinister shipment a matter for warm congratulation? My right hon. Friend has my full support in that. Does he accept that Iraq may have already used chemical long-range delivery weapons, and that it recently threatened to do so again against Israel? Will he reassure us that nothing will be done to appease the immensely dangerous ambitions of that ugly regime and its dictator?

Mr. Ridley: Nobody could condone the plans that it is thought Iraq has in that area. On the other hand, it is quite right strictly to control the export of armament materials. If we are aware that that is happening, we will, of course, refuse a licence.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will the Secretary of State ask either the Secretary of State for Defence or the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Clark) a factual question? On what date did the Ministry of Defence or its Procurement Executive first know that there was something that could be said to be in the nature of a weapon? When did the Ministry of Defence first know that there was a problem? On what date did that occur?

Mr. Ridley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will have heard the question that the hon. Gentleman put. I think that it would be better for him to reply for himself.

Sir Hal Miller (Bromsgrove) *rose*——

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not know either, and it is not a matter for me.

Sir Hal Miller: Since, more than two years ago, I made an offer to his Department, to the Ministry of Defence and, I believe, to a third agency, on behalf of Walter Somers, to withdraw from the contract, to meet the contract and to enable it to be traced, or to carry on with the contract, and as I repeated that offer 12 months later, does my right hon. Friend share my surprise that there can be any question of prosecuting the company for any contravention of regulations or lack of good faith in the matter?

Mr. Ridley *rose*——

Hon. Members: Resign.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State.

Mr. Ridley: If any company believes that it is exporting or has an order to export any piece of equipment which might have a military application, it is for it to apply for an export licence, and in that case it is considered. Concerning the question that my hon. Friend has asked, I think that it would be wrong for me to answer the last part, since that could prejudice any possible decision.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): In view of the comment of his hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Sir H. Miller), when those approaches were made by the firm, did the right hon. Gentleman's Department make any approaches to the Ministry of Defence? If so, on what date did they make those approaches? If they failed to do so, why on earth did they so fail?

Mr. Ridley: As I said, I cannot go into those matters at this stage.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): While I endorse my right hon. Friend's comments about the efficiency of the Customs in this case, could he say whether there is any track record by the Space Research Corporation of equipment which did not have a military use?

Mr. Ridley: Yes, sir. Space Research Corporation was involved in many types of project, many of a civil nature.

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): Does the Secretary of State accept that at some time the House will have to know whether or not the Defence Export Services Organisation or International Military Services, which are both 100 per cent. controlled by the British Ministry of Defence, were ever involved or approached regarding those contracts? Does he appreciate that this country is the world's second largest arms supplier? That being so and being common knowledge, it is bound to be the case that every riff-raff country around the world that is looking for weapons of destruction—sometimes to use against its own people—will come knocking at British doors. Therefore, extra vigilance has to be maintained, and that has clearly been lacking.

Mr. Ridley: That is not quite right. Extra vigilance has been exercised in the Customs operation for some time, and it has been a great success, not long after a previous success was achieved with the nuclear trigger devices, which the House will remember. I do not know why the House is accusing the authorities of not succeeding in that respect. On both occasions, success has been achieved.

Mr. Kenneth Warren (Hastings and Rye): Is my right hon. Friend satisfied with the co-ordination standards between Customs and Excise and his Department? Secondly, while I have no truck whatsoever with the horrendous regime in Iraq, what evidence does he have in his Department from those engaged in oil refinery design that the material and the tubes in question are not for the application intended? Thirdly, what information has he, metallurgically, to show that the tubes would be able to sustain the firing of a shell or a missile?

Mr. Ridley: On my hon. Friend's first point, yes, I am satisfied that contact between my Department and the Customs and Excise is of a high order. Secondly, as I said in my statement, from examination of the parts which have been seized at Teesport, Ministry of Defence experts have come to the firm belief and strong conclusion that those are parts of a gun. They do not believe that they were intended for any other purpose.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The Secretary of State appeared to be implying that there is guilt on the part of some or all of the companies involved. If, after appropriate investigation, he finds that they are completely innocent and that the fault lies with public Departments, will he return to the House to make that clear?

What happens if other countries that may be within the targeting arrangements of this odious regime decide that they should have enormous guns? Will it be all right for Sheffield Forgemasters to go on making these tubes?

Mr. Ridley: On the first point, I do not believe that "guilt" is the right word. That would be prejudicing any trial that might take place. It is correct to allow Customs to consider whether it wants to take proceedings, and all these points would come out in any proceedings that might be taken. After the proceedings have concluded, it will be right for the House to find out the further details that it may wish to know, but I cannot prejudge Customs' decision on whether to take proceedings.

On the second point, any firm that receives an inquiry or order to make parts that it believes could be part of an offensive weapon must apply for an export licence. If it is confirmed that it is a gun of this type, that licence will not be granted. We can be quite certain that nothing will come from this country.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House knows that we have an important debate to follow.

Mr. Skinner: This is important.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Skinner: This man has been protected.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Sit down, please. We have a very important debate today and a ten-minute rule Bill. I shall allow three more questions from each side. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Robin Maxwell-Hyslop (Tiverton): Since my right hon. Friend is also responsible for the Export Credits Guarantee Department, will he tell us whether this contract was underwritten by the Export Credits Guarantee Department, and what are the implications of any such underwriting for the present situation in which supply has been discontinued by order of Customs?

Mr. Ridley: I cannot answer my hon. Friend's question without notice. I shall give him a full answer, but I understand that the company was paid when the goods left its works.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): In view of the bloodstained criminal nature of the regime in Iraq, which started the Gulf war and used chemical weapons, is the Secretary of State aware that far more will have to be done by Ministers to answer the question asked by the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Sir H. Miller)? While Customs officers are certain to be congratulated, Ministers are not. We shall certainly want a further statement, including one from the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

Mr. Ridley: I do not think that there is anything that I can add in answer to that.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that Sheffield Forgemasters acted in good faith throughout this affair? Was not it a wholly owned subsidiary of British Steel, which was wholly owned by the Department of Trade and Industry when the order was placed?

Mr. Ridley: Those facts could be verified, but I cannot myself verify them. It does not seem to be relevant to the fact that, on this occasion, the export of a piece of an armament that could have been of grave disadvantage was successfully apprehended and prevented from being used.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): Why has it taken the Secretary of State's Department a full week to respond to information that was given to the country by Customs and Excise? In an earlier statement, the right hon. Gentleman informed the House that he had to have information before he could act. Will he confirm or deny that that information came from the Israeli secret service?

Mr. Ridley: The goods were distrained by Customs officers, who then waited for the Ministry of Defence to inspect and verify the purpose of the goods. There was no role for my Department to play during that period, because the goods had been distrained. There was no question of the goods being exported so long as they remained with Customs officers. If the MOD experts had reached a different conclusion, the goods would and could have been exported. The fact that the goods were prevented from being exported is a great success. I cannot of course answer the hon. Gentleman's second point, and I do not believe that he expected me to do so.

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): Would my right hon. Friend please remind the Opposition, in the middle of their hysteria, that Iraq has just finished a long and bloody war in which hundreds and thousands of its people were killed, that peace has not yet been signed, borders have not yet been agreed and prisoners have not yet been exchanged? Should we be surprised that a country whose next-door neighbour is larger and gripped by destabilising fundamentalism should use every form of extreme subterfuge to try to bypass an arms embargo?

As that is the case in this incident, and as we are not the totalitarian regime that the Opposition would have us become, but a free market economy, is it not understandable that it will take time to pick up such exotic undertakings in which state Governments try deliberately to bamboozle other nations? Therefore, should not companies in Britain that have acted in good faith be free from any form of prosecution and the Customs department be congratulated on its good work in picking up this particular incident?

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): How much was the hon. Gentleman paid?

Mr. Ridley: There is a lot in what my hon. Friend said at the beginning of his remarks with which I agree. However, it is absolutely essential that we recognise that this has been a successful operation which has prevented the export of goods which could have had an immense potential for damage.

Mr. Page: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Will the Secretary of State accept congratulations on behalf of the Customs and Excise for standing up to his Department's efforts to undermine the Customs and Excise department's activities in that case? Will he confirm that the British Overseas Trade Board's export intelligence promoted the project in consultation with the British embassy in Baghdad? Will he confirm that it has Export Credits Guarantee Department cover? Will he also confirm that executives at Sheffield Foregemasters met representatives of the Belgian company, which is not, as the Secretary of State tried to claim, noted for its connection with peaceful activities?

At the end of this sorry affair, does not the Secretary of State think that it has something to do with ministerial responsibility? Have not his Department and his office lamentably failed over years to seek out the military aspects of the contract? If the Secretary of State was a decent, honourable Minister obeying the usual rules, would not he resign?

Mr. Ridley: I most strongly rebut any suggestion that the DTI has not co-operated fully with the Ministry of Defence and the Customs. They worked together throughout the period to identify the equipment. A lot of what the hon. Gentleman said in the middle of his remarks was not something that I can comment on with the possibility of a case pending—[HON. MEMBERS: "What case?"] I said "the possibility of a case". With regard to the last part of the hon. Gentleman's remarks, I will pass on to my noble Friend, Lord Caithness, who is responsible for the Customs, the congratulations that the hon. Gentleman offered.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on an action that has helped peace in the middle east and which will be widely welcomed by everyone concerned about the stability of that troubled part of the world? Does my right hon. Friend agree that the contract underlines the danger of trading with Iraq? May we have an assurance that all future contracts will be looked at with particular vigilance by my right hon. Friend's Department?

Mr. Ridley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I agree with what he has said. I confirm that we will continue our high state of vigilance in deciding whether export licences should be granted. I can now also tell my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton (Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop) that no ECGD cover was available for the contract.

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Hillhead): Does the Secretary of State accept that, even by his own standards, this has been a truly extraordinary performance at the Dispatch Box this afternoon? Even if it means leaning across to his colleague from the Foreign Office, will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the reason that 44 of those pipes are now in Iraq and that only the last batch was stopped is that the information was given to the Government by Mossad, the Israeli secret service, immediately before the goods were exported—the same Mossad that fired five bullets into the back of the head of Dr. Bull in Belgium some weeks before? Will the Secretary of State and the Government support Senator Dole's plea in the middle east last week that all countries of the middle east with a capacity of weapons for mass destruction, including Israel with its nuclear weapons, should abandon such weapons and bring about the stability that the area needs?

Mr. Ridley: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman fully estimates the gravity of this incident. Many Opposition Members try to make party politics out of a great success story in getting this export stopped so that the gun cannot be put together. Of course I shall not follow the James Bond musings at the end of the hon. Gentleman's question.

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I will take points of order in a moment, after the Standing Order No. 20 application.

UDR Soldiers (Murder)

4.1 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the massacre by the IRA of four Ulster Defence Regiment soldiers in Downpatrick on 9 April."

During the recess, the IRA carried out a bloody massacre of four young Ulster Defence Regiment soldiers in Downpatrick on 9 April. Those young soldiers were Private Michael Adams, aged 23, who had served in the regiment for seven months and was formerly with the Royal Engineers; Lance-corporal John Bradley, aged 25, who had four years of service in the UDR and was formerly with the Royal Highlanders; Private Steven Smart, aged 23, who had served with the regiment for a period and was also with the Royal Artillery; and Private John Burch, aged 28, who joined the regiment over one year ago.

I understand from personal knowledge that three of the four bodies were so shattered that the loved ones were not able to open the coffins and see the remains. The vast crater, like a lake, that was left in the road speaks volumes about the strength of the explosives that were used to carry out those atrocious, cold-blooded murders. We should add to that the circumstances of the kith and kin—one already a mother and carrying yet another child who will never see his father; one a fiancée for whom this is a double sorrow, for her father was murdered by the IRA in the Kingsmill massacre; another a mother of two; and another a young bride-to-be, looking forward to her marriage day.

A vehicle used in the atrocity was hijacked by the IRA on the border, and no doubt the murderers are now across the border, in the very safe haven of the Irish Republic.

Those murders took place against the background of a vicious political attack on the Ulster Defence Regiment. Mr. Haughey has said that the regiment must go; Mr. Collins has said that there is no place for the regiment in the Ulster security effort; and in a recent programme, the BBC equated the Ulster Defence Regiment with the IRA and said that it was part of the problem.

One final word——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has had his three minutes.

Rev. Ian Paisley: I deplore the fact that the Secretary of State did not come to the House today to make a statement so that the representatives of Northern Ireland could discuss the matter.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) asks leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the murder of four UDR soldiers by the IRA last week."

As the hon. Gentleman knows, under Standing Order No. 20, I have to announce my decision without giving my reasons to the House. I have listened with deep concern to what the hon. Gentleman has said about this matter. As he also knows, the decision that I have to take is whether to give that matter precedence over the business set down for today or for tomorrow. In this case, I regret that the matter that he has raised does not meet the requirements of the Standing Order and I cannot, therefore, submit his application to the House.

Points of Order

4.7 pm

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I will take Mr. Heffer first.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): During his statement, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said several times that he could not answer the points raised by hon. Members because there could be, there might be or there may possibly be a case pending before the courts. Is that a new doctrine in the House? I have always understood that, when a case was before a court, we did not have the opportunity or the right to question Ministers on that matter, because the issue was before a court and comments here could prejudice that case.

I may be wrong, Mr. Speaker, but I have never before heard a Minister make a statement and say, "I cannot answer the hon. Member"—who had raised a perfectly legitimate question that the Minister should answer—"because there could be, there might be or there may possibly be a case before the courts." Is that a new doctrine, Mr. Speaker? Is that allowed in the House? Is it not time that Ministers should be told that, when there is not a case before the courts, hon. Members who ask questions have a right to be given answers to those questions?

Mr. Speaker: In the first place, I am in no way responsible for answers that are given. Secondly, on the question about doctrine, it is not a doctrine upon which I can make a judgment. I understood that it was the judgment of the Secretary of State himself that, if he was to answer certain questions, that might be prejudicial. It is not a matter for me.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): During the recent question to my right hon. Friend the Secretary for Trade and Industry from my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, South-West (Mr. Page), like several of my hon. Friends, I distinctly heard the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) ask from a sedentary position what my hon. Friend was being paid for his question. Did you hear that, Mr. Speaker? If you did, do you agree that the hon. Member for Walsall, North should apologise to the House and withdraw what he said?

Mr. Speaker: It was a highly charged Question Time. I did not hear—[*Interruption.*] Order. There was a good deal of noise and I did not hear everthing that was said from a sedentary position.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I ask you to reflect on two points that arise from the statement made by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. First, while you are right in saying that you have no responsibility for the content of the answers given by the Secretary of State, if the phrase "I have nothing to add" goes unchallenged, through you and the Table Office, it becomes a blocking motion whereby further written questions may not be tabled.

The second and shorter point that I ask you to consider, Mr. Speaker, is that only five hon. Members were still standing at the end of the statement and many of us were also seeking to rise at the end of the statement about the murder of the *Observer* journalist when, again, we were not called. Like myself, other hon. Members may wish to raise constituency interests and perhaps you could bear that in mind the next time——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The first part of the hon. Gentleman's comments is a matter of speculation, because no such question has been tabled. On the second part, I remind him and the whole House that it would be easy for the Chair to allow questions on statements to run out. It would be equally unfair to hon. Members who wish to participate in subsequent debates. I have mentioned today——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): This one is more important.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Well, it is an important debate, in which there is a great interest. I have to make a judgment on these things.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I hope that hon. Members who are now rising do not wish to raise points with me that they might have put to the Secretary of State had they been called.

Mr Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Because of the great care, consideration and surveillance of the Department of Trade and Industry, one of my constituent companies took months to obtain a licence to export non-military goods——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That can be dealt with on another occasion. It is not a matter for me.

Mr. Dickens: My constituent company would expect me to be called.

Mr. Speaker: Order. No. It might have expected that, but many other right hon. and hon. Members wish to participate in the next debate.

Mr. Dickens: There were only three hon. Members left standing on each side.

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is very selfish for the hon. Member to believe that he should be called in preference to his colleagues.

Mr. Skinner: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wonder whether there is a special Standing Order which has escaped my attention in respect of the protection of Ministers when they are under fire. It is becoming increasingly evident to many of us on this side that there must be an order which you observe which is a kind of "protect Nicholas Ridley society". In view of the last time on the Fayeds and again today——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is a disreputable charge for the hon. Member to make. He would be absolutely the first to come to me if he was cut out of a subsequent debate.

Mr. Spencer Batiste (Elmet): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You are constantly exhorted at Question Time to get through as many questions as possible. Today you managed to get through no less than 43 questions. Unfortunately, however, you did so only because 30 Labour Members who had important questions on the Order Paper did not turn up to ask their questions. Those of us who are interested in Trade and Industry questions seek your protection to allow us to raise important

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matters. I wonder whether consideration could be given in such circumstances to your looking through the long end of a telescope to see hon. Members who are not here in order that questions that are on the Order Paper are asked and brought before the House.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member was called twice, so I do not think that he has any crib.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Would you confirm that when a senior member of the Cabinet asks to make a statement in the House he makes it not only on behalf of his Department but of the Government as a whole? Might not it have been better to use other procedures? Four Departments wanted the matter questioned—the Treasury for Customs and Excise, the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Trade and Industry. In view of the suspicion that the Ministry of Defence has displayed a Nelson eye for some time on the Iraqi orders, is not it unacceptable, as the Defence Secretary was present and the Minister of State for Defence Procurement was sitting by his side, that when I simply asked for the date when the Department first knew about the matter—a simple, artless, factual question—I did not receive an answer? One should not be told that it is a matter for the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Speaker: I think that the hon. Member should table a question to the Secretary of State for Defence on such matters.

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I called the hon. Member on the statement, but I will call him again if it is a point of order that I can answer.

Mr. Page: Further to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle), for which I thank him, and as the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) has not had the courtesy to withdraw his remark, may I make it clear to the House that I am paid by no Government and no Government agency?

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I rise on a point of order to try to establish better in my mind the criteria that you, Mr. Speaker, adopt when deciding how long ministerial statements will be allowed to run. We have just returned from a fairly generous Easter recess—[HON. MEMBERS: "Some of you."]—Some of us have. During that time, the matter which was the subject of the previous statement was running as a major item on all the news bulletins and was on the front pages of all the newspapers. There was——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that we have had enough of that.

Mr. Banks: I am just trying to ask you, Mr. Speaker, how you decide how long a statement will run.

Mr. Speaker: I will tell the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Banks: That is all I asked.

Mr. Speaker: That is very offensive——

Mr. Banks: You have been offensive to me, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: —but I will tell the hon. Gentleman. The Chair has an obligation to balance the time available in the House and the hon. Gentleman has frequently been to see me to express his distress at not being called in debate.

Mr. Banks: No, I have not.

Mr. Speaker: Then I hope he never will.

Mr. Banks: There would not be much point.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have to balance these matters. There is great pressure to take part in the coming debate. As a result of these points of order, I regret that all the hon. Members who wish to participate are unlikely to be called.

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am deeply disturbed at the failure of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to make a statement this afternoon about the slaughter of the four members of the Ulster Defence Regiment outside Downpatrick during the recess. The impression is gaining ground among people in Northern Ireland that IRA murders are so commonplace that the Government do not feel that they have to make a statement, which would give Members from Northern Ireland an opportunity to put questions about the security situation in the Province. As there is this crisis of confidence, and the Ulster Defence Regiment is under attack not only from the IRA, but by its propagandists, surely the Government should come to the House to make a statement about those murders and allow Members of Parliament from Northern Ireland to question them.

Mr. Speaker: That will have been heard by the Leader of the House, but whether statements are made is not a matter for me.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I shall put together the two motions relating to statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

FISHING VESSELS

That the Fishing Vessels (Acquisition and Improvement) (Grants) (Amendment) Scheme 1990 (S.I., 1990, No. 685) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

VALUE ADDED TAX

That the Value-Added Tax (Transport) Order 1990 (S.I., 1990, No. 752) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Dorell.]*

Question agreed to.

National Lottery

4.17 pm

Mr. Ken Hargreaves (Hyndburn): I beg to move,

> That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision for a national lottery to be held for the benefit of the arts, sport and the environment in the United Kingdom.

I wish to place on record my thanks for the help and support I have received in seeking to promote a national lottery from Europrint, for whom I was previously a consultant, from Lord Birkett, and particularly from the international conductor, Dennis Vaughan, without whose dedication and hard work, public support for a lottery would not be at its current high level.

It will not have escaped the notice of hon. Members that not all forms of new taxes are universally popular, and the words of Thomas Jefferson in 1826 are as accurate now as they were then:

> "Lotteries are the perfect tax, paid only by the willing."

Lotteries have existed for centuries. The Romans participated in them as a form of entertainment, and by the early 1700s, European Governments had begun to recognise the revenue potential of lotteries and started to license their operation. Revenues were used to finance the construction of roads, schools and churches. Unfortunately, by the mid-1800s, even Government-controlled lotteries were falling prey to abuses and fraud, and lotteries fell into disrepute. The advent of computer technology and improved communications has changed all that and made safe, honest lotteries once more a practical proposition.

Today, 116 countries throughout the world have lotteries. They have been used to finance the building of Sydney opera house, to fund the Olympic games in Moscow and Mexico and to build the great American universities of Yale and Harvard. Although Britain has benefited in the past from national lotteries—the British museum was built using funds from them, for instance—Britain and Albania are now the only two countries in Europe that do not have a national lottery.

Dennis Vaughan said in a recent article:

> "Everyone agrees about the necessity of funding for health, education, pollution, children, old age and the like, so they should come out of common taxation. There will never be agreement about the various merits of arts, sport and the visual aspects of the environment, so the only fair way is to pay for them by voluntary taxation . . . a lottery."

I share that view and I believe that the arts, sport and the environment deserve increased resources because they contribute significantly to the quality of life.

Many of the problems that we face underline the need for greater provision. Claudio Abbado, the great conductor, pointed out that, whenever youngsters participate actively in classical music, there is no drug problem; yet young people who live in the west and east of England have to rely on visits from London orchestras to be able to listen to first-class musicians, and the Welsh national opera has no home.

Those who practise sport regularly find that it is the best antidote to misery, despair and indolence, which are often cited as causes of the tendency to drug taking. Participation in sport also helps people to rid themselves of untold frustrations which often lead to violence.

There is an urgent need for extra sports facilities for our young people. A letter that I have received from the Amateur Swimming Federation of Great Britain makes the point that swimming and sport in general in our country are being left behind their counterparts in the countries with which we compete. Facilities here are poor compared with those in other west European countries. A similar story can be told about most other sports. Much of the time freely given by thousands of volunteers to help young people participate in sport is spent in fund raising. The tremendous support for the idea of a national lottery from environmental groups underlines the necessity for a major new injection of funds into many areas of their work.

We have the need for extra resources; we have the desire to take part in a national lottery with a prize of £1 million or more. In a recent opinion poll, 44 per cent. of people said that they would buy a ticket each week, 71 per cent. said that they were fairly likely to buy a ticket and only 6 per cent. said that they were certain not to buy one.

I referred earlier to a new injection of funding. I have no doubt that the introduction of a British national lottery will result in a significant increase in resources for sports, the arts and the environment. Projected sales of lottery tickets, arrived at by taking the per capita spend on lotteries in EC countries, produces a figure of £3·1 billion. If 45 per cent. of the proceeds are returned in prize money and another 20 per cent. allocated to expenses, we are left with 35 per cent. to distribute to the various causes. That would allow £1 billion more to be spent on sports, the arts and the environment each year.

That sum could fully fund a symphony orchestra in each regional centre, retain famous works of art in this country and increase support for young talent throughout Great Britain. It could also provide a new national stadium built to the highest Olympic standards, a fully funded research centre for sports medicine and scholarships for aspiring young athletes, in addition to extra facilities nationwide. It could also improve the environment by helping the conservation of land and waterways and the preservation of wildlife.

All this could be done with just one year's revenue from a British national lottery, and it would be extra money. It is my intention that the amount raised for sport, the arts and the environment should be in addition to current levels of Government spending, not a substitute for them.

It is clear that many people in Britain want to buy lottery tickets. Many are already doing so, not least for the West German lottery. It is unfortunate that the money that they are spending is being used to improve German roads, hospitals and facilities, whereas it should be used to benefit people in Great Britain. Unless we act, we shall continue to ensure that the money that we lose ends up in Cologne, Bonn or Hamburg instead of Colchester, Birmingham or Hyndburn.

To the extent that many people are already buying tickets, many of the arguments against a British national lottery are now irrelevant. In the past, fears have been expressed that a national lottery could damage charity and sports club lotteries and the football pools, and could encourage compulsive gambling. I believe that such fears are groundless. Evidence collected in the United States shows that, contrary to charities' first expectations, their ticket sales actually increased.

Ireland satisfied the concerns of the charity lotteries by including a clause in its legislation to compensate them for any loss of income incurred as a result of the introduction of a national lottery. In over two years since the launch of the lottery, no claim has been received. In an interdepartmental working party report on lotteries in

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1975, the pools companies stated that a vigorous pools industry and large lotteries were compatible. I believe that a national lottery based on a "rub-off" ticket would have little effect on the pools.

I reject, too, the fears about compulsive gambling, which flourishes in enclosed environments, such as casinos, slot machine arcades and betting shops where the risks are high, the action fast, the results determined quickly and where gamblers can use their perceived skill to beat the system. Lotteries have none of those elements, so they do not lead to compulsive gambling.

I welcome the support that the Bill has received from hon. Members of all parties. I have described evidence of the need for a lottery, of support for a lottery and of the desire of the majority of people to take part in a lottery. We in this House should be the last people to oppose a lottery. We have to enter a lottery every day to ask a question, and every year to introduce a private Member's Bill. If we are committed to extending consumer freedom and promoting voluntary action, we should give this Bill our full support.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Ken Hargreaves, Mr. Patrick Cormack, Sir Cyril Smith, Miss Kate Hoey, Mr. Dennis Turner, Mr. Peter L. Pike, Mr. David Amess, Mr. Alastair Burt, Mr. Simon Burns, Mr. David Evennett and Miss Ann Widdecombe.

NATIONAL LOTTERY

Mr. Ken Hargreaves accordingly presented a Bill to make provision for a national lottery to be held for the benefit of the arts, sport and the environment in the United Kingdom: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 11 May and to be printed. [Bill 124.]

Orders of the Day

Courts and Legal Services Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Speaker: I must announce to the House that I have selected the reasoned amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. In view of the somewhat late start to this debate and the pressure to speak, I ask right hon. and hon. Members to make brief speeches, please, so that all who wish to participate may do so.

4.27 pm

The Attorney-General (Sir Patrick Mayhew): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

In the opinion of the Government, going to law in civil cases is all too often unduly complex. All too often it is needlessly inconvenient, takes too long, and can be disproportionately expensive. Therefore, part I of the Bill is intended to make the public's access to justice simpler, quicker and more convenient. It is a shame that the Bill upsets the Labour party, whose motion declines a Second Reading to the Bill.

The objective of part II of the Bill is the development of legal services for the public, in particular in advocacy, litigation, conveyancing and probate. It opens the door to new ways or better ways of providing these, while maintaining always the proper and efficient administration of justice. It, therefore, seeks to stimulate competition and foster high standards of professional service to the public. Again, it is a shame that those objectives seem to find insufficient favour with the Labour party. The Bill is apparently beyond amendment. Labour Members would refuse it a Second Reading. I must, therefore, take a little time to explain what they suggest the House should vote against.

I will begin by recalling the civil justice review. In 1985 the review body was established by a Conservative Lord Chancellor, my right hon. and learned Friend Lord Hailsham, who charged it to improve the machinery of civil justice in England and Wales and in particular to reduce delay, cost and complexity.

The review body reported in 1988 with recommendations that were widely applauded at the time. Its report was only the second in this area to propose major changes since 1869, when the creation of the Supreme Court of Judicature was proposed, so the proposals were extremely important. Most of the review's recommendations requiring primary legislation are given effect in part I of the Bill. The main thrust of part I is to allow all civil cases to be dealt with at the appropriate level and no higher.

The key conclusion of the review was that relatively few of the cases now being handled in the High Court need to be handled there because they are not of sufficient weight or complexity to justify that. Therefore, the major change made possible in part I is the reserving of the High Court for judicial review cases, for other specialist cases, and for general cases of unusual substance, importance or difficulty. That follows the key recommendation of the civil justice review. The result will be to speed up the handling of cases remaining in the High Court, and to make the cheaper, speedier, and more convenient procedures and service provided by the county courts available now for those cases which are smaller and less complex.

The road leading to that reform will have to be travelled by stages. The county courts do not as yet have all the procedures or the resources that the increased work load will require. The Lord Chancellor has said that the transfers of work will not be made until the proper resources are available in the county courts to deal with them. However, a large amount of the necessary work is already under way—for example, the preparation of new procedures for the handling of payments following a court judgment, known as suitors' cash. From this month most payments will pass directly from debtor to creditor without having to be handled by the court. That should make the equivalent of some 300 posts in the court service available for other work. The work already under way includes the centralised issuing, from Northampton, of county court summonses at the suit of major creditors. The saving there should be the equivalent of another 50 full-time posts by late this year.

The work already under way also includes the establishment, on a much greater scale than presently, of county courts where long trials can receive a continuous hearing, and avoid that bane of the county court practitioner, to say nothing of the judiciary and the parties concerned, of having one adjournment after another. Already there are nearly 50 such continuous trial centres, and it is hoped that within two years most trials of any significant length will be dealt with in those centres.

As for resources, in any event there is need already for an increase, and so this year extra funds are available which should provide for the court service as a whole an increase of around 350 staff over and above those already in post. Changes to be effected may require up to 100 further posts themselves, so I emphasise that the Government intend first to recruit the staff that the changes will require. The Opposition's motion to convey the idea that the Government are neglecting to provide the resources that the reforms in the Bill will demand therefore cannot be justified. To rely on that notion as a reason for inviting the House to vote against the Bill, with all the benefits that it will achieve for the public in terms of cost-effectiveness, competition and convenience in the provision of legal services, is an excuse that falls some way short of being persuasive.

We must travel the reforming road in stages. The changes in the jurisdiction of the county courts, and in the system of allocating cases to them, will be achieved not all at once but by a series of orders to be made by the Lord Chancellor. My right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor envisages that the first order would require that all but the most substantial of personal injury cases would have to begin in a county court, and all general actions below a financial limit to be set by the order and proceeding to trial would have to be heard in a county court, unless they were exceptionally complex or important. It is intended that the Lord Chancellor's first such order will not take effect before January 1991. Full consultation about it is about to begin and it will be subject to the affirmative resolution procedure.

Before leaving part I of the Bill, I should mention, at the other end of the scale, the small claims procedure. The House may recall that the civil justice review examined that procedure and found that it had proved its worth. Cases are automatically dealt with as small claims if their value is £500 or less. The Government intend that the limit should be increased to £1,000 by rules of court, to implement one of the review's recommendations. Additionally, part I of the Bill makes new arrangements for representations by lay persons, both for litigants in small claims and for those in debt cases and housing cases proceeding in the county court. Litigants can be represented, but not necessarily by a lawyer.

That part of the Bill certainly justifies the Government's claim that it will make public access to justice simpler, quicker and more convenient. It will also make it more cost-effective. That will be in the interests of everyone—not least the legally-aided litigant. Because legal aid has been the subject very recently of substantial legislative reform, and as work arising from that reform is already proceeding separately, the Bill rightly does not contain a major element dealing with legal aid. However, legal aid is, of course, central to the Government's overall aims because it is an essential service for people who cannot themselves pay, whether in part or in full, for access to legal advice and legal representation.

It is estimated that 259,000 civil legal aid certificates will be issued in 1989-90, compared with 190,000 certificates 10 years ago. In November, the Lord Chancellor introduced a package of improvements to eligibility arrangements which will confer real benefits on three important classes of people—children, pensioners living off their savings, and those involved in personal injury cases. That change brings 5 million children into the scope of legal aid. Already under way is a full review of the financial conditions for legal aid across the board, both civil and criminal. The Lord Chancellor has given assurances in another place that people currently eligible for legal aid will not lose when the Bill comes into force.

When so much is already in train under the Legal Aid Act 1988 and by way of the review for the development of legal aid services, it is idle to criticise the Bill for not dealing additionally to the large extent that it already does with matters relating primarily to legal aid. To vote against the Bill on that ground does not seem awfully respectable.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): Does the Attorney-General accept that 15 million fewer people are eligible for legal aid this year compared with 1979? Does he acknowledge that, no matter that he is changing the structure of the court system and transferring cases from the High Court to the county court, if people are unable to bring their cases before the court because they fail legal aid eligibility criteria there is no point in changing the structure?

The Attorney-General: As to eligibility, the Lord Chancellor has said that by one calculation it does appear that a smaller percentage of people—56 per cent. today rather than 70 per cent. a few years ago—may be eligible for legal aid. However, it is difficult to be satisfied as to the right basis for making that calculation. One calculation is based on the family expenditure survey, which adopts a different definition of a household from that adopted for the purpose of eligibility for the legal aid scheme. I suggest that it is more important to concentrate on identifying which particular types of litigation cost and candidates for legal aid really need to be assisted from public funds, in order to provide access to the courts for different, specific purposes. That is one of the most important functions of the review now being undertaken.

[The Attorney-General]

Part II of the Bill particularly concerns the provision of legal services. Under our statute and common law in England and Wales, the authority or right to provide legal services for reward is generally restricted to those who hold professional qualifications. In general, our courts have no investigative powers of their own and therefore rely, perhaps to a unique extent, on the quality of the legal profession that serves both courts and public.

Obviously the qualities of integrity and fearlessness are pre-eminent, but it is also highly important to ensure that the profession remains responsive and sensitive to the needs of people who require the services of lawyers. It must never give the appearance of being remote.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Is not the cab rank principle extremely important in this connection, ensuring that cases are taken by counsel and by solicitors?

The Attorney-General: I entirely agree, and I shall say more about that later.

In recent years the legal profession has undergone and absorbed many great changes, a number of which it has instituted or introduced itself. Solicitors and barristers can now advertise their practices—and, what is more, their charges—and they do so. The Bar allows its members to accept instructions in certain kinds of work from professionals who are not solicitors; a new profession of licensed conveyancers has been created, and solicitors now charge highly competitive prices for conveyancing work. Training within each branch of the profession has been completely transformed.

No less important than those changes, however, is the need to help the evolution to continue by ensuring that there are no unnecessary restrictions to hinder the public in their attempts to obtain legal services. If competition, for example, were unnecessarily restrictive, so that new or better ways of providing legal services—or a wider choice of people to provide them—became needlessly shut out, that would be a good example of what I mean. The Government believe that the general test should be whether a restriction is appropriate to maintain the proper and efficient administration of justice—if it is not, it should go.

For example, the Government understand very well the need to ensure that legal services continue to be of high quality if the public are to be protected. Those who provide them must therefore be properly qualified and properly accountable—accountable to the client, to their professional body and to the courts.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): I agree very much with what my right hon. and learned Friend is saying about the quality of the service provided, particularly by barristers, and by solicitors representing clients in the higher courts. Can he not say, even at this late stage, that the Goverment will introduce a provision to allow clients to claim against their barrister if he is negligent—if he does not turn up in court, for instance, or does not do his homework? Surely, if we are to guarantee quality and give certain people a monopoly to represent clients in court, we should allow those clients to obtain legal redress if their representatives are negligent.

The Attorney-General: The immunity from actions for negligence which has long been accorded to barristers by common law, and which the Bill extends to all advocates, is very closely confined. It deals only with the conduct of a case, principally in court. It was confirmed in two House of Lords judgments—Rondel *v.* Worsley 1967, and another in the following decade. The Bill preserves that narrowly confined immunity in the public interest. It is important, for example, that an action for negligence based on the way in which an advocate conducts a case "on his feet" in court does not lead to a retrying of the whole issue. Without the immunity, that would be almost inevitable and very much against the public interest. In many instances, however, a breach of duty by advocates —including barristers, of course—at present gives rise to a liability in relation to negligence, and that will continue.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): As I am sure my right hon. and learned Friend will accept, immunity at the Bar is not the only immunity. Witnesses giving evidence in the box are immune from action—as, most notably, are hon. Members in the House.

The Attorney-General: My hon. Friend makes an apt and accurate point.

The Government propose that in future rights of audience before a particular court should depend solely on whether advocates can demonstrate that they have received the appropriate education and training, and are bound by the appropriate codes of conduct. The Government consider that that fitness to practise is best established by professional bodies and other organisations whose members provide legal services, and that it is for such bodies to satisfy the courts and the public that their members can meet the high standards of competence and conduct required for the exercise of rights of audience.

Those requirements are at the heart of the Government's intentions, and are secured by the statutory objective and the general principle for which clause 15 expressly provides. The statutory objective is the development of legal services in England and Wales through provision for new or better ways of providing those services and a wider choice of people providing them, along with the constant maintaining of proper and efficient administration of justice. The general principle is that the question whether a person should be granted a right of audience in relation to any court or proceedings, or should be granted a right to conduct litigation, should be determined only by reference to certain specific factors.

First, it should be established whether that person is qualified in accordance with the educational and training requirements appropriate to that court or those proceedings. Secondly, it should be established whether he is a member of a professional or other body that has rules of conduct governing the conduct of its members, has an effective mechanism for enforcing those rules and is likely to enforce them. The rules—in relation to the particular court or proceedings—must be appropriate in the interests of the proper and efficient administration of justice. It will not be enough if they are simply appropriate to preserving the interests of the body concerned.

In relation to rights of audience in any of the superior courts, a fourth factor was added by amendment in another place. That brings me to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman). The fourth factor is the question whether a professional body's rules of conduct include provisions embodying what is loosely called the cab rank principle, subject to reasonable exceptions. The amendment—now contained in clause 15(3)(d)—excluded from its ambit the rights of audience in the superior courts that solicitors currently enjoy.

The question in another place was whether that principle needed to be spelt out in the Bill. I can now tell the House that the Government have decided to accept it, and to include it in clause 15. It may be generally described as the principle of non-discrimination by a practitioner between prospective clients in any area of law in which he practises as an advocate. Provision will, however, be needed to ensure that employed advocates may be allowed, by the operation of the machinery set up by the Bill, to act only for their employers in whatever court or proceedings in which they may have a right of audience.

The Government support that principle, considering it to be in the general interests of prospective clients and the administration of justice. For that reason, having consulted the Law Society and the Bar Council, they propose that clause 15 should provide for a wider application of it than is achieved by subsection (3) (d). They propose that it should apply to all rights of audience granted by a professional body, in whatever court or proceedings.

The Government will introduce their own amendment to give effect to that policy in due course. What is more —consistent with the principle of non-discrimination— they will introduce amendments to apply to the Bar the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 to cover discrimination in professional relationships, both at the Bar and between barristers and those instructing them.

Advocacy, litigation, conveyancing and probate services are the main services covered by the relevant part of the Bill.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Can the Attorney-General confirm that the principle of non-discrimination will ensure that there is no discrimination against those potential clients who are in receipt of legal aid?

The Attorney-General: It would not be right for me to anticipate the formulation of the amendment that the Government will introduce to give effect to the principle of non-discrimination. When it is introduced, there will be ample opportunity for the Standing Committee to discuss it and I trust that the Committee will be graced by the presence of the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile).

The four categories—advocacy, litigation, conveyancing and probate—are very different in character, their only common feature being that under our law they can be undertaken for reward only by a professional with specific qualifications. Part II of the Bill provides three separate ways to permit development in those areas. The first covers advocacy and the conduct of litigation, which are the two categories of work upon which the administration of justice by the courts crucially relies. That first way employs a process by which an appropriate body may be authorised to grant to its members the right to undertake advocacy and litigation rights. That process is developed from the present statutory and common law arrangements, in which the judiciary is involved, whereby such rights are granted.

Although the Bill provides the mechanism as well as the impetus for change, it also preserves the position of solicitors and barristers by providing that the Law Society and the Bar Council shall be deemed to have granted to solicitors and barristers the rights that they respectively hold at present. They will be deemed to have been authorised to do so consistently with the requirements of the Bill by virtue of their existing regulations and rules.

If a new body were to seek authorisation to enter that area or if the Law Society or the Bar Council wished to grant an extension or alteration of existing rights to their members, there would be a need under the new arrangements to secure the approval of the Lord Chancellor and the designated judges in accordance with the new procedure. The road which may lead to such approval is mapped out in schedule 4. It leads first to the Lord Chancellor's advisory committee on legal education and conduct. That committee will be established under clause 17, and it must first consider the matter. There will be a lay majority on the committee, to illustrate the importance of the public's interest. A Law Lord or a judge of the Supreme Court will be in the chair. The committee will have the general duty of assisting in the maintenance and development of standards in the education, training and conduct of those offering legal services.

The second stage will be for the Lord Chancellor to consider, with the advice of the committee and of the Director General of Fair Trading, whether in connection with the proposals the members of the applicant body will be suitably qualified and whether they will be subject to appropriate codes of conduct, which will be enforced.

The third stage will be for the Lord Chancellor to inform the four most senior judges of the Supreme Court either that he proposes to give his approval to the application or alteration, or alternatively why he proposes to withhold it. Those judges, called in the Bill the designated judges, are the Lord Chief Justice, the Master of the Rolls, the President of the Family Division and the Vice-Chancellor. If the Lord Chancellor or any of the designated judges is satisfied that approving the application would be incompatible with the statutory objective or the general principle established in clause 15, he must refuse his approval. If, on the other hand, each of the judges concurs with his proposal to give approval, approval will be given.

The Government consider that those arrangements continue, in an appropriate way, the long-established involvement of the judiciary in the control of proceedings in the courts in which they sit. However, the arrangements regulate the exercise of judicial involvement in that area by reference to the statutory objective and the general principle established in the Bill. For example, if a designated judge were to refuse to concur with the Lord Chancellor's proposal to approve an alteration to the rules of conduct of, say, the Law Society, his refusal would have to be compatible with his specific duty, imposed by clause 16, to act in furtherance of the statutory objective and in accordance with the general principle. If it were not so compatible, it would be subject to judicial review.

The Government believe that the establishment of safeguards for the public, by the means that I have described, is a proper and important function of the Bill. It is intended to secure, as a result, that only those who are adequately trained, experienced and regulated will become newly authorised to exercise rights of audience or rights to conduct litigation.

Advocacy is not only a particular skill; it is a particular service to the courts and to the public, and one upon which the courts implicitly rely. It is important that all those

[The Attorney-General]

wishing to appear in the higher courts should be appropriately trained and qualified. It is important also that the courts can always rely upon an advocate placing his duty to the court before his duty to his client.

The framework in part II of the Bill permits change to evolve in the light of all those considerations, and subject always to the over-arching safeguard that the proper and efficient administration of justice must be maintained. The safeguards rightly embodied in the Bill in no way detract from the aim of removing unnecessary restrictions, which is the policy which part II is intended to implement. Yet they are wholly compatible also with the great importance that the Government attach, as the Lord Chancellor has said, to the continued existence of a vigorous and independent Bar.

The second way of permitting development to be created by part II of the Bill concerns the right of financial institutions and others to do the conveyancing work that is currently restricted to the legal profession, notably solicitors and licensed conveyancers. The Bill sets up an authorised practitioner scheme. The proposals will supersede those of the Building Societies Act 1986, which have not been implemented and which will be repealed.

The proposals in the White Paper would have enabled the Lord Chancellor to recognise professional and other bodies as suitable to grant their members the right to provide conveyancing services to their borrowers, subject to appropriate standards of competence and conduct. However, when more detailed development of this proposal was carried out, it led the Government to conclude that, on balance, it was better to set up a single regulatory body responsible for the authorisation, supervision and discipline of the new authorised practitioners.

The Bill therefore establishes a new and independent Authorised Conveyancing Practitioners Board to take on those functions. It will have the duty to seek to develop competition in the provision of conveyancing services. Its constitution, procedure and powers can be found in schedule 5. The board may make rules providing for a compensation scheme for clients who have suffered loss through dishonesty by authorised practitioners or their employees. Conveyancing work by solicitors and licensed conveyancers in private practice will continue to be regulated by the Law Society or by the Council for Licensed Conveyancers. The board will be required to set up a conveyancing ombudsman scheme, to which all authorised practitioners must belong. The conveyancing ombudsman, not the board, will deal with the individual customer's complaints.

The Government recognise that, for most people, the process of buying and selling their homes is the most important financial event of their lives and accordingly the Government take consumer protection issues in that area very seriously. A mainstay of consumer protection under the authorised practitioner scheme will be the regulations on competence and conduct to be made by the Lord Chancellor under clause 39. The matters which may be included in those regulations are based on those set out in the code of practice, whose main principles were published in the Green and White Papers last year.

As the Lord Chancellor has said in another place, those regulations will be the subject of wide consultation and they will be subject to the affirmative resolution procedure. It will be one of the functions of the board to make arrangements designed to ensure that authorised practitioners are complying with those regulations. The Lord Chancellor has wide powers under clause 39 to make regulations covering not only matters relating to competence and conduct, and the protection of the interests of clients, but also the maintenance of fair competition between authorised practitioners and others providing conveyancing services.

Those provisions are designed to develop, with proper safeguards, further competition in the conveyancing market. The Bill will prevent the tying-in to a mortgage of an obligation to purchase other services.

The Government do not believe that the existing national network of independent solicitors will be undermined by these initiatives. We are well aware of the importance of ready access to legal services for the public, and of the importance of local solicitors' firms in all our constituencies to secure that. But I think that solicitors will be well able to compete to retain conveyancing business in the future. A survey carried out by the National Consumer Council showed that over half the population would prefer to have conveyancing done by an independent solicitor rather than by a lending institution, and that confirms the findings of a separate Law Society survey.

I am sorry to take so long, Madam Deputy Speaker, but the Bill covers a wide ambit and I hope to cover the main provisions. I have nearly finished.

The third way to permit development which is established by the Bill consists of new arrangements about probate work. The Bill proposes that banks, building societies, insurance companies and their subsidiaries should for reward be able to prepare applications for a grant of probate. At present that work is restricted to solicitors, barristers and notaries. Institutions will be required to belong to a suitable complaints scheme.

There is also provision for the Lord Chancellor to extend to professional or other bodies, having consulted the advisory committee and the President of the Family Division, the right to authorise their members to do this work if they satisfy statutory standards of conduct and of competence.

The Government attach much importance to the need to maintain the present high standards of competence and integrity in the provision of legal services. We believe complaints procedures that are truly effective are an important way to achieve that. The Bill accordingly provides for the creation of a new legal services ombudsman, with a significantly wider jurisdiction and greater powers than were given to the office of the lay observer, which it replaces.

The ombudsman will be able to investigate the handling of complaints by professional bodies that relate to solicitors, barristers, notaries and licensed conveyancers; to investigate the original complaint; and, where a complaint is found to be substantiated, to recommend that compensation be paid by the practitioner or by the body concerned.

The Law Society has also put forward to the Government proposals to amend the legislation governing its own complaints handling powers and procedures, and in particular to allow it to direct solicitors to pay compensation to clients who have received inadequate professional services. The Government have welcomed that initiative and they intend to bring forward the necessary amendments as soon as possible.

The Bill also removes or clarifies a number of miscellaneous, statutory or common law restrictions on the organisation and practice of the legal profession.

Practitioners will no longer be stopped by law from making even limited kinds of conditional fee arrangements, and barristers will be able to enter into contracts for their services.

The statutory ban on solicitors entering into partnerships with other professionals will also go. That will not, however, stop the Law Society adopting professional rules to deal with such matters if it wants to do so. The point is that the Government see no justification to retain such a provision in main legislation.

The Law Society would also be enabled to make rules regulating the formation of partnerships with lawyers from other jurisdictions. Secondary legislation under the Companies Act 1985 will also be brought forward to allow such partnerships to be formed with more than 20 partners, provided that the majority of the partners are subject to regulation by an appropriate professional body in the United Kingdom. That would remedy a concern raised in another place about the practical scope for such practices to be established.

Further provisions in part III of the Bill amend the qualification criteria for judicial appointments to reflect the changes in the arrangements for grants of rights of audience, and they revise the judicial pensions legislation, primarily to provide more fully for widowers' pension rights. Part IV amends the Solicitors Act as regards the regulation of the solicitors' branch of the profession and part V amends the law governing arbitration to permit an official referee to act as the sole arbitrator with the approval of the Lord Chief Justice.

Finally, there are a number of miscellaneous amendments which, for example, make provision in connection with the liability of magistrates and their clerks in actions for damages, and the award of costs in magistrates courts.

Heaven knows what tortuous transactions within the shadow Cabinet led to the decision to invite the House to vote against the Bill. It is a decision of which the right hon and learned and, I suspect, rather unhappy Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) on the Opposition Front Bench is the mournful inheritor. He will find it an inheritance of the kind that the Romans called hereditas damnosa—because he cannot get rid of it, and yet for all his considerable eloquence it will cost him his credibility to defend it.

As Mr. Marcel Berlins asked in *The Guardian* last week:

> "Just what is the Labour Party's policy towards the Lord Chancellor's Bill on the legal profession? Does anyone know?"

For this is a Bill which simplifies going to law, and makes it quicker, more convenient and more cost-effective. It widens the choice of practitioner—whether advocate, litigator or conveyancer; it stimulates competition; and it fortifies the client who has a grievance by creating an ombudsman for conveyancing and an ombudsman for legal services.

By all those measures and more besides the Government intend and believe that the public will have better access to justice. The Opposition wish the House to vote against the proposals, but I commend them to the House.

5.7 pm

Mr. John Morris (Aberavon): I beg to move, To leave out from "That" to the end of the Question and to add instead thereof:

> "this House declines to give a second reading to the Courts and Legal Services Bill *[Lords]*, which proposes substantial changes in the organisation of the courts and legal profession, but which fails to ensure sufficient resources for the efficient administration of the county courts; which fails to make the financing and administration of the courts and legal system accountable to this House; which neglects to deal with the denial of eligibility for legal aid, and fails to address itself properly to ensuring wider opportunities for legal representation; and which misses the opportunity to modernise the system of selection and appointment of the judiciary."

It was interesting that in his last few remarks—perhaps it was a Freudian slip—the Attorney-General was conceding that the Bill would be the interitance of an hon. Member on this side of the House; we noted that with glee. Perhaps he had not thought out the matter, because he was not looking at his notes at the time, but we take that concession and we shall use it fully, perhaps in a reasonably short time before the next election comes. We thank the Attorney-General.

Hardly anyone would quarrel with the Government's aims, as expressed in the Green Papers, to ensure that the public has the best possible access to legal services and that those services are of the right quality for the needs of the client.

The quarrel, which goes wider than the political spectrum, as the Attorney-General knows, is whether those aims will be achieved, in particular since the Government rely on free competition and the discipline of the market to achieve them. The writer of the Lord Chancellor's Green Papers and the White Paper is the handmaiden of the Department of Trade and Industry. They reek of the furnaces of that Department. I suspect that the fire had been lit before the present Lord Chancellor took office, probably unbeknown to his predecessors. It is against that background that we should judge whether the philosophy of market forces is appropriate for achieving the best for the consumer in an area where so much is taken on trust, and where integrity and independence are so vital.

It is sad and wrong that this is the first opportunity that the House, as the provider of supply, has had to discuss any of the proposals, which were first published as far back as January 1989. That underlines the need to transfer accountability for those parts of the Lord Chancellor's Department that deal with administration and finance, now that it is a significant spending Department, to the House.

The purpose of the Queen's courts, meeting as we do but a stone's throw from Westminster hall, is to serve the state and the citizen and in so doing to hold the balance between the Queen's peace, her Government and her subjects and between subject and subject.

The legal profession is the servant and the agent of those needs and exists for that purpose. It must be independent and fearless. The judiciary, drawn from that profession, and in whom is entrusted the holding of the balance, must of necessity be independent. Too frequently these days it is a popular cry to attack the judges. From time to time, I fear that individual judges deserve criticism. However, where there is a need for independence and

[Mr. John Morris]

integrity no one can be better trusted than judges, hence the need for them to exercise the greatest care when making extra-judicial comment.

However well-merited a proposal may be, it is of the utmost importance to weigh it against the background of whether it undermines the independence of the profession or of judges.

Labour Members do not disagree with the Government's proposals to open up advocacy to those who are properly qualified; hence, perhaps to the disappointment of the Attorney-General, we shall not vote against the Bill. We are concerned about its implementation and what is omitted from it—in the time-hallowed way of objecting to proposals as a whole because of omissions.

I make quite clear where our starting point is, in case it has escaped the attention of the Attorney-General. We shall not take up the cudgels on behalf of any part of the profession for the sake of obstructing the increased availability of talent in advocacy where it is of benefit to the client. I have no intention of defending over-restrictive practice for the sake of it. I fear that I am old enough to remember as a young circuiteer the restrictions on appearing off-circuit. Over the years, the Bar has rightly dismantled those restrictions.

Fears have been expressed about some of the present proposals and certainly about some of the original proposals. Some of those fears have been reduced, and the present proposals are an improvement on the Green Papers. With a little more groundwork and consultation, some of those fears might have been avoided.

I wish to ensure that the independence of the judiciary, which I hope we all treasure, is not undermined by a bureaucracy which owes itself to the favour of a Minister, who after all is a political figure. The Lord Chancellor's advisory committee must be funded through the Consolidated Fund to mark its independence and staffed to ensure, so far as practical, independence similar to that of the judiciary. Lord Rawlinson, a distinguished former Attorney-General, said in a dramatic part of his speech in the other place that nowhere outside a Marxist state does a Minister appoint judges and have the ultimate say in who may appear in courts before those judges.

The Lord Chancellor is therefore right to distance himself from too direct an involvement in the latter. It is right that he at least shares the ultimate responsibility with senior judges. Any attempt to water down the collective responsibility of judges, who have exercised such rights since time immemorial, would be wrong. We shall consider how the collective wisdom of judges is exercised. It is important that they are perceived not to be obstructive to the aims of the Bill if it is approved by Parliament. As the Attorney-General said, they will have to take account of the Act, and the advisory committee, with its lay majority, will be open to judicial review of their actions. To many, it is inconceivable that they would be obstructive, but it has been said and we should face up to it. I do not share that view.

Why do I lay such stress on the distancing of the licensing role of the Lord Chancellor compared with judges? For the administration of justice, Labour intends to create a Department that is directly answerable to the House. We are all aware of the anger of many hon. Members when a judge makes imprudent remarks, perhaps in a particular type of case. With a Minister directly answerable to the House, one can imagine a similar outcry when an advocate is denied his right to practise. It will therefore become even more important for the Lord Chancellor or his successor to minimise his involvement.

How important it is to have fearless and independent advocates when the Executive must be challenged in, for example, the process of judicial review, which involves many immigration cases, or where the cause is so odious that it is only because advocates are independent and fearless that the client can be satisfied that his case is being properly fought and that popular belief does not attach to the advocate the odium of the cause.

Sir Hugh Rossi (Hornsey and Wood Green): I am sorry to interrupt the right hon. and learned Gentleman, but I am not certain that I have correctly understood him. Having stated the importance of an independent legal profession, he seemed to suggest a diminution in the independence of the judiciary by making their pronouncements subject to criticisms and overview in the Chamber. That would lead to political interference in judicial independence. That appertains in some systems, but I hope not in a parliamentary democracy such as ours.

Mr. Morris: If the hon. Gentleman looks carefully at my remarks he will discover that I said nothing of the kind. I underlined the Attorney-General's commitment to judicial review of any licensing in which judges are involved. I pointed out that, unhappily, judges are criticised inside and outside the House. When a Minister is directly involved in licensing, it will be not the judges who are criticised but the licensing and the actions of the Minister. That is the point that I was seeking to make. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will understand if I made it badly.

It would be a sad day if the finest advocacy were not available for odious cases to ensure that in the dispensation of justice every argument had been advanced in the exercise of every man's right under Magna Carta.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Am I wrong in believing that it is not possible to criticise judges in this House other than on a motion of both Houses?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): The hon. Lady is quite correct, but I have not heard the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) criticise a particular judge.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The right hon. and learned Gentleman was saying that judges can be criticised in the House, which is not so.

Mr. Morris: The hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) misunderstood my point. I am saying that, unhappily and regrettably, judges are criticised, whether one likes it or not. It is no good the hon. Lady shaking her head. I have been here long enough to know the correct processes. The hon. Lady has also been here a long time and knows that, rightly or wrongly, judges are criticised. I was not criticising judges but saying that when a Minister is directly answerable to the House, taking over some of the responsibilities of the Lord Chancellor's Department and being involved in licensing, more criticism will be made of him than when a judge occasionally makes an intemperate remark that does not find favour with people inside and outside the House. I hope that I have made my point abundantly clear. I thought that I had made it clear the first time, but I certainly made it clear the second time. I hope that I carry the hon. Lady with me now. *[Interruption.]* If I have not made it clear, I am prepared to repeat it.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. That would be tedious repetition.

Mr. Morris: I bow to your wisdom, Madam Deputy Speaker. I thought that I had made my point clear, but I am quite prepared to repeat it for the hon. Member for Lancaster.

It would be a sad day if odious causes did not have the availability of the finest advocacy to ensure that in the dispensation of justice every argument had been advanced in a particular cause. During debates in another place, the cab rank rule became more a matter of concern. Today the Attorney-General called it non-discrimination.

If enshrining that rule was expected to, and would, undermine the widening of advocacy rights in the Bill to qualified people, I would have no truck with it. It should not do that. As the Lord Chancellor said some years ago, wearing his hat as leader of the Scottish Bar,

> "this obligation is an important constitutional guarantee from the point of view of a citizen's freedom of access to the courts."

The rule does not exist for the sake of the Bar. It must be improved upon so far as it is exercised by the profession. It is not perfect and I welcome what the Attorney-General said about that this afternoon. The rule is part of the price that the Bar, as advocates, has paid for its monopoly of audience in the superior courts.

What should the rule mean? A practising advocate must be prepared, in the interests of enhancing access to justice, to take instructions from anyone, however odious his cause, in the field in which that advocate practises. Advocates cannot pick the popular as opposed to the odious causes or the easy as opposed to the difficult cases.

If we extend the privilege of advocacy, with it must go the burden of the cab rank. The client will know that he will have an advocate of his choice, subject of course to availability. The judge and jury will know, because of the nature of the advocate's duty to appear, that he is not identified with his client's cause. It would be short-sighted if the consumer failed to comprehend the magnitude of his loss in the long term if the rule was not maintained. It would be a grave restriction of the client's right of choice if the rule disappeared and all advocates were able to pick and choose.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): There is an anxiety here in that barristers, by introducing the clause about cab ranking, have tried to restrict competition from solicitors. As we are talking about the cab rank rule, is there not a case for saying that, as with black cabs, there should be a restriction on trade if there is a monopoly? If the principle is to be applied to two professions, should we not recognise that there are minicabs as well as black cabs and that there must be two systems instead of one?

Mr. Morris: My hon. Friend is wrong. If the rule disappeared or was not maintained or improved the client would lose. The rule matters not one iota to the profession. It is a burden on the profession, but a burden that it is prepared to carry, and has carried from time immemorial, as part of its privileges. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) has done much for the consumer and the client, but they would lose out if there was no one left in the profession prepared to defend them. That is the important point.

The Yorkshire ripper must be defended and there must be a defender for the odious cause. The defence of an individual's liberty would be weakened if advocates were not available to defend that odious cause. We will have to examine the Attorney-General's proposals with great care to see what practical difficulties arise and then try to ensure that there is an effective solution that protects the consumer and the individual, because the principle exists for him.

I want now to refer to the extension of the rights of audience to all Crown prosecution service employees in the Crown courts. I fear that I envisaged Treasury pressure for that some years ago when I addressed a conference organised by Justice on the future of the profession. I surmise that it is the Treasury's belief that prosecutions by in-house advocates would be cheaper. The CPS employees believe that that practice will enhance their career prospects. All that is understandable, although it goes against assurances given by Lord Hailsham when the CPS was set up. However, we should examine that point.

In the immediate future, and perhaps for quite a few years, the CPS has enough work to get its house in order in relation to its existing functions. I do not blame the CPS for that. Rather, I blame its Treasury masters for under-funding and under-establishing the service. I believe that CPS employees receive inadequate salaries for their work and the responsibilities that they carry.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown), who assisted me in the House at the time of the creation of the CPS, warned the Attorney-General of the price that the service would be paying in its inability to attract the required number of staff because of the salary scales. Despite the improvements, my hon. Friend has been proved right.

Frankly, the Law Officers lost their battle with the Treasury over pay and they either badly under-estimated staffing levels, or they lost that battle, too. The service has still not recovered. I suspect, therefore, that the exercise of an extension of the right of audience is not an immediate prospect. I am concerned about the long-term effects.

A distinguished Treasury prosecutor, Mr. Roy Amlot QC, wrote a most challenging letter that appeared in *The Times* on 23 February last year. He underlined the importance in any serious crime of the independence of the prosecutor

> "owing no allegiance to the Government or Government Department, not motivated by results, advancement or the approval of his superiors."

He ended his letter stating:

> "The Green Paper has ignored a principle which ought to be of fundamental importance—the guarantee of an independent element in the State machinery of justice."

We must decide where the greater gain lies. Would independence be less or more with in-house prosecutors at Crown court level? Do serious and difficult cases require the independence that exists today? What would be the effect on the junior criminal Bar? What would be the effect of polarising advocates at the high level into prosecutors and defenders even more than they are sometimes today?

[Mr. Morris]

What would be the dangers if judges in future were drawn more from the ranks of prosecutors who had never defended?

The immediate gains of possible Treasury savings and enhancing career prospects should be weighed carefully against probable weightier disadvantages. It is curious that the Government, who are bent on privatising anything that moves, or anything that does not move, should consider further nationalisation of prosecutions. That has happened already. I wonder whether the Government's Right-wing think tanks have been consulted. The Prime Minister has an interest in the Bar and I have just read that she has become an honorary fellow—whatever that means—of the American Trial Lawyers. Does she know what the Attorney-General is about?

I want now to consider the importance of the high street solicitor. He or she is the public's point of access to the law. It would be a grave disadvantage to the public if his or her role was made more difficult of if services were made less comprehensive. The small firm will look carefully at the development of the City mega-firm with its in-house advocates who may be coralling all the work at its expense. I share some anxiety about institutions undertaking conveyancing work. We all want to make conveyancing as cheap as possible, particularly when the most important commercial transaction in most people's lives is buying a house. Certainly, over the years that process has become very much cheaper. My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby has played a notable part in that process.

Safeguards regarding the independence of advice have been written into the Bill. As I said, the purchase of a house is the most important commercial transaction of people's lives. There have been massive developments in recent years with financial institutions taking over estate agencies. It is therefore even more important that the consumer is safeguarded and that the advice that he obtains is independent. Hon. Members will examine that part of the Bill more carefully.

There are two outstanding omissions from the Bill. The Attorney-General has dealt with them in part. First, there is a failure to ensure that adequate resources are provided for our county courts. Despite the Attorney-General's words, we certainly welcome the institutionalisation of the civil justice review in part I. Great progress has already been made by judges in redistributing work from the High Court to the county court under section 40 of the County Courts Act 1984, and masters and registrars have also transferred cases down. I was glad to hear of the number of county court centres where continuous trials can be heard. Nevertheless, there are horrendous tales of a lack of resources in county courts. Before the system in the Bill works, there must be adequate resources, and staff will need to be paid at a rate that will retain them. The state has taken their dedication for granted for far too long. What is the current rate of resignations by court staff in the Lord Chancellor's Department? Are the figures double those of comparable sections of the civil service?

I was shocked to read accounts in the other place about courts running out of their allocation of postage money, about a five-month delay of a 10-minute hearing in Birmingham, about a four-month delay in Bromley before a petition could be issued, and about a six-week delay in Swindon to get an injunction to protect a woman from her violent former boyfriend. If they are right, such tales mean that it is a pretty awful situation. The general public are probably under the impression that all trials continue from day to day until a case is finished. As the Attorney-General said, there is an increase in the number of places where there are continuous trials, but they may be the exception rather than the rule. What proportion of cases not finished on the same day must wait weeks before they are allocated another day to continue the hearing? The increase in costs is enormous, the strain for the litigant is unacceptable, and the pressure to settle in the meantime is considerable.

It is not only in county courts that penny-pinching rules the day. The other day, I was told of a court where the phone had been taken out of counsels' room because takings did not meet charges. In other courts, incoming calls are not allowed because there is no money in them for the Lord Chancellor's Department. I do not know of a court in which phonecard telephones are installed. In a profession in which communication is of the utmost importance and when the public and the profession need to be kept in touch, one marvels that the courts run as smoothly as they do. That telephone instance is just the tip of the iceberg. One hears horrendous tales of cash limits on courts and immense delays until more cash is made available merely to reply to correspondence. The Law Society has stated the problems in some detail in its memorandum to the Lord Chancellor.

There is strong evidence that the present county court system is working under great disadvantages. I welcome the increases envisaged and reported by the Attorney-General. If the Lord Chancellor's Department were properly accountable to this House for its finance and administration, as Opposition Members envisage in our motion, we would have examined matters long ago, either through a Select Committee or through other means. In the absence of a Select Committee, the Department has been able to avoid proper scrutiny. Until adequate resources are available part I of the Bill should not come fully into operation. Although the Lord Chancellor has accepted an amendment relating to an annual report on the business of the High Court and county courts, we must ensure that resources are available. It should be a statutory requirement to provide adequate resources for the courts.

I now refer to the Government's failure to provide adequate resources for the operation of the legal aid scheme and, in particular, the failure to extend legal aid to tribunals. Legal aid has been allowed to wither on the vine. It has been estimated that in 1979, 80·9 per cent. of householders were eligible for legal aid. By 1989, the figure had declined to 57 per cent. In 1979, 79·1 per cent. of individuals were eligible. Ten years later, the figure had declined to 53 per cent. Mr. Michael Murphy of the London School of Economics' department of statistical and mathematical science stated:

> "The assertions by successive Lord Chancellors and their Department, either that eligibility has remained unchanged or questioning whether previous estimates demonstrating a considerable fall are accurate, are inexplicable on rational grounds."

The Lord Chancellor, to meet widespread criticism, held a press conference shortly before the Queen's Speech, announcing "a new approach", which included this Bill. As the Attorney-General mentioned, that new approach included a general review, which will take up to three years, and a package of improvements for pensioners, children and personal injury cases. No comparable changes have been made in green form eligibility. The Attorney-General estimates that the changes will increase eligibility from 56 per cent. to 74 per cent. in personal injury cases.

But what of other matters in which assistance may be required? The president of the Law Society, Mr. David Ward, and the chairman of the general council of the Bar, Mr. Peter Cresswell QC, recently wrote a joint letter to the Lord Chancellor because of the profession's concern about declining eligibility. They share that concern with the Lord Chancellor's legal aid advisory committee. They pointed out that the basic uprating of about 5·2 per cent. will not even keep eligibility limits in line with inflation,

"let alone reverse the savage cuts in legal aid made over the past few years."

They are concerned with the formula, the scope and the time scale of the review. They endorse the Lord Chancellor's advisory committee's view that

"the downward drift of eligibility levels might gather momentum over this time."

They also pointed out that better targeting—this was mentioned in the Attorney-General's speech—might result in fewer people being eligible and might mean that those who are just above the eligibility level could be prevented, on financial grounds, from pursuing their legal rights argument. It is disingenuous for the Green Papers to suggest that the no win, no fee proposals will allow greater access to the law and somehow compensate for the lack of any extension of the legal aid system.

The president and the chairman have misgivings about the review being conducted behind closed doors and suggest that there should be an independent review, reporting within six months. I entirely agree. Not only is the existing legal aid scheme being allowed to wither, but there appears to be no hope of extending it to tribunals. The Bill's long title includes the challenging words

"to make provision with respect to legal services".

Unhappily, the opportunity to spell out the path forward has not been grasped.

I wonder how many hon. Members have had to deal with case after case in their surgeries of constituents who are to appear before a tribunal in the following week with claims for mobility allowance, constant attendance allowance or unemployment benefit, for example. Although hundreds, if not thousands, of pounds are at stake, we know that many people go to those tribunals unrepresented. There must be something wrong if someone can get legal aid for a comparatively minor action in the county court, worth perhaps less than £2,000, yet a worker with 20 years' service, aged 54 and earning £200 per week, who alleges that he has been unfairly dismissed, receives no help whatsoever in presenting his case. He may not have the support of a trade union, whereas his employers may have in-house lawyers and will certainly have recourse to solicitors and barristers to represent them at the industrial tribunal, if they so wish. That employee might have a claim of up to £12,000 on the facts, but within the framework of the present legal aid system, no matter how strong his claim and no matter how large his potential award, he cannot get legal aid to assist him at the industrial tribunal. What is the logic——

Mr. Alex Carlile *rose—*

Mr. Morris: No, I shall not give way because I have almost finished.

What is the logic of drawing a distinction between those two cases and how can that distinction be maintained? Mr. Ward and Mr. Cresswell have expressed their concern about the lack of progress on tribunal representation. They suggest, first, that an order of priority should be worked out for extending legal aid to certain tribunals, starting with appeals to the social security commissioners. Secondly, they suggest that consideration be given to funding a national network of agencies for tribunal representation. That could at least be a start and we all await the Lord Chancellor's reaction.

In the absence of a positive reaction and in the light of the omissions that we have identified in our motion, while I do not recommend my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote against the Bill's Second Reading, I urge them to support our motion in the Lobby.

5.43 pm

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): I imagine that the debate will be dominated by lawyers. Indeed, I see around me in the Chamber predominantly hon. Members who are lawyers. The House knows that I am no lawyer, so I hope that I shall be forgiven if I make a few comments about the Bill from the point of view of the general public and their more mundane dealings with the legal professions.

I begin by giving the Bill a general welcome. I am especially glad that it has come to the House with a good deal more support from the various parts of the legal profession than it looked as though it would enjoy at one stage. That is to be welcomed. I pay tribute to the Law Officers who, I know, have worked hard to try to bring to Parliament a Bill that is not as contentious as at first appeared. If my right hon. and learned Friends on the Front Bench will forgive me, I want to pay a special tribute to the Lord Chancellor, for whom I have had the greatest possible admiration during the 11 years since he joined the Government.

However, I am concerned at some of the Bill's implications for some of the more mundane legal services. I am all for competition between lawyers and anybody else who is capable of performing competently the legal services that we are accustomed to solicitors performing. However, in the welcome move to opening up this area, I am concerned that, in fairness, we should not put solicitors at a disadvantage. Over the years, I have played my part in criticising solicitors and I do not suppose that I shall stop now, but they perform a great service to the public and it would be wrong to throw out the baby with the bath water, as the Bill does in certain respects. The principal purpose of my remarks is to draw attention to some of those instances and, in so doing, I acknowledge the advice that I have received from Westmorland Law Society.

Clauses 46 and 47 deal with probate. The Bill proposes to extend, under strict controls, the groups of people who are able to carry out legal work on deceased people's estates up to the point of a grant of probate. I have no quarrel with that. Until now, such work has, in practice, been confined to solicitors and to the trustee departments of the banks because, under the existing rules as I understand them, only solicitors can apply for a grant of probate. If that work is to be extended to wider groups, as the Bill proposes, we must ensure that those groups are competent and properly regulated. I am content that that seems to be being done. However, why is there no

[Mr. Michael Jopling]

provision for regulation of the next stage, the administration of estates after the grant of probate? That work is enormously important, but I cannot find any proposals in the Bill to regulate the way in which solicitors —who in the past have been closely regulated in such matters—should administer estates after that point. Why have the Government not gone the whole way beyond the point of the grant of probate and applied regulations similar to those that already exist for solicitors to the new groups of people?

Sir Anthony Grant: We should bear it in mind that those other bodies, such as banks, charge on average two or three times as much as solicitors for administering estates.

Mr. Jopling: I do not know whether that is still the case, but my hon. Friend used to be a solicitor, so I am sure that that is a heartfelt point.

Creditably, the Bill puts right an anomaly in relation to mortgages. As things are at the moment, if a solicitor who arranges a mortgage for a client also arranges insurance cover, by arranging an endowment policy to cover the mortgage, as I understand it, the solicitor must account to his client for any commission of more than £10. In the past, that rule has not applied to a building society, so the present situation is fundamentally unfair. I am glad that the Bill puts it right to an extent. I notice that it will be put right by a regulation by the Lord Chancellor under clause 39, after the Bill has received Royal Assent. It is essential that, in clause 39, the regulations under subsection (2)(g) ensure that all authorised practitioners operate on a level playing field with regard to the disclosure of commission. That is an important consumer protection and I hope that that undertaking can be given.

My last point is about conveyancing. Both my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General and the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) said how important conveyancing is. It is perhaps the most important single transaction that many people undertake in their whole lives. I welcome the setting up of an independent body, the Authorised Conveyancing Practitioners Board, to make sure that those who will deal with conveyancing, apart from lawyers, are properly policed.

The Bill does not adequately deal with the onus on authorised conveyancing practitioners to give what the Financial Services Act 1986 describes as "best advice" on the financial services which are on offer. I say that because the position now is that many building societies are tied to a single insurance company. Here lies the problem. While a practitioner who is not tied to an insurance company must give that best advice on the whole of the insurance market, that is not so for the practitioner who is tied. I was surprised to discover that.

I received a letter dated 23 October last year from the Lord Chancellor on this point. He said:

> "In the case of the tied agent, however, this 'best advice' will be restricted to the range of products which are available from the company to which the adviser is tied."

As I understand it, that means that advice from an untied practitioner should never be worse but could often be better than the advice from a tied practitioner such as a building society tied to an insurance company. That is a most unsatisfactory position, and I hope that the Government will consider ways of surmounting the problem.

I suggest three ways in which the problem could be overcome. First, it might be possible to insist that the term "best advice" cover the whole of the insurance field, not, in the case of tied practitioners, simply the field available from the insurance company to which the practitioner is tied. Secondly, practitioners who are tied to an insurance company could be forced to provide more than one quote for insurance covering a mortgage. Thirdly, no practitioner could be allowed to place, say, a third, half or two thirds of his firm's life policies with any one company. Those are just three ideas that I throw out for consideration by my right hon. Friends.

I began by saying that the issues that I wished to raise were mundane. However, they are of crucial importance to a vast proportion of the general public. It is on probate, conveyancing and mortgages that the great majority of British people come across lawyers. I hope that those matters can be considered, and that, as the Bill continues through the House, it can be improved in order to deal with them.

5.54 pm

Mr. Peter Archer (Warley, West): The right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) is under no obligation to apologise for speaking in the debate. This lawyer not only forgives him but welcomes him. Too many of our debates on legal subjects are confined to lawyers. If I may, I shall develop that theme in a few moments.

It is not every Bill that I wish to see initiated in another place and arrive in this House after an eventful career elsewhere. Most Bills of a controversial nature are better if they emerge from this House, where we can decide on principle whether they should survive or be mercifully dispatched, and proceed to another place for more careful scrutiny. Whether there is a better way of scrutinising Bills is not a theme on which I wish to embark in this debate. We have troubles enough for today.

But with this Bill our task has been facilitated by the careful examination that it received in another place. In deciding on its general principle, we know what is in the Bill, what is in the package, how it is wrapped, how it is likely to be presented and how and when we shall see it unwrapped. When we go through the Lobby tonight we shall know what is on offer. Perhaps uncharacteristically, I express gratitude to the other place for the careful scrutiny that the Bill has received.

I do not wish the Attorney-General to get the wrong idea. We shall not be entirely idle in Committee. I understand that the Lord Chancellor has taken up certain themes from another place which he wished to reconsider. It will be in the interests of constructive discussion and of the Government's business managers if they are introduced in good time in Committee.

Then again, the Attorney-General introduced a wholly new matter into the Bill today. I imagine that we shall probably welcome it, but I should have preferred to hear it for the first time from the Attorney-General rather than from my contacts in Fleet street. But let us not introduce a sour note into the debate at this early stage.

We shall not be entirely idle in Committee. We may have the odd improvement to suggest. I do not think so ill of the Attorney-General and the Lord Chancellor as to believe that they will all fall on deaf ears. However, it would not be realistic to hope that we can change this into a different Bill. When hon. Members go through the Lobby tonight they will know pretty well what is on the stall.

At the outset I declare an interest. I am a practising member of the Bar and I have been so continually for 37 years with an interruption of only five years when the Crown was my only client. It is true that for much of that time the Bar has not been my principal activity. But it has been one of my activities and whatever the other advantages of practising at the Bar, it has made me a better-informed, if not necessarily a wiser, parliamentarian. So I am sure that the House will make due allowance for whatever I say, and rightly so.

When an activity assumes the name and rank of a profession, practitioners are under numerous constraints to observe faithfully the standards of that profession. The original professional training, the opinion of the practitioner's peers, the social and cultural influences and, after a time, sheer habit are important protections for the consumers of those services. But what those standards are and the way in which they are expressed must be examined from time to time by people who are outside those influences.

I welcome the intervention of the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale because any profession may be tempted to adopt practices and to persuade itself that they are in the public interest when they really stem from the advantages that they confer on practitioners. That is one reason why I welcome the provisions in the Bill for the ombudsman.

There should be no complaints from the Bar when we are occasionally subjected to an inquiry by a royal commission, even if it transpires that ultimately its recommendations are ignored, as in the case of the Benson commission. The Lord Chancellor's Green Papers have impelled the Bar to look again at some of its own practices and itself to initiate some important changes.

I hope that other lay Members will participate in the debate and I shall try not to inhibit them by continuing for too long—[HON MEMBERS: "Famous last words."] Popularity is a wonderful thing.

I hope that I shall be forgiven if I take a moment of the time of the House on Second Reading to raise two questions of general principle. The first is the form of the Bill. It is largely an enabling Bill, which means that it does not say what will happen if it is passed into law, but it confers powers on various people to decide what will happen and when. We are asked to delegate powers to the Lord Chancellor to alter the allocation of business between courts and decide what is an authorised body, to the rules committee to decide on procedure and to the advisory committee to advise on the whole field of legal services and the work of the courts.

Some anxieties were rightly expressed in another place by Lords Rippon and Simon that Parliament is not being asked to examine the position to discover whether this is an appropriate time to open the floodgates for a vast increase in the work of the county court and assess whether the county court is in an appropriate condition to absorb and process it. We are being asked to empower the Lord Chancellor to decide when, and under what conditions, that will happen.

I need hardly say that I cast no reflections on and intend no disrespect to the present distinguished occupant of that high office. Indeed, it would be churlish not to place on record that his accessibility during the discussions on the Bill, and his generosity with his time, should serve as a model for all Ministers. However, there are judgments and assessments to be made as to whether that transfer is an appropriate step to take and, if so, whether this is an appropriate time to take it. Those are the responsibilities of Parliament. We cannot decide everything. Some of our problems relating to the length of our sittings, and the difficulties of including every hon. Member in our business, relate to our reluctance to delegate decisions which other legislatures find it sensible to delegate. You, Mr. Speaker, know that better than any of us.

But some of these decisions require a balance to be struck between different considerations and interests. They are political decisions, although probably not party-political ones in this case. They are decisions about how best to conduct the affairs of the body politic and they should be decided by the political process, after political debate by those who have to answer to their constituents at weekends and, probably, explain them in the British Legion club at 10.30 pm on a Saturday—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) does not have a British Legion club in his constituency. My hon. Friend indicates that he does, so I am receiving a sympathetic response.

It is not a complete answer to every question raised in the Bill to say that the Bill leaves the decision to the Lord Chancellor or distinguished senior judges or the advisory committee; we must assume that they will apply the right criteria and reach sensible conclusions.

If the Bill makes it possible for someone with no legal qualifications to acquire a right of audience in the High Court—I am not talking about barristers and solicitors, but people with no legal qualifications—and, having acquired that right of audience, to move from there to be appointed to the highest ranks of the judiciary, it is not enough to say that those who will advise on such matters will use their common sense and will not recommend unsuitable appointments. If we do not think it appropriate for those without legal qualifications to be appointed Lords of Appeal in Ordinary, we should not give anyone, however distinguished, the power to make such an appointment.

I venture to warn the Attorney-General, if he will forgive me, that if there is the power to appoint a surveyor as a High Court judge, in five years' time an hon. Member will ask the Attorney-General of the day how many surveyors have been appointed High Court judges. Someone will say, "If Parliament conferred the power, why has it not been exercised?".

It should not afford us great comfort to reflect that the delegates who take those decisions may be open to challenge. That merely introduces a further degree of uncertainty. If the rules relating to rights of audience are to be delegated to the Law Society and the general council of the Bar, it does not greatly cheer me to reflect that the Director General of Fair Trading may disagree with them and challenge what they decide. The considerations which may be uppermost in his mind, and which he is required by statute to have in mind, are not necessarily the considerations that we believe should prevail. That raises the second issue of principle which I want to introduce into the debate.

[Mr. Peter Archer]

The avowed purpose of the Bill is to extend to consumers of legal services a wider choice. I do not quarrel with that as an aspiration. Indeed, we shall wish to explore in Committee how far the proposals are likely to achieve that purpose. We shall wish to explore how far siphoning off some of the ablest law students into large law firms will extend the choice of advocates for lay clients—particularly if those firms are multi-disciplinary ones—and how far pressures on the high street solicitor, about which we have heard from the right hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale, will maximise the choice available to house buyers.

However, even as an ambition, this is subject to two qualifications—I say that in all friendship to my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell). First, not all measures for the protection of consumers consist in maximising their freedom of choice. The purpose of food hygiene regulations is to restrict consumers' freedom of choice to those foods guaranteed not to poison them. It is important that the range of consumer choice should be restricted to those capable of doing a proper job. It is tempting for someone in the process of buying a house to leap at the prospect of a single-stop package to include finding the house, arranging the mortgage, providing the insurance and carrying out the conveyancing, particularly if it seems that some of those services will be offered at cut rates. Sometimes, consumers are better protected by eliminating some of the options.

Secondly, in the sphere of litigation it is not invariably true that the interests of the consumer coincide with the public interest. The interests of an unmeritorious plaintiff or a guilty defendant consist of winning the case at all costs. The interests of justice require that the consumer's choice does not extend to those prepared to bend the rules in order to win.

I recognise that the Attorney-General is subject to some constraints as a member of a Government who believe that the solution to almost every problem lies in a free market. But I am sure that even he, with his usual fairness, will agree that this sector of the free market has its limitations.

May I add an observation on a further theme which has sometimes intruded in debates in another place? When it has been suggested that a particular formal safeguard would be sensible, it has been asked, "Are you suggesting that a person is necessarily dishonest just because he is not subject to the disciplinary code of the Law Society or the general council of the Bar? Do you believe that because someone may owe a loyalty to those who employ him, he is incapable of giving objective advice? Are you saying that because someone does not have a professional qualification, it follows that he is a jabbering idiot?" It is easy to ask that sort of question, and it can be asked in the right context to great effect. Of course, the answer in every case is no, but because people may be honest in the absence of regulation and capable in the absence of qualifications, it does not follow that all formal regulations are a waste of time. Even in the absence of a cab rank principle, an eccentric, an exponent of an unpopular cause or someone accused of a vile criminal offence may find a capable advocate to argue his cause. But, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) said, it is much easier for an individual advocate to do the right thing if there is such a rule, partly because it creates an atmosphere, a general expectation that he will behave properly, and partly because it is much more difficult for anyone to misunderstand his motives.

I am not an unqualified admirer of Thomas Hobbes; it does not follow that in the absence of institutional safeguards everyone will behave like a brute, but such safeguards add a bit of stiffening to the social constraints that we sometimes all need if original sin is not to take over.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that discussion so far has centred on the rights of professional bodies, but that it should centre on the rights of the individual, the protection of the public and ensuring that they are given the best possible services?

Mr. Archer: I cannot always reply to my hon. Friend with an unqualified affirmative, but on this occasion I have no qualifications to add to what he said.

It is a pity that, with the machinery of law reform now at our disposal, the Government did not initiate a wider discussion and, in particular, did not provide more time for bodies, which themselves needed to carry out wide consultation, to respond to some of the proposals. It might have helped if the Government had begun by seeking a consensus on what is wrong with the legal system. What are the complaints of those who use legal services? I believe that any such consensus would have identified two major areas of complaint. The first would have been that referred to by my right hon. and learned Friend—about hearing dates in the county courts, unanswered letters, under-provision for continuous hearings, unrealistic lists and sharing clerks in the Crown court. Anyone told that the answer to those problems was to transfer more work to the county court could then at least have judged the proposal in the light.

The other area in which there would almost certainly have been consensus was also referred to by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon—the provision of legal aid. The last speech that I was privileged to make from the Dispatch Box in 1979 was to introduce the Legal Aid Bill of my late right hon. and learned Friend Lord Elwyn Jones. I am sure we all agree that his absence from our debates on this Bill is much to be regretted.

The Legal Aid Act 1979 brought between 70 per cent. and 80 per cent. of the population within the ambit of legal aid. After all the statistical sophistries to which we have been subjected over the past two years, as my right hon. and learned Friend said, it is now generally accepted that that figure has fallen to about 50 per cent. We know that in whole areas of litigation legally aided representation is not available, and that levels of remuneration and delays in payment are persuading increasing numbers of firms of solicitors to refuse to offer—because they feel unable to—a service to those who depend on legal aid.

A further problem is becoming increasingly apparent. There were references in another place to those who have the resources to finance a moderate action, including perhaps a day in the High Court, but who would be bankrupted if they had to pay for a long hearing or a series of appeals. If justice is to be available to all, including the middle-income groups, we need to replace the present cut-off point with a sliding scale, so that everyone may have access to legal aid if confronted by actions that are beyond his means.

The Society of Labour Lawyers has persuaded the Labour party that there is a need to take a much wider look at the network of advisory services, to ensure that proper arrangements are made for referrals within the system, and to seek out those geographical areas where some essential services are missing. We need an advisory services commission to oversee the present shambles which is spread out across seven Government Departments. Such proposals are referred to in the response of the Society of Labour Lawyers to the Green Paper—a response that I commend to the Attorney-General.

Both in the courts service and in the provision of legal services there is a need for a more substantial commitment of public resources. In the absence of that, the proposals in the Bill are pointless. Given that, some of them deal with problems that will have ceased to exist. There is, for instance, no need to embark on contingency fees if we have the resources to provide legal aid and representation. It is easy to ask for more money; it is just as easy to reply that one does not solve a problem by throwing money at it. We have heard that antiphon many times, but it is certain that the problems of our courts and legal services are those of inadequate resources.

If we want a legal system that will continue to receive compliments from America and commendations from foreign lawyers, we shall have to pay for it at the going price. We are conning the public if we pretend that our debates on this Bill are a substitute for that.

6.15 pm

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Anyone happening to drop by the Chamber and being privileged to hear my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General opening the case for the Bill would have been forgiven for thinking that nothing very important was happening here this afternoon, except for some very good and sensible improvements to the legal system. Such is the consummate skill of my right hon. and learned Friend as an advocate that he has persuaded himself that the Bill is universally good and universally welcomed and that anyone attempting to criticise it subjects himself to an inheritance of damnation.

I wish that that were so, but the casual listener would have been shocked to discover the immense opposition and heat that the legislation has engendered. He would, for example, be shocked to realise that the major element of the Bill was considered by the Benson royal commission in 1979. In 1983, this very Government said that it was not necessary to give solicitors the right of audience in the higher courts; in 1985, they repeated that assertion; and in 1987 they repeated it again. Yet overnight, with no change in the circumstances of our legal system, this Bill has introduced precisely such a change.

The casual observer would also be shocked to know of the packed meetings of barristers and solicitors up and down the country, of the hours of vituperative though often brilliant speeches and debates in the other place, and of the hours of negotiation, discussion and amendment behind the scenes.

Why has this happened? It is because it is widely feared that the Bill, even in amended form, will be the beginning of the end of the independent Bar and of the separate branches of the legal profession, which have been among the greatest protectors of the liberties of the individual in our free society, which continues to be admired the world over—and envied in many countries.

I declare an interest as a practising barrister—when my political duties allow—but I want to make one point clear: contrary to what is apparently thought about the opposition to the Bill from the Bar, members of the Bar have little self-interest in opposing the Bill. Certainly, the strong objections of the Law Lords have nothing to do with self-interest. The Law Lords have no career structure to maintain which might be threatened by the Bill and no financial advantage from opposing it—their interest is purely the good of society. Most barristers would be financially much better off if the Bill were passed. I have no doubt that I would be better off both as a Member of Parliament and, in the unlikely event of my leaving this place at the next election, if I were to become a full-time solicitor advocate. So let us hear no more ill-informed nonsense of the kind that has led some Members to say that lawyers were bound to oppose the Bill anyway. If self-interest only were at stake, the Bar would support the Bill.

The Government's intention in the Bill is wholly excellent. It is to improve access to justice for all who need it by making the court system simpler, more efficient and quicker and by providing sufficient legal services to meet clients' needs. That is terrific—everyone can sit back and admire the intention. The trouble with the Bill is not simply that it cannot and will not attain that intention, but that many of its provisions will achieve the very opposite.

Almost the entire legal profession, which at least enjoys the advantage of knowing how the legal system in England and Wales works, fails to understand how this of all Governments can believe that if solicitors in villages and small towns—71 per cent. of solicitors operate in firms of four or fewer partners—have their conveyancing bread and butter taken from them and are thus driven to practise in larger towns and cities, that will somehow make their services more available to ordinary people. Ordinary people will have to get into trains, taxis and cars, travel to the big towns and cities and go to the new big firms of solicitors which will charge people immense sums for the minor items of advice which formerly they could have received in the local solicitor's small practice. This is because the operating overheads of large city firms will be substantial. It is manifest nonsense to assume that such a step will provide ordinary people with greater access to legal services.

It is impossible for many of us to understand how it can be an advantage to make the Bar wither away and encourage every young lawyer to become a solicitor. Youngsters leaving university will be given the choice. If they want to become a barrister, they will have to spend some time earning little or nothing and at the end of the day they will compete in the market for jobs all over the country, which they may or may not want to do. The work will come in dribs and drabs and most of it, particularly in the criminal sector, will be legally aided and therefore without substantial remuneration. Work has been done on the average income of members of the Bar and it is much lower than is generally believed. On the other hand, the youngsters may become solicitor advocates with the right of audience in the higher courts and the right to become a Queen's Counsel and a High Court judge, just like barristers. They will have a roof over their heads, constant work, a car, a pension and holidays with pay. Few

[Mr. Ivan Lawrence]

university graduates will choose the uncertain career of the Bar in preference to the far more secure and certain career of solicitor. After a time, fewer people will go to the Bar, nearly all graduates will become solicitors and the Bar will wither away.

Solicitors cost much more than barristers. That is why in the courts in which solicitors may now operate they often prefer to use barristers, because they are cheaper. The Crown prosecution service in London has to pay twice as much for a solicitor as for a barrister to do a day's work. It is difficult to see how anybody can believe that the provisions in the Bill and the withering away of the Bar will make legal services cheaper. That is yet another manifest nonsense.

Nor do the majority of the legal profession see how the introduction of the win-at-all-costs philosophy, which means that one may not be paid much or at all if one loses a case, as half the litigants in our courts usually do, will as though by magic improve the quality of justice in our courts. We do not have that incentive to win now, so there is a greater belief in the integrity of our lawyers, and justifiably so, than if we had the American system where winning is important if one is to be paid. That is not just nonsense, but dangerous nonsense.

The three objections to the fundamental concepts of the Bill are therefore that it will make justice more and not less expensive, that it will make legal services less and not more available to consumers lower down the income scale, and that it will diminish the quality of justice itself. It will do those things not because they are in the consumer's interest, nor because there has been an enormous increase in public demand for those changes, but because some bureaucrats, politicians and perhaps some lawyers from another planet simply do not understand the legal system in England and Wales because they have neither knowledge nor experience of it.

Obviously, some things are wrong with the legal system, and the Government's Green Papers have put a good deal of momentum behind some of the changes. The Bar has produced an excellent response to the Green Papers. Considerable changes have been made and my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General has acknowledged and commended them. That has been a positive result of all of this.

Let us face up to the true facts and not pretend in order to justify some diversionary, tactical changes, about what consumers find wrong with the legal system. It is not that they do not get enough legal aid or legal aid for enough legal actions and that they therefore do not have enough access to the courts. The Government would have to spend much more money to satisfy that demand. Will they do so? They will not. I do not pretend that I am in favour of the Government spending massively more money, but ordinary people complain about the need for more money for more legal services, not about the matters provided for in the Bill. Next they complain that they have to wait too long for their cases to come to court. We need more computerisation, more judges, more courts and more court staff if we are to satisfy that demand, which will cost much more money. Again, some may want the same lawyer always to be available for their case, but that costs much more money because the lawyer has to be paid to be out of court for the days or weeks until the case appears in the list. It is therefore difficult to believe that the genuine anxieties of the British people about the deficiencies of our legal system come down to anything other than money, genuine efficiency and the improvement of the court system. It is difficult to think of any major improvement in our legal system that the British people feel is necessary which the Bill will achieve, and we should be wrong to pretend otherwise.

The Bill is to some extent different from the original one and the Green Papers. We must recognise that and thank the Lord Chancellor for listening because that is precisely what he did. For that reason, certain crazy ideas—such as the certified advocate becoming more qualified the more flying hours he had clocked up—have gone out of the window. We must thank their Lordships for at least one important and necessary improvement which has been much welcomed in the House today—the insertion of the cab rank principle into the Bill for solicitor advocates—and we must thank the Government for their wise acceptance of that amendment. One of the main contributions of the Bar to the efficiency and availability of legal services is the cab rank principle. Just as the customer can pick any taxi cab from the cab rank, so any defendant or plaintiff, however mean and rotten his cause, can book the services of any barrister who may be available. Marshall Hall himself was available to defendants all over the country, and the same principle holds true today even if all that a defendant can offer is a measly legal aid fee.

As with the taxi driver, the experienced barrister knows the quickest, most efficient and, therefore, the cheapest way to his client's destination and, as with the taxi cab rank, the client usually does not have to wait so long for his case to arrive in court as he would if there were no taxi rank. That is why it is so important that that principle be maintained for all to whom it now applies, particularly the advocate in the higher courts, and I am pleased that there will be no question of removing the principle from the Bill before it becomes law.

Of course, that will be a burden for solicitor advocates who might prefer, for example, to go on taking work from insurance companies at fees which are much higher than legal aid fees, but, as the Opposition spokesman in the other place, Lord Mischcon, himself a most distinguished solicitor, and others on the Opposition Benches today have said, those who acquire the privileges of advocacy rights should be required to undertake the burdens and obligations which go with them and, I would add, particularly when the consumer will benefit.

Some years ago my noble Friend the Lord Chancellor described the cab rank rule as an important constitutional right. Nothing has changed. It still is, and he has recognised it as such.

Even with that addition to the Bill retained, however, there is still too much wrong with the Bill. I give some examples. First, if a high street financial institution—the bank or the building society—needs to lend money for the purchase of houses to stay in business, what kind of objective legal advice about buying a house will the customer really be given by the in-house solicitor? Complicated and expensive bureaucratic safeguards can be built in until the cows come home, but we cannot avoid the conclusion that such legal advice will not be independent and may not be disinterested.

Secondly, by all means let us transfer work from the High Court to the county court, but first let us ensure that the county courts have enough slack and surplus capacity to deal with that work. What do we have today? The figures have been given by one hon. Member after another. We have overworked county courts, staff changes and shortages on an unbelievable scale, awful cramped buildings and inadequate back-up facilities. Since many county court and circuit judges do High Court work anyway, by all means let us bring litigants to local courts and not to London, but funds will first have to be made available to stop them being overworked and understaffed. What undertaking can my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General give that such finance will be forthcoming? Without it, what on earth is the point of the change?

Thirdly, multi-disciplinary partnerships create another problem. This is an incomprehensible element of the Bill. What independent advice will a solicitor be able to give to a client who needs to sue a firm of accountants which has let him down badly if his solicitor is a partner in the accountancy firm? It is nonsense.

Fourthly, under the Bill, incredible as it may sound —we are talking about the Bill being welcomed by ordinary people—a person with no legal qualifications at all will have the right to practise in any court and, once he has that right, to become a judge in any court, and even to become a Lord of Appeal. Under the Bill, a person with no legal qualifications can become a Lord of Appeal and lay down the laws of the land. That is manifest nonsense.

Fifthly, the legislation's main intention was to break the monopoly of the Bar to conduct cases in the higher courts and to allow solicitors to be appointed as High Court judges. Although few institutions are as competitive as the Bar, it was thought that more competition was required. But solicitors can already become High Court judges—all that they have to do is to become barristers, so no great legislation or expensive bureaucracy is necessary if that end is desired. It is now easy for a solicitor to become a barrister. If solicitors want the right of audience in the higher court, they can become barristers. That is much easier than it was in the past.

If further changes are considered so necessary, it could all be done cheaply and efficiently, without expensive bureaucracy and costly administration, if senior judges were allowed to consider the qualification of advocates and to grant rights of audience subject to the cab rank principle. Why is it necessary to have this complicated, bureaucratic and expensive machinery, with clauses 17 to 31 and schedules 1 to 4 laying down the process by which all that has to be done?

If we have that kind of money to spare, why on earth are we not spending it on improving the courts or extending legal aid? I could go on, as the House well knows it is within my power to do, to dwell on the many unsatisfactory aspects of the Bill, but others wish to speak.

I appreciate that the opportunity of the Bill has been taken to make a number of improvements in the courts and legal services and I accept those without taking time to enumerate them. Sadly, however, the Bill may well be the beginning of the end of the Bar as we know it, and a fused profession, which nobody on either side wants—solicitors, barristers or the public—will be the inevitable conclusion of these unnecessary labours.

I realise that such is the unpopularity of the lawyer—ranking only marginally higher than that of the journalist and politician—that there is little likelihood that this unhappy, unfortunate, unnecessary and expensive Bill will not get its Second Reading, so our only hope will be to improve it. If, during the Bill's passage through the House, I am fortunate enough to be invited to participate in the Standing Committee proceedings, I hope that I shall be able to play some small part in making those improvements.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is not the responsibility of hon. Members who are now in the Chamber that we had a rather late start to the debate, but at this rate all those hon. Members who wish to speak will not be called. I ask hon. Members to ensure that their speeches are not over-long so that as many as possible may be called.

6.36 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): First, I declare an interest as joint secretary of the all-party barristers' group of both Houses and, more particularly, as a practising barrister for nearly 20 years. I mention that not only to declare my interest but also to try to lay a myth, which exists particularly at the Department of Trade and Industry and in certain quarters of the House, about the Bar.

It is nearly 19 years ago that I entered, as a tenant, the set of provincial chambers where I practised for some years. I had no prior connection with the legal profession and I was lucky to be accepted there. When I entered those chambers, the overheads were kept at a low level. I was given one eighth—there were eight of us in the chambers —of a piece of paper on which my head of chambers had written that my chamber expenses for that year would be £127. Thus I started my career at the Bar.

As a member of the Bar in those chambers, I was not subjected to any sort of hierarchy. I was fortunate to be outside any hierarchical structure, because it meant that, if solicitors chose to send me cases which appeared to be beyond my years, I was permitted to do them.

Thus, in Department of Trade and Industry terms, the Bar is the ideal profession. It is entirely market-oriented. Every barrister works for him or herself. They are eventually paid, often by recalcitrant solicitors and sometimes many years in arrears. I was recently paid £4·50 for drafting a divorce petition some 12 years earlier. Our overheads have kept at a low level throughout the years.

It helps if one's father, or even one's grandfather, was the Lord Chancellor; it helps even more if one's father is the senior partner in a busy firm of solicitors with lots of litigation. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the Bar is an extremely egalitarian profession—as a procession of Lord Chancellors over the years serves to prove, if one examines their backgrounds. I am proud to be a member of such a profession.

I accept the need, as do all sensible barristers, to cut away unnecessary undergrowth from the profession. It is in the interests of lawyers to modernise their profession —and if they do not do so themselves, they can only expect others to do it for them. The question which must be asked is whether the Government have approached this matter in the right way; the answer, as one would expect, is partly yes and partly no.

The Bill's legitimacy depends on two criteria. First, and above all, it must seek to improve the position of the consumer. Secondly, it must not weaken the independence of the judge or lawyer, for to do so would weaken the position of the client, to allow challenges to be made

[Mr. Alex Carlile]

against decisions of the Executive; where necessary, of the police; of local government; and of the increasing number of bodies in which are vested significant resources of power over the citizen.

In the context of those criteria, I should like to raise a great many points. However, accepting the constraints of time, I propose to address only four issues of major concern. If I am fortunate—or unfortunate—enough to serve on the Committee considering the Bill, I foresee a great many more issues which will require detailed debate.

The first issue is the ready access by the citizen to the courts and tribunals of the land when the occasion arises. That means having ready access not only to the courts themselves but also to competent advice from which he can gain confidence in deciding whether or not to go to court. The Bill merely touches the edges of that problem. I acknowledge that the Government have invested more money in the legal aid system, and I welcome the current review to which the Attorney-General referred when opening this debate. However, it is fair to point out—as did the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris)—that an increasing proportion of the population falls outside the limits of legal aid, which are too low and too selective.

Every monthly increase in inflation means that a smaller percentage of the public is eligible for legal aid. Far too many people have experienced wrongs that should have been righted, but they cannot afford to go to law, despite the fact, which should be put on the record, that the cost of litigation in England and Wales—I cannot speak for Scotland—compares reasonably favourably with anywhere else in the European Community, and makes us seem like a bargain basement by comparison with even some of the remoter jurisdictions of the United States of America.

The Bill and the Government's motives would be more convincing if they were accompanied by an immediate widening of certain aspects of the legal aid net. There are obvious gaps in legal aid that do not require a review before introducing remedies. I listened with care to what the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon said about tribunals. I believe that he agrees—though his remarks were a little impenetrable—that legal aid should be extended immediately to industrial tribunals. The last Labour Government took the deliberate and shameful decision to exclude it. That decision was not taken on the merits of the case but in response to the disgraceful bleatings of a few trade union leaders, who thought that their membership figures might drop if legal aid were available for industrial tribunals. That omission should be put right, and I do not have confidence in waiting for a Labour Government to do so because I am not convinced that they would. After all, Labour had plenty of opportunity to introduce such a provision before.

Consumer access to justice depends also on judges and courts being available to hear cases that cannot be settled out of court. I welcome the commitment to take many cases out of the High Court, whose sittings—despite significant improvements in recent years—are delayed and whose places of jurisdiction are often many miles from the scene of a legal dispute. I welcome the decision to bring many disputes down to the county court. The civil justice review has much to commend it—at least in concept.

The county court is intended as a local and, above all, as a summary court. As such, it should provide reliable, speedy justice. It has often been said that justice delayed is justice denied. The aim of the county court is to provide justice while events are still fresh in the memories of witnesses. Unfortunately, delays in some county courts have reached absurd proportions.

Loyal county court staff around the country have expressed to me their extreme frustration at the ridiculous amount of work that they are required to undertake, in a way that sometimes subjects them to abuse from the public —who do not understand the difficulties under which court staff have to work. The Government have made a commitment to provide extra resources to ease the transition through the civil justice review, but their commitment is far less than that needed to make the review work.

Over the past 11 years, county courts and Crown court offices have faced successive staff inspections pursuant to Government economic policies and designed to cut staffing —which is what happened. An entirely opposite approach will be needed to ensure that the review works. I hope that the Government will give an assurance that whatever resources are required to make it a success will be available —even if they amount to a great deal more than is currently anticipated. We do not want to see the Crown prosecution service fiasco happen all over again with the civil justice review. We do not want the Attorney-General coming to the House, as he did recently, to admit that initial resourcing—as in the case of the CPS—was insufficient.

Another important aspect concerns the cab rank rule, or what the Attorney-General called the non-discrimination rule. I welcome the Government's acceptance that that principle should be enshrined in the Bill. It will benefit the consumer, but it offers no advantage to the lawyer, as was emphasised by the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence). It is much better to pick the best-paid case, but the cab rank rule means that the lawyer will have to undertake the case that comes in first.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Tell us another one.

Mr. Carlile: I say to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell)—whom we would have allowed to enter our chambers despite his lack of qualifications, and who would have benefited from some training in interview techniques in the early part of his career—that there is very little evidence of abuse of the cab rank rule, other than anecdote. The Bar regards breaches of that rule as a serious disciplinary offence, and if the hon. Gentleman has evidence that people have broken it, he should report them.

Mr. Mitchell: There is an enormous weight of anecdotal evidence, but to impose it on solicitor advocates is a restriction of trade and an attempt to maintain the monopoly of the Bar.

Mr. Carlile: Since the hon. Gentleman became a television star, he has abandoned his attachment to the consumer.

I made an important point during my intervention in the Attorney-General's speech, and I shall make it again: the Government must accept that the rule against discrimination should apply to legally aided clients.

Advocates must be required to represent clients within their areas of competence, whether they are privately paying or legally aided; otherwise, the rule will not apply on a level playing field and the consumer will not benefit from it.

Thirdly, the independence of judges, lawyers and regulators of the profession is single and indivisible. There are serious objections to the Bill in its present form, which threatens that independence. Inevitably, the Bill politicises the appointment of the designated judges. It ducks out of a radical and much more clearly understandable approach to the appointment of judges, such as the establishment of a judicial appointments commission. Worst of all, it creates a politically appointed advisory committee—another politically appointed committee, subject to all the problems of patronage. Thus it brings into the political arena the rules of conduct applied to practitioners—something that should be abhorrent to those committed to independence among lawyers.

It is extremely surprising to see a Conservative Government seeking a power with such a dangerous potential for misuse in perhaps less happy future times. There is no significant evidence that either the Law Society or the Bar has failed to modernise its professional codes; indeed, the Bar's revised code of conduct is a model of progressive thinking and adjustment to the modern age.

Another aspect of independence needs to be highlighted and protected—the independence of the advocate from undue influence or involvement. Of course the advocate should be involved, even devoted—in the professional sense—to the client's case. However, the scope for mistakes—and much worse than mistakes—is narrowed significantly if the advocate is not the person who interviews witnesses prior to conducting a trial, especially a serious trial in the criminal courts.

It is equally valuable for those who prosecute serious cases to have considerable experience of defence work to secure the objectivity that is necessary if justice is to be done. One of the most difficult decisions that a prosecutor makes is to abandon the prosecution—to offer no evidence. It is the experience of defending cases—perhaps as many as he prosecutes—that enables an advocate to make that decision more correctly and skilfully.

Finally, let me deal with local legal services. In my large rural Welsh constituency, there are firms of solicitors operating in Guilsfield—my predecessor as Member for Montgomery practises there—in Welshpool, Newtown, Llanidloes, Llanfyllin and Machynlleth. I doubt whether real intellectual justification can be found for the privileged position of solicitors if conveyancing is seen as an isolated activity or skill.

However, there seem to be two sound if pragmatic reasons for retaining much of the present position. First, there is the great pressure that financial institutions and some estate agents are likely to impose on financially innocent home buyers. An independent voice is essential in what is the largest transaction in most people's lives. Secondly, local legal services in the form of solicitors—for example, in the places that I have mentioned—are heavily dependent upon, and in reality subsidised by, conveyancing.

Those firms in such areas as Llanfyllin and Machynlleth will not be compensated by rights of audience; that is the last thing that they want. They like to obtain expert advice from counsel in chambers elsewhere, and would be embarrassed by their clients asking them to appear for them in the Crown court or the High Court.

If conveyancing goes, large numbers of small firms of solicitors are likely to go to the wall. At best, they are likely to be subsumed in much larger firms, with a smaller fund of local knowledge and a consequent reduction in choice. As any practising solicitor in the House knows, local knowledge is crucial in negotiating the settlement of local disputes. People will become more litigious if a solicitor comes in from a city elsewhere and merely advises them on the legal issue under consideration, without having regard to local conditions. The Government have not addressed that problem adequately.

The Committee stage promises to be a lively affair. We hope for considerable improvement in the Bill, which has the right to go to Committee: and I shall vote for that if necessary, and advise my right hon. and hon. Friends to do the same. With my mind closely on the two criteria that I cited at the beginning of my remarks, I shall see how the Bill looks in relation to those criteria after its Committee stage. They will be our litmus test; I hope that the Bill will pass that test.

6.57 pm

Sir Hugh Rossi (Hornsey and Wood Green): I must declare some interests. First, I am chairman of the Lords and Commons solicitors group. Secondly, I have held a solicitor's practising certificate for 40 years—although for the past 15 of those years the demands of the House have obliged me to retire from active practice, perhaps enabling me to take a detached view of these matters. Thirdly, I am the chairman of the London board of a building society, a position that some might consider could give rise to a conflict of interest with some provisions of the Bill, but which helps me to consider the matter objectively.

The House will not be surprised if I do not follow many of the right hon. and hon. Members who have already spoken, as all but one have represented the Bar. There is a contrary view for the House to consider. The Bill is clearly in the mainstream of the Government's desire to tackle restrictive practices—a policy that has brought immense benefits to our economy and to the consumer. The professions—especially the legal profession—cannot stand aloof from that, nor has the legal profession done so. Scarcely a firm of solicitors has not either merged with others or considered merging; they are evaluating themselves and planning their futures in the way that efficient enterprises do. With the restrictions on advertising and marketing gone, firms can now direct themselves towards the markets in which they plan to expand.

In central London, the legal community serves the private client—more particularly, the corporate or commercial client—better than ever before, not only by our standards but by international standards. London is now recognised as the legal centre for Europe. Where else can a team of specialists in banking, shipping, aviation, insurance, financial futures or mergers and acquisitions be put together within hours, ready for a major international transaction? That could happen in New York, but nowhere else in Europe. Our legal firms in London and our other major cities are now the envy of nearly every other country in Europe. Our firms are poised to take full advantage of the European internal market, with the Law Society's 1992 awareness campaign leading the way.

[Sir Hugh Rossi]

Of course, those firms are not representative of the whole profession. There are 55,000 practising solicitors in offices throughout the country. There is scarcely a high street in any town that does not have a sole practitioner or a two or three-partner firm, affording a network of accessibility to the legal processes and to justice. Speaker after speaker has recognised that that should not be undermined or destroyed. If the Bill unfortunately does that, it will be a sad day for this country and its people.

While solicitors can be proud of their response to the spur of competition given by the Government, they are also proud of the solid foundation on which they rest, especially the consumer protection afforded by the regulatory system that we have inherited, in Solicitors Act after Solicitors Act, laying down the responsibilities that the profession has willingly adopted and accepted in self-regulation through the Law Society.

A client dealing with a solicitors' firm can do so with confidence, knowing that that firm is insured up to £1 million for every claim that may be made against it. Clients' money is underwritten by unlimited compensation. Nowhere else in the country does anyone offer that sort of protection to the consumer. We need only to contrast it with the financial services industry, where there is no overall insurance system. Indeed, FIMBRA came near to collapse over the proposal to institute one. If a client's money is missing, he has to await bankruptcy proceedings before he can get a penny, and then the most that he can expect is £48,000, regardless of the size of his loss.

The profession values, and attaches the greatest importance to, its independence and its ability to give impartial advice without fear or favour. The advice given by a lawyer who one suspects does not understand one's interest or is not fully committed to one's representation is virtually valueless. However, independence of mind, independence to give impartial advice, cannot be bought at the snap of a finger. Professional independence is underpinned by a tradition and a code of ethics that are regularly upheld. By the same token, that independence can be easily undermined. In the solicitors' profession, it is maintained by ensuring that only solicitors bound by the same code of ethics own the firms that employ solicitors who offer services to the general public. In the protection of the public, proper regulation and the profession's independence are linked.

As has already been implied by a number of right hon. and hon. Members, at the end of the day the independence of the legal profession is the bulwark against too great an encroachment by the state upon the lives of individuals. That is why I questioned the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) when he suggested control over the judiciary by this House. God forbid that politicians ever influence or affect the judicial independence of our courts. I hope that that is not the way that the Labour party wants to lead us.

I must refer to the Bar and the need for it to maintain its traditional independence. Solicitors have good and warm personal relations with members of the Bar. However, if the divided profession works in practice, it cannot be said to be based on a secure, modern foundation. While the solicitors' profession has adapted and modernised itself, the Bar collectively often gives the appearance, if not necessarily the substance, of being rooted in the past. Its monopoly of business in the higher courts and its resultant hold on all senior judicial appointments could, for the most part, be retained by common consent if the Bar did not persist in demanding a legal monopoly.

I do not believe, and nor does any solicitor whom I know, that the giving of audience to a specially trained and qualified solicitor in the High Court would destroy or cripple the Bar. That has certainly not been the case in Australia or New Zealand. I do not believe that the right of audience in the lower courts has adversely affected the Bar to any extent. I am sure that only a minority of the 55,000 solicitors will wish to have the right of audience to the High Court and then it will be mainly for clients with whom they have developed a special relationship. The vast majority of solicitors—the general practitioners of the profession—would still need the specialisation offered by the Bar. The partners of the large City practices involved in mergers with international companies could not afford the time to be tied down in court, away from their desks and telephones.

It is in that context that we welcome the Lord Chancellor's brave attempt in the Green Paper to set out a framework for reform. He had to withstand a withering, sustained and almost personal campaign from those opposed to reform. That campaign is far from over, as is clear to anyone who has followed the proceedings of the Bill in another place.

What was his proposal on the reform of the profession? It was that solicitors and barristers should undergo further training after initial qualification and before exercising the rights of audience to the higher courts. To the credit of the Law Society, it accepted that a level playing field was not appropriate and that it was not necessary to require barristers to undergo further training. Nevertheless, it accepted the need for solicitors to have that training. That was a major concession, which has enabled the Government to introduce reforms in a much more simplified form than originally envisaged. The Law Society should be given full credit for that.

The latest—and, I hope, the final—manifestation of the campaign by those opposed to reform was the amendment, carried in another place—proposed and supported by the Bar and the judges, against the advice of the Lord Chancellor—to impose what has already been referred to by member of the Bar after member of the Bar in this House as the cab rank rule on solicitors wishing to exercise the rights of audience in the higher courts. We shall study carefully what my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General said in opening the debate. We shall have to consider carefully the amendment that he proposes to put down. If I understood him correctly, he said that the Law Society was reconciled to the cab rank rule. If that is the case, then he is mistaken. That is not so.

The Law Society understands and would wish to participate in a system whereby there is no discrimination against an individual wishing to have access to justice, but that is entirely different from the cab rank rule as practised by the Bar. Whatever the merits that rule may have for the Bar, it is entirely another matter for the solicitors' profession. Barristers take work on referral only. That is part of their terms of business. They accept cases in their field of practice, and that helps to spread the work around for the benefit of the Bar in general and for newly called members in particular. The rule also provides useful protection for advocates who can rightly claim that it is not necessary for them personally to be associated with the cause that they advocate in the courts.

However, I do not say that that means that every barrister has to take on every case that is put in front of him. There is a rule of the Bar which states, if I remember the wording roughly, that no member is obliged to take on any work for a fee which is inadequate in his view having regard to the complexity of the matter and to his knowledge, experience and standing. If that is not a coach and horses through the so-called cab rank rule, I should like to know what is.

I shall give the House some anecdotal evidence. In my younger days I experienced great difficulty in negotiating fees with counsel's clerks, or securing the man I wanted for my client, because of that rule or something similar. No cab rank rule was applied in those cases. I cannot bring those papers before the House now, as they are more than 20 years old, but they are engraven on my memory as a young solicitor trying to represent clients through the courts. *[Interruption.]* Paragraph 502 of the barrister's code of conduct stipulates what I have just recited. Therefore, let us not have so much of this holier-than-thou attitude that member of the Bar after member of the Bar has entertained the House with.

By large, solicitors do not operate on referral and the cab rank rule would be an unacceptable imposition. Some solicitors have built up practices by specialising in particular fields of work. In doing so, they have had to decline to represent certain classes of defendant. For example, some provide a service by specialising in housing work on behalf of tenants, and others have built up a relationship of trust with rape crisis centres. The business of those firms would be endangered, and the sensitive relationship between solicitor and client undermined if they—[HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish."] Members of the Bar are talking who have no experience of running a solicitor's office.

In some parts of London, to accept a landlord as a client would make it difficult for a firm to build on its reputation of representing tenants' interests. Similarly, to represent a defendant in a rape case is considered by firms which work closely with rape crisis centres as something that would cause problems for them, and would make it more difficult for their clients to accept that the firm is on their side and would do the best for them.

The House has to bear in mind the fact that the Bar, which is always one step removed, has the solicitor as a buffer between the client and himself or herself, and it can afford to take a more detached view of the way in which it approaches the lay client, in a way that the solicitor cannot. If the cab rank rule, in its present form, proceeds, it would also prevent solicitors from offering advocacy simply as an additional service to existing clients, rather than to the world at large.

Why should solicitors not be able to offer advocacy to existing clients? I should have thought that that would be in the interests of the consumer. Most solicitor advocates would not wish to be committed to advocacy all the time. If they did, as my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) suggested, they could join the Bar. They want to stay solicitors and they want to give a better service to clients. Why introduce into another situation a rule that is appropriate to the Bar?

Mr. Bermingham: The hon. Gentleman will remember that I have been both a solicitor and a barrister. If one has 1,000 cases a year, all of which require Crown court advocacy, which one does the solicitor advocate choose to do? Will he not be picking and choosing the most juicy cases on his list? Is that not the danger, unless there is a cab rank rule?

Sir Hugh Rossi: That is a matter for his client. The client would insist that the solicitor represents him or her in court. They would say, "That is why we came to you, because we heard that you are very good at this and we want you to represent us." The solicitor cannot afford to have the word go round that he is refusing business. He would soon have little business.

Mr. Bermingham: That is not the case.

Sir Hugh Rossi: That is the case, and the hon. Gentleman knows it. Because a solicitor does not accept some work referred to him, that does not mean that those clients are without a remedy, because the Bar is still there. We are only saying that that right should exist in certain circumstances.

The hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) may appreciate that, if he builds up a reputation as a solicitor advocate and his firm accepts the cab rank rule, down the road, some rivals may say to themselves, "This is a nasty vexatious litigant, who will drive everyone mad." They will recommend him to go to the hon. Member's firm. They will say, "He will look after you." The vexatious madman will come along and the hon. Gentleman will be stuck with him under the cab rank rule. At least solicitors act as a filter for members of the Bar in such situations.

The cab rank rule is neither necessary to ensure proper representation nor effective to ensure high quality representation. To impose it on solicitor advocates would unnecessarily obstruct the way in which solicitors could offer their services to the public. The Bar is well aware of that. The amendment was introduced in another place simply as a wrecking amendment, to ensure that solicitor advocates would not wish to exercise the right of audience in the High Court. That was the beginning and the end of this proposal. I hope that, when the Law Officers consider the amendment and bring forward their own form of wording, they will bear that carefully in mind.

Conveyancing has been a live subject since the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) introduced his private Member's Bill some seven years ago. The solicitors' profession did not react well at that time. Its reaction may well have helped the Bill on its way.

The Law Society did not accept the advice that hon. Members offered at that time, but it has reflected on it and it is not making the same mistake today. Whatever misgivings it may have about the results of the proposals, it does not seek to stand in the way of the Government's clear determination to allow institutions to provide conveyancing. It has confined itself to attempting to ensure that the safeguards necessary to protect clients are put in place. The mechanism that the Government now propose —a regulatory board—is an improvement on the previous proposal for a mix of regulatory authorities.

If house buyers have the right to choose between an institutional conveyancer and a solicitor in private practice, they will have to exercise much caution when making that choice. The massive advertising budgets of the

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major institutions will stimulate and create demand. The one, two or three-man solicitor practices cannot begin to compete with that. Let us hope that the motives of the institutions are as they say they are—simply to offer a conveyancing service for the convenience of their customers. Can we be sure that that is true?

The aim of the institutions may be to ensure that the house buyer, having been sold a mortgage and a life policy, does not realise that he has been oversold and does not need the expensive policies that he is proposing to take. Disturbing reports have recently appeared in the press of people being obliged to surrender their endowment policies on the advice of those selling them a house, offering them a mortgage and getting them to take on another endowment policy. The Institute of Insurance Consultants estimates that home buyers lose £680 million a year by unnecessarily surrendering endowment policies. We also know from those reports that agents do not always put forward the best offer to vendors because they will lose their commission if they do not persuade the vendor to do business with someone who is taking out an insurance policy through their agency.

Independent financial advice for householders is more important than ever before. It is interesting that my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling)—the only non-lawyer who has taken part in the debate—said that this was one of his greatest concerns. He gave a formula whereby the consumer could obtain independent advice on different insurance policies. But it does not end there, because modern thinking is that a mortgage could be better linked to an investment trust arrangement rather than to an endowment policy. Who will give that independent advice other than a solicitor who is streetwise and knows his way around the financial world and is in business simply to advise his client impartially?

If the result of the Bill is that fewer house buyers have their eyes opened about the commitments and investments that they are taking on, that will be a cause for concern. It will be a sorry day if the House eventually accepts a Bill that does exactly that.

I hope that the Bill will receive a fair wind on Second Reading. Much of it is long overdue and necessary, but there are some concerns which I hope the Law Officers will bear in mind in its final stages.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is the 10-minutes rule being applied today? Many hon. Members wish to speak.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): The 10-minutes rule is not being applied by Mr. Speaker today, but I repeat the appeal that he has made at least twice for shorter speeches; otherwise, many hon. Members will be disappointed.

7.24 pm

Mr. Denzil Davies (Llanelli): I shall endeavour to respect your comments about short speeches, Mr. Deputy Speaker. For that reason, I shall not follow the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi), although I shall deal with some of the points that he made.

Once upon a time, before the great Thatcherite revolution, which is supposedly encapsulated in this Bill and in many others that we have debated in the past 10 years, there were barristers and solicitors. Barristers argued cases in court and wore wigs. Solicitors sat at desks, interviewed witnesses, shuffled bits of paper and generally prepared the case. That was not the reality because barristers also sat at desks, wrote opinions and drafted pleadings, and some solicitors argued cases in court without wearing wigs.

That was the position before the Bill. Let us consider now what will happen when the Bill becomes law. As I read the Bill, there will be a great metamorphosis. Barristers will become advocates, and solicitors will become litigators. Advocates will still argue cases in court wearing wigs and will draft opinions and pleadings. In the main, litigators will still sit in offices and prepare cases and litigation.

The original attempt at a great revolution came up against the reality that there are two different functions —preparing a case for court and putting it to the court. Usually, barristers carry out one function and solicitors the other. One function is not superior to the other and the people who carry them out are not superior to one another. One is glad to see that those different functions appear in the Bill, because the public often think that employing a barrister and a solicitor is a conspiracy to extract more money from the populace and that it is some kind of restrictive practice for which there is no justification. We should commend the Government for the fact that in clauses 15 and 16 the Bill enshrines in statute for the first time the fact that there are two different functions—the function of advocacy and the function of the litigator.

What happens when the great Thatcherite revolution comes up against the reality that generally it is better for the advocate to be an independent contractor and not subject to a contract of employment or a partner in a firm? The result, as we have seen before, is that a new quango is set up. Quangos were set up following privatisation of the telephone and electricity industries and most other privatisation measures and here again—lo and behold—there is to be another quango. It is a very good quango with 14 members and a chairman. No doubt they will be worthy people; some will be barristers, some solicitors and others worthy lay people. We all know how the Government appoint quango members. They do not do as the Labour Government tried to do—they do not try to be even handed. We all know how lay members to quangos are appointed under this Government. If they are friends of the Government, they are appointed. If they are not, they do not have a chance.

What is the quango supposed to do? Schedule 2 tells us that it is meant to oversee legal education. We should all agree that that is a worthy objective. I have practised at the Bar on and off for the past 20 years, and one criticism of the Bar is that legal education does not provide the kind of training in advocacy that students should have before they sit their final exams. Years ago I lectured at the university of Chicago law school. I was very impressed with American law schools, although I accept that they are different institutions. In the American law schools, advocacy—training in the courts—counts towards the final examination marks. If the quango can improve legal education in that respect—I accept that there have been improvements over the past 10 years—nobody will object to that.

What else is the quango supposed to achieve? Somehow it has to try to resolve the Green Paper's original intention to do away with the so-called restrictive practices. However, that intention came up against reality. The quango is supposed to bridge the gap between the advocate and the solicitor who wants to be an advocate occasionally, as the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green put it so well. The quango must deal with the litigator who wants to do a little hobble as an advocate, but the Bill does not explain the criteria. I suppose that that is par for the course. This great Thatcherite Bill tells us nothing—everything is left to Ministers and to the quango.

As the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green said, what will happen to the litigator who does not want to advocate all the time, but who has an old and valued friend—perhaps a landlord—for whom he has been working for years and for whom he goes to court and does a case? Will he be able simply to walk into the court and put a wig on his head? What about the company lawyer who may have spent 30 years advising companies and who knows the theory of company law backwards? What if he decides to go to the companies court for an old and valued company? Can he simply drop into that court? Will he have to have a licence for that particular right of audience or will licences be granted to groups of solicitors?

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Davies: It is no use the Parliamentary Private Secretary, the hon. Member for Bury, South (Mr. Sumberg), shaking his head. The Solicitor-General should tell us what criteria will apply and how the licences will be granted. I do not object, but I should like to know how the process will operate. I should like to know whether a one-off application will be allowed or whether the litigator will have to prove a track record over a period or an intention to have such a track record.

The Attorney-General skated over the question of partnerships. I hold an old-fashioned view in that I believe that an advocate should not be a partner but should be a sole practitioner. I am not casting aspersions, but a partner is contractually bound to his fellow partners. He is almost a trustee in that there is almost a trust between partners. Should advocates enter into partnerships with other advocates? Should advocates enter into partnerships with litigators, and should litigator advocates be allowed to enter into partnerships with litigators? What happens in the multi-disciplinary partnerships which are now in vogue in the City and the west end?

I do not believe that litigator advocates should be partners with litigators. I understand that there are firms of solicitors which practise in the county courts where there are partners and I do not believe that that can be changed. However, I should like the quango to lay down rules so that if a litigator wants to become an advocate, that is fine, but that the litigator should not remain a partner with his fellow partners because that could lead to a conflict of interest between the partners, the courts and the clients. The position is even worse when one considers multi-disciplinary partnerships.

Let us suppose that a large firm of solicitors which specialises entirely in building and construction work decides to bring into partnership three or four surveyors who have worked for that firm in litigation over a considerable period. That would then be a multi-disciplinary partnership of litigators and surveyors. Let us suppose that one of the litigators wishes to become an advocate. The partnership would then comprise litigators, a litigator advocate and surveyors. A case may come before the High Court in which the expert witness is a surveyor partner, the case is presented by the litigator advocate partner and the case is prepared by the litigator partner. I do not believe that the Office of Fair Trading would believe that that was in the interests of the consumer and in the interests of justice or that it would lead to greater efficiency or lower costs. There are great dangers in allowing such partnerships. In Committee I hope that the Government will tell us more about their thinking in respect of partnerships and how they see the quango developing the rules for partnerships between different parts of the profession.

Everyone apart for the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green believes that the cab rank principle is a good thing. It has not worked perfectly and the rules are now being tightened. The answer is to tighten the rules again and apply them to all advocates and litigator advocates. It was ridiculous for the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green to argue the example of a firm of solicitors which specialises in landlord and tenant work and has always worked for landlords. He argued that, under the cab rank rule, that firm would have to work for tenants as well. That is an appalling and immoral attitude. Most solicitors would not agree with the hon. Gentlman. As David Napley pointed out in his article in *The Times* earlier this week, most solicitors would be happy to abide by the cab rank rule.

Sir Hugh Rossi: I had in mind particular firms which pride themselves on their Left-wing views. Some firms in London concentrate on representing the interests of the tenant and will not consider a landlord if one should cross their premises. We must consider whether we are prepared to force those firms to do what they do not want to do.

Mr. Davies: That is not a defensible argument if they wish to become litigator advocates. If they do not wish to do so, the problem does not arise. We are considering only those who wish to become litigator advocates, and the corollary of that is that they should accept the cab rank principle.

In principle, I welcome part I of the Bill and the civil justice review. I welcome the eventual transfer of cases to the county courts, if funds are available and legal aid is approved. It is extraordinary that 70 per cent. of Bar members practise in London. If we could have an efficient county court system and a transfer of power, that would be a very efficient devolution of power in terms of costs, but it will take time and it will need money.

Personal injury cases can now be transferred to the county court if the claim exceeds £5,000 and for claims up to £25,000 according to the intentions of the civil justice review. Very often those cases are very difficult and important because they affect human beings. It is important that funds should be available to the county courts to enable them to hear such cases properly and efficiently. I do not believe that the Bill will reduce costs or lead to more efficient justice, and it may endanger an independent Bar. The Government should state exactly

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how they intend to operate rules relating to applications for licences by those who are not barristers but who wish to become litigant advocates.

7.29 pm

Mr. Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster): I hope that the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies) will forgive me if I do not follow him directly, but hon. Members are coming under increasing pressure of time. However, I shall mention various matters to which the right hon. Gentleman referred. I hope that he will be grateful for that at least.

Hon. Members have begun their orations with a declaration of interest. We even heard the triumphant declaration, "I am not a lawyer," from my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling). I, too, must make a declaration of interest. At least it is unique in that I am the first of the hybrids who have been called to speak, although the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) has intervened briefly. For more than 15 years I was in active practice at the Bar. I am now a practising solicitor in so far as a solicitor can practise and be a Member of the House. I am proud to have a practising certificate. I think that I am the only hybrid who has gone from being a barrister to being a solicitor. Three Opposition Members have gone the other way. I hope that they are not frightened by my sudden presence in the midst of their former profession.

I assure my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) that I did not change over to go rushing off to set up an advocacy practice. I am only too relieved—this remark has more serious significance than a flippant comment—that I no longer need to run round keeping judges waiting as well as be a Member of this House. That comment applies to the vast number of people who have chosen, at whatever stage of their careers, to opt for the solicitors' side. One does not become a solicitor to become an advocate.

A further part of my declaration of interest is that, if the Committee of Selection so wills it, I hope that I shall serve on the Standing Committee and move various amendments on behalf of the Law Society, which I shall make plain when I move such amendments. Therefore, the pattern of this abbreviated speech is to set the scene for the information of Government Front-Bench Members and others of certain points that will be taken, some of which have been touched on in the debate.

We are a divided profession—that is accepted in the Bill. Various horror stories and images have been raised in previous discussions on this measure and have crept into our generally sensible discussions tonight. I have no doubt that the profession will remain divided, that it has worked well, that it is as good as other legal professions anywhere, and that its standards are of the highest. That applies to all elements of the profession. Therefore, it follows that the system should be changed only very carefully. The Bill does that. I do not regard it as an extreme measure nor, with all respect not only to hon. Members but to Members of the other place, as an insidious gateway to matters such as fusion of the profession. Nevertheless, the profession must react to modern needs. It cannot resist all change.

I spent a brief part of my Easter looking at some of the debates in the other place. Even in the calm serenity of the past few days, some judicial apoplexy seemed to occur in the otherwise sedate columns of Lords *Hansard*. It must be noted that some members of the judiciary and others went over the top in their initial reaction to the measure. As a barrister turned solicitor, I am most anxious that that does not happen in our debates and that we may be calm and constructive throughout our proceedings.

By no means does the Law Society like everything in the Bill, and various aspects of that dislike will come out subsequently. I like to think that hon. Members have been constructive and that we shall seek to improve the Bill in the national interest, not in a sectional interest. Hon. Members and members of the Bar are mutually and generally concerned with high professional standards and the preservation of those standards by the necessary long-established controls. That point was made most eloquently by the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer), a former Solicitor-General.

It is with pleasure that I note that this is not a party-line occasion. I hope that the two sides of the profession will come together on certain matters. Although we might get away from Government versus Opposition and vice versa attitudes, there is a danger that we might encounter solicitor versus barrister and vice versa attitudes. That would not be good for the overall outcome of the Bill when it leaves this place. Therefore, I expect some strange alliances in an effort to improve the Bill to the maximum.

There are some specific concerns about rights of audience. There has been a lot of fuss about very little. As I said earlier in jest, the vast majority of solicitors have no interest in professional advocacy. With experience of both sides of the profession, I have no doubt that the Bar, with its obvious skilled practice and tradition in this regard—that is, the fact that it practises on a regular basis, which is necessary in court work—will remain pre-eminent and necessary. The central point is that if, in maintaining those values, it makes itself out to be a bastion which in some way—with which I totally disagree—is so weak that it cannot survive without forms of privilege and what some would call restrictive practice, it will point the way to its own demise much quicker than anyone who has had anything to do with the Bill would have dreamt of.

One would obviously want to look at the role and power of designated judges under the schedule 4 procedure; those matters were examined in the other place and they will be discussed again. Their role has not, to say the least, been inactive. Whether it goes to the extent that the judiciary should have powers of actual decision rather than a more consultative and interpretative role is something that we shall wish to consider against whether it is for the legislature, the Executive or both whether hon. Members should have the power of decision and whether judges should be kept in their normal, traditional and extremely distinguished place.

Another matter of specifics is the number of judges on the advisory committee while preserving the lay majority. It might be rather nice if a circuit judge managed to get on to the committee, in so far as there might be an extra judge on it. It would be even nicer if that circuit judge just happened to be a former solicitor. One doubts whether that could conceivably happen, such would be the array of the establishment against such an idea. If solicitors can be sufficiently qualified, talented and able to be judges, perhaps they might have a place and an active role together with the other half of the profession and the judiciary generally on the advisory committee. I do not think that such a role should ever be resisted.

Hon. Members have made considerable reference to the cab rank rule. What my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General has already said—and will doubtless say again—was not the same as the attitude taken by the Lord Chancellor in Committee in the other place, when the proposal was defeated, or on Report in the other place when, against the advice of the Lord Chancellor and the Government, the proposal was narrowly passed. From what has been said, it is clear that the cab rank rule has gained an almost hallowed status. In all honesty and humility and with all respect, in my legal career I cannot remember people going up and down the steps of my chambers, damning the cab rank rule and saying that their careers had been ruined because they could not take this or that case. Perhaps it was with such thoughts in mind that the national press used phrases such as, "a wrecking amendment", and that the amendment was promoted "by self-interest", and to "preserve the status quo" and even that it was "hypocritical in nature". Although it goes too far, that was the reaction of the outside world.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) more than addressed himself to the detail of the provision. The cab rank rule was very much in evidence in the early stages of my career. I appreciate that it is the ethos of the Bar that at five o'clock in the evening when one goes to the clerk's room in chambers, it is a case of "Cambridge for you", Ipswich for you", "London sessions for you" and of goodness knows where else. Subsequently in one's career, not only do the sort of rules and regulations that have already been referred to come into the fray, but availability also comes into the picture. I have never yet encountered a clerk who was not good enough at least to protect in general the careers of those for whom he was responsible.

Under the veneer of so-called competition, we should not block out one of the Bill's central aims, which is the freedom of the poor old consumer, who sometimes comes less and less into the discussion when lawyers get going. As it stands, the clear purport of the provision is to put a solicitor off becoming an advocate in the area where he is most likely to be asked to become an advocate, which might be a case in which the client wants him to act and that he knows all about.

Therefore, while I note the Government's present position, I must advise my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General that that position is not wholly accepted. Although I noted down his words, I shall not remind my right hon. and learned Friend of them except to say that I know that he is talking about a principle rather than about the specific phraseology and drafting of that clause. The Law Society and many others will listen to all the arguments on this issue. The Government's change on this matter means that I must firmly register with my right hon. and learned Friends on the Treasury Bench the fact that those discussions will go further.

A related question with which I hope we shall not have to bother—I regret that it has crept in—is the far-fetched argument that was raised in the other place that the separation of the preparation of a case from the advocacy of it is a hallowed principle that precludes a solicitor from becoming an advocate. I hope that we can avoid that argument. I am all for the objective role of the advocate, but it is wrong to use that as a hallowed principle to prevent the Bill's purpose.

I hope that the following matters will be raised in Standing Committee. First, there will obviously be several amendments and matters to be considered in relation to conveyancing and to probate law, especially with regard to professional standards and the independence of advice. When it comes to the last word, perhaps the market place is not everything, and professional standards are something—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] I have always been a moderate member of the Government party, as Opposition Members should know, and I am now making a legal rather than a political speech.

Secondly, I hope that the issue of conditional fees will be considered. I have always had great personal reservations about conditional fees. I know that within the profession there is broad acceptance of the Bill as it stands on this matter, but I wish to register this point of concern that I expect will arise again.

My third point relates to multi-disciplinary practices. The Bar and the Law Society have a mutual concern about this. As such practices are being considered, at the very least we need to establish some tight rules.

Fourthly, there is widespread concern about the performance of the courts, especially the county courts, which have already been mentioned. The Bill must address this concern satisfactorily, and in so far as it does so, that must be satisfactorily explained by the Law Officers.

Fifthly, I welcome the proposals on the Parliamentary Commissioner. He must effectively cover court staff, who must not hide behind too wide an interpretation of what is or is not judicial or the result of some form of judicial action.

A final important point that will need to be considered in Standing Committee is the fact that, just because the Lord Chancellor's Department is responsible for judicial appointments, it does not mean that that function should be removed from being the responsibility of a Select Committee of this House.

Whatever happens from now on, may the result of it be a better Bill.

7.56 pm

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): As a non-lawyer, I hesitate to intrude in these deliberations, but as the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris) mentioned fleetingly, the consumer must be considered in all this. The Bill is welcome only to the extent that it is a long-overdue shake-up of a profession which, with honourable exceptions at every level—I acknowledge that —has managed to combine appalling levels of service, outrageous fees and a degree of self-satisfaction unmatched by any other profession. To the extent that the Bill does not achieve that, that job will remain to be carried out on another occasion.

I am a socialist, but I must say that if ever a profession urgently needed a dose of market forces, it must be the legal profession. In saying that, I acknowledge the reservations expressed by my right hon. and learned Friends the Members for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) and for Warley, West (Mr. Archer). The extent to which the Bill rises to the occasion must be measured by the outrage that it has provoked in the higher levels of the legal establishment. The Lord Chancellor made a promising

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start and provoked a vintage performance in the other place from the Lord Chief Justice, which provided a valuable insight into the judicial mind when the wig is off. I regret that the Lord Chancellor has been leaned on to some extent and that the original proposals have been watered down.

Any measures designed to increase rights of audience in courts are welcome, as are measures to reduce delays, to break lawyers' conveyancing monopolies, to provide effective redress against incompetent lawyers and to widen the charmed circle of those who become judges—a glance at the latest edition of the "Freemasons Handbook" shows that there is some scope for improvement.

In the brief time allotted to me in the debate I shall concentrate on a couple of omissions from the Bill. Judges have had quite a lot to say about the Bill in the other place and elsewhere so I hope that they will not mind if we have a thing or two to say about them. The retirement age of appeal court judges should be lowered as a matter of urgency to, say, 65 for a start. I believe that it was only in the last decade that the retirement age was lowered to 75, and even that failed to catch Lord Denning. Some attention should be paid to filling any vacancies that arise with persons whose horizons extend beyond the saloon bars of Surrey.

The major point that I wish to make is that there is a major omission from Bills such as this which will have to be rectified. The Bill is wide ranging and it would have been appropriate for it to provide some remedy to deal with persistently alleged miscarriages of justice. It is becoming something of a legend in Britain that it is extremely difficult to persuade the Court of Appeal or, indeed, lawyers in general—with honourable exceptions —to own up to the possibility of serious mistakes. That is one of the more enduring features of our legal system.

I was reading only this afternoon Ludovic Kennedy's introduction to "10 Rillington Place". He described the campaign that it was necessary to pursue before it was conceded after 16 years that Timothy Evans was innocent. That difficulty has become topical again in recent years as a result of a handful of celebrated cases. The Carl Bridgewater case is one of them, and the Broadwater Farm case is another. The best known are those of the six people convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings and the total of 10 people convicted in connection with the Guildford and Woolwich bombings.

Everyone knows that one of the principal difficulties in those cases is that senior lawyers are unwilling or extremely reluctant to face the possibility that mistakes have been made by other senior lawyers. In the case of the Birmingham pub bombings, it is obvious that one of the major difficulties was that Lord Bridge, who was the original trial judge and is now one of the most senior judges in the land, went overboard in his original trial judgment and his going overboard was endorsed in January 1988 by the Lord Chief Justice. It is clear that before any progress can be made on that case, which is beginning to blight the entire legal system, the resignation or retirement of the Lord Chief Justice will be necessary.

Before anyone cites the case of the four people convicted of the Guildford pub bombings as an example of the willingness of the judicial system to own up to mistakes, I remind the House that the convictions were quashed only because the Director of Public Prosecutions —an honourable man, for whom I have the greatest respect—went to the Court of Appeal. I was there and had the pleasure of seeing the Lord Chief Justice's face as he was forced, with clenched teeth, to quash the convictions. The DPP went to the Court of Appeal and asked for the convictions to be quashed in terms which left the Lord Chief Justice no discretion whatever.

Many of those who were present on that occasion, including many eminent lawyers, were in no doubt that if the DPP had allowed the Lord Chief Justice the slightest discretion the Lord Chief Justice could have talked his way even out of the new evidence. I say that because I also sat through the Lord Chief Justice's disgraceful judgment in the case of the Birmingham Six when he performed intellectual gymnastics of a spectacular variety.

Probably the most persistent miscarriage of justice, which most clearly demonstrates the great problem with our legal system—it will have to be addressed sooner or later and it is a pity that this issue is not addressed in the Bill—is the Cooper and McMahon case. In 1970 two men were convicted of murdering a postmaster in Luton. By about 1974 it became clear to the Home Secretary of the day that something was seriously wrong in that case. Four successive Home Secretaries between 1974 and 1980 referred the case to the Court of Appeal. On each occasion the judges sat, stonyfaced, and said, "We have heard nothing new—take them away." In 1980 it became so embarrassing that the Home Secretary of the day, William Whitelaw, because he could not devise a way to persuade the judges to own up, simply ordered the gates of the prison to be opened, gave the men a railway ticket each and sent them home without so much as an apology for the decade that they had spent in gaol.

I fear that the same will happen eventually in the case of the six men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings. There are people of good will at every level and in all parties but no one can devise a way of persuading the Court of Appeal to own up.

The Attorney-General: I have listened to the hon. Gentleman's fairly familiar record, but the last phrase calls for some explanation, even from him. He said that there was no other way of persuading the Court of Appeal to own up. I hope that he will reflect on what he has just said. The Court of Appeal is obliged to deal with references from the Home Secretary, which take the form of appeals, on the evidence put before it. The hon. Gentleman will recall that the Court of Appeal sat for some five weeks, that it considered all the evidence that the applicants sought to put before it and that it came to its decision in a judgment which is in the Library of this House, on the basis of that evidence. I hope that he will reflect on what he said about owning up.

Mr. Mullin: I have had a great deal of opportunity to reflect on the matter. I was present throughout most of the 30 days of the appeal hearing. It is clear to me that many people in high places, although not necessarily the Lord Chief Justice, know that a mistake has been made—they knew for years that a mistake had been made in the Timothy Evans case—but they have great difficulty in finding a way out, as has been remarked on by commentators of the same political persuasion as the

Attorney-General. The right hon. and learned Gentleman comes from the merciful wing of his party and he knows the problem as well as I do.

I am pleased to see that the Chairman of the Select Committee on Home Affairs is present. In 1982, the Select Committee came up with a potential solution to the problem. It examined the matter in detail and made a good report. It unanimously recommended that some form of court of last resort should be set up with power to consider, among other things, evidence which was inadmissible before the courts. It is important to note that there would have been several non-lawyers on the panel. That was rejected out of hand by the Government, but after some negotiation the Lord Chief Justice—who, even then, was Lord Lane—promised more flexibility in taking references back from the Home Office. If he ever made that promise, he reneged on it. One of the most interesting paragraphs at the end of his judgment in the Birmingham case was uttered in the knowledge that the Guildford and Woolwich cases were in the pipeline. He said:

> "As with so many of these cases referred to us by the Home Office, the longer it went on the more convinced we became that the convictions were safe."

In other words, "Don't waste our time by sending Guildford". The Department did send Guildford and we now see what happened.

In 1988 the hon. Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) and I attemped to amend the Criminal Justice Bill and implement some sort of court of last resort. We modelled our amendment carefully on the wording that the Select Committee had unanimously recommended in 1982. We attracted all-party support for the amendment. I regret that the hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler), who was on the Committee in 1982 and was present during the discussion of the amendment, did not support it. Indeed, he sat in silence and made a dash for the No Lobby at the appropriate moment. I hope that he will now reflect on the matter and come to a different conclusion.

The result is that we are now faced with further scandals which are corrupting the whole judicial system. Sooner or later a way out will have to be found. There is another possibility. Sir John May, a distinguished judge, is conducting an inquiry into what went wrong in the Guildford case. I have the highest expectations of Sir John May's inquiry, but the precedents are not all that good. The Brabin inquiry into the Evans case concluded, after he had been pardoned, that he probably had murdered the baby and not his wife. Sir Henry Fisher's inquiry into the Confait case concluded that the people who had just been released and had their convictions quashed were probably guilty. That had to be repudiated when the real killer was found. Lord Hunter's inquiry into what went wrong in the Meehan case concluded that Meehan probably had done it. He had to be repudiated when Meehan had to be given a large amount of compensation.

The precedents are not good, but I approach Sir John May's inquiry with an open mind. I noted that in his opening statement he made it clear to the police representatives that if anyone attempted to persuade him that the purpose of the exercise was merely to reconvict people who had just had their convictions quashed, he would not hear evidence designed solely for that purpose. I hope that he sticks to that.

It is interesting to note that the General Council of the Bar and the Law Society both submitted evidence to the May inquiry calling for some sort of court of last resort. A personal letter which I received from a Law Lord—I shall not embarrass him by naming him—states:

> "The case for a 'Court of Last Resort' is a strong one. We need an independent court of review freed from the burden of routine work and with no track record to defend, which can review fact and law and is charged to consider the whole case."

That is an idea for which the time has come. I regret that the Bill has not seized the opportunity, but it will have to be done at some time because this scandal is beginning to infect the whole of our judicial system. I hope that eventually it will be put right, if not by the present Government, then by a future Labour Government.

8.12 pm

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Croydon, North-West): I begin by declaring an interest as a practising solicitor, and I shall try to make my speech brief. I have practised for nearly 20 years in a provincial firm of solicitors in the sphere of litigation, dealing with divorce, crime, licensing and civil work in the county courts and High Court.

If anyone had asked any of my clients their principal worry, apart from the quality of my advice, he might have heard about three principal concerns: first, why does everything take so long; secondly, why does it cost so much; and thirdly, why cannot we get legal aid? Therefore, legal aid, legal delays and the costs of law are the three great worries of the average client. Any Bill on legal services should address those particular issues because they are the ones that worry the public. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General is entirely happy that those three key issues are being addressed.

I shall mention but two matters in the Bill: first, access to the High Court. Hitherto, we have been entitled to take our cases to the High Court. There has been no restriction, and anyone can begin a case there, whatever the case. That has been good. It is excellent to increase the jurisdiction of the county court, but I wonder why we are proposing to restrict access to our High Court. Might we not consider introducing competition into the court system, giving litigants the choice of which court in which to begin—county or High Court—and then directing resources to those courts that prove the most popular? The ability to go to the High Court, unfettered, is an important one.

I sometimes worry that our High Court is monopolised by the big, corporate clients and foreign multi-national concerns, which have the ability to use our High Court system without paying a penny for the privilege, apart from their lawyers' fees. The more that such multinationals end up in our High Court, the less individuals from this country have the opportunity to take their case there.

The second aspect of the Bill is the cab rank rule, referred to so frequently tonight. In the past, it has been applied by the Bar. I agree with the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) that, by and large, the Bar has applied it pretty well. In my experience during 20 years, the Bar has been good in that respect. Solicitors, however, have not had to abide by the cab rank rule, although in my practice I tried hard to do so. I have occasionally had to turn a client away, but by and large I took each case as it came, whether I liked the nature of the alleged offence and whether or not the client had legal aid.

[Mr. Humfrey Malins]

It is important that solicitors practising advocacy should take cases, whether they be legally aided or private, and give a consistent and high standard of service to all.

I am glad that the cab rank principle has been inserted as a condition of obtaining new rights of audience. It is right that those who are granted the privilege of High Court rights should accept the burdens as well. I believe that I heard my right hon. and learned Friend say that he was considering exempting employed lawyers from the cab rank principle. If he did, I venture to suggest that this might be a mistake. I hope that in winding up my right hon. and learned Friend will develop that point.

I am concerned about the state of the solicitors' profession in 1990, compared with the profession 20 years ago. I am not sure that, today, a council tenant gets the same quality of advice as he or she would have had 20 years ago. I am not sure that the elderly lady on moderate means gets the same quality of service as she received 20 years ago. I am not sure that the best advice is still available to the poorest. Why is that?

There must be a variety of reasons. One may be that we are living in the days of the big battalions of law practices. I am worried that the big, slick city firms trawl round the universities, creaming off the best brains with the promise of corporate and commercial work in our big cities at treble the salaries of country firms. I am also worried that small firms in small towns amalgamate, and sometimes move out of town to create bigger organisations for the lure of corporate and commercial work. Other firms tend to concentrate more on the profitable work and delegate legal aid work to junior clerks or, worse, turn it away.

I say these things not by way of criticism, because everyone is human, but as something which makes me sad. I do not think that we are moving towards a system in which the poorer people in our society will retain the best quality of service. About 20 years ago, people tended to join a solicitor's practice because they wanted to serve the community. They knew they would have to do some unpaid work for the public good, but there was a certain dignity in the profession. Now, I am sorry to say, at the end of the year too many partnerships look not so much to the service for their clients, but to the service for their fleet of BMWs.

I conclude on that sad note. I mean it as no criticism of my brother solicitors. It is partly due to the world we live in, which is not a world I particularly like. Our duty in this House is to ensure that we pass a Bill that will result in the same quality of service for rich and poor alike.

8.18 pm

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): I congratulate the hon. Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Malins) on his speech, which I wholly endorse.

I declare an interest as having been a solicitor in the past and a barrister now. When the hon. Member for Croydon, North-West talks about service in firms of solicitors 20 years ago, I know what he means. It was what I was hinting at during the speech of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer), when I suggested that we were approaching the matter from the wrong end.

We should consider how it feels to the man in the street —the chap who lives in the rural village who has a modest job, modest home and modest means. Several fates may befall him. His wife may walk out or he may get thrown out—it matters not because the principle is the same—and he will need matrimonial advice. Where will he go? Twenty years ago, when I practised as a solicitor in Sheffield and served the rural areas around, if that happened in Bakewell, Alfreton or another small village or town, a man could go to the local solicitor who had been in the village for 20, 30 or 40 years and knew the area and the problems. That solicitor, with the solicitor acting on the other side, could efficiently, and often at little cost, resolve the matrimonial problem.

The Bill will go to the statute book in its present form because those who thought it through, on issues such as conveyancing, forgot a crucial point: rural practices die without a conveyancing element. In the old days conveyancing carried many a private practice through the winter, so to speak. It was the financial backbone of a practice. Rural practices did not charge people who came in to make wills. Charging people for wills at commercial rates such as those charged in the City would involve hundreds of pounds, and what pensioner could afford that? So the service was provided by the Law Society in the old days, and I hope that the society will continue to offer it.

The person in the village who wanted to buy a house, to get divorced or to make a will had a local solicitor. We shall rue the day when we say that commercialism and efficiency should supersede the element of service in the Law Society of yesterday. I must tell the Attorney-General in the kindest possible way that if he allows himself and the Government to be railroaded down this route he will be making a grave mistake.

Let us imagine that the man in the village runs over someone or is run over himself. Once again, he will need a lawyer, a specialist. In the old days he went to the rural solicitor, who sent him on, perhaps, to the town solicitor, who, in those days, knew about these matters— *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) does not know much about these matters, and I must tell him that we are discussing an issue that matters to the vast majority of people in this land.

There comes a moment when a person needs good advice. In the old days he went to the local solicitor, in the village or the town. He could sort out what expertise was needed, which is where specialisation comes in. I concede that big London firms of solicitors have special expertise, but some of what we have heard recently in the Fayed case and others makes me wonder whether commercialism brings with it a price in terms of loss of integrity. We must be careful least money become a god in the profession. The moment that happens, professionalism will start to go.

For many years I was a local solicitor and when a local person came to me for advice I looked round for the man or woman who was expert in the relevant field, and sent briefs to this or that counsel because he was independent and good. Counsel knew what they were doing; they survive only one mistake. Thereafter, the word goes out and they are finished.

If the Bill is passed, if the cab rank rule goes and if the solicitor advocate who does not know these disciplines is allowed to pick and choose—as I pointed out in an intervention in the speech of the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi)—the customer may not get the best possible advice.

When I became a barrister I did not look on it as a change of profession. I saw it as another step in specialisation, because that is all the criminal Bar is—specialised advocates who know what a case is all about, who know the rules and who are efficient. That is the only way to survive. The profession is fiercely competive and we should not underrate it or write it off. On the contrary, we should remember its value and compare it with the American system. The Government should be careful: they are beginning to walk a dangerous road by allowing commercialism to override professionalism. Of course, we can resolve the problems of solicitor judges and so on, but let us always remember the man in the street. It is he whom the professions seek to serve and it is his interests that the House should be debating the Bill.

The Bill includes many mistakes that must be rectified. If, at the end of the day, a Bill emerges that will serve the man in the street with the best possible professionalism we shall have done a good job. We must cast aside our prejudices and think with open minds if we are to serve that man.

8.24 pm

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): I had not imagined that I would find myself almost wholly in agreement with everything that the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) has just said.

I cannot claim to be a layman, but it is 20 years since I practised as a solicitor. Before that, I practised for some years in the City, and I am still a member of the Law Society. I think that I am unique in being the only Member to have been opposed at a general election—in 1970—by an official anti-solicitor candidate, the redoubtable Mr. Carter, who was one of the first to do freelance conveyancing. He made some nice remarks about me in his election address, and he lost his deposit, so all was well in the end. It was a bit hard on me, because I did not do much conveyancing at the time.

I want to speak first about advocacy and rights of audience. When I was practising, the last thing that my colleagues or I wanted was to appear in the High Court as advocates. We have plenty of other matters to occupy our time, and we wanted to use the best expertise we could find from the Bar. That was commonly true of the City of London and of other parts of the country; the system seemed to serve my clients and the interests of the country very well. That is why I wholly support the need to preserve an independent Bar. The last thing I want is that its members should become muddled up in the American style with attorneys here, there and everywhere.

The maintenance of an independent Bar is essential, and the amendments that my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General has made to the Bill would make that possible, whereas the original Bill would not have. However, the Bar must recognise that, in Gallup polls—in so far as one ever pays attention to such polls—80 per cent. of people say that they want solicitors to have the opportunity to appear in court if necessary. It is ridiculous that solicitors cannot appear in certain instances which probably do not require the greatest expertise. That it why it is necessary to open up the rules and rights of audience.

I shall not go over all the arguments about the cab rank rule again, except to say that it is obvious that the clause imposed in another place, which was a wrecking proposal by their Lordships, needs careful reconsideration. I think that it was clear from what the Attorney-General said that that will be rectified in Committee. I certainly hope that it will be.

I want to say a word in favour of the Bar in relation to liability. The consumer associations are wrong to imagine that complete liability can be imposed on the Bar when it is carrying out its work. It is perfectly proper that it should be liable and not have immunity if it makes obvious errors, such as failing to turn up in court or acting in a grossly negligent way outside the court, but in court it is essential that the Bar enjoy immunity in the same way as witnesses and we in this House do.

If we were to be sued and dragged into court all the time, what sort of debates would we have here? The same applies to the advocate in court; he must enjoy immunity if he is to give uninhibited service to his client. We do not need to copy the United States or any other country slavishly in this respect. There is a tendency to think far too much in transatlantic terms. I have always been wholly opposed to the contingency free racket that prevails in the United States. Far too many litigants are dragged into all the traumas of court by over-exuberant American Perry Masons or people like him. It would be appalling if that came about here.

I am a little uneasy about the proposal for taking cases on spec, as it were. Anyone who is a Pickwick fan will recall how angry it made Mr. Pickwick that the odious firm of Dodson and Fogg was discovered taking the case of Mrs. Bardell on spec. A fat lot of good it did poor Mrs. Bardell, as it turned out. In Committee, we must be careful to ensure that the fees that a lawyer can charge for taking a case on spec should not bear a remarkable resemblance to a percentage of the damages obtained. I am not at all happy about that, but if we consider it carefully, we can probably reach a compromise. What we really need is not more but less litigation.

Conveyancing is the aspect of the law with which the vast majority of people come into contact. As has been said, it is the most important thing in their lives. I whole-heartedly agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Malins) and the hon. Member for St. Helens, South about rural practices. The basis of small rural firms has been their conveyancing work. They have rendered a good service to their clients and have often provided other services free. Sometimes, even litigation has been subsidised by conveyancing work. That will disappear unless we are extremely careful.

I am disturbed that banks and big financial institutions will take over conveyancing. I hope that careful checks will be placed on them. Several banks have been acquiring estate agents. The standards of the estate agents' profession are much lower than those of the Bar, of solicitors or of any other profession. Many examples of abuses and conflicts of interest have been brought to light which have been to the great disadvantage of clients and humble citizens. It would be sad if the service rendered by traditional solicitors in rural areas to humble people was lost in a mass of gigantic conglomerates which operate on a purely financial basis. Therefore, the Lord Chancellor's regulations in clause 39 must be considered carefully.

In general, this is a good Bill, which moves in the right direction. I am surprised that the Opposition oppose it, and I cannot understand why. Much remains to be done in Committee. Most of the work will have to be done there. I ask the House, especially the Law Officers, to remember

[Sir Anthony Grant]

that cheapness is not always best. The old phrase "cheap and nasty" is as applicable today as when I learned it from my grandmother.

In recent years, the trend has been to treat conveyancing as a purely commercial activity. It is nothing of the sort. We have likened the profession's activities to selling bananas and second-hand motor cars. They certainly are not. They are different. If we are to make the legal profession effective—the Bill will help—we must bear in mind the need to preserve and enhance the lawyer-client relationship of trust, fearless support and independence. That is how clients and society will get the justice and redress which they deserve.

8.33 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): I am a non-lawyer, so my remarks will be extremely brief. So far, most of the debate seems to have been something of a domestic dispute between the Bar Council and the Law Society about the relative merits of each profession. I do not want to enter into that, as I have no experience of it, but I wish to make one or two points about the Bill.

It is proposed that most future litigation will be commenced within the county courts. I am worried how that will affect personal injury cases. I have some limited experience of them because I negotiated many settlements before I was elected to the House. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) told us of the problems of the county court system and my local law society has related to me the problems and workload of various county courts throughout the country. It is worried that the Bill's provisions will not be backed up with adequate resources to resolve the delays and problems.

Again, it has been related to me that some litigants in personal injury cases may be disadvantaged by being required to commence their case in the county court rather than the High Court, especially if the case is serious or if the potential damages could be substantial. They will be disadvantaged by delays. Some negotiators and solicitors may be disadvantaged in negotiating a settlement, as the insurance company or defendant will know that the plaintiff has recourse only to the county court and not to the High Court, so has access to county court costs only. Some solicitors and negotiators believe that they will be disadvantaged in negotiating a high proportion of settlements because of that. Moreover, as all personal injury cases will fall on the county court system, it will be further clogged up, and there will be many more delays.

Potential conflicts of interest could arise when financial institutions, such as building societies and insurance companies, rather than solicitors, undertake conveyancing. I am no particular fan of the solicitors' monopoly on conveyancing, but I am aware of the dangers for the ordinary man in the street of changing it. An estate agent may advise him to take on an endowment mortgage, which will not be in his best interests if in a few years he moves house, as it will not have had a chance to mature.

The estate agent who provides the mortgage may recommend the in-house solicitor who can do the conveyancing at a reasonable or cut-price rate. The primary purpose of a building society or financial institution, which is to sell a financial package or a mortgage, could conflict with the best interests of the client. That is made worse when a tied practitioner is involved. As I understand it, he can give only best advice over the range of financial packages of products which he may sell.

Individuals in such circumstances will face considerable pressure. If an individual can be provided with all the elements of his house purchase at one office, he is unlikely to seek advice elsewhere. The basic principle is independent advice. Many people who enter into the largest purchase that they will make in their lives may not get that advice.

The hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) also mentioned estate agents. On 1 March 1990, the consumer magazine *Which?* in an investigation of estate agents showed that some buyers were handicapped because they chose not to use the financial services of the estate agent. For example, a lower offer was accepted because the bidder agreed to take an in-house mortgage and to use in-house financial services. It is essential that such people are given strictly independent advice, and I hope that that section will be widely debated in Committee.

Clause 85 deals with the limitation period for the commencement of actions, on which I have been involved in some correspondence, again with regard to personal injury cases where the time limit appears to be being reduced to three years. Previously, a protective writ could be issued within three years, which would then allow an extra 12 months for a case to be prepared by solicitors. Proceedings will now have to be commenced within the three-year limitation period, apparently because the Government are seeking to reduce delay in such actions. That is unlikely to be the effect. Indeed, delays could be increased. Moreover, many people may be denied access to the law in cases of personal injury simply because they have particular problems in preparing their case.

There are considerable arguments for extending the limitation period rather than reducing it—for example, in cases of serious injury, where the plaintiff may take a long time to recover; where the prognosis could not be established until some years after the accident, particularly in the case of a progressive industrial disease such as pneumoconiosis; or where knowledge of the claim or the right of action does not become apparent for some considerable time—for example, where a specialist engineer's report might reveal that there was cause of action where previously solicitors did not think that there was.

Under the new circumstances, proceedings could be commenced hastily to protect a claim within the three-year limitation period, and shortly afterwards the practitioner could find that, because of a rapid improvement in the medical situation or a technical report, the cause of action was dramatically changed. In such a case the solicitor might be liable for costs for commencing a case too early or in the wrong court. Recently, a solicitor wrote to me saying:

> "Vast sums of money are wasted issuing writs most of which are never served against defendants who may perhaps be guilty but of whom many no doubt are completely innocent. It is an idle exercise: a scandalous waste of time and money which serves no useful purpose whatsoever."

Reducing the limitation period will not solve the problem.

The clause will deny many claimants access to the law. Many people have come to me three years after the date of their accident and I have had the unhappy duty of telling them that they have no case to pursue simply because they are out of time because of limitation periods of which they knew little if anything.

The reduction in the limitation period will not reduce delay in cases; it will simply complicate matters. The civil justice review body said that the limitation period was to prevent defendants facing old cases, not to reduce delay. It did not say that proceedings should be commenced within that limitation period. That does not address the particular problem.

I welcome the creation of a legal services ombudsman. I have been pursuing a case for more than two years, but within 30 seconds of walking into an interview with the Law Society I was informed that the legal practitioner with whom I was dealing was negligent, that there was nothing that could be done about it, and that the individual concerned would have to sue. Two years later, I am no further forward with that case, despite considerable correspondence and many meetings. I hope that the legal services ombudsman will address that problem.

8.44 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): I have been the legal adviser of the Institute of Legal Executives for about 15 years, but not once during this Second Reading debate have legal executives been mentioned. Yet all who practise, either at the Bar or as a solicitor, will know the debt that they owe to legal executives. I am glad to see the former Solicitor-General nodding in agreement. It is important to acknowledge and to recognise the work that they do. They prepare instructions for counsel, they brief counsel and they are experts in procedure, probate, litigation, advocacy and so on. The Bill provides a unique opportunity to give them the recognition that they have earned over the years.

The Institute of Legal Executives was formed in 1960, but it owes its origins to the 1920s and the Managing Clerks Association and, in turn, to a former organisation which was founded in the late 19th century. Its record goes back almost 100 years. It has 20,000 members who take four general papers in law practice and four further papers. In 1989 no fewer than 15,000 members took the examinations. That gives some idea of the kind of work that legal executives do and the qualifications that they achieve.

In education, training and discipline legal executives play an immensely important role in the service of the law. They are well qualified, and the lack of recognition that they have received is extraordinary when, under the Bill, a person who is in no way qualified in the law could end up as a member of the Bench—an extraordinary state of affairs.

There are one or two clauses in which legal executives have a particular role to play. For example, clause 15 deals with whether a person should be granted a right of audience or a right to conduct litigation in relation to any court or proceedings. The criteria listed include

> "(a) whether he is qualified in accordance with the educational and training requirements appropriate to the court or proceedings;
> (b) whether he is a member of a professional or other body which—
> (i) has rules of conduct . . . governing the conduct of its members;
> (ii) has an effective mechanism for enforcing those rules of conduct; and
> (iii) is likely to enforce them".

In all those respects, important as they are, the member of the Institute of Legal Executives would expect to be granted a right of audience and the right to conduct litigation. I sincerely trust that that will be implemented when the time comes in the context of the advisory committee.

Clause 17 states that there will be 14 members of the advisory committee, excluding the chairman, making a total of 15, of which two must be practising barristers, two practising solicitors and two persons with experience in the teaching of the law. Eight other persons are to be appointed after consultation with such organisations as the Lord Chancellor considers appropriate. There is an overwhelming case for including at least one representative of the Institute of Legal Executives in that list.

As persons with experience in the teaching of the law are included, and as the institute has a crucial role in legal education, given its disciplinary code and the manner in which it runs its affairs, the time has come to give the institute the recognition that it deserves. That would be conferred not exclusively upon the institute, but upon its members. Such recognition would ensure also that they could enjoy the confidence that comes from knowing that they are recognised for performing the first-rate work that they have carried out in the public service for a very long time.

8.49 pm

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North): I, too, have no interests to declare, other than the fact that, in common with many right hon. and hon. Members, I deal from time to time with the consequences of legal cases and with solicitors and barristers.

I welcome, together with my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley), the concept of a legal services ombudsman. Any right hon. or hon. Member who has dealt with a case against a firm of solicitors or a barrister knows of the appalling difficulties presented by the existing procedures of the Law Society and Bar Council. That is not to be critical of either body, but the existing arrangements and the relationships between both bodies, and between members of the legal profession and their clients, are so complex as to make it very difficult to secure a positive outcome. The result is, perhaps inevitably, always something of a fudge. My experience of the legal profession is that there is a need for an ombudsman, and I am pleased that the Bill makes provision for one.

No right hon. or hon. Member has yet welcomed the extension of the role of the Parliamentary Commissioner. There has long been a need to clarify the relationship between the commissioner's department and that of the Lord Chancellor in investigating the actions of court officers in relation to administrative matters in general. I congratulate the Lord Chancellor on addressing that issue. The provisions in the Bill mean that anyone who has waited for some time for money from the courts, for example, will be able to look for some redress from the ombudsman.

My final and most important point concerns compensation for those who are bereaved as a result of an accident. I particularly have in mind correspondence that I have received from members of the Liverpool Law Society following their experiences in dealing with the aftermath of the Hillsborough tragedy 12 months ago. The

[Mr. George Howarth]

Criminal Justice Act 1982 provides for compensation of up to £3,500 where the deceased person was under the age of 18 or was a husband or wife of someone over that age. The experience of the consortium of Liverpool solicitors dealing with the bereaved families of those killed at Hillsborough is that neither category deals with all cases satisfactorily. They point out that the age limit is not the best way of assessing the relationship between a young person and his family. The youngster who continues receiving education at college or university after the age of 18 is a classic example of someone who is still, to some extent, dependent on his or her parents. The solicitors argue that the age limit is too arbitrary a criterion and that each case should be considered on its merits.

The 1982 Act does not provide for common law husbands or wives and thus reflect society as it is. The existing legislation creates much hardship and certainly a great deal of heartache in dealing with the aftermath of tragedies such as Hillsborough, Zeebrugge and King's Cross. The view of the Liverpool Law Society is that the amount of compensation should be increased. I suggest a figure such as the £10,000 proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Mr. Cunliffe) in a private Member's Bill.

The question of age as a key criterion for eligibility should also be re-examined, taking more generously into account the circumstances of the individuals concerned. Finally, in the context of compensation, common law partnerships should be recognised as being equally as valid as marriage. I hope that those important issues will be pursued in Committee. If such proposals are adopted, I am more likely to vote for the Bill at a later stage than I am tonight.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The winding-up speeches are expected to begin at 9.20 pm. Four hon. Members who have been in their seats for a long time wish to speak, and I trust that they will share the remaining time available among themselves.

8.55 pm

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): Having listened to much of the debate, I feel that I need some relief from the constant chorus from the legal profession as to its wonderful nature. Frankly, if one talks to the individual who has used a solicitor for conveyancing or in litigation, one begins to realise that belief in the high quality of the legal profession is not well-founded.

Many believe that the legal profession is a delicate but perfect flower and that it may be damaged by market forces and the abolition of restrictive practices. That is a load of tosh and nonsense. I can think of no less efficient, less effective or slower profession than this country's legal profession. By and large, it would be difficult to find individuals having better intellectual abilities. However, they should be able to organise their affairs in a far better way. There is something very wrong with the ethos of the profession—which, despite the self-congratulatory facade that has been presented tonight, needs a thorough shake-up. I am not sure that the Bill goes far enough, but it goes some way to that end.

It was incredible to hear right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House suggest that people buying houses should subsidise litigation by accident victims or divorcees. That is absolute bunkum. It was also claimed that solicitors give financial advice. I have bought five houses, but no solicitor ever gave me financial guidance, or said, "I know better than you, young man. Why not do this, that or the other?"

It is nonsense to suggest that a primary function of solicitors is to protect their clients from buying the wrong property. In the rising market of last year, I should like to know how many solicitors asked their clients, "Do you realise that house prices can fall as well as rise, and that interest rates might increase?" It is also claimed that solicitors are sensitive to local conditions and know what their clients should do, but that is largely untrue. It is certainly not my experience with the legal profession. The preservation of the legal profession's privileges is not in the public interest. The more that we can do to open up the profession and introduce competition the better.

I have been looking back at the amounts that I have paid for the conveyancing of my houses over the years. I first bought a house in 1969, and paid more in cash terms for a solicitor than I paid just the other year. I stopped using solicitors and first used the National Association of Home Owners, which was one way of getting round the solicitors' monopoly. Then I used an unlicensed conveyancer. Recently I have gone back to using a solicitor, simply because competition is such that solicitors offer a package that is too good to miss. The quality and the speed with which they get on with the job has gone up and up. The less money they charge, the less time they can take and the more efficient they must be. That must be good for the consumer—and we have heard so little about the consumer, other than the self-congratulatory remarks of the lawyers who are looking after them so well.

The idea that we should put any restrictions on the way in which the market for conveyances has opened up, or on the one-stop shopping for people to go in, obtain a mortgage and financial advice and get their conveyancing done, should be strongly resisted. We need regulations that protect the consumer but do not protect the monopoly of the legal profession.

Let me give a few examples. I bought a house in Huddersfield, along with 200 other people on our estate; after several years it turned out that the sewers had collapsed. Almost every solicitors' practice in Huddersfield, and in many surrounding towns, was involved in conveyancing houses on that estate. We are all told that if we use a solicitor we shall be protected against anything going wrong, but what did we find? All the solicitors had sent a Law Society form to the local council, asking whether the houses were connected to a public sewer. The local authority's answer was yes. What the form did not ask was whether it was the public sewer in the road immediately outside the house or the one two miles down the road. According to the Yorkshire water authority, the sewers in question were not adopted sewers.

All 200 house owners went back to their solicitors and said that they had not looked after their interests. The solicitors said, "We sent the form saying that the houses were connected to a public sewer, but you did not ask whether the sewer was in the road outside the house. We had to find that out for you." The problem went on for years. Eventually, a senior solicitor in one of the firms in Huddersfield got together with all the authorities, banged their heads together and finally sorted the problem out. The local authority and the water authority put money into a kitty, and the householders did not have to shell out anything. The solicitors all denied liability. None of them wanted to know when we asked whether it was possible to sue a solicitor for not protecting his client properly. All the humbug about solicitors protecting people is so much hot air.

Because the builder of that estate had gone bankrupt, I decided to go to an auction to buy the freehold reversions of the leasehold properties and put them out to tender so that people could buy them individually. I hoped to use only two solicitors—one for myself and one for the people wanting to buy. The solicitors said that all those wanting to buy could not use a single solicitor; they had to use separate solicitors. Two years later, not one freehold reversion had been conveyed to those people, because of the delay caused by solicitors saying that it was not worth their while to do the work. We gave them a three-month deadline to complete the work, but only half met it. I still own most of those freehold reversions today, and they provide me with a reasonable income.

I congratulate whatever Government brought in the small claims procedure. As a small business man in Yorkshire, I found that solicitors were not interested in going to court on my behalf to chase up debts of £200 or £300. I was able to find out from a helpful solicitor's clerk that it was possible to use the small claims procedure on my own. Because I was self-employed, I could go in and litigate against people who did not pay their bills. In the 10 years for which I did that, I probably handled 200 or more cases, most of which were settled out of court.

It is a simple procedure. When we went to an arbitrator, as long as there was a solicitor on the other side I knew that I had won, because they were never properly briefed by their clients and they never had enough information to fight the case properly. I lost only twice—to two little old men who were so befuddled that the arbitrator felt sympathetic towards them.

The maximum limit of £2,000 to take someone to a small claims court is ridiculously low. It would go nowhere if a builder came to build an extension, for instance. The amount should be raised to £10,000, £20,000 or even higher. Why should not people use the county court procedure, which is so simple? The arbitration procedure is easy and it allows the arbitrator to ask proper questions. It is a good and informal way to sort out disputes. It is essential that directors of small limited companies have right of audience in a county court. Currently, unless they are self-employed they do not have that.

Contingency fees are another way of shaking up the legal profession and of giving rights of access outside the legal aid system, and we should try to do that more and more. The freeing of rights of audience would help by providing competition. It would allow the winds of change to blow through the legal profession.

I have rapidly read through my notes because time is short. I am glad that the Bill has been introduced because it helps the consumer. However, consumers are far from satisfied with the legal profession. I am referring in the main to solicitors, as I am glad to say that I have not had to go to litigation with barristers looking after my interests. I have heard scare stories from people who say that their barristers have been badly prepared, do not have a proper brief and therefore do not represent them properly. I urge the Government carefully to consider the possibility of a barrister being negligent—not that he had poor judgment or that he has not done the job as well as another barrister might have done it. It should be possible to prosecute for negligence. We must ensure that people can get lawyers to fight cases against fellow lawyers.

9.6 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I wish to declare an interest as a former law centre solicitor, although I have not practised since the general election. I join other hon. Members in paying tribute to the radical nature of the Lord Chancellor's proposals. I broadly support them and I congratulate him on his courage in walking through the minefield of the unseemly row between solicitors and barristers. Nothing becomes the profession less than the way in which they squeal as they fight to retain their diminishing monopolies.

The proposals may founder not because of the self-interest of the profession, but because it lacks the resources necessary to carry them through. I welcome the extension of the rights of audience for solicitors. I was persuaded a long time ago of the necessity for a fused profession. It is wrong that members of the public must pay twice for representation. It is wrong that they must pay twice when their representatives switch halfway through the case. Solicitors are specialised in certain areas and it is right that they should be allowed to represent their clients in the highest courts of the land. I welcome the establishment of an advisory committee, which will have a lay majority.

On the cab rank principle, I am convinced of the need for a principle that allows solicitors to take on any case that comes their way. That is especially important for legal aid work. However, I was a little confused by what the Attorney-General said about the sex discrimination and race relations legislation. I am not sure whether he meant to include his reference on the cab rank principle. I hope that when he replies to the debate he will say whether it is possible to use any of the exemptions in that legislation. For example, could a woman solicitor represent only women clients if that was what she wished? I should like the cab rank principle to be represented in a code of practice rather than in the Bill. I am a little concerned about the way that it has been advanced by the Bar to coincide with the fact that solicitors are to have an increase in their rights of audience.

I welcome the changes during the last few years that have allowed people to use licensed conveyancers, and have resulted in a reduction in the cost of conveyancing. I have yet to meet many starving solicitors as a result of those changes. We should pay tribute to the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), who was one of the first people to propose such legislation through his private Member's Bill. The law has been changed, but my fear is that it will go too far.

I am not convinced that big financial institutions will be able to draw the line on conflicts of interest. I have been convinced by the arguments of my local law society, especially by Peter Smith, the honorary secretary of Leicestershire Law Society, who sent me a number of cuttings from local newspapers, and one from *Today* dated 26 February 1990. I do not wish to say that I believe everything that appears in *Today* but the article seems to highlight a particular case, in which the Halifax Building Society, acting as estate agent, was able to convince people

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of the need to accept a lower offer by saying that by accepting that offer it would be able to arrange a mortgage. Those hidden costs of borrowing will become a feature if conveyancing is extended to financial institutions using in-house solicitors.

I like the idea of multi-disciplinary practices, but I think that they are unworkable in practice. They will threaten the independent and impartial service which solicitors now give. They will threaten client confidentiality and will make it more difficult for clients who are concerned about proceedings to pursue a complaint.

I wholeheartedly endorse the comments of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris), which I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) will repeat, on the county courts. I and other hon. Members support the transfer of cases from the High Court to the county courts because we believe that that will enable them to be dealt with under the small claims procedure or other procedures at a local level far more effectively. However, I remind the Solicitor-General, who sat on the Committee that discussed the Children Bill, as I did, that when put into effect the Children Act 1989 will place a greater burden on the county court system. It has been remarked that the county court system makes a profit of £6 million a year. I do not see why some of that money cannot be used to lessen the present delays in the county court system and to make it easier for people to litigate before it. If the attention that we seek is not given to the county courts, the system will collapse.

I should have liked to have seen something more in the Bill about training for solicitors, but perhaps that will come later. I should also have liked to have seen some reference to the creation of family courts. During the passage of the Children Act, the Solicitor-General promised that at some stage he would come back to the House and report on the rolling programme that he has instituted to establish family courts. I believe that the Bill provides an excellent vehicle for a family court system, and I hope that we shall have some assurances in his winding-up speech that he will accept that.

I welcome the establishment of a legal ombudsman. I am concerned at the refusal of the Government and of some hon. Members to enable consumers, should they wish, to sue their advocates if they make a mess of cases. It is ludicrous that solicitors and barristers are immune from litigation if they do not conduct their cases properly.

In the past 10 years, Parliament has legislated for rights which cannot be enforced because citizens cannot pay. The legal aid system is in severe crisis. The Attorney-General has just returned to the Chamber. He will recall that on 12 February, when I initiated a debate on legal services, I pointed out to him that I would not like justice to be cash-limited—I referred to it as justice-capping. I gave him some figures which he has not countermanded today. In the past 10 years, 15 million people have lost the right to legal aid, and last year 8 per cent. fewer people were granted legal aid than in the year before and there was the second largest drop in use of the scheme from 1,700,054 to 994,066. There has been a 3 per cent. drop in the granting of civil aid certificates. The Attorney-General himself used the figures when he spoke about the percentage decline and the number of people eligible for legal aid.

At local authority level, law centres, advice centres, citizens advice bureaux and other agencies that provide necessary advice for local people are being squeezed.

Our system of justice does not exist merely to feed barristers and solicitors or to provide employment for court clerks. The courts and the professions exist to enable ordinary people to obtain justice. Justice must never be seen to be cost-effective, but it must be administered effectively. There is still genuine anger that the law is expensive both in time and money, inaccessible, favours the privileged, conducts itself in jargon, supports monopolies, is remote and is conducted by lawyers for lawyers. Our duty as legislators is to put an end to those excesses. That will not happen with this Bill, but given good will in Committee we may set out on the right road. I warn the House at this early stage that without the proper resources the journey will not even begin.

9.15 pm

Mr. Michael Irvine (Ipswich): I decline to follow my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) in his doom-laden and over-lugubrious approach to the Bill. I want every bit as much as he does to maintain an independent and strong Bar, which is the key to the Government's intention of providing more choice to the litigant. Without a strong and independent Bar, the litigant's choice will be diminished. With it, it will be enhanced.

Where I differ from the diagnosis of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton is that I believe that the Bar is robust enough to stand up to the extra measure of competition that the Bill will bring. Of all the professions, the Bar is probably the most competitive. There is competition to get good pupillages, competition to get into good sets of chambers, competition between sets of chambers and competition between members of chambers. The Bar is a robust profession and is well able to take care of itself.

However, I have one anxiety that is shared by many fellow barristers. It relates to the recruiting activities of the major City firms of solicitors. They are anxious to recruit the brightest and the best from the Bar, and they have deep pockets with which to do so. Indeed, they are already doing so to a considerable extent. When the Bill is enacted they will be in a position to recruit from the Bar in-house lawyers who will still be able to continue to practise in the High Court and the principal appellate courts. It will be more tempting for members of the Bar to leave and to join those firms.

That is a fear with some substance, but the approach of many at the Bar is too pessimistic. Although there are certainly advantages in being an in-house lawyer, there are also disadvantages and frustrations. The Bar will be able to surmount that competition and will continue to attract many of the best and brightest. I also foresee that many people who leave the Bar and join the large City firms as in-house lawyers will in time return to the Bar as independent practitioners.

A further anxiety about the Bill relates to contingency fees. It is crucial to the effective and efficient administration of justice that there is absolute trust between the judge and the advocate appearing before him or her. A barrister has a duty to the court which may conflict with the interests of his client. He has a duty to draw the judge's attention to cases that go against the argument being put forward. There is a duty to disclose documents that are unhelpful to the case. There is also a duty not to harass unduly or unfairly the witness who is being cross-examined.

My main anxiety about the contingency fees—I am glad that we are adopting the Scottish rather than the American system—is that, because the barrister's financial advantage is caught up to a much greater extent with the outcome of the case, there will be greater pressures brought to bear on our current high professional standards.

I believe that the Bar will be able to withstand those pressures, as will our friends the solicitor advocates who will be joining us before the High Court, the Court of Appeal and other appellate courts, but there are some risks in the Bill. Good reforming measures often carry risks. On the whole, the Bill is a good one and I commend it to the House.

9.20 pm

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): We have had a fair, critical and open-minded debate. There has been no difference about the Bill between the two sides of the House. The debate has not been dominated entirely by the legal profession, and there has been no unanimity between Labour and Conservative Members. In all, we have had a good, stimulating debate and the Bill has had a healthy start before it enters Committee.

The debate vindicates the Opposition's decision not to vote against Second Reading tonight. We support many parts of the Bill, but it was right for us to table a reasoned amendment, for which we will ask the House to vote. Our amendment fills out the frame for the Bill and provides performance standards by which we shall measure the way in which the Government provide both for the reform of the legal profession and for the access to law for people throughout the country.

The Bill cannot be described as having a single theme. On the one hand, it deregulates part of the profession, and on the other it introduces at least five quangos. It is a Bill for the English courts and the English legal profession.

Mr. Alex Carlile: And for the Welsh.

Mr. Fraser: And for the Welsh—I beg the hon. and learned hon. Gentleman's pardon. It is a Bill for the English and Welsh legal professions, and it was introduced by a Scots lawyer. This must be the first occasion on which legislation, in its early stages at any rate, has led to threatened industrial action by the judges and the threatened resignation of the Attorney-General.

With one hand, the Bill gives rights and opportunities for solicitors to become judges or have rights of audience in the higher courts, yet it almost takes those rights away with the other hand. In Committee we will want to consider the possibility of a single designated judge exercising a right of veto over the extension of the rights of audience. We want to get that balance right when we examine that matter in Committee.

The Bill reforms the courts system, but it does absolutely nothing about the obscurities surrounding the selection, training and appointments to the judiciary—and by judiciary I mean both the High Court and the magistrates bench. In the light of what the Attorney-General said in his opening remarks about equal opportunity and avoiding discrimination, it is even more important that we should open up that area of the legal profession to reform as well.

As I have said, we will not vote against Second Reading tonight, because there is a great deal in the Bill that we can support. However, we would have had a better Bill and the progress of legal reform and the reform of the courts would have been assisted if we had had such a debate a year ago, when the Government produced their Green Paper and then their White Paper. The quality of today's debate sustains the argument that this is the kind of subject on which the House should be consulted at a much earlier stage and on which we could have made a constructive non-party contribution to the development of policy. It is a pity that the House has come to the matter so late in the day.

What should be our attitude to the reform of the legal profession and the provision of services? I declare an interest, in that I am a lawyer. From time to time, we are not popular either as lawyers or as Members of Parliament, even among our colleagues until—as all hon. Members will be aware—someone actually wants advice. One is reasonably popular on those occasions, but one is not always universally popular at other times.

There is great danger in confusing qualifications with monopoly. Competition is not distorted by those who offer services being trained, having high standards and being competent to practise—indeed, rather the reverse. Competition is helped by having a common set of specifications and qualifications. Competition is distorted only when access to a qualification is not open to all, or when a qualification provides restricted entry to doing something for which it is not necessary to have the qualification at all, or when anti-competitive behaviour is imposed as a condition of holding the qualification—for instance, prohibitions on advertising and price display. There would have been less criticism of the professions if the Law Society and the Bar had revised their rules, particularly in respect of advertising and making information known about services provided, much earlier.

The trend of consumer protection has been in favour of tests of competence—for instance, the control of conduct of estate agents, house builders, insurance brokers, investment business, doctors, dentists, nurses, teachers and so on. It would be short-sighted if we were to reverse that process for lawyers, because their practice becomes more complicated all the time and demands more, not less, training and more qualifications. We meet the needs of the consumer if we make sure that people are properly qualified. We shall certainly want an even playing field and proper regulation when we deal with these matters in Committee.

Although protection of the consumer is important, it is not the only consideration when it comes to regulating legal services. There must also be an ethical commitment to an ideal of truth, trust and fairness, even if the lawyer suffers in the short term by obeying it. If the professional ethic is lost, in the long run the consumer will lose as well.

There are two classic examples, one of which will appeal to my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin). One occurs when a defence lawyer is asked to plead innocence of a crime to which the defendant has unambiguously confessed to the lawyer. Lawyers are constantly asked, "How can you defend somebody who has told you that he has done the crime?" Of course he cannot. The second example is not the defence lawyer but

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the prosecuting lawyer who suppresses evidence which, if made available to the defence, would lead to the acquittal of the defendant. Those are two examples in which the duty of the lawyer, whether to the client or to the state, must override the instructions that are given to him by the client. If he otherwise overcomes his professional scruples, he is in effect taking money to tell lies knowingly or to suppress the truth from the court or from his colleagues.

I mention those points not because I think that lawyers are particularly self-righteous or better than other professions. I do not think that they are. Many professions have an ethic. It is not right to say that, as a member of the legal profession, one treats these matters on a higher plane than people in other professions. I mention those points to underline the fact that one simply cannot have purely competitive, market, money-making considerations as the only basis for this legislation.

We do not want a Bill that will create injustice. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) mentioned that clause 85 will create a real injustice. At the moment, everybody knows that, if they have a claim for personal injury, with some exceptions the writ must be issued within three years. That is a certain period and it allows for a solicitor to have three months afterwards within which to serve the proceedings. Many people will suffer major injustice if clause 85 remains as drafted. When matters go to court, there will be arguments about whether service of the proceedings took place.

There are many examples. A company may change its registered offices and writs may be sent to the wrong place. There is a great possibility of creating uncertainty and injustice if clause 85 remains in the Bill. We shall return to that point in Committee.

The Bill gives new rights to conduct legal services, such as probate and conveyancing and, to a small extent, litigation. In Committee, we shall try to ensure that the Bill works even-handedly between practitioners, and follows the principle that independence of advice to the client should be preserved. There are too many temptations and imperfections for this matter to be left to market forces. My two examples have already been touched on. The first relates to probate. We do not oppose, the Law Society does not oppose and no one in the profession opposes in principle the extension of the ability of non-lawyers to take probate cases. If a bank or an insurance company has been appointed as an executor, it is right that it should be allowed to get probate itself, provided it is properly qualified to do so. However, at the moment, solicitors are under an external supervision in terms of the amount of money that they can charge for probate cases and it is well known that banks and insurance companies charge about three times as much for carrying out probate services.

In another place, the Government said that that matter should be left to the market, but we must remember whom we are talking about and the people who pay that three-times-higher bill, should that occur. First, those concerned will not be the executors of the will. They will not be in charge of the administration of the assets of the estate. Secondly, the original customer is dead—otherwise the will would not go to probate. Thirdly, those involved may well be widows or children who do not have any legal capacity. One cannot say that that class of consumer—on the one hand, the dead consumer and, on the other hand, the vulnerable consumer, who is perhaps a minor—will be properly protected by the operation of market forces. Although I do not oppose the provision in principle, there must be an appeal to a third-party authority about the level of charging because the scale of charges might have been fixed long after the testator made the will or even after the will has been probated.

My second example relates to conveyancing. Again, there is no opposition in principle, because Labour Members have been instrumental in widening the choice of conveyancing services, while maintaining standards of competence and behaviour. I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) was not called to speak in the debate. If financial institutions carry out the conveyancing, the question that arises is whether they will perform that work primarily for the consumer's benefit or for their own. The problem is whether they will undertake what is known in other trades as "cherry picking"—that is, taking those parts of the work that are attractive and remunerative and leaving those that are unremunerative.

I shall summarise my point by considering the amounts of money involved in a conveyancing transaction. Let us assume that a house is sold for £100,000 and, for the sake of argument, that the conveyancing charges will be £500. In the same transaction, the commission for the sale of the house will be £2,000—about four times higher than the conveyancing fees. I repeat that we are talking about a financial institution that may earn £2,000 in commission for the sale of the property as opposed to about £500 in legal and conveyancing fees.

However, we must then add another factor. Let us assume that the property is sold on a mortgage of £60,000 backed by an endowment policy. The commission on that endowment policy might be worth about £1,000. Therefore, on the one hand, there is the consideration of making £3,000 in commission on the sale and the endowment and £500 for the so-called "independent" advice that is being given to the person undertaking the conveyance. Under those circumstances, one must consider whether, unless there are countervailing rules, completely independent advice will be given to the person undertaking the conveyance.

There is a simple way out of that, especially in relation to the endowment. As the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) has pointed out, it is reckoned that about £680 million per year is lost by people surrendering endowment policies that they would otherwise have been well advised to maintain. The answer probably lies in the Lord Chancellor exercising his powers to compel the financial institutions to disclose the commission that they receive as a result of the sale of an endowment policy. Solicitors have to do that now. They must not only disclose the amount but account for it to the customer. There must be an even playing field if we are to ensure that the first consideration, which is independent advice, is achieved and that there is fair competition between the professions.

The deficiencies in the Government's approach to these matters form the subject of our reasoned amendment. The first deficiency is the failure to deal with the inadequacy of legal aid. My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) gave some telling figures. The truth of the matter is that, although expenditure on legal aid has increased during the past 10 years, in the past two or three years, the number of people who obtained legal aid advice and assistance has fallen off. More worryingly, there is now a falling off in the number of firms undertaking legal aid work. That has never happened before. The reason why it is happening is that the Government have geared the reward to people undertaking legal aid—both solicitors and barristers—at a figure well below the real costs and the inflation rate for conducting legal work.

The reward this year is about 7 per cent., compared with a real rate of inflation in legal costs and the costs of running a legal practice or barrister's practice of about 12 per cent. That has had a cumulative effect over the past few years. The consequence is that people are increasingly getting out of legal aid work. If we carry on giving third-class rates of reward to people who do legal aid work, we shall at least finish up with a second-class practice. That is not right. Access to the law and quality of representation should be commensurate with the case. The way in which legal aid has been drifting is militating against that.

The second deficiency in the Bill relates to the conduct of county courts. There was some attraction in the suggestion of the hon. Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Malins) that there should be competition between one county court and another. Indeed, there is some such competition. In some county courts, people submit voluntarily to their jurisdiction because they know that in court X an application under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954 will be dealt with in seven days, whereas in court Y it will be dealt with in about six weeks or two months. There should perhaps be some competition between one county court and another.

The Government should think about a second practical matter—the difficulty of a litigant coming up against the same judge time and time again. In the High Court, at least there is the advantage that, unless one is unlucky, one will not get the same judge twice. Especially in country jurisdictions, there is often the possibility that, if either the advocate or litigant upsets the judge on one occasion, they will upset him on every subsequent occasion. That is a perfectly serious point. If we are to push more work down to the county courts, the judges should move around as well as the litigants.

Our greatest fear is that, on present performance, the Government are delegating work to a pretty ramshackle structure. I have just looked through a brief list of claims of maladministration against county court staff. It makes horrific reading. At Braintree county court, the list was overloaded and a case was adjourned. The same thing happened at Bromley county court and at Edmonton county court. At Exeter county court, the judge did not turn up. The registrar did not turn up at another county court. Cases have been incorrectly listed for a registrar —and so on.

Anyone who has any passing aquaintance with the operation of the county courts will be deeply worried about the standard of performance and the possibility of loading a huge amount of work on to a structure that cannot cope with the business now. The Attorney-General said that some staff would be released because the county courts will no longer operate payments systems. I am not sure that that change will operate to the advantage of some smaller litigants, who will say that they paid their money directly to the plaintiff. The bailiff will come in and find no independent record of whether money has been paid or not.

Our last criticism is that nothing in the Bill modernises except in the slightest detail, or makes transparent our system of recruiting, training and selecting the judiciary, or puts into statute any criteria for that exercise. That is in stark contrast to a Bill that sets out the criteria for the duties of the advisory committee.

The way in which judges and magistrates are selected or permitted to apply for the bench should be open and transparent and placed outside the control of political appointments. They should be the subject of the Judicial Appointments Group and take into consideration the elimination of prejudice or operation of discrimination through sex or race. As far as possible, the judges should reflect the composition of the community upon which they sit in judgment. These should not be secret matters, subject to political control. We were accused of trying to ensure political control of the appointment of judges, but we want to see that removed entirely from the political arena. I can think of one case in which the Prime Minister operated a political veto in respect of a judge's appointment.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) said, this is an enabling Bill, the final shape of which is not known. In our reasoned amendment, we try to sketch in a framework in which the change will take place and provide, in the course of our Committee discussions, for a comprehensive legal service in which the quality of and access to representation before the courts and tribunals are not dependent on wealth, privilege or advantage, but provide equal access to the law throughout the country. The Bill will not do that, which is why we have tabled our amendment. If our amendment is not passed, we shall try to achieve those goals in Committee.

9.42 pm

The Solicitor-General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): This has been an interesting and valuable debate with varied contributions from both sides of the House. If we had shut our eyes it would often have been difficult to know from which party or interest any particular contribution had come.

The Bill tackles and sets out to resolve major issues which have required attention for many years. The hon. Member for Norwood (Mr. Fraser) made a number of detailed comments which I look forward to taking up, considering and discussing further in Committee. The hon. Gentleman has a great deal of knowledge, having practised as a solicitor in London, and it has been a pleasure to work with him on previous Committees.

The comments made in the debate covered the key topics in the Bill. First, there is the civil justice review, which the Bill implements and which provides the first major structural reform of our system of civil justice since the judicature Acts of 1873. That aspect has been generally welcomed. The only point made about it was that it required adequate resourcing. That point has been firmly made by the Lord Chancellor and, in so far as it forms part of the criticisms underlying the Opposition's reasoned amendment, I shall return to it in detail later.

The second key aspect is the creation of a framework —I emphasise that word—to enable the structure of the legal profession to develop through a process of evolutionary change. That has been welcomed, but it was also questioned by the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Mr. Davies), who asked how it would work in the Bill. It is

[The Solicitor-General]

important to emphasise that the Bill creates not the result, but the framework for producing the result. It will initially be a matter for the profession, or parts of the profession, or for other professions, to come forward with proposals which will be examined by the advisory committee under clauses 15 and 16, by the Lord Chancellor and by the judiciary, through the four senior designated judges. Their combined wisdom will come forward and their combined agreement will be necessary before changes can be made.

It must be recognised that the Bill follows years of difficulty, particularly between the two parts of the legal profession—barristers and solicitors—which has been to some extent reflected in the carefully considered arguments put forward from either side of the debate. It was evident that the arguments were advanced not from either side of the Chamber but from the two points of view. I think of the eloquent arguments on behalf of solicitors advanced by my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) and the eloquent arguments on behalf of barristers put forward by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence), the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) and the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile). All those arguments were reflected in the responses of barristers and judges to the Green Papers—the "quality of justice"—and they will have to be combed through and evaluated by the professionals themselves in the first instance to see what kind of structure they come up with. It will then come to the Lord Chancellor and the judiciary for approval, or the lack of it, as the case may be. In that way, what has often been an agonising debate, which has properly been passionately discussed by those on both sides, should find a way of making progress, and a system which had not shown much capability of gentle evolution should find a way of effecting evolutionary change.

The third key point in the debate concerned the creation of a framework within which to encourage wider competition in conveyancing and probate services. The other sensible reforms relating to the appointment of the judiciary, allowing solicitors to make progress up the judiciary, judicial pensions, the power of the Law Society to regulate solicitors, and the extension of the jurisdiction of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration to cover court staff were also mentioned. The extension of the commissioner's powers was widely welcomed, not least by the hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth), one of the laymen who played a significant part in the debate—with his hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) and my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, South (Mr. Bruce).

In its major aspects, the Bill tackles problems that have been the subject of serious debate for as long as I have been in Parliament—almost 11 years—and for which there has been a growing need for resolution for all the 25 years I have been in practice as a barrister.

Like my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General, I was taken aback to learn that the Opposition appeared to be seeking to oppose the Bill as a matter of principle, but it has become clear from the speeches of the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon (Mr. Morris) and of the hon. Member for Norwood that the Opposition do not oppose the Bill itself but are putting down a marker with regard to two aspects of it—resources for the county court, and legal aid—by means of their reasoned amendment.

First, I wish to rebut as strongly as I can the comment by the right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon that legal aid is withering on the vine. That is nonsense. When the right hon. and learned Gentleman's party left office, legal aid was being funded to the tune of £119 million per year. It is funded now at about £589 million—almost a fivefold increase in value and about 150 per cent. over and above inflation. That can hardly be described as withering on the vine. Nor do I refer to monetary value alone. The aspects of legal aid which are important to this Bill include the fact that the number of civil legal aid certificates has increased from 190,000 10 years ago to 259,000 today—an increase of about 30 per cent. That is a picture of steady growth.

The right hon. and learned Member for Aberavon and the hon. Member for Norwood criticised the Lord Chancellor because he has set in train a review of legal aid, coupled with the careful administrative review that the Legal Aid Board is carrying out, and because he is seeking how best to target the money on legal aid. That is not a matter for criticism. It is a matter of good government. I do not know what impression the Opposition wish to give the country about legal aid. I have peeped into their policy review to see what they say. *[Interruption.]* I see the hon. Member for St. Helens, South scowling. He would no doubt wish nobody to look into that document and probably shrinks from looking at it himself. It states:

> "Over time and as resources become available we intend consistently to improve access to legal aid."

That is the kind of general statement which will thrill everyone in Knowsley.

The realistic step to take is exactly that which the Lord Chancellor is taking—to look carefully at where best to deploy the money. As he has said, he will not wait three years to come forward with sensible proposals—he will introduce them as and when his scrutiny throws them up. I remind the House that as recently as 9 April the reforms that the Lord Chancellor announced in November came into effect. Under those reforms, children's means are to be assessed separately from those of their parents, pensioners dependent on a small capital nest egg will get additional protection and all litigants in personal injury cases will have the benefit of an increase in the upper limit. That will help many people to gain better access to legal aid.

Mr. George Howarth: Will the Solicitor-General give way?

The Solicitor-General: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, but I have several points to answer and not much time in which to do so.

The Opposition have argued the need for adequate resources for the county courts. The Lord Chancellor has recognised that there have been problems in the county courts. The hon. Member for Norwood scratched around his notes to pull together some rather disparate problems from individual county courts. I do not deny that those problems exist or that there may be more, but the Government are tackling them. Expenditure is being increased. The Lord Chancellor has made it clear that the civil justice reforms will come in stages and not before the courts are ready.

The number of circuit judges has increased steadily from 353 five years ago to 408 now. That is a significant increase. As a result of the last autumn statement, the number of staff in post is to increase by 350 this year to carry out the administrative work of the courts. This year there are to be up to an additional 100 staff for the civil justice review and the Children Bill, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz). The need to handle suitor's cash will be ended. It may lead to one or two difficulties, but it is a sensible way to relieve county court staff of a job which plantiffs and defendants can do better themselves. That will release some 350 staff for other work. The summons production centre at Northampton is imaginative thinking. Large users of the county court can issue summonses, which some do in large quantities, highly efficiently. That will result in a saving of 50 staff.

Under present administrative procedures some 1,500 trials a year come down from the High Court to the county court and are handled by 50 trial centres. In my early days in the county court, if a case went over more than one day, one would stand back and go away for three to five weeks. Cases dribbled on for months. That will not happen. An additional 25 trial centres are in the pipeline. That is the proper and, dare I say it, the Conservative way to manage the system, to get it working better so as to meet the needs of the day.

I want to try to answer one or two points raised in the debate. My right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling) spoke as a layman, and laymen are to play an important part in the advisory committee where they are to have a majority. It is in the interests of the public and users of legal services that the reforms are rightly being brought forward. My right hon. Friend made three points about probate, mortgages and tied practitioners. The answer to his point on probate is that at the moment there are no provisions for the administration of estates after grant of probate because there are none in the present law. The Government have improved the position by introducing a complaint system to cover such matters, which my right hon. Friend will find in clauses 46 and 47. Clause 39 enables the Lord Chancellor, if appropriate, to make regulations on accounting for commissions. The financial services regime deals with tied practitioners, but we shall have an opportunity in Committee to consider how that works in practice in relation to the providers of mortgages.

My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-West (Mr. Malins) asked why we do not let any case go to the High Court. Here again it is a question of proper management of resources. There will no longer be any upper limit in the county court. If one let any case go to the High Court, the great temptation for the client would be to say that his was a terribly important case and that if it could go to the High Court it should. That would be a wasteful use of resources.

My hon. Friend also asked about employed lawyers and why they should not have to abide by the cab rank rule. It is impractical to think that an employed lawyer carrying out work for his employer in a particular area can in any realistic sense hold himself open to all comers. He would become an employed solicitor. We must hold that position open.

The hon. Member for Barnsley, Central was worried about wasting money on issuing writs. I understand the point because I was involved in that debate long before I was a member of the Government. There has always been a problem about whether to clamp down on the length of time available in which to start proceedings and get them up and running or whether to get them moving. There has been a consistent complaint that cases have hung around for three years, the writ is then issued and the next year has dribbled by. To answer a point made by the hon. Member for Norwood, that period will come down to four months. Writs will have to be issued and served and proceedings got under way. After several years of complaints, we believe that that will be a wise approach, but we can discuss that further in Committee.

The Bill lays the ground for major reforms to our system of civil justice. It opens the way to a balanced, carefully thought out evolutionary development of our legal profession. It provides a structure for properly controlled development of competition in conveyancing. After years of debate and not a little anguish, the Bill will come to be seen as a landmark in the sensible, evolutionary Conservative approach to reform and I commend it to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 101, Noes 203.

Division No. 162] **[10 pm**

AYES

Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Beckett, Margaret
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Fraser, John
George, Bruce
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hardy, Peter
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Henderson, Doug
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Illsley, Eric
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Leighton, Ron
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
McFall, John
McLeish, Henry
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Radice, Giles
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Spearing, Nigel
Strang, Gavin
Vaz, Keith
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*

Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ken Eastham and
Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dicks, Terry

Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Favell, Tony
Fearn, Ronald
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forth, Eric
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*

Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Maclean, David
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Miller, Sir Hal
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Moate, Roger
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neubert, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roe, Mrs Marion

Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thurnham, Peter
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. Nicholas Baker.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 60 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading), and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 42 (Committal of Bills).

Courts and Legal Services Bill *[Lords]* *[Money]*

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Courts and Legal Services Bill *[Lords]*, it is expedient to authorise—

(a) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

  (i) any sums required by the Lord Chancellor for the payment of grants under the Act to the Advisory Committee on Legal Education and Conduct and the Authorised Conveyancing Practitioners Board;

  (ii) any other expenses incurred by the Lord Chancellor under the Act; and

  (iii) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money provided by Parliament under any other enactment;

(b) the payment out of the Consolidated Fund of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums to be paid out of that Fund under any other enactment.—*[Mr. Lilley.]*

10.12 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): It is, perhaps, entirely appropriate that a non-lawyer should speak on this Bill via the money resolution, because the Bill has been —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will those hon. Members who are not remaining for this debate please leave the Chamber quietly?

Mr. Mitchell: I have never seen so many lawyers working so hard for so little and at such length, which is why I am speaking on the money resolution. The Bill has provoked a protracted matrimonial dispute between the Law Society and the Bar Council. I am concerned with the consumers' point of view, which arises under the money resolution because its provisions do not cover the Lord Chancellor's increased expenditure and expenditure under related legislation, such as the extension of the ombudsman role.

The real problem of the inadequate provision of legal services is financial. The system seriously fails the people —not the wealthy who can always afford to pay for legal services, but the mass of the people who need the backing of the law in employment rights, housing matters, domestic and matrimonial disputes and so on.

All those issues are fairly inexpensive and of no great interest to the legal profession because there is little reward in them. However, they require the adequate provision of services so that people can have their rights protected. That is where both the money resolution and the Bill fall down. The provisions of the money resolution are inadequate to extend the services that we want to those in society who are currently badly served by the administration of justice. They require a department—a Ministry of Justice—answerable in the Chamber. They require a public defender service providing effective protection for the mass of the people. They require a legal services commission. They require proper training, in particular for judges, which is covered in the money resolution. I do not know why we have not yet established a YTS-type training scheme for judges. Under our system we have some of the worst-trained judges in the world. Certainly we have nothing like the provision for training of judges as exists in France. Finally, they require the type of injury compensation scheme that exists in New Zealand.

Instead, the Lord Chancellor has gone for the market solution to try to get more work out of the system for less money. He has gone for a money resolution that covers less ground. A market solution—increased competition —makes fewer demands on the public purse and gets more work out of the system. I have no objection to that as a principle, but it does not cover enough ground. The money resolution is not as extensive as I would have wanted it to be.

I congratulate the Lord Chancellor on the Bill, first for having begun progress after the logjam which built up under his predecessors and secondly for the ingenious solutions that he has gone in for. However, there are other areas in which we could serve the consumer better without making substantial demands on the money resolution— for instance, by making barristers and lawyer advocates in the higher court liable in law for incompetence, negligence and inadequacy. Why should they be exempt from legal action of that nature? No one else has that protection. We need to bring them into the scope of negligence cases and they should be taken to court for inadequacy in their work.

The money resolution covers the extra work of judges, but the extra work that falls on them in respect of their control over access to representation in higher courts is not something that they should have to do in any case.

Why should judges, who made their views on solicitor representation in higher courts absolutely clear, and who are defending the vested interests of barristers in this matter, have power over that area? Why not allow solicitors to operate in the higher courts on the same basis as we now allow lay people to operate in the county courts? It could be as simple as that. It would not need the expenditure in the money resolution if we opted for that more straightforward solution and then let the consumer choose whose services he wanted to represent him.

We could also get a wider range of representation by providing that the solicitor who prepared the case could present it in the court. That could be done without extra expenditure, thus widening the range of choice. If we maintain the ban on those who prepare cases representing them in court we are imposing a rule that does not apply in the lower courts, and it is wholly unnecessary.

We could have direct access to barristers. I am alarmed to find that the Bar Council has taken preliminary steps to discipline barristers who work in solicitors' firms. Why can we not establish a principle of direct access to barristers?

The cab rank principle was put into the Bill by Lord Alexander to restrict competition among solicitors in the higher courts or, as the Legal Action Group put it, "to make mischief". Really it is there as a restraint on competition, because it is difficult for solicitors to comply with that ruling. I shall quote briefly from the Legal Action Group's current report:

> "The Bar's own cab-rank rule does not bear too much investigation. Only from last month has this vaunted bulwark of the country's civil liberties actually required a barrister to act in a legally aided case. The exceptions to the general principle remain so wide that any barrister could devise a justification for refusing almost any particular case or general class of work."

The editorial concludes that the real issue is to ensure that

> "every client should have access to a solicitor, not that every solicitor must act in every case."

[Mr. Mitchell]

The money resolution covers the Authorised Conveyancing Practitioners Board. I am concerned that the board will effectively cover only the work of banks and building societies. There is a different rule-making system through the Law Society for solicitors and a different system again through the Council for Licensed Conveyancers for licensed conveyancing. As a result of the separation of powers, there will be three rule-makers. It will be difficult to achieve a level playing field and a system that ensures that each operates under the same rules and competes on the same basis. The way that the Authorised Conveyancing Practitioners Board will operate will be inadequate.

The money resolution will cause extra expenditure for courts. The Government's views on the proposals of the civil justice review have not been clarified.

The Bill makes some welcome changes, particularly in respect of debts. I welcome them because the procedures have been too automatic and abrupt and the consumer has had too little power in them. However, I am not sure how it will work in practice. The civil justice review made 91 recommendations. We need to know what the Government's response will be before we can adequately judge how much expenditure will be involved and what regulations will follow to implement the provisions of the Bill. When will the Government give their considered response to those 91 recommendations, many of which affect expenditure under the money resolution? The problem of debt will increase the more the current deflation bites. To know how those procedures will operate, we must be aware of the Government's position.

The legal services ombudsman will have an expanded role, but we are not sure how he will function. He needs to have power to deal with shoddy and inadequate work and negligence. There is a provision in the Bill that all procedures must be exhausted before there is recourse to the ombudsman, whose expenditure is covered by the money resolution. The previous procedures under the Solicitors Complaints Bureau were not satisfactory because it had no power to award compensation. Will it be given power to do so and will the Government table an amendment to enable that, because it will have an effect on the number of cases that come before the legal services ombudsman?

The money resolution is wide-ranging, which is why this has been a rather more wide-ranging speech than it would have been. It embraces the least adequate part of the Bill. The Bill is good because it enhances competition and therefore enhances the drive of legal services to serve the consumer. But that is not enough, and we still need wider provisions and the correction of various parts of the Bill, which I hope will be made in Committee. We want to establish the basic principle that the legal system is a service industry working to serve the people, particularly the consumer of legal services, rather than the self-interest of those who operate it.

10.24 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I am grateful for this opportunity at the end of our main debate to speak to the money resolution. I suppose that the House should be grateful that we have not been pressed for time today in debating the Bill. Indeed, we could have examined the statement made earlier by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in much more detail and every hon. Member who wanted to speak on Second Reading of the Bill could still have done so. It is gratifying to know that those of us who were concerned that there should be proper examination of the statement were proved right. In view of the Government's track record of incompetence and shambolic action in the past week, it behoves the House on every available opportunity to examine what the Government are doing. That is what we are doing on this money resolution.

I do not cavil at the Attorney-General's claim that there is a need for speedier hearings of cases in civil courts. The Government say that that can be achieved by transferring cases from the High Court to the county courts, and I believe that that is probably right. However, the amount of money that the Government have allocated for that, including judicial salaries, ranges from £1·6 million to £2·1 million for the first three years. The Government also point out that there could be a bulge in activity in the courts which will be incorporated within a maximum figure of £3 million in the first year, £4·5 million in the second year and £5 million in the third.

Ministers should explain to the House the basis for those figures, which are included in the explanatory memorandum at the beginning of the Bill. We are anxious that adequate resources should be available to ensure that the transfer is made speedily and effectively so that there can be adequate access to the county courts for people who, as several hon. Members who declared their interests as lawyers said, complain about cost and delays. Those are the two principal complaints about legal issues. I hope that the Solicitor-General can assure the House that the amount of money provided is adequate and that the calculations have been made very carefully.

The idea of an ombudsman for legal services is good. The difficulties of complaining about barristers are legion. There has always been a qualification that people might seek to reopen a case if they complain about a barrister's negligence and sue in tort for that negligence. That has always been a difficulty.

The Law Society has probably been the body most effective at protecting its members rather than the general public when complaints are made. As one might expect, the Law Society's rules for dealing with complaints about solicitors are highly complicated and normally require a solicitor to interpret them to the luckless person who believes that he has been badly dealt with. In my experience of constituents who have made complaints, a general system of supervision by an ombudsman is likely to yield better results more effectively and more quickly than the turbid and complicated rules laid down by the Law Society, which has a vested interest in maintaining those rules.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the ombudsman be a lawyer?

Mr. Cryer: That is not absolutely clear.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): He is not allowed to be a lawyer.

Mr. Cryer: I am informed from a sedentary position that the ombudsman will not be a lawyer.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): Will my hon. Friend give us an example of the complicated rules about making a complaint?

Mr. Cryer: One of my constituents felt that his case had been mishandled by a solicitor, and wrote to the Law Society and obtained a copy of its rules. We went through the rules extremely carefully and found that he had very little basis for a complaint. That left him feeling dissatisfied. He had the bones of a case, but after an exhaustive search we were not able to proceed. That was my constituent's experience. As a result, I had to drag my eyes through the Law Society's list of rules, which I found to be extremely complicated. Rules to be used for facilitating complaints should be as straightforward as possible so as to encourage justified complaints.

Legal education will cost about £750,000 in the first year. The provision for legal education and conduct is welcome because legal education seems unnecessarily chaotic. It is only relatively recently, for example, that polytechnics have started to run courses to qualify solicitors. I refer to courses such as the common professional entrance exam in which, in effect, an ordinary degree can be converted to a law degree to allow entrance to the Law Society finals. I hope that the money will be well spent [illegible] clarify the legal position and also to encourage the sons and daughters of working men and women to become solicitors and barristers.

For many years, entry—certainly to the barristers' occupation—has been too expensive for many families to contemplate, despite the fact that in the past 10 or 15 years scholarships of one kind or another have been introduced.

Mr. Alex Carlile: That is mythology.

Mr. Cryer: I inform the hon. and learned Gentleman that for many families entry into the barrister's occupation represents a potential financial burden that they cannot accept with equanimity. Of course, under the Government, the general position with fees has not helped at all.

According to the financial memorandum, the overall annual cost of the Bill will be about £5 million, rising to £6·5 million. That includes money payable for judicial salaries. I am sorry that the Bill does not tackle the difficult problem with our judiciary. The judiciary is appointed to be independent so that the arms of the Executive and of the judiciary are not merged and so that the Executive cannot warp the law. That is the theory, but it does not work out very well in practice.

One problem is that judges are often ignorant and arrogant and cannot easily be removed from office except by a joint address of both Houses of Parliament. That means that some judges—I cannot name them because Members, as elected representatives, cannot even comment on judges, such is the insulation of their position—make statements about cases on which they have made decisions. Months later, they refer back to previous cases in which they have made decisions of horrifying indifference to some of the circumstances. By going on the media in the full glare of publicity and referring to previous cases, they resurrect the case on which they commented previously, which brings back the full horror of the first occasion to the family concerned.

Mr. Skinner: That is Pickles.

Mr. Cryer: Yes, quite often judges make thoughtless comments. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) was absolutely right to mention Judge Pickles. Judges say, "I can't be sacked, I must carry out my duties and I believe that they include commenting on cases as I choose." The Lord Chancellor has expressed general criticism of Judge Pickles' comments and, in a letter to me, he has also expressed great concern. The Government must tackle the problem of maintaining some independence for the judiciary, while providing a better way of ensuring that judges conform to some reasonable rules, which includes preventing them from commenting freely on judicial decisions that they themselves have made and producing the harm that I have described.

Judges who feel that they are better in a television studio can abandon their jobs and go full-time as commentators or do some sort of comedy turn.

Mr. Skinner: Pickles could be on a panel game.

Mr. Cryer: Indeed. Judges should not persist in retaining their judicial function if that causes difficulties for people who are brought before them and for their families.

I realise that there are difficulties, but this matter should be tackled in Committee. There should be some warning to the as yet handful of the judiciary who behave with complete impunity to all pleadings from the rest of the judicial establishment. The Lord Chancellor says that he can do nothing. I understand that if a judge comments in the fashion that I have described the practice is for him to be sent off to some provincial circuit with uncomfortable lodgings where it is drafty and nasty.

Mr. Skinner: It cannot be too bad.

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover queries what I am saying. I am told that that is the way in which judges are brought into some sort of conformity, but it is not working. It is fair to comment on that fact in relation to the money resolution, which deals with salaries paid from the Consolidated Fund. Indeed, they are paid from the Consolidated Fund so that there can be no taint of Government money being paid direct to the judiciary in recognition of its so-called "independent" position.

In conclusion, I hope that the Solicitor-General has been suitably briefed on the money resolution because it is an important part of our scrutiny and, as I said earlier, with the Government's sorry record of incompetence, we have to seize every opportunity to ensure that that scrutiny is maintained.

10.37 pm

The Solicitor-General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): The money resolution has proved an opportunity for a wide-ranging addition to the debate that we enjoyed before 10 o'clock.

The key provisions in the Bill in relation to the money resolution are in parts I and II, which take forward the recommendations of the civil justice review and the Government's proposals concerning the provision of legal services. As the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) has rightly said, part I is expected to give rise to additional annual expenditure increasing from £1·6 million to £2·1 million for the first three years. Such costs should be essentially transitional, representing the need to increase both judicial and administrative capacity in certain parts of the system—principally in the county courts—which will, in the main, be offset over time as a result of revised and streamlined procedures. As I said in

[The Solicitor-General]

the Second Reading debate, it is, however, estimated that there will be a continuing need for around 50 additional staff in the longer term to strengthen the listing arrangements in trial centres, which will be where the new work will in the main be dealt with.

This is, of course, separate from the additional provision announced in the autumn statement last year, which will enable the Lord Chancellor to increase the numbers of staff in the courts by about 350 to take account of recent increases in the work load.

Judicial salaries are paid from the Consolidated Fund, but those of registrars, who will be retitled "district judges" as a result of the Bill, are paid from the Lord Chancellor's Vote. The increase in numbers of the judiciary required in connection with part I will be predominantly at the "district judge" level. All the expenditure relating to this part—including the transitional bulge in legal aid expenditure referred to in the financial memorandum and caused by the faster throughput of business—is therefore expected to fall under the head at paragraph (a)(iii) in the money resolution.

Part II of the Bill sets out the new framework for the provision of legal services and establishes the Lord Chancellor's advisory committee for legal education and conduct, the legal services ombudsman and the Authorised Conveyancing Practitioners Board, together with its associated ombudsman scheme and appeal tribunals. The cost of all these bodies—which will pave the way to enable the provision of legal services to become less restrictive, while maintaining standards and public confidence in those providing them—may be taken into account at paragraph (a)(i) and (ii) in the money resolution. However, it is intended that the Authorised Conveyancing Practitioners Board and the conveyancing ombudsman should in time become self-financing through fees.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), who unfortunately must be elsewhere engaged—

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): He is doing an interview on Sky television.

The Solicitor-General: —welcomed the new scheme for the legal services onbudsman. He asked whether the legal services ombudsman had power to award compensation. The answer is that he has power to recommend compensation but not to enforce it. To enable him to enforce it would effectively make him another sort of court, whereas he is intended to be a different type of scrutineer. Publicity, which would no doubt appeal to the hon. Gentleman, is a considerable weapon in enforcing this type of ombudsman's decision.

In order not to keep hon. Members from some clearly entertaining material, I conclude my remarks on the money resolution and commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Wrightington Hospital

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

10.41 pm

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): I welcome the opportunity given to me by Mr. Speaker to raise the problems caused by the waiting lists at Wrightington hospital in my constituency and within the West Lancashire health authority which is almost coterminous with my constituency.

Before I enter into the arguments on the matter, I pay tribute to the dedicated staff and doctors at the two main hospitals which make up West Lancashire health authority —Wrightington hospital and Ormskirk district and general hospital. In the past 12 months we have been granted £25 million by the North Western regional health authority to build a new hospital. I am pleased to say that it is now under construction. My hon. Friend the Minister for Health recently visited West Lancashire to cut the sod to start building the new hospital.

The purpose of the debate is to draw attention to the problems of orthopaedic surgeons at Wrightington hospital. Waiting lists in West Lancashire health authority are low compared with national averages. That is a tribute to the staff. However, the position of the orthopaedic side, particularly upper limb, is extremely bad. It is acute and needs to be brought to the attention of the House. Action must be taken to deal with this problem.

The major problem arises from the waiting list of Mr. John Stanley, the upper limb surgeon. He is in need of additional support. The problem arises because Wrightington hospital is a regional centre of excellence. It draws patients from all over the country. During the past 12 months, 94 district health authorities have referred patients there. It is one of those hospitals that has been in the forefront of orthopaedic surgical technique developments and has played a major part in the development of hip replacement surgery for people afflicted with arthritis. That has become an operation that is widely carried out throughout the Health Service, and much of the work on it was pioneered at Wrightington.

Wrightington is also a centre of excellence for rheumatology and contains one of the small units in the north-west which deal with rheumatology in children. In recent years, the rheumatology ward at Wrightington has been the subject of debate in this House. I am pleased that, due to the attitude of my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) when she was a Minister, that institution continues to supply a good service to the people of the north-west.

At present, there are 1,660 patients awaiting admission to Wrightington hospital. Of those, 1,065 have been waiting six months or more. Of those, 791 patients are on Mr. John Stanley's list for upper limb surgery. His difficulty is that he is one of six specialist upper limb surgeons practising, particularly on hands and arms, in the United Kingdom. Of his patients, 568 have been waiting for six months, and 427 for more than 12 months.

Therefore, the problem has existed for some time. When the Department of Health recently analysed the worst 100 waiting lists in the country, Wrightington's list came 58th. It was hoped, at that time, both by the district health authority and me, that the announcement by the Department of Health in the White Paper "Working for

Patients" that 100 new consultants would be created would result in Wrightington receiving a consultant to alleviate its problems.

The North Western regional health authority absorbs about 9 per cent. of the total national expenditure on health care. But an examination of the number of consultants who had been appointed by the Department, following the undertaking in "Working for Patients", found that only six had been appointed to the north-west —less, on a global examination of the position, than would be expected according to the number of patients and the volume of NHS resources absorbed by the North Western region.

Today, the NHS treats more patients, with more staff, than ever before. It is a demand-led system. Resources have to be placed at the points where the pressure arises and demand is greatest. Wrightington falls into that category. Since 1985-86, the number of patients treated at Wrightington has slowly increased, from 2,305 in 1985-86 to 2,715 in 1989-90—an increase of more than 400 in discharges. But in 1985-86, the number of patients who had been on the waiting list for 12 months or more was 218; in 1989-90, it was 628. Therefore, despite the fact that more patients are being treated, the number on the waiting lists is increasing.

That is a tribute to the success of Wrightington and to the ability of the doctors there to provide excellent service —but it is making matters more difficult. Ministers in the Department of Health have tried to lessen the problem by means of the waiting list initiative. We are grateful that in 1987-88 another 250 patients were allowed operations because of the increased resources from that initiative. The comparable figures for 1988-89 were 120, and for 1989-90, 140.

However, despite consideration by the Department and its clear understanding that the problem needs tackling, the waiting lists continue to grow. It appears that Wrightington is a victim of its own success. If the problem continues, the waiting lists will only grow.

An application has been made to the Department under the so-called Yates initiative, whereby the Government determine whether waiting lists can be reduced by providing funds to hospitals centrally. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will look with some sympathy at our application for £235,000 to carry out more operations so as to reduce the waiting list.

It is impossible to discuss the waiting lists in one hospital without also considering the district health authority as a whole. West Lancashire district health authority has two major hospitals—the district hospital at Ormskirk, where a new hospital is being built, and Wrightington itself.

Over the past 12 months the formula by which the regions are funded by the Department has been changed. As a result, West Lancashire health authority has received a budget increase of 6.5 per cent. in the past year. That is made up of amounts of 5·8 per cent. and 0·7 per cent., the latter being a non-recurring sum.

I am sure that my hon. Friend will make the point that the retail prices index and health pay and prices costs are not necessarily one and the same, because the RPI contains some elements that are not relevant to pay and prices in the Health Service, such as mortgage interest rates, and so on. But some aspects of health costs, especially those relating to drugs, have risen in price well above the rate of inflation. So the district health authority, those who take an interest in health in the area and I all believe that 6·5 per cent. is not enough. If it is implemented, it will unfortunately entail a reduction in the health authority's resources over the coming years.

The change in the formula, as it has affected the North Western region, worries me. Unless it is reconsidered, we shall face the same problem next year, and the year after. This year the problem has been concealed, to some extent, by the large increase in the NHS budget generally, but the same formula for determining increases will apply next year. The North Western region's morbidity rate is extremely high, and the formula has been changed to the detriment of the region. If the Department were to look into that, it would benefit the health authorities in the region, which is the second biggest in the country.

When my hon. Friend does his calculations for Wrightington and examines the health authority's problems, I ask him to consider the performance of West Lancashire district health authority over the past few years. It is a model of financial rectitude and has followed Government guidelines time and time again. Over the past five years it has increased the number of patients it treats by 20 per cent. and has never overspent its budget. Unlike other district health authorities which have closed wards when they have overspent to reduce costs, West Lancashire has never called on that requirement, although major structural changes have been made as small cottage hospitals have been closed, such as Greenlane—Brandreth is planned for the future—to centralise treatment in Ormskirk, which is the geographical centre of the district, in modern facilities that are being built.

The cost improvements asked for by the regional health authority and the Department have always been delivered, but a small authority which covers 120,000 patients who are served by the hospitals within its environs has its limits. There is a deep feeling, particularly among the members of the district health authority, that overspenders benefit, while they have done everything that they have been called on to do.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to look at all those factors when he considers West Lancashire health authority, particularly at the morbidity ratio and the changes in the formula that will affect the North Western region as a whole and West Lancashire in particular. I again impress on him that the service at Wrightington will be a demand-led service of excellence. It is recognised throughout the country as second to none. It is demanded and will continue to be demanded by the public. The consultants who are doing such a good job deserve the support not only of their colleagues on the district health authority, but of Members of the House and the Government as a whole. I hope that my hon. Friend will look with sympathy on the difficult task that they face, perhaps with a view to helping to alleviate those problems while improving the service to patients.

10.57 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Roger Freeman): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) on presenting a case on behalf of his constituents with his customary clarity and courtesy.

It is nice to see you back in the Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker, after your visit to New Zealand. I understand

[Mr. Roger Freeman]

that you and your wife were able to combine it with a few days holiday. I hope that you enjoyed your holiday and that your official visit was a great success.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Freeman: My hon. Friend concentrated his remarks principally on Wrightington hospital, which is just without his constituency boundaries. He would want me to say that our hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Dover) represents the constituency that includes Wrightington. I understand that a good proportion of the staff and patients must come from my hon. Friend's constituency. It is part of the West Lancashire health authority, to which I pay tribute for achieving significant improvements in health care over the past six years. Indeed, my hon. Friend will be interested to know that the most recent accurate statistics for 1982 to 1987-88 show in-patient admissions up 22 per cent., out-patient treatments up 33 per cent. and day cases, principally day case surgery, up 60 per cent. It is interesting that treatment of patients in the trauma and orthopaedics specialty increased by 29 per cent. between 1982 and 1988-89. Those are truly remarkable figures which are a tribute to the skill, dedication and hard work of the staff.

Trauma and orthopaedic work, in which my hon. Friend is particularly interested tonight, includes broken limbs, hip and knee replacements and investigations into chronic arthritic conditions.

I understand that, last year, some 3,730 patients in west Lancashire were treated for trauma and orthopaedic conditions requiring hospital treatment compared with 2,880 in 1982—a significant increase. One understands that the population is aging and that the pressure for orthopaedic care is consequently increasing, and that technological advances, particularly the modern marvel of the hip replacement, which my hon. Friend and I, if we ever reach a great age, may well be candidates for, make possible surgery that was not dreamed of by our parents, let alone our grandparents.

My hon. Friend referred to the visit to Ormskirk of my hon. Friend the Minister for Health to kick-start a piece of construction equipment preparing the site for the new hospital—a £25 million development, with 139 beds for medical and general surgery, 23 for children and 8 for intensive therapy patients, and a modern accident and emergency department. I am sure that my hon. Friend is looking forward to the completion of that project, which will be of great value to the people of Lancashire.

My hon. Friend referred to the revenue allocation for west Lancashire, and I was busily trying to calculate the figures as he spoke. For the record, it is important to note that, for the year 1989-90, the year that has just ended, I calculate that the authority received some £25,310,000, made up of £24,568,000, to which was added AIDS money of £165,000, growth or development money of £379,000 and a number of other miscellaneous items totalling £198,000. The record should also show that, in the year to come, the allocation is £27,051,000, to which should be added an allocation for AIDS, certain White Paper work and capital charge preparation of some £200,000, giving a total of £27,251,000. I make that an increase of about £2 million, or 8 per cent.

I would not argue with my hon. Friend about the precise mathematics, but when we start moving in 1991-92 to full and proper weighted capitation, I believe that, from advice that I have received, albeit provisional, my hon. Friend's district will be a gainer, presumably reflecting the fact that either the population is forecast to increase and/or demographic factors will move in favour of his constituents—that is, if their average age is particularly high in comparison with the rest of the region, or if their relative health is such that the district merits a greater allocation of funds. The provisional signs are that my hon. Friend's district will benefit.

I understand that Wrightington hospital has located within it a regional specialty service for joint replacements, including upper limb, hip and knee replacements. One associates the hospital with the late Professor Sir John Charnley, who, even to a relative layman such as myself, is well known for his pioneering work on hip replacements.

It is relevant to note that, of the 942 hip replacements carried out in 1988-89, 34 per cent. were for patients living outside the north-western region. My hon. Friend quoted a slightly different figure, but it made the same point, that on orthopaedic work the hospital is serving a broad area.

The service deals with the lion's share of complex rheumatoid cases for the whole of the north-west and Mersey regions, and provides the only service for those two regions for wrist replacement and 90 per cent. of elbow replacements. It provides the only wrist surgery service in Great Britain, so it is not surprising that the hospital is facing a growing demand for surgery that is reflected in the activity figures for that specialty and in the waiting lists.

Over the past four years, patient activity has increased from 2,232 cases in 1986-87 to 2,715 in 1989-90—an increase of 22 per cent. At the same time, the number of patients coming forward for treatment has increased at an even faster rate. One understands the reasons—the hospital's reputation and the increase in the aging population.

The increase has been so fast that the number of patients waiting for more than 12 months increased from 339 in 1986-87 to 628 in 1989-90. At 1 March, 628 patients had been waiting for more than one year. My hon. Friend drew my attention to the fact that 427 patients are on Mr. Stanley's list for upper limb surgery.

Wrightington hospital has met all the efficiency targets set for it by the region. Last year, a target baseline figure of 2,304 treatments was set, and 2,715 were achieved. The irony is that, the better and more successful a hospital is at treating patients, the more likely it is to run up against cash constraints imposed by the current funding system.

My hon. Friend knows that, from April 1991 onwards, the new regime will benefit the hospital in two ways. First, there will be a contracting system whereby, if patients are referred from outside to a hospital of such distinction, money will follow those patients. The hospital's budget will become more flexible to the extent that, the more that it can attract patients from outside its district, the more money will flow into it. Secondly, our new system of allocating funds on the basis of weighted capitation should work in favour of districts where demographic and relative health factors indicate the necessity of allocating further funds.

Mr. Hind: Is my hon. Friend aware that the consultants at Wrightington hospital have expressed interest in becoming a self-governing trust because, as my hon. Friend pointed out, it is in their interests to do so? That change could be of some help to them in the future.

Mr. Freeman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing that interesting fact to my attention. If we receive Parliament's permission to proceed with the initiative, we do not expect that the hospitals and other units announced this summer will comprise the full and definitive list. If Wrightington is not in the first wave, in the fullness of time we expect that it, together with all other establishments having the proper qualifications, will be included in what will be an experiment of great value to hospitals throughout the country.

My hon. Friend referred to our inability to allocate an extra consultant to Wrightington hospital. It would not be helpful or constructive if I sought to justify that action. Suffice it to say that that decision was made by the Department and not individually by Ministers, which was the right way to proceed. We received twice as many bids as there were available consultants, so we were to some extent constrained by the number of qualified senior doctors able to become consultants. However, I understand my hon. Friend's specific point concerning the need for additional help in respect of upper limb surgery, which I shall bring to the attention of my Department's officials. I had not fully appreciated the point that my hon. Friend made.

I may be able to give my hon. Friend some further encouragement in respect of the hospital's waiting list. Over the past three years, we sought to concentrate waiting list moneys on reducing the number of patients waiting for operations for more than 12 months. That was our top priority. We know that such patients numbered 628.

I understand that the region has allocated some £431,000 to the district health authority over the past three years to treat 761 more trauma and orthopaedic patients, 500 of whom will be at Wrightington. In 1990-91, some £77,400 is being allocated to Wrightington as bridging money until Mr. Yates and his team make up their minds about any further allocation of funds to the hospital. That money will permit another 45 knee or hip operations, and another 25 upper limb operations.

John Yates looks after a special fund: £12 million has been set aside to be allocated nationally, following an examination of all the waiting lists in every district specialty by the management team from the inter-authority comparisons and consultancy unit, led by Mr. Yates. The valuable work started by the team in 1989 will continue this year. I understand that it is now considering a bid from the district for some £232,000 to carry out 135 more knee and hip replacement operations and 75 more upper limb operations, and I know that it will consider the bid very carefully.

It will take full account of the specialist nature of the work undertaken, and will know that the management executive led by Duncan Nichol is taking a particular interest in the number of hip replacements to be achieved in the North Western region this year. I understand that the team will meet the district chairman and managers in May to discuss the bid. Mr. Nichol will be interested in how it proceeds, and so will I.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eleven minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 19 April 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: We have not started yet.

PRIVATE BUSINESS

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL (No. 2) BILL *(By Order)*

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question proposed [26 February],

That the Bill be now considered.

Debate further adjourned till Thursday 26 April.

RIVER TEES BARRAGE AND CROSSING BILL *[Lords]* *(By Order)*

Read a Second time, and committed.

Mr. Speaker: As the next 13 Bills set down for Second Reading have blocking motions, with the leave of the House I shall put them as a single group.

ADELPHI ESTATE BILL *(By Order)*

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question proposed [27 February],

That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Debate further adjourned till Thursday 26 April.

CATTEWATER RECLAMATION BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON LOCAL AUTHORITIES (NO. 2) BILL *[Lords]* *(By Order)*

CLYDE PORT AUTHORITY BILL *(By Order)*

SHARD BRIDGE BILL *(By Order)*

VALE OF GLAMORGAN (BARRY HARBOUR) BILL *[Lords]* *(By Order)*

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON UNDERGROUND (VICTORIA) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON REGIONAL TRANSPORT (PENALTY FARES) BILL *(By Order)*

LONDON UNDERGROUND BILL *(By Order)*

Orders for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday 26 April.

EXMOUTH DOCKS BILL *(By Order)*

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question proposed [29 March],

That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Debate further adjourned till Thursday 26 April.

GREAT YARMOUTH PORT AUTHORITY BILL *[Lords]* *(By Order)*

HEATHROW EXPRESS RAILWAYS BILL *[Lords]* *(By Order)*

Orders for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday 26 April.

Oral Answers to Questions

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. By opting to go to Sandringham this afternoon rather than being in his place for Agriculture Question Time in the House of Commons, has not the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food got his priorities wrong? I admire much of the work of Prince Charles, and I have been a staunch supporter in difficult times of the European Community, but does the House agree that it is deeply unhelpful that the heir to the throne and a European Commissioner should consider that their business, however interesting and praiseworthy, should take precedence over a Minister's duty to be in the House of Commons for his own Question Time?

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Curry): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I was going to explain in answer to the first question the reasons for my right hon. Friend's absence. As the House will recall, this Question Time was originally fixed for 5 April and my right hon. Friend, with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and two European Commissioners —for agriculture and for environmental affairs—had a long-standing engagement today. My right hon. Friend hopes that the House will understand the importance of his keeping that engagement to deal with extremely important matters.

Mr. Speaker: I think we should get on.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Beef Industry

1. **Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the present state of the beef industry.

Mr. Curry: The beef breeding herd is at its highest level for a decade. Last year there was a rise of 9 per cent. over 1988.

Mr. Carlile: Under European Community rules, the Government could pay up to £71·37 per cow in hill livestock compensatory allowance. At the moment they are paying merely £54·50. Why will not the Government support hill farmers to the hilt when their incomes are depressed largely as a result of Government policy?

Mr. Curry: The Government support hill livestock producers very substantially. We recently increased the hill livestock compensatory allowance for sheep producers and we judged that that was the best place to put a limited resource. The hon. and learned Gentleman will recall that last year we increased the suckler cow premium by 42 per cent. and extended it to smaller farmers. That particularly affects beet producers, 60 per cent. of whom are in less-favoured areas. We direct £50 million a year in HLCAs to beef producers in the uplands. So we have nothing to apologise for in our support of the beef industry.

Sir Hector Monro: Does my hon. Friend agree that the increase in the suckler cow subsidy does much to improve confidence in the beef industry? As rearing hill calves is a long-term project, will he give as early warning as possible about the future of the HLCAs for next year so that farmers can plan with confidence?

Mr. Curry: I take heed of my hon. Friend's comments. The fact that we have to negotiate in Brussels means that sometimes we cannot give as much warning as we should like because negotiations are delayed. It is certainly true that we have at heart the welfare of those beef producers.

Dr. David Clark: As the issue dominating the beef industry is mad cow disease, why do the Government refuse to implement the recommendation of their own Tyrrell working party and undertake a random sample of dead cows at slaughterhouses to ascertain the extent of mad cow disease in the British herd?

Mr. Curry: The reason is that the measures that we have taken are more effective. We maintain extremely effective controls, and many of our actions have gone beyond the recommendations of our scientific advisers. We believe that the precautionary approach is right. We have done everything possible to safeguard public health and have gone beyond many of the recommendations made in that respect.

Food Hygiene

2. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the hygiene standards of British food resulting from the Food Safety Bill and those of food from other European Community countries.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Maclean): The Food Safety Bill is a joint initiative between my Department and the Department of Health.

Once the Bill and various subsidiary regulations are in place, we will have a comprehensive and flexible framework in controls, equal to the very best in the world.

Mr. Coombs: My hon. Friend and the whole House will be aware that the Food Safety Bill creates a framework for a mass of secondary legislation in the form of regulations on food safety. Will my hon. Friend assure the House that he will consult widely and thoroughly on all the regulations before they and the Bill become law to ensure that British food continues to be as safe and wholesome as any in the world?

Mr. Maclean: As my hon. Friend knows, the Bill allows us to consult on a wide variety of regulations and I can give the House the assurance that he seeks. We will consult widely on the regulations that will be required as the Bill becomes law. We shall conduct those negotiations and consultations during the summer. I thank the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) for his kind comments about the Bill in an article in the *Financial Times* last week.

Dr. David Clark: If food hygiene standards in Britain are as high as the Minister says, why has food poisoning increased fivefold since the Government took office?

Mr. Maclean: It is strange for the hon. Gentleman suddenly to attribute food poisoning to the Government taking office. That is quite bogus and the correlation cannot be made. The hon. Gentleman knows that that is so.

Sugar Beet

3. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the future of the United Kingdom sugar beet industry.

Mr. Curry: The United Kingdom sugar beet industry grows and processes about half the United Kingdom's sugar requirements. We will seek to ensure that British sugar interests are defended in the forthcoming review of the Community's support arrangements.

Mr. Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is in the British interest that British Sugar should remain a British-owned company? Does he agree that foreign acquisition of it would be bad for employment and bad for British sugar beet growers?

Mr. Curry: The ownership of British Sugar is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Office of Fair Trading. My function is to ensure that the interests of British beet farmers and British beet production are safeguarded. I shall pay close attention to that in the negotiations.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Has the Minister discussed the representations concerning the future of the British sugar beet industry with the Chairman of the Select Committee on Agriculture?

Mr. Curry: No, Sir.

Sir William Clark: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Government intend to continue to import the present tonnages of cane sugar?

Mr. Curry: Yes, I can give that assurance. The importation of 1·3 million tonnes of cane sugar from the developing countries is important to the United Kingdom. It constitutes half our supply and a major outlet for cane producers. Next month, I shall address the ministerial meeting of the African, Caribbean and Pacific producers on precisely that subject.

Salmonella

4. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has met poultry farmers to discuss the problem of salmonella poisoning during the last six months.

Mr. Maclean: Ministers and officials at my Department have, on a number of occasions, met and corresponded with individual poultry farmers and organisations on matters relating to salmonella.

Mr. Hardy: Is the Minister fully aware of the serious anxiety and vulnerability of most egg producers? Is not their critical position compounded by the importation of foreign eggs, which may be dumped? Although they are subject to testing, is he aware that the rest of the batch of eggs not taken for testing will have been eaten long before the results of the test are known? Is not that ridiculous?

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that, as has been stated many times in the House, we do not have the power to ban the importation of foreign eggs. Nevertheless, we have followed—and are keen to follow—the Select Committee's advice that we should redouble our efforts in the EC to achieve EC-wide salmonella controls. I am pleased to tell the House that those negotiations are proceeding apace. We expect to hear proposals from the Commission in May with a view to their being completed this year. That is the best safeguard that we can give to our producers and consumers.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Notwithstanding my hon. Friend's excellent efforts to achieve EC-wide safeguards against salmonella, will he bear in mind the fact that other European countries have a far lower standard of overall hygiene than we have? Will he ensure that nothing in the harmonisation process weakens the effects of the Food Safety Bill or the ability of the Government to safeguard our people against food poisoning?

Mr. Maclean: The criticism at present is that we are making too strenuous efforts to control aspects of food poisoning. We do not intend to weaken our efforts to protect our consumers, irrespective of what products they are eating. We shall be stressing in Europe the need for Europewide controls to be placed as effectively in other EC countries as they are placed here.

Mr. Lofthouse: What is the point of testing the eggs if the vast majority have already been eaten?

Mr. Maclean: Because we can take up the matter immediately with the Government of the egg-producing country concerned—as we did when we found salmonella in eight consignments of eggs—and that Government can take the necessary action. That is the extent of what we can do under existing salmonella controls and that is why we want better ones. I must point out to the hon. Gentleman that in the first two months of this year egg imports represented only 4 per cent. of eggs consumed. That is a small proportion of our egg supply.

Miss Emma Nicholson: Will the Minister reassure me that rare breeds of hens will be safeguarded? They may require a special regulation. Their gene banks are very important.

Mr. Maclean: I am delighted to give my hon. Friend that reassurance. There is no question of a special rare breed of bird being exterminated. However, I also give the House the assurance that anyone who sells eggs to the public for profit, whether those eggs come from rare brids or others, cannot expect to be exempt from the salmonella controls or from our public health measures.

Fishing Industry

5. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations he has received from representatives of the west coast of Scotland fishing industry.

Mr. Curry: In response to concerns expressed by west coast fishermen, we have issued a consultation document on fisheries management on the west coast.

Mr. Macdonald: May I ask the Minister specifically about the proposal to allow the aggregation of licences? Will he take on board the concern expressed by west coast fishermen that that will simply mean that larger operations, usually on the east coast of Scotland, will buy up the smaller boats of the west coast? That will mean a loss of livelihood for west coast fishermen and will harm conservation in the long run.

Mr. Curry: I wish to get the terminology straight. The proposals that we have just announced are for the aggregation of capacity, not licences. Even if we then proceed to adopt a consultation document on the aggregation of entitlements, it will not concern licences as such. We are a long way from a transferable licence, although, as I have always made clear, it is an option. The aggregation of capacity is a limited measure which aims to get fishermen away from the tight straitjacket of being unable to increase tonnage or horsepower at all. Fishermen can now buy a bigger boat and obtain the catching capacity entitlement that goes with a boat of that size. Fishing entitlement aggregation would be a more radical measure and would push more in the direction of the rationalisation of the fleet. However, we are committed to consulting widely before introducing such a measure.

Mr. Salmond: Does the Minister understand that thousands of fish processing workers in the west of, and throughout, Scotland face a wage freeze in the current year? Does he appreciate that they are among the lowest-paid industrial workers in the country, in most cases earning £100 or less for a full week's work, at a time when inflation is pushing towards double digits? How long will it be before the Minister and his colleagues snap out of their complacency and introduce a crisis package of measures to stabilise the fortunes of the industry, onshore and offshore?

Mr. Curry: What the hon. Gentleman means by crisis package of measures to stabilise the industry is that we should simply give it more money; that is his familiar theme. The action that we plan to take is, first, to make management more effective, with the series of measures that I outlined to the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) and, secondly, to tackle seriously the question of conservation. I must point out to the hon. Gentleman that workers in the west coast processing industry would be much worse off if we did not manage our fisheries to ensure that there was fish to catch in the future.

Grain

6. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has received any representations about the competitive position of bakers using north American grain in preference to European grain; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: I have received no representations, but I am arguing for a reduction of the high levy imposed on north American wheat in the current price negotiations. The bread-making quality of home-produced wheat has improved to such an extent that we now use less than a tenth of the amount of imported grain that we were using 10 years ago.

Mr. Thurnham: Will my hon. Friend do his utmost to achieve a reduction in agriculture tariffs at the forthcoming GATT talks so that quality bakers, such as Warburtons in my constituency, no longer have to pay a levy of £100 a tonne on imported north American high protein grains?

Mr. Curry: We shall press to get levies down and the GATT talks will almost certainly result in a phased programme of cuts sustained over a number of years. Without that, I do not think that the GATT talks would succeed at all. I remind my hon. Friend that the stabiliser has produced three years of cuts in grain prices and that farmers are feeling the pinch. It is only fair to say that if we obtain the green pound devaluation for which we are aiming—in the United Kingdom, at least—grain prices will rise, which will put farmers on more equal terms with their competitors overseas.

Mr. Strang: Does the Minister accept that the major problem affecting competition with European grain producers is the enormous burden and disadvantage imposed on the home industry as a consequence of the gap between the green pound and sterling? Does he accept that the original proposal to cut the gap by one third is inadequate in relation to those commodities for which the difference is well over 10 per cent.?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman will see from the arrangements that were on the table when the price-fixing negotiations broke up a few weeks ago that the devaluation of one third had rather passed into history. We very much hope that when the negotiations resume, it will stay part of history.

Mr. Andy Stewart: As British millers and bakers are buying wheat at 30 per cent. less in real terms than they were five years ago, does my hon. Friend agree that it is about time they passed on some of their good fortune to their customers?

Mr. Curry: It is certainly true that the price of grain as a raw material for the bread maker has not increased recently. It is also true that we must strike a balance—that is what most politics is about—between the interests of the producer and the interests of the consumer. At the moment, it is the producers who believe that they face an injustice, and we are trying to correct that.

Eastern Europe

7. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the outcome of his discussions following his recent visits to Poland, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria.

Mr. Curry: The principal purpose of my right hon. Friend's visits to Poland, Czeckoslovakia and Bulgaria was to support political and economic reform in those countries and to seek export opportunities for British business men.

Mr. Field: As he is one of the foremost defenders of British fishing interests, will my hon. Friend allow me to congratulate him on organising a three-month course on fisheries management at Hull for Polish fisheries managers, at a cost to the British taxpayer of £133,000? Does my hon. Friend agree that, in view of the size of the eastern bloc fishing fleet and as trawlers no longer have to eavesdrop on boring ministerial conversations and can concentrate instead on fishing, it is important that Britain leads the way in showing the eastern bloc fleet how to conserve its stocks rather than continue to plunder them recklessly?

Mr. Curry: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The project that he mentioned is an example of the carefully targeted aid that we envisage for eastern Europe. On eastern European fisheries capacity, EC resources are shared out according to track record and there is no case for allowing east European vessels to fish Community waters. I have made it clear at a number of Fisheries Councils that we will not allow Soviet, Polish or other vessels into the North sea.

The West German fleet underfishes by about one third of its capacity and there is room for East Germany to take some of that quota without seeking any general allocation at European level. Of course, some eastern European waters might be available for western fisheries if East Germany joins the European Community.

However, I completely agree with my hon. Friend; we are not in the business of giving away a scarce resource, particularly to those who might not be most attentive to its conservation.

Mr. Andrew Welsh: Will the Minister give assurances that measures to help east European farmers will cause minimum disruption to the home industry, for example with regard to the bulk import of cheap fruit pulp? If the object of the exercise is to increase finance for east European farmers, would not it be more sensible to do that by fixing cross-border prices rather than by using the tariff system, which can cause great disruption to the home industry?

Mr. Curry: When proposals were made to give concessions under the generalised system of preferences to Poland and Hungary, the United Kingdom argued that they should be restricted. We have since had close discussions about careful monitoring of the price arrangements. We can sustain imports provided that the prices are genuine and not dumping prices. We are in touch with the Commission and we will ensure that aid is specific and limited, that it will not damage our industry and that we do not make a greater contribution than anyone else to the necessary process of liberalisation in eastern Europe.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: During my right hon. Friend the Minister's extremely successful visit to eastern Europe, did he detect any enthusisam to revert to the old-fashioned and failed economic policies of socialism and communism, or did he find an enthusiasm to embrace many of the economic policies that our Government were the first to introduce in this country over the past 10 years?

Mr. Curry: I understand that when Belisarius reconquered Italy, he coined the phrase, "If you seek a desert, look around you". I think that my right hon. Friend the Minister looked around eastern Europe and saw that 40 years of socialism had had the same effect. He gained no impression of an anxiety to revert to communism, but of a considerable anxiety to learn some of the elements of capitalism.

Farm Animal Welfare Council

8. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what reports he is expecting from the Farm Animal Welfare Council.

Mr. Maclean: The Farm Animal Welfare Council has just started studies of the welfare of broiler chickens and of animals kept in extensive husbandry systems. I look forward to receiving the council's advice when this work has been completed.

Dr. Howells: The Minister will be aware that the main recommendation of the February 1990 report from the council was that recommendations in earlier reports, which are still outstanding, should be implemented. He has not implemented those recommendations. Will he ignore the February 1990 report like he ignored all the others? Will he continue to allow animals to be subjected to misery?

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman's remarks are unfair and wrong. We received two reports in February which we are currently consulting on and studying. We have accepted the overwhelming majority of FAWC recommendations and many of them have already been put into legislative effect. I hope to lay before the House shortly detailed regulations on the slaughter of red meat animals and later this year regulations on the welfare of horses at markets. The hon. Gentleman must be careful before he makes erroneous comments to the effect that we have ignored FAWC reports.

Mr. John Greenway: Does my hon. Friend agree that the acceptance of many FAWC recommendations has helped to ensure that this country has one of the best records on farm animal welfare in the European Community? In future changes in the welfare codes, will my hon. Friend try to ensure that those practices are extended, not just in this country, but throughout the European Community so that we do not export unacceptable husbandry practices?

Mr. Maclean: My hon. Friend has hit the nail on the head. When we consider welfare in this country and the excellent FAWC reports, we accept that it is becoming increasingly important to extend those provisions to other EC countries. That is why my right hon. Friend the Minister took a welfare initiative in the EC. We sent EC Commissioners a host of recommendations on animal welfare that we would like to be extended across the Community. If we like animals and believe in their welfare, it is not good enough simply to improve their lot in Britain and these islands; the morality must extend overseas, too.

Mr. Wigley: Will the Minister confirm that FAWC has the right to inspect and to report on puppy farms which, in certain instances, have been the cause of considerable abuse? What is the Government's latest thinking on that matter and what do they intend to do to tighten controls in that area?

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman is right to be concerned about welfare on puppy farms. This is a matter for the Home Office, and I know that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department is currently considering what action can be taken. I shall certainly pass on to him the hon. Gentleman's concerns.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Further to the previous question, will my hon. Friend take this issue seriously? There have been strong reports about puppy farming in west Wales and we have seen horrific photographs of emaciated dogs being cruelly treated. The matter causes great concern to my constituents and we need Government action immediately.

Mr. Maclean: Those of us who like animals, and especially those of us who love dogs, agree with my hon. Friend that action is required. That is why my hon. Friend at the Home Office is considering what action can be taken. Having heard the views expressed in the House today, I shall be pleased to confirm to my hon. Friend that the House wants action on this matter.

Mr. Ron Davies: May I remind the Minister that the February report on enforcement specifically recommended that the number of vets in the state veterinary service should be increased to allow them to discharge properly their responsibilities on animal welfare? Given that during the past 10 years the Government have reduced the number of vets in the state veterinary service by 25 per cent., yet, despite that, the Government still apparently have a commitment to animal welfare, will the Minister now undertake to accept that specific and direct recommendation in the FAWC enforcement report and ensure that the number of vets in the state veterinary service is increased?

Mr. Maclean: I have made it clear that, having just received those reports, we are currently considering all the recommendations and are consulting widely on them. The hon. Gentleman should not be obsessed merely with the numbers employed in the state veterinary service. He should be more concerned about how effectively and efficiently it is carrying out its work. I am delighted to be able to tell him that its efficiency and effectiveness has improved considerably. I am proud of the excellent job that it does in all aspects of animal welfare and in enforcing the regulations.

Sheep Farmers

9. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has to ensure that the cash flow of sheep farmers is improved in the next 12 months.

Mr. Curry: Our plans to pay two advances of sheep annual premium to producers in both less-favoured areas and other parts of the United Kingdom will help the cash flow of sheep farmers.

Mr. Nicholson: That reply was welcome, as was my hon. Friend's recent visit to my constituency, where he gave an excellent speech to a conference organised by the Exmoor Society and when he made the valid point that no honest Government could guarantee the income of every farmer, irrespective of the circumstances. Will he confirm that his Department gives the highest priority to providing incentives to farmers to remain on the uplands, because farmers are our best conservationists?

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend is perfectly correct and I am grateful for his kind remarks, despite the fact that it was raining heavily in his constituency at that time. The Government put considerable resources into the uplands, but we cannot guarantee the livelihoods of all farmers there. However, it is clear that society is putting a higher and higher price on conservation of the countryside, and it is in our interests to encourage farmers to take advantage of that and to add to their fundamental role as food producers, the role of being the guardians of the countryside, as we all appreciate.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Does the Minister agree that the incomes of many sheep farmers are still being reduced because of the loss of stock and the worrying of stock by dogs? What is the Government's most recent estimate of the number of animals that are worried to death by dogs and how much does that cost farmers? Is not it high time that we had a proper dog registration scheme to encourage responsible dog owners and to stop some of the waste of animals' lives as a result of sheep worrying?

Mr. Curry: Most sheep farmers in my constituency have a clear formula for dealing with dogs that worry sheep.

Mr. Marland: Is my hon. Friend aware that in Buckinghamshire there has been an outbreak of caseous lymphadenitis and that the disease affects sheep? Will he take this opportunity to reassure the House and all sheep farmers that his Ministry is taking all necessary precautions to make sure that the disease does not spread elsewhere?

Mr. Curry: I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks. The disease has been found in goats, but it has not yet spread to sheep. We have taken strict precautions to ensure that there is no risk to human health.

Mr. Kirkwood: Is the Minister aware that the announcement that he made earlier about the advance payments is welcome as far as it goes? However, does he accept that a serious cash flow problem faces sheep producers in the uplands, particularly in areas such as the Scottish borders? Does he further accept that one of the best ways to solve cash flow problems faced by sheep producers is to take advantage of the flexibility that he still has within the hill livestock compensatory allowance mechanism, which at present affords a payment of only £7·50 per ewe, whereas the European Economic Community would allow a payment of £10·70 per breeding animal? Will the Government use that flexibility to eliminate some of the cash flow problems facing sheep producers?

Mr. Curry: I am afraid that there is a Catch-22 in what the hon. Gentleman says. If we were to pay the full amount, the number of animals that would be eligible for the full payment under the headage limit would be reduced. We used the resources at our disposal to increase the HLCAs. We also argued for maximum flexibility in the European regulations. The hon. Gentleman must understand that our resources are limited. We shall always put them where they are most effective.

National Farmers Union

10. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met the president of the National Farmers Union; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend last met the president of the National Farmers Union on 4 April, to discuss how the United Kingdom agriculture and food industry could best respond to recent developments in eastern Europe.

Mr. Yeo: When my hon. Friend next meets the NFU, will he assure it of the Government's continuing and strenuous efforts to achieve a substantial devaluation in the green pound? Does he agree that when farmers in south Suffolk and elsewhere call for such a devaluation, they are merely asking for a chance to compete on equal and level ground with their continental counterparts?

Mr. Curry: I agree with my hon. Friend that we are seeking not to give British farmers an advantage but simply to curb some of the disadvantages that they suffer because of the problem with the green pound. At the same time, farmers should be realistic. Demands that we should devalue the green pound in one go are unrealistic. We shall do the best that we can, taking into account all the facts that must be considered.

Mr. Geraint Howells: Did the Minister discuss with the president his predecessor's abolition last year of the guaranteed price for wool, which will have a disastrous effect on the economy of the hill farming areas? At this late stage, will he have another consultation with the chairman of the Wool Marketing Board to discuss the continuation of the scheme, which has operated so successfully in this country for the past 30 years?

Mr. Curry: Of course, we have discussed the issue extensively with wool producers and, indeed, with the board. The measures that we propose command broad consensus. We are discussing what the guarantee should be for the current year and hope to decide it shortly. When we eventually introduce the legislation to abolish the guarantee, we expect that it will have broad support in the House.

Mr. Hague: When my hon. Friend next meets the president of the NFU, will he be able to tell him when European Community Ministers will get round to agreeing not only a devaluation of the green pound, but the final instalment of this year's ewe premium, which is eagerly awaited in this country?

Mr. Curry: I hope that I shall be able to do that. The premium is fixed by the management committee. At a meeting yesterday it was taken off the agenda by the Commission, as it was the previous month. We are pressing that the decision should be taken quickly so that we can pay the final instalment. I undertake to make sure that once agreement is reached we shall make the final payment within a month to the best of our abilities.

Mr. Home Robertson: Will the Minister say something about the impact of penal interest rates on the rural economy when he next meets the president of the NFU? Now that interest rate payments from the farming industry have reached a crippling £1,000 million a year and its level of indebtedness has increased threefold to £10,000 million since the Government came to power, does he think that the Conservative party will get any more credit from rural voters?

Mr. Curry: I am disappointed to see that the hon. Gentleman has not used his recess to think of some new questions. I discuss a large number of matters with the president of the NFU, but few of his comments or the matters that I discuss with my farmers lead me to suspect that they are about to vote Labour. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House may remember that just before the recess complaints were made about private conversations during Question Time. I hope that that will not happen now.

Horses

11. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on measures available to protect horses and other equines from abuse; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: There are numerous measures that protect equines on common land, on farm, during transit and at export. We hope to introduce specific controls on horse markets in the next few months, and will press in the Community to retain controls on export of horses for slaughter.

Mr. Greenway: Is my hon. Friend aware that the horse is man's oldest and most faithful friend and that our history and prosperity have been borne on his back, but that horses will suffer severe and cruel deaths in the knackers' yards of Europe after 1992, unless suitable action is taken to replace British legislation on minimum values? Will he ensure that the Government will somehow get into place right across Europe proper legislation to safeguard horses, especially British horses, from cruel deaths?

Mr. Maclean: I should think that only my two dogs would disagree with the first part of my hon. Friend's assertion about man's best friend. I can give him the absolute assurance that we are determined to fight as strongly as we can for the unique British system of minimum values for horses, because we are all aware of the strength of feeling that horses should be protected better than the present EC proposal suggests.

Mr. Cryer: What are the Government doing to improve the EEC standards? Does the Minister accept that many people are worried about live animals exported for slaughter, because standards of care for animals throughout the Common Market vary and are often lower than United Kingdom standards? Is not it about time that the Government stood up to the EEC Commission and told it to get on with the job of improving standards, instead of capitulating on every occasion?

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends must decide which tack to take. Previously they have accused us of resisting too many EC proposals that we think are disadvantageous to the interests of this country. Now the hon. Gentleman's line is that we are capitulating. We shall not capitulate on animal welfare. We shall fight strenuously for our animals and their welfare at slaughter. That is why my right hon. Friend the Minister recently took an initiative in the EC to extend the excellent British system throughout the EC. We shall argue for that.

Mr. Lord: Does my hon. Friend accept that there is nationwide anxiety that when our horses and ponies finish their useful lives they should not be allowed to be exported live for slaughter, with all the misery that that may entail? Does he think it intolerable that our European partners should force us to reduce our standards in any way? Will he please do his best to ensure that that does not happen?

Mr. Maclean: I am delighted to give my hon. Friend that assurance. I urge him and our hon. Friends to lobby in the European Parliament and the European Commission, to show the extent of feeling in Britain for our unique system of minimum values. My hon. Friends and I are doing our bit, arguing to maintain the system, but we need the support of welfare organisations in this country and Europe to convince everyone that minimum values are good and should stay.

Parrots

12. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he has taken as a result of the hon. Member for Linlithgow's meeting with the hon. Member for Calder Valley (Mr. Thompson), on the import of parrots.

Mr. Maclean: New measures on the import of exotic birds were announced last December following our publication of a detailed study of mortalities among imported birds on arrival and in quarantine.

Mr. Dalyell: Is not man's best friend the parrot? In view of the fact that the 13 per cent. bird mortality in quarantine and on arrival is a fraction of the overall mortality, can we have an immediate ban imports pending the negotiations now taking place? Does the Prime Minister think that present Ministers are as active or energetic as the hon. Member for Calder Valley (Mr. Thompson)?

Mr. Maclean: The hon. Gentleman is right to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Mr. Thompson), who met him in his office and took the initial initiative. If hon. Members read the speech before Christmas of the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and my reply to it at 4 o'clock in the morning, I should have thought that they would conclude that I was the hon. Gentleman's best friend. We are taking strenuous measures to control the importation of exotic birds and all the measures that I outlined in the debate in December are being pursued at this very moment.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Lewis:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 19 April.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Lewis: Will the right hon. Lady explain why she thinks that it is fair that Mr. and Mrs. Thatcher of Dulwich will save £1,700 in poll tax as against rates this year when Mr. and Mrs. Donovan of Greater Manchester —Mr. Donovan is a retired laboratory technician and they are pensioners—will pay £531 more than they would have done, including transitional relief?

The Prime Minister: I think that we should all be better off if we lived in good Tory authorities such as Westminster. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I shall not be any net better off when I finish giving the extra away, nor shall I be any better off than I am now by not having taken something like £120,000 to which I am entitled on my salary.

Q2. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 19 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Sumberg: Will my right hon. Friend join me in condemning those who deliberately break the law by refusing to pay their community charge, leaving others to pick up the bill? Is not it deplorable that there are Members of the House who also practise that unlawful conduct? Surely such people are encouraged by the pop star antics and clenched fist salutes of the Leader of the Opposition.

The Prime Minister: Everyone should obey the laws that have properly been passed through Parliament, as that is what the rule of law and democracy is about. Anyone who does not is setting a deplorable example, is also putting great burdens on others and is not in any way being democratic or observing the rule of law. Everyone should condemn such behaviour.

Mr. Flannery: Will the Prime Minister explain why the party of defence and law and order, which never believes that a single Labour soldier fought in the last war, now cannot even recognise a gun barrel?

The Prime Minister: I should like to say first to the hon. Gentleman that everyone is grateful to all those who fought in the last war; without them we should not now be free. So far there has never been a gun barrel made with an aperture of 1m wide, which is the diameter of the proposed Iraqi pipe.

Q3. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 19 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Does my right hon. Friend share my view that Ford's investment of £400 million in south Wales is a sign of investors' confidence in Britain under her Government? Does she further agree that the fact that Ford is spending some of its investment abroad because of previous trade union intransigence is a clear sign that investors are worried about the future and of what investors would do if this country were ever again to be dominated by the Labour party's trade union paymasters?

The Prime Minister: We do indeed welcome Ford's investment at Bridgend and Swansea, phase 1 of the Zeta project, which will help to sustain employment in south Wales. We very much regret that Ford chose to take the second part of that project to Cologne because, in the words of its press release,

> "Another factor in reaching the decision . . . has been the need to ensure continuity of supply to our continental plants."

As Ford could not ensure continuity of supply from south Wales because of the activities of the unions, it was not prepared to put another factory there. The unions have driven Ford away twice—once from Dundee and once from the Zeta 2 project in south Wales.

Mr. Kinnock: Will the Prime Minister say why there has been no effective response from any part of the Government to the inquiries made since 1988 about the Iraqi gun contract by Sheffield Forgemasters, Walter Somers and her hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Sir H. Miller)?

The Prime Minister: The point remains that at no time did either firm apply for an export licence for a gun or other military application. If the firms had done so, the application would have been refused.

Mr. Kinnock: That is not an adequate answer on such an issue. As Head of the Government, will the Prime Minister say whom she holds responsible for this shambles over the Iraqi gun contract? Which Minister must bear the blame?

The Prime Minister: Any company wanting to export something that requires an export licence has a duty to apply for that licence. At no time did either firm apply for an export licence for a gun or other military application. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said yesterday, the enormous 1m wide pipes that the firms were making were described in a totally different fashion and at no time did they apply for an export licence for a gun or other military equipment. Had they done so, the application would have been refused. It is their duty to apply if they are exporting something that needs a licence.

Mr. Kinnock: That is the most devious evasion. The testimony of the right hon. Lady's hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove has shattered the idea that the Government did not know about this during the past two years. I repeat: which Minister is to blame?

The Prime Minister: I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman ever listens to replies. If a company wishes to export something that needs an export licence—military equipment does—it is its duty accurately to describe it and to apply for an export licence for what it is exporting. No such application came for a gun or other military application. That is the fault of the companies seeking to export the product.

Mr. Hunter: In forming her policies towards South Africa and the African National Congress, will my right hon. Friend bear it in mind that less than two years ago the ANC publicly announced that it would accept funds from the IRA? Will she personally look into reports coming from Northern Ireland that on Wednesday 4 April two members of the ANC named Sabblae and Karoo were in Downpatrick, County Down, meeting the head of the IRA in South Down and other members?

The Prime Minister: I am certain that my hon. Friend will have checked the facts that he gives. He knows that we never, never support armed struggle, no matter by whomsoever it is proposed, and the ANC stands for armed struggle and continues to do so. In our view it is time to get down, not to rhetoric but to the nitty gritty of negotiations, and to do that in South Africa with the existing South African Government.

Mr. Ashdown: Will the Prime Minister list for the House her reasons for opposing local income tax, raised through the revenue system, as a replacement for poll tax? Does not she realise that it would be easier, fairer, simpler and cheaper to raise than the poll tax, and just as accountable, and that it operates in many countries with full public support? Does not she see that local income tax as a replacement for poll tax is a way out of her and Britain's poll tax nightmare?

The Prime Minister: There are several reasons why local income tax would not work. First, it is usually dealt with not where a person lives, but where he works, which, for many people, is a different place. PAYE is done in the firm for which a person works, which may be different from the place in which he lives.

Secondly, many people would not wish to divulge all their affairs again to local authorities, and they would have to do so. Those are two good reasons for not having a local income tax.

EC Budget

Q4. **Mr. Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will raise at the next meeting of the European Council the size of the United Kingdom's net contribution to the European Community budget; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so. The Fontainebleau 1984 mechanism remains wholly intact. Our cumulative benefit from it will be some £7·5 billion by the end of 1990.

Mr. Taylor: As last year's record contribution of £2 billion, or £3 a week for each British family, was outrageous, will my right hon. Friend make it abundantly clear that had she not battled so furiously for rebates in 1984, that amount would have been at least 50 per cent. higher—and this at a time when she was accused of being negative, unhelpful and unenthusiastic about Europe?

As almost everyone seems to be having a go at her these days, will my right hon. Friend also make it abundantly clear that she will maintain her courageous battle for Britain against socialist nonsense and overspending in the EEC? Will she totally ignore the views of the wimps and Euro-nuts among the Opposition—and even among the Conservative party—who are seeking to blow her off course?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend. We fought staunchly for Britain's rebate. We started off, to coin a phrase, by being isolated and we came back with £7·5 billion for Britain.

Mr. Spearing: Will the Prime Minister confirm that in addition to financial matters, she and the Foreign Secretary will discuss the Belgian proposals for European union with other Ministers from the Common Market when they meet in Dublin over the next two weekends? Does she agree that these issues render the prerogative an increasingly outdated idea, and accordingly, will she tell Mr. Haughey when she meets him tomorrow that she is not prepared to give any view on, still less any commitment to, that paper unless it has been debated in this House? Does not she think that anything less than that represents an unacceptable democratic deficit in the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister: There are now two matters: one is European monetary and economic union; another has been proposed informally by Chancellor Kohl and concerns political union. Neither matter is properly defined, but in so far as economic and monetary union was defined in the Delors paper, in stages 2 and 3, this House has already made its view clear: we could not possibly accept stage 2 or stage 3 of Delors as they stand, although we accept stage 1. [HON. MEMBERS: "When?"] We accept stage 1 and its completion and we are well ahead with completing it in this country.

In our view there are plenty of other matters to discuss in Dublin—the consequences of German unification, completing the single market in 1992, bringing the Uruguay round to a successful conclusion, especially on agriculture, completing the EEC-European Free Trade Association negotiations, and devising new forms of association for the countries of eastern Europe. If we got down to discussing those matters, that would be far better than discussing more esoteric issues that do not need to be addressed now.

Engagements

Q5. **Sir John Stokes:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 19 April.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Sir John Stokes: Is my right hon. Friend aware that today is Primrose day, the anniversary of the death of Benjamin Disraeli, that great Conservative statesman? Does she recollect that he used to say that one of the principal aims of the Tory party was to improve the condition of the people? Is not that precisely what my right hon. Friend and the Government are doing?

The Prime Minister: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I am grateful to my hon. Friend. In terms of net take-home pay, for every £3 that the average family had under Labour, it has £4 under the Conservatives. Britain has a higher rate of employment and a far better Health Service and environment than ever before. That would have suited Disraeli and I am glad to pay tribute to him on Primrose day.

Business of the House

3.30 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Will the Leader of the House tell us the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Sir Geoffrey Howe): The business for next week will be as follows:

Monday 23 April and Tuesday 24 April—Consideration in Committee of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill *[Lords]* (1st and 2nd Allotted Days).

Wednesday 25 April—Opposition day (11th Allotted Day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion entitled "The poll tax, the uniform business rate and local government services".

Remaining stages of the War Crimes Bill.

Thursday 26 April—Remaining stages of the Enterprise and New Towns (Scotland) Bill.

Motion to take note of EC document relating to the automobile industry. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

Friday 27 April—Private Members' Bills.

Monday 30 April—Second Reading of the Finance Bill.

[Thursday 26 April: Relevant European Community Document: 10971/89 Single Motor Vehicle Market
Relevant Report of European Legislation Committee: HC 11-xii (1989-90) para 2.]

Dr. Cunningham: Will the Leader of the House reconsider his proposal that the House should take the remaining stages of the War Crimes Bill after 10 pm? It is not usual for us to consider primary legislation after 10 pm in the House. We regard that as an unacceptable proposal, and I hope that he will take it away and think again about it.

Can the right hon. and learned Gentleman give the House some more explanation about the likely course of events when we come to consider the amendments to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill on Tuesday night? Is he aware that it appears that the House will be asked to vote on perhaps 14 consecutive amendments, taking four or more hours of voting time during the night? Is it reasonable or rational to ask the House of Commons to determine such important, controversial and sensitive issues in that way? I hope that we can have some explanation from the Leader of the House of why the House is being placed in that position.

Is not Parliament entitled to some clarification from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry following his statement yesterday about the Iraqi gun fiasco? Should not we have some urgent and candid answers from the Department of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Defence to the many unanswered questions which remain following the exchanges in the House yesterday?

For example, who will explain the widely differing versions of events given by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Sir. H. Miller)? I hope that the Leader of the House will soon provide Government time for a debate so that we can have proper answers to those questions to make up for the pathetically inadequate performance given by his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in the Chamber yesterday.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Of course I understand why the Gentleman raises his first point. However, it is important for the House to get ahead with the business at convenient opportunities. The House had a full day's debate on the general principles of the War Crimes Bill on Second Reading on 19 March. No amendments have been made to the Bill in Committee, and no Government amendments are proposed on Report. In those circumstances, what I have proposed should be reasonable.

I understand why the hon. Gentleman raised his point about the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill, but he will know that there has been extensive consultation about the handling of the Bill, both through the usual channels and with a wide range of other representatives. I do not expect to have commanded universal assent to that, but I believe that I have arrived at conclusions that are the best practicable arrangements.

It is important for us to tackle the central questions in an orderly fashion, and together. Again, we have considered through the usual channels and in other ways the possibility of separating them, but that has given rise to anxiety that hon. Members might vote on one part of the debate and not remain closely involved to vote on the other part. We have arrived at the conclusion that this is the best way to do it. I appreciate that considerable time may be spent on voting, but if we address the matter sensibly we should be able to reduce the number of contested votes. I believe that it will be regarded in the end as more satisfactory to do that than to spend a great deal of time debating without reaching a conclusion, as has happened so often in the past.

As for the questions about my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, he made a statement to the House yesterday describing all that was then known about the matter. The components in question were apprehended as a result of alertness once the matter became known. It is in the nature of things that exports of that type take place against a background of subterfuge and concealment, not least on the part of the orderers, and those concerned with supply are not always fully informed of what is happening or how they should be handling the matter. The Government have apprehended the components, and further investigations must take place. If it is thought right to tell the House any more about the matter at any future stage, I am sure that my right hon. Friend will consider doing so.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I point out that no fewer than 49 hon. and right hon. Members are seeking to take part in the subsequent Hong Kong debate? I hope that hon. Members will put only one question each to the Leader of the House, and confine it to next week's business.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that many hon. Members on both sides of the House welcome his decision on dealing with the abortion question next Tuesday night? At last there will be a decision without obstruction. It is worth voting, if necessary for four hours, to clear the matter up.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am grateful to my hon. Friend; that is the other side of the argument.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): The right hon. and learned Gentleman knows that there is a prayer concerning the Criminal Damage (Compensation)

(Northern Ireland) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 1990. Will he find time for a full debate on the matter? The regulations have been with us for a long while, and it is about time that the House explored the matter once more to come to conclusions on certain inequities that are beginning to show up.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I cannot say more than that I will examine the matter closely in the light of what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Mr. Robert McCrindle (Brentwood and Ongar): In next Wednesday's debate initiated by the Opposition on the community charge and the uniform business rate, will my right hon. and learned Friend arrange for the the Secretary of State for the Environment to remind the House that, of the totality of local government expenditure, a sizeable amount is met through national taxation, and that therefore ability to pay—a matter widely referred to in the press and in the House recently—is already a matter carefully taken into account by Her Majesty's Government?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I shall certainly draw that important point to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): Did the Leader of the House watch the programme on television last night in the "Inside Story" series called, "Our Reactor is on Fire"? If he or those in his Department did not see it, I offer him a copy of the programme and ask him to look at it and take note of how the Prime Minister and the Cabinet of the day were duped by the nuclear industry and how the Black inquiry, which was set up specifically to look into health problems of that community on the Cumbrian coast, was deliberately kept in ignorance. If he cannot initiate a debate next week in Government time, will the Leader of the House allow the House an early opportunity to discuss the degree of mendacity that the nuclear industry visited on what appears to have been a supine Government in the past?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I do not accept the judgment that the hon. Gentleman makes on the entire industry, nor, I suspect, does the shadow Leader of the House. The safety of the industry, and of Sellafield in particular, has been subject to continuous scrutiny by the Health and Safety Executive authorities and the Government.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): While I accept that next Wednesday's debate on local government finance and the community charge arises on an Opposition motion, will my right hon. and learned Friend ensure that during that debate, the powers that be in the Government produce proposals to remove the inadequacy of the current rebate scheme and the transitional relief scheme and to raise the £3,000 limit at which the taper begins to make what is in principle a good change in local government finance acceptable to the people?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I hope that my hon. Friend will take the opportunity offered by the debate to make those points. He might also take the opportunity to comment on the fact that the Opposition are now apparently dedicated to maintaining the community charge for the foreseeable future.

Mr. Eric S. Heffer (Liverpool, Walton): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman reconsider his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) about the Iraqi gun incident and the answers that were given yesterday by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who has developed a new doctrine that Ministers can refuse to answer a question because there may be a case pending in the courts? You, Mr. Speaker, were right to say that it was not a matter for you, but it is a matter for Members of Parliament, as that would mean that, in future any Minister in any Government could refuse to answer a question because there might be a court case pending. Therefore, it is a matter for the House of Commons, and we should be debating it. I ask the Leader of the House to reconsider his answer and to provide a early debate on that aspect of the matter as well as the particular incident.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I do not think that the matter spreads as widely as the hon. Gentleman suggests. One can well imagine that in other circumstances, a Minister would be unable to comment on every aspect of a matter that is still the subject of inquiry for a variety of reasons including the possibility of criminal proceedings. In those circumstances, there must be some inhibition, but, as I have said already, if a suitable means arises, I am quite sure that my right hon. Friend will be prepared to come back to the House.

Sir Dudley Smith (Warwick and Leamington): Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that, at Question Time yesterday, the Minister for Industry made a significant statement about the huge increase in Britain's car manufacturing capacity? In the circumstances, despite what is happening at Ford, does he agree that we should have a debate on the industry soon, as one of the great success stories of recent years?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I agree with my hon. Friend. The continuing expansion of our automobile manufacturing capability is an important achievement of the past 10 years.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): Happily, the Government have now accepted the intention of my Bill, supported by right hon. and hon. Members of all parties in the House, to give the people of Australia one of the two original copies of their Constitution Act. While I am grateful to the Lord Chancellor and the Leader of the House for their most helpful discussions with me on the legislation, is there anything that the right hon. and learned Gentleman can tell us today about the timing of its passage through the House? Could we possibly mark ANZAC day on 25 April by completing in this House at least one stage of the Bill?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I have seen that suggestion made, although on a rather more ambitious basis. I cannot give the right hon. Gentleman the timing proposals for that Bill; nor would I want to raise any expectations of the kind that he has identified. I shall certainly see whether it is possible.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): When my right hon. and learned Friend is discussing next Wednesday's debate with the Secretary of State for the Environment, will he ask him to deal at length with transferring the whole cost of education, or at least

[Mr. Patrick Cormack]

teachers' salaries, from local authorities to the central Exchequer? Will he also deal with the plight of village shops, which is a very real one?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I will draw both points to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, but I cannot resist the opportunity to say yet again to my hon. Friend what I said during the Easter Adjournment debate: merely transferring the financing of this or that aspect of any activity to central Government amounts to no more than a book-keeping transaction.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): Will the Leader of the House arrange a further debate following the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer)? The right hon. and learned Gentleman will be aware that, yesterday, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said that his Department was not aware of the gun contract with Iraq. He will be further aware that the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Sir H. Miller), a former deputy chairman of the Conservative party, did not agree with him. He said that he had informed the Department twice about the gun but that he had had to go elsewhere to get some action.

Does not the right hon. and learned Gentleman think that this matter needs clearing up for the benefit of the House and of the country, to decide who is telling the truth and who is lying?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: There are clearly matters that can be further examined, but I do not honestly think that it is sensible for us to do so across the Floor of the House.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): May I reinforce the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton)? Almost everyone agrees that the principle of the community charge is right, that everyone should pay something, but most people will agree that at the least, the first year's implementation has been unfortunate. Will my right hon. and learned Friend insist on the Secretary of State for the Environment—the Government realise the need for this—announcing proposals in his speech next week for reform and change, because it is time that they were debated?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am more ready to endorse my hon. Friend's warm welcome for the principle of the community charge than the rest of his remarks, but I shall bring his observations to the attention of the Secretary of State.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): As the Leader of the House has found himself unable to arrange debates on some of the many outstanding statutory instruments that are the subject of prayers on the Order Paper, will he give the House an undertaking that important issues such as the Police (Scotland) (Amendment) Regulations—police officers have been considerably financially prejudiced as a result of the poll tax regulations—and the National Health Service (Charges for Drugs and Appliances) (Amendment) Regulations will be debated in Committee next week?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I cannot give a specific undertaking in respect of either of those matters—certainly not for next week. I understand that there is widespread interest in the police regulations and I shall seek through the usual channels to find an opportunity for them to be discussed in due course.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): May we have a debate on Lithuania? Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware of the widespread concern about the reaction of the Soviet authorities? Is he further aware of the feeling that the EEC and the Government must come up with some initiatives for aid? May we have a debate in the near future?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The whole House will understand my hon. Friend's expression of concern. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will discuss the matter with his colleagues in the Twelve during their meeting this weekend.

Mr. Michael Foot (Blaenau Gwent): Following the extremely important question put by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer), and as this matter affects the rights of the House against the Executive, will the Leader of the House, first, say when the Solicitor-General or the Attorney-General will make a statement on the legal aspects of the matter? Secondly, will he give an absolute guarantee that the Minister concerned will appear before the House if there is to be no legal case, because he took refuge in the fact that there would be one? We think that it was quite improper that he should have done so, but if he is to proceed, he must explain himself to the House.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am not sure whether the Law Officers would be the most appropriate Ministers to respond on a matter that is the subject of possible proceedings by the Customs and Excise rather than by the Law Officers' Department. The matter is still under investigation in that way. The right hon. Gentleman should not conclude that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is taking refuge in the prospect of a prosecution. He is merely saying that certain matters are subject to investigation for a possible prosecution, about which it would not be sensible to comment at this stage.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Following the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham) about Lithuania, will my right hon. and learned Friend ensure that the Foreign Secretary, in a statement after the weekend EC meeting, makes it perfectly clear that the Government endorse the view of the United States President that Lithuania enjoys an unequivocal right to self-determination, and that the western European powers will provide practical assistance in every reasonable way?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is here, and will have listened to that point. He will certainly consider with me the possibility of a statement about the matter next week, and he certainly bears in mind my hon. Friend's points of argument.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): When we have a debate on the Iraqi gun, as the Leader of the House implied that we should, will it be in order to point out that the reasons why we have this shambles are the free market philosophy operated by the Government and the fact that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has gone on record on many occasions as saying that he wants to see the Department of Trade and Industry completely abolished? It is because he has not been keeping his eye on things that we have this mess now.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: There were two misunderstandings in that short observation. First, I gave no suggestion of a prospect of a debate on the matter. Secondly, it is foolish to contend that the possibility of promoting the supply of arms to any customer is greater or lesser under any given pattern of economic organisation. By definition, such activities take place covertly and such people set out to find arms wherever they can. It is always the task of the Government to try to detect that, but it is by no means easy.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Could my right hon. and learned Friend find time for a debate on tourism? Some months ago, a decision was made to exempt people who run bed-and-breakfast businesses from the uniform business rate for up to 100 days a year. That has created a major burden for others in the industry, especially in my constituency. We have not had a tourism debate for a considerable time, so will my right hon. and learned Friend please find time for a debate as soon as possible?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I am not sure about the prospect of a debate on tourism. However, my hon. Friend will see that the uniform business rate is one of the subjects selected by the Opposition for debate next Wednesday.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Bearing in mind the fact that virtually every newspaper today carries comments by the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Sir H. Miller) that someone in Whitehall has been lying about the export order for Iraq, is not it essential that we have a statement early next week from the Secretary of State for Defence or the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry? The statement should tell us precisely what the responsibilities of those Departments were when the hon. Member for Bromsgrove made representations on behalf of a firm in the west midlands and when that firm said that the pipes might well not be pipes, but parts of a gun. Surely the House of Commons is entitled to know about those matters. Why is there this cover-up, evasion and deceit from Ministers and everyone else on this matter?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman should not dramatise the matter in that way. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry made a statement to the House yesterday. The possibility of a criminal offence is being investigated in the light of some of his observations. It is entirely proper that that should happen.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. In view of the pressure on time today, I ask hon. Members not to ask questions that have already been asked and answered, but to ask about business next week.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Is not it a little quixotic that the House found a whole day to debate the breach of some informal rules by one Conservative Member, but is still unable to find time to debate the conduct of 31 Labour Members who are breaking the law? Does my right hon. and learned Friend further agree that the inaction of the Leader of the Opposition—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I asked for one question per Member.

Mr. Brazier: The inaction of the Leader of the Opposition on the subject is incredible.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I agree with my hon. Friend. The important point that he raises has been raised frequently in the House, and rightly so.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Will the Home Secretary be making a statement next week on some of the recent decisions in courts in the Irish Republic—particularly the decision in the Dublin criminal court which was reported in a Dublin newspaper on 1 April, in which a person who was up for a stabbing offence was told that he must go to England to take a job immediately? Is there a "sin bin" here? Are our immigration laws so open that people can come here to escape justice?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The matter to which the hon. Gentleman refers is not one of the more familiar cases in the Irish jurisdiction, but I shall certainly bring it to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

Mr. Peter Fry (Wellingborough): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, following the Opposition's choice of the community charge as the subject for debate next Wednesday, it is high time that the Government found time for a time for a debate on the future of local government organisation, as it is becoming increasingly clear that two tiers of local government are unnecessarily wasteful and that the present system causes confusion, with district councils being blamed for overspending by county councils?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I understand my hon. Friend's point. The present arrangements certainly can give rise to such misunderstandings, but I would hesitate to conclude that that in itself is sufficient to persuade us to embark on the wholesale reform of local government.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Is the Leader of the House aware that the poll tax of £297 set by my council, Calderdale, was 34th from the bottom of the league and that, when the charge is capped, it will be fourth from the bottom? May we have a full day's debate on the matter, so that the Secretary of State for the Environment can explain how he arrived at the ludicrous decision to cap Calderdale council?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State explained, his approach was founded on the principles that he set out to the House when he made his statement. The hon. Lady will be able to raise the matter in next week's debate.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): My right hon. and learned Friend will remember that, on 29 March, the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) called for a debate on Barnet's housing policy, claiming that the chief solicitor had said that Barnet council was liable for prosecution under the Race Relations Act 1976. May we have such a debate soon, as the head of legal services of Barnet council claims that he said no such thing? Is not it disgraceful that the hon. Member for Brent, East should make such misleading statements?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I confess that I do not have the details of the matter at my fingertips to quite the same extent as my hon. Friend, but I am grateful to him for reminding me of the subject.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Can we have a debate on no-strike agreements? Does the Leader of the House think that it is fair that those who provide cheap labour in the dining rooms and elsewhere in the Refreshment Department of the House should be prevented from taking industrial action? Is that fair, given that they earn so little?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: That matter, so often raised by the hon. Gentleman, will be considered by the House of Commons Commission shortly.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): My right hon. and learned Friend will know that this year is Tidy Britain Year. May we have an early debate on tidiness and keeping litter off our streets, especially as I am sorry to have to report that I have received a complaint from her worship the mayor of Weymouth and Portland that she has seen the House with litter strewn all over its floors? Should not we be setting an example? I should be most grateful if we could have a debate on this subject.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I know that, over the centuries, many people have had some sympathy with that view, but I fear that the House's deplorable habit of occasionally leaving paper behind could not be corrected very quickly.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Has the Leader of the House had time to look at the 14 private Bills set down for consideration today and again deferred until next Thursday? Does he recall that, about six months ago, he told the House that he would be urgently considering the whole question of private business? Is not it time that he reported back to the House and told us what progress he has made in that investigation?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Gentleman is quite right to remind me of the matter. He knows that I am engaged in discussions about it, and I hope to report to the House before long.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree with me that, now that the Russians have admitted to the massacre of 15,000 Polish officers in Katyn Wood, it would be right for the House to have a debate on the Polish Resettlement Act 1947, and that the best memorial that the British taxpayer could erect to those gallant murdered officers would be to provide financial aid to Polish people who settled in this country and who now wish to return to their native land?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I have not had an opportunity to consider that proposal. I will draw it to the attention of my right hon. Friends for further consideration.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Can the Leader of the House arrange for a statement to be made by the Secretary of State for Defence next week before Operation Elder Forest begins? That operation will subject many areas, especially the north-east of Scotland, to further bouts of low-flying aircraft. Does the Leader of the House understand that, next week, Scottish schoolchildren will be taking certificate examinations and that next Wednesday they will sit the English exam, one of the most popular exams, when the exercise will be at its height?

Mr. Speaker: Briefly.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Secretary of State for Defence explain why the exercise has been arranged for such an inconvenient time and also tell us who was responsible for organising it for next week?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I can only draw that matter to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, and I will do so.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Since some of the issues are outwith the Select Committee on Members' Interests, and since he phoned me asking for an apology about a question that I had asked on American complaints about him, before it festers any further, could the position of the hon. Member for Hampshire, East (Mr. Mates) be clarified by a statement from the Secretary of State for Defence about the complaints received—or not—by the Ministry of Defence?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: As I understand it, those matters are being investigated by the two Select Committees concerned. However, I will bring the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

Ms. Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-East): Will the Leader of the House clarify the reply that he gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) earlier about the debate on Tuesday? Many of us have heard rumours about how the Leader of the House particularly intends to address the voting patterns. It seems to some of us that, if those rumours are true, in addition to giving way to pressure to include that matter—which many of us believe is far outwith the terms of the Bill—the Leader of the House is in fact giving way to other pressures so that the House will not be able to approach the issue in a fair and open-minded way, but would have a strong bias built into it.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The hon. Lady will know that the way in which that matter is being handled has, as I have said already, been the subject of the widest possible consultation. Decisions about management will be taken by the Chair and by the Business Committee. It is my impression that the approach that I have so far outlined has the support of the majority of hon. Members.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): As was implicitly recognised in a written answer just before the Easter recess, the Prime Minister and other Ministers have inadvertently misled the House on a number of occasions because of the poverty statistics with which they have been provided. Ministers have been provided with statistics that appear to show that the poorest people in our communities have become more prosperous at twice the rate of the community as a whole. The Government now tell us that that is almost diametrically opposite the truth, and that their rate of increased prosperity has actually been less than that in the country as a whole. As Government policy has presumably been predicated on the false assumption that the statistics provided by the Prime Minister were correct, may we have a statement on the whole affair?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I doubt whether that is an appropriate question for business questions, but I shall bring the matter to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security. The Government set out the matter quite clearly in the written answer to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman, as a former Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, share the concern of friends and families, including Jill Morrell, of British hostages? While supporting a policy of no deals, they are nevertheless concerned about the urgency that they believe the Government attach to solving the problem. Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman, in his capacity as Leader of the House, offer an early opportunity for the Government at least to give an indication that they attach urgency and priority to reaching a conclusion to that serious problem—in spite of the delicacy of the matter, which the House will accept?

Sir Geoffrey Howe: I fully understand why the friends and families of people who have been hostages for a long time feel continuous anxiety of the kind to which the hon. Gentleman referred. I must reassure him and them that that topic is almost never absent from the minds of Foreign Secretaries and Foreign Office Ministers. It is a matter of great and continuing anxiety to see whether there is anything further that can be done to explore possibilities. For reasons that the hon. Gentleman will understand, it is not always sensible to advertise that continuing concern with the matter. He can assure all those concerned that the Foreign Secretary and his Ministers share their anxiety.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c

Ordered,

That the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978 (Amendment) Order 1990 (S.I., 1990, No. 758) be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Dorrell.]*

Points of Order

4.5 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The point of order relates to the Procedure (Debate on Matters Awaiting Judicial Decision) resolution, which the House passed on 23 July 1963. You may recall that yesterday the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said:

> "I cannot answer detailed questions without prejudicing the rights of people who may be on trial."—*[Official Report,* 18 April 1990; Vol. 170, c. 1429.]

In spite of that, this morning, the *Yorkshire Post* reported that Customs and Excise are "not actively considering prosecutions".

However, this is not a matter for the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry because, on the date to which I have referred, the House passed, without Division, a resolution setting out the circumstances in which matters awaiting judicial decision can be referred to. It states:

> "matters awaiting or under adjudication in all courts exercising a criminal jurisdiction . . . should not be referred to . . . from the time that the case has been set down for trial or otherwise brought before the court".

Therefore, there is a clear definition, The resolution also states:

> "such matters may be referred to before such date unless it appears to the Chair that there is a real and substantial danger of prejudice to the trial of the case."

There therefore seems to be a responsibility on you Mr. Speaker, where a Minister tries to abuse the resolution and to escape the accountability of the House over matters that are his responsibility, that you should make it clear whether it appears to you

> "that there is a real and substantial danger of prejudice to the trial of the case"

if a Minister attempts to seek that excuse. However, as there is no case and no trial, no Minister could possibly use that excuse. Surely, therefore, it is incumbent on the Chair to ensure that the terms of that resolution are properly carried out and that a Minister does not try to evade his responsibilities.

Mr. Speaker: There is no question of that matter being sub judice. That was not raised with me yesterday. The hon. Gentleman has quoted *Hansard* to me, but he will also note that I said at column 1437 that

> "I understood that it was the judgment of the Secretary of State himself"

that he could not answer those questions. I never said that it was sub judice.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. We are in danger of creating an unwelcome precedent in the House as a result of the conduct yesterday of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who abused the procedures of the House to avoid answering very important questions, to which hon. Members of all parties are entitled to candid, frank and urgent answers. The conduct of the Secretary of State yesterday has been described in one prominent newspaper today as either incompetent or dishonest.

As these matters go right to the heart of the integrity of this Government when answering for their actions in the House of Commons, I hope that you, Mr. Speaker, will not simply let this matter slip away, so that such a

[Dr. John Cunningham]

precedent will have been established. We should have the ability, without an artificial hindrance placed before us by Ministers, to obtain answers to such important questions.

Mr. Speaker: The whole House knows—the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) got it right —that I said yesterday that, provided what Ministers or any other hon. Members say is in order it is not a matter for me. It is not for me to say if the Secretary of State's judgment was correct. I never said that the matter was sub judice, and it is not.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West) *rose*——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I shall take Mr. Budgen first.

Mr. Budgen: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will you give the House your guidance on the second motion relating to the main business of the day, the British Nationality (Hong Kong) Bill? You will note that the Order Paper contains a motion in the name of the Leader of the Opposition:

> "That the Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House."

Wholly different, separate and important considerations attach to that motion and hon. Members might take a different view on it than on the Second Reading motion. Will there be opportunities for a separate debate on the second motion?

Mr. Speaker: No. The hon. Gentleman has been here a long time and he has often seen these motions on the Order Paper. It is not debatable, but it is certainly votable. I will now take Mr. Skinner. I hope that his point of order will not delay an important debate. The position has marginally improved. Now, only 48 hon. Members wish to take part.

Mr. Skinner: In response to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) and subsequently to my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) and the Shadow Leader of the House, my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), you said that it was not your responsibility, notwithstanding the points that have been made, particularly by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South. It is pretty clear to Opposition Members that yesterday we had a Minister present who used the opportunity to cloud the issue and wriggle away from his responsibilities. If in future you spot that and realise that a Minister is trying to use the sub judice rule wrongly, perhaps you could consider giving extra time to hon. Members who want to grill the Minister, instead of allowing him to escape his responsibilities.

Mr. Speaker: I know what the hon. Member is trying to return to—the question of how long I allowed the statement to run yesterday. I hope that some of his hon. Friends who could not speak in the subsequent debate yesterday as a result of points of order had a word with him.

Orders of the Day

British Nationality (Hong Kong) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the Secretary of State, I repeat that there is great pressure to take part in the debate today. In the interests of equity, I proposed to give some precedence to hon. Members who were not called when we last debated this matter in July. I hope that Privy Councillors will understand that they may suffer thereby by being called later on the list. I propose to put a limit of 10 minutes on speeches between 7 and 9 o'clock, but I hope that those who are called before that time will bear that limit in mind in the interests of their colleagues in the House.

4.12 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Waddington): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I hardly need remind the House that, although since the second world war Britain has granted independence to many former colonies, rarely have we had to make plans for handing over a territory to a foreign power, and never to a communist one. I certainly do not have to remind the House that the remarkable story of Hong Kong's economic success is one in which our own country has been and is intimately involved. Quite apart from what many, if not most, of us might regard as our moral duty to maintain the prosperity and stability of Hong Kong up to 1997 and to secure a smooth changeover in that year, Britain has an enormous stake, in terms of trade, investment and jobs, in Hong Kong's continuing success. This is a case, if ever there was one, where duty and the national interest march hand in hand.

It is with Britain that responsibility for Hong Kong rests over the next seven years. We must do our best to see that as long as we remain responsible for the territory, its prosperity and stability are maintained. That is what this Bill is about. I emphasise that our proposals, far from contravening the joint declaration signed in 1984, are designed to carry out the agreement's central purpose, which is to maintain Hong Kong's prosperity and stability in the run-up to 1997.

The Bill addresses a real and present threat to that objective. There are plenty of people who still want to go and live in Hong Kong—largely people without skills wanting to reap the economic benefits of making their homes there—but there are also many people leaving, who include professional, managerial and technical personnel in proportions far in excess of their numbers in the population. Indeed, 24 per cent. of all emigrants come within those categories, but represent only 5·5 per cent. of Hong Kong's population. Thirteen per cent. of Hong Kong's information science professionals—a classification which includes computer experts—have been leaving each year. Hong Kong's economy and stability cannot indefinitely survive such a haemorrhage of talent and enterprise.

The rationale for the proposals now before the House remains as set out by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary in his statement on 20 December. First, current rates of emigration and reduced confidence pose a real threat to Hong Kong's stability in the period before 1997. Secondly, most of those who are emigrating do so reluctantly, because it is the only means of acquiring the assurance of a foreign passport. Thirdly, most of them would remain if such an assurance were available without the need to leave Hong Kong.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): Will my right hon. and learned Friend give an assurance to my constituents, most of whom must live in an already overbuilt area and are under severe pressure from Ealing council to build on such green land as remains? Can the Home Secretary assure me that overbuilt areas such as mine will not be pressed into taking even greater populations than they already have to bear and that provision will be made elsewhere?

Mr. Waddington: I shall develop that theme later. First and foremost, this is not an immigration Bill, but a nationality Bill which is designed to anchor people to Hong Kong rather than to encourage them to come here. I certainly assure my hon. Friend that if the people selected were to come here they would have superior skills and be far less likely to concentrate in large numbers in city centres than, perhaps, people with lesser skills.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): My right hon. and learned Friend has correctly said that the Government's objective is to make it possible for people to stay in Hong Kong. I ask him to put himself in the position of a Hong Kong business man aged between 35 and 40 who has the great good fortune to get a British passport. Such a man, having heard what is being said in communist China now, may feel that that may be a black mark against him when the communist Chinese take over in 1997. Would he not feel disposed to leave Hong Kong early so that he can re-establish his business, his family and his fortune?

Mr. Waddington: I disagree with my hon. Friend. Once a person in a good, well-paid job in Hong Kong has the assurance of a British passport, there is no urgency for him to leave. We must not assume that the worst will happen. Under the joint declaration those who are in Hong Kong after 1997 will have the right to work, the right of abode and the right to travel to and from Hong Kong.

I fully recognise that the remedy which the Bill offers represents an unprecedented departure from the normal principles of our nationality law. We considered carefully whether a scheme leading to entry clearance rather than full citizenship would suffice, but we concluded that such a scheme would not resolve the problem. It would have precisely the opposite effect to that intended and would draw to the United Kingdom the people who were given guarantees. They would be anxious to get their children into Britain while the children were still under age and qualified for entry under the immigration rules. They would be determined to establish the residential qualification for citizenship as soon as possible.

The governor of Hong Kong is convinced that the assurances of citizenship provided in the Bill are the only effective way of restoring confidence and maintaining prosperity, and all the evidence emerging from Hong Kong supports that.

Clause 1 requires the Secretary of State to register up to 50,000 persons recommended by the governor under a scheme approved by Parliament and also to register their spouses and minor children. Clause 3(3) provides for a committee to advise the governor on the operation of the scheme. Obviously in arriving at the figure of 50,000 the governor—rather than the Government—has had to make a difficult judgment, but discussions—

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Sigmund Freud at work.

Mr. Waddington: If the hon. Gentleman would wait just a moment he would not make as big a fool of himself as he did on television last night.

Discussions with Hong Kong since December have reinforced my view that we have got it about right. The figure of 50,000 is a number which is capable of having a real impact on emigration and confidence in the territory, and that is what matters.

Clearly, citizenship granted to the head of a family would be unlikely to anchor him to Hong Kong if citizenship were not granted also to his immediate family, but it is obviously impossible to provide in the Bill for a limit on the number of wives and children. My right hon. Friend has, however, given an estimate of the absolute maximum number of people who might benefit, which is 225,000.

The 50,000 would be a carefully chosen and highly qualified group of people—in good jobs, earning good salaries. If they decided to settle in the United Kingdom they would doubtless have a valuable contribution to make here. But that is not the purpose of the Bill. It is a Bill designed to persuade them to remain in Hong Kong rather than go off elsewhere in the coming years to acquire another nationality as a sort of insurance policy.

Dr. Michael Clark (Rochford): My right hon. and learned Friend talks about establishing confidence and keeping prosperity in Hong Kong. Does he concede that it is important that the Chinese Government should make some moves to ensure that those two attributes stay in Hong Kong? Does he also concede that by putting the Bill before the House he is taking pressure off the Chinese who will see that we are giving relief to Hong Kong while they do nothing?

Mr. Waddington: Obviously there is a joint responsibility. The Chinese Government have a responsibility as a result of what they undertook to do under the joint declaration, but there is also a duty on us. I should have thought that that was plain.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): How will the Bill provide an assurance for the 93·5 per cent. of those eligible under the general allocation section as set out in the explanatory memorandum? That figure ranges from the 79 per cent. of those involved in the information services to the 96·1 per cent. of those involved in the education services who will not receive a passport under the scheme. How will they be encouraged to stay in Hong Kong as a result of the Bill?

Mr. Waddington: We will give assurances to people who play a key role in the Hong Kong economy. Anchoring those people to Hong Kong will help to maintain its stability and prosperity. The maintenance of that prosperity and stability will be to the advantage of all those others who have not been selected under the scheme.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend, who has been extremely generous in giving way. He will know that many of us who

[Mr. Anthony Nelson]

have serious misgivings about the Bill are concerned specifically about the numbers who might come here. Many of us are worried that it will be the most dependent rather than the most able who will end up here. They will come with a view to exporting their labour and capital within the European Community after 1992. Those people will have no loyalty or obligation to the country or the Crown. What is the Government's best estimate of the numbers involved? Should we accept such an obligation?

Mr. Waddington: I must remind my hon. Friend that the object of the selection scheme is to ensure that those selected are key workers. Therefore, my hon. Friend is far from the mark when he talks about the less able being selected. The most able will be selected. By definition, those selected will be key workers in responsible jobs, on whom an economy such as that of Hong Kong depends.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): Does the Home Secretary accept that the Bill must be seen in the context of the Government's immigration control during the past 10 years? What additional resources is he prepared to give to the posts in Bombay, Islamabad and Karachi where people are having to wait up to six months for an interview in order to join their spouses in this country? What additional resources will he give to process the applications for those waiting for quota vouchers in Bombay? What additional resources will he give to the immigration and nationality department at Croydon, where people have to wait up to two years to get their naturalisation certificates processed?

Mr. Waddington: If my recollection serves me aright, the processing of applications by members of families settled here speeded up last year and more were processed than in the year before. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the settlement figures for last year, he will find that half of all those granted settlement were members of families already settled here. I should have thought that that was a perfect illustration of the generosity of our policy on immigration, in that it has given rights to the families of those who settled here earlier.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): In 1981 we made a political judgment about the number of Chinese residents in Hong Kong who would be genuinely at risk after the transfer of sovereignty. Under section 4(5) of the British Nationality Act 1981 we made specific provision for them. Will that provision be used again or is it to be ended now?

Mr. Waddington: We recognised some time ago, and announced to the House, that some provision would have to be made for those in sensitive posts. The scheme we put into operation then is subsumed in this scheme. The explanatory memorandum about the scheme contains a reference to the sensitive services scheme which will cover the people whom my hon. Friend would wish to see covered.

The Bill is designed to persuade people to remain in Hong Kong rather than go off elsewhere in the coming years to acquire another nationality as a sort of insurance policy. They might come here after 1997 if there were a collapse of confidence in Hong Kong, but in that event many more people from Hong Kong would arrive here seeking refuge. If that happened we would look to the international community for assistance, but, given our historical links with Hong Kong, who can doubt that in a difficult situation the United Kingdom would be expected to take the leading role? The Government believe that the Bill will greatly reduce the chance of such a collapse before 1997 and thus increase the prospects of a successful transition when the time comes.

It would have been unreasonable to ask the House to approve an enabling Bill such as this without revealing how the Government envisaged that the resulting powers would be used. Therefore, I turn to the explanatory note, which I have laid before the House, describing the selection scheme that the Government have in mind.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): If the purpose is to encourage people to stay in Hong Kong, why should not the use of the passports be restricted until 1997? If they can be used immediately, surely that opens the door immediately.

Mr. Waddington: I do not see how that meets th[illegible]. If one announced that one was going to grant passports in 1997 people would go off looking for passports in other countries now, because they would never know how safe was the undertaking that in 1997 another Government would honour the bargain and issue the passports. Having heard the irresponsible nonsense spoken by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) last July, I can well understand why that fear might be present in some people's minds.

Mr. Norman Tebbit (Chingford): I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend, but I think that he misunderstood what my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) said. He did not say that the passports should be issued at some time in the future; he suggested, as I have suggested to my right hon. Friend, that the passports should be issued—if the Bill is enacted—in due course and in the normal way, but marked "Valid 1 January 1997". If my right hon. and learned Friend is right and if this legislation is an encouragement to people to stay in Hong Kong, they will not wish to use the passports before 1997, will they?

Mr. Waddington: To issue passports in such an unprecedented form would be an invitation to people to think that the bargain would not be honoured if, through some terrible catastrophe, someone like the right hon. Member for Gorton was the Minister responsible at the time.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Bearing in mind the fact that the Government of the People's Republic of China will not, it appears, recognise this legislation, and hence will not recognise the passports, how will the Bill ensure that the people whom we want to remain in Hong Kong will remain there? Does not my right hon. and learned Friend believe that granting proper democracy to Hong Kong, with a full franchise for all over the age of 18 by 1997, is the way to achieve what we are seeking to achieve?

Mr. Waddington: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has made a statement about moves towards democracy, but there is no point in taking steps that will come to a dead end in 1997, as my right hon. Friend made clear in his statement not so long ago. That is the short answer. In the joint declaration the Chinese Government are committed to allowing people to stay in Hong Kong, to continuing to give them the right of abode there, to continuing to allow them to work there and to continuing to allow them to leave and return there.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): My right hon. and learned Friend will know that I do not share some of my hon. Friends' concerns about the effect of this proposal on United Kingdom immigration policy, but I want to follow up his point about the attitude of the Chinese Government to those who may take up these passports. Is not it plain from the memorandum attached to the 1984 treaty that it was clearly seen by both the British and Chinese Governments that this possibility, if enacted as legislation, would in effect deprive the people taking advantage of my right hon. and learned Friend's proposals of their Chinese nationality? If that is so, how could it possibly make sense to say that we are encouraging people to stay in Hong Kong when, by enacting this legislation, we are virtually making them stateless after 1997?

Mr. Waddington: We are certainly not making them stateless; we are giving them British citizenship—the opposite of statelessness. I must make it plain that in the United Kingdom memorandum we never undertook not to grant British citizenship to people in Hong Kong before 1997. We made it absolutely clear that people who will cease to be British dependent territories citizens in 1997 will be eligible to retain an appropriate status that will not involve a right of abode in the United Kingdom. So what we are doing is entirely in accord with the agreement reached with the Chinese in 1984.

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): Will my right hon. and learned Friend be kind enough to explain why it is proposed to extend the right to apply for citizenship beyond British dependent territory citizens to holders of Hong Kong certificates of identity and to any of the eligible categories who apply for BDT citizenship before the Bill receives Royal Assent?

Mr. Waddington: It would be unjust if we did not because there is no difference between the qualifications of a person who is already a BDTC and a person who is entitled to become a BDTC but whose application has not yet been processed. Therefore, it would not for one moment be considered fair if one were to put the shutters down on those who by luck rather than good management have become BDTCs now and discriminate against those waiting in the queue.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Before the Home Secretary moves on to the detailed arrangements under the scheme, will he address himself to three particularly vulnerable groups in Hong Kong—the non-Chinese ethnic minorities who will be stateless after 1997, the non-British spouses of British citizens who are in great difficulty and anxiety and the pitiful handful of 24 war widows whose position remains, disgracefully, most uncertain? Will he give the House clear assurances about the safeguards that will be made to protect those three small but vulnerable groups?

Mr. Waddington: If the hon. Gentleman will be patient for a while, I shall deal with the second and third categories. On the first category, the hon. Gentleman will remember that steps were taken some time ago to ensure that no one would be left stateless after 1997, and at the same time an undertaking was given to the non-ethnic Chinese in Hong Kong that if by any chance an individual were to come under severe pressure after 1997 we would consider sympathetically his application to come here.

Let me deal now with the explanatory note which I have laid before the House and which sets out the selection scheme that the Government have in mind. It is the product of extensive discussions with the Hong Kong Government and it is based on principles originally proposed by them.

The scheme that we envisage would be divided into four separate sections. Seventy-two per cent., or 36,200, of the 50,000 places would be allocated under a general section, open to people from a wide range of walks of life who had a key role in maintaining Hong Kong's prosperity and successful administration. They would come from the following seven broad areas of work—business and management, accounting, engineering, information services, medicine and science, law and education. The distribution of places to the various occupational groups within those broad areas would take account of the rate at which their members were emigrating, to focus the assurances where the need is greatest.

A number of places would be set aside for other technically or professionally qualified people who do not fit neatly into the listed occupational groups but who perform essential functions. Applicants in the general allocation section would be marked on a points system taking account of age, experience, qualifications, special circumstances, proficiency in English, British links and community service. Age is important because the scheme is intended to reflect Hong Kong's future need for personnel, and emigration is particularly high in the 30 to 40 age range.

Points for special circumstances would be a means of, for example, recognising exceptional individual achievement or of giving extra weight to occupations suffering higher emigration rates than others within the same group. As to British links, this will include service with a British firm and the Bill does not, therefore, contain provisions for a secondment scheme as originally envisaged. How best to give assistance to British companies will no doubt feature in our detailed discussions on the Bill.

A points system is not familiar to us in Britain, but it is well understood in Hong Kong as a result of its use by the Australian and Canadian immigration authorities, and considerable work has gone into devising one which would be as fair and objective as possible, with the governor's advisory committee playing an important and impartial role. The Independent Commission Against Corruption, which will be represented on the advisory committee, has already been involved in designing the way in which the points system will operate, and will monitor the practical application of this as of other aspects of the scheme.

The second section of the scheme is for key entrepreneurs. The House knows that Hong Kong has a number of well-known and respected entrepreneurs who have extensive investments there, who employ substantial numbers of people and whose departure would do much to undermine confidence. We therefore envisage that the scheme would reserve a small number of places—not more than 1 per cent. of the total—for people in that category.

The third section would provide places for Hong Kong's disciplined services—that is, the police, prison, immigration, customs, fire and auxiliary air force services, as well as the Independent Commission Against Corruption and the garrison. Places will be allocated to

[Mr. Waddington]

those services in proportion to their staff numbers. Applicants will be assessed on a points system, similar to that already described but adjusted to take account o. the needs of each service.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): Is the Home Secretary aware that Donald Tsang, the chief administrator of Hong Kong, has estimated that 750,000 people will apply for passports—15 times as many as the number of passports available under the scheme? Will not that have a very destabilising effect on Hong Kong?

Mr. Waddington: I have made this point already, and I do not think that it needs repeating. The fact remains that the selection of 50,000 key personnel who are essential to the good government of Hong Kong and the management of its economy will stabilise Hong Kong, keep it prosperous and thus provide an incentive for the rest of the people to stay.

Finally, the sensitive services section will provide for people who, as a consequence of service to Hong Kong or United Kingdom interests in either a civilian or military role, would be especially vulnerable or exposed after 1997.

This is a scheme for key workers, not for a wealthy and influential elite. It makes provision for teachers, doctors, nurses, engineers, computer programmers, accountants, business managers, civil servants, policemen and the like, and reactions in Hong Kong so far lend no credence to the claim that it is considered elitist or divisive there. It is—as the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) wisely said yesterday—selective, and that is its object. It is seen in Hong Kong as a scheme that will contribute to the stability and prosperity of the territory, and will therefore benefit the community as a whole.

There are two other groups of people whom I should mention—and about whom I was questioned a few moments ago—who are not covered by the Bill but for whom I believe some provision must be made. I refer to the widows and widowers of British citizens who were resident in Hong Kong. I am prepared to offer an assurance that they will be allowed to come here if they are still resident in Hong Kong, have not the citizenship of another country and have not remarried. They would, of course, have been able to come here anyway under the immigration rules during the lifetimes of their spouses. In accordance with the recommendations of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, the same assurance will extend to the widows of former service men who served in defence of Hong Kong during the second world war under the Government of Hong Kong, and they will be able to come here irrespective of the husband's nationality.

Mr. Marlow: My right hon. and learned Friend has said that the objective of the measure is to enable people to stay in Hong Kong, but if people have British passports when they come into Britain the fact is not registered. How will we know how many of those 50,000—or 225,000—actually come to reside here? How will we know how successful my right hon. and learned Friend's prediction has been?

Mr. Waddington: The Hong Kong authorities keep a careful check on people who leave Hong Kong and are absent for more than six months. Obviously, if a person is granted British citizenship he is not liable to immigration control, but a check would be kept of those who left Hong Kong with British passports. I think that that meets my hon. Friend's point.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): The Home Secretary has not touched on the context of the measure and, in particular, the recommendation of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee that it should be seen in an international context. What developments have taken place in his touting for support from other European countries, and especially from the United States?

Mr. Waddington: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will deal with that at length in his final speech, so I shall leave it to him.

Mr. Paul Channon (Southend, West): My right hon. and learned Friend has not dealt with the question about the non-United Kingdom spouses of British citizens. Unless something is done, they will be in the curious position of being treated worse than the Hong Kong spouses of Hong Kong citizens are at present. Their numbers are very small. Will my right hon. and learned Friend say a word about that?

Mr. Waddington: There is no difficulty, provided that their husbands are still alive. Wives of British citizens will have an absolute right to come here under the immigration rules. The problem arises in the case of those who are widowed, and who have therefore lost their opportunity to come here under the immigration rules.

My right hon. Friend seems worried by my reply, so I shall let him have another go.

Mr. Channon: I am sorry to interrupt my right hon. and learned Friend again, but may I ask him to check the position carefully? I understand that spouses must have three years' residence here. That entirely defeats the object of the Bill, as it means that families will have to leave Hong Kong rather than being encouraged to stay.

Mr. Waddington: With respect, my right hon. Friend is confusing two separate matters. Spouses will have an absolute right to enter the country, although three years' residence will be required after that for them to obtain British citizenship. They will not need British citizenship to have the assurance that they can come here at any time during the lifetime of their spouses. The difficulty arises only if they are widowed, and that is why I am making special provision for people in such circumstances.

In conclusion, I should refer to suggestions that the Bill either betrays the Government's lack of confidence in the joint declaration or will reinforce uncertainty about the future among those not selected. I do not believe that either allegation stands up to scrutiny. It is a fact of life that, following the events in China last June, confidence in Hong Kong declined to a low ebb. The Bill is designed to tackle that problem; far from undermining confidence, it will bolster it.

As for the Chinese, they have not said anything to suggest that they will fail to honour their side of the joint declaration, and under the terms of the declaration it will be incumbent upon the Chinese Government after 1997 to go on allowing Hong Kong residents with British citizenship to continue to live and work in Hong Kong, and to have free movement in and out of the territory. That is clearly set out in paragraph 3(4) of the joint declaration, and in section XIV of annex 1 thereto.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has taken pains to explain to the Chinese our reasons for introducing the proposals, and we believe that they will in time come to accept them as a sincere contribution to Hong Kong's successful transition to Chinese sovereignty. It is also profoundly to Britain's advantage to secure such a transition. That is why the Bill serves the joint interests of the British people and of the Queen's subjects in Hong Kong. I commend it to the House.

4.48 pm

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): It is less than a year since the slaughter in Tiananmen square, so it is easy enough to understand the apprehension with which the people of Hong Kong anticipate the handing over of the colony to China in seven years' time. That apprehension is, I believe, felt by all the people—more than 5 million residents, including more than 3·25 million British dependent territories citizens.

There cannot be a solution to the problems of the colony and the confidence of the residents that does not address the needs of all the people, not just a few. There can be no just or even practical solution in a scheme that offers a special escape route to a favoured and arbitrarily chosen minority. Selection emphasises the existence of the problem, but offers no way out of it for the majority of Hong Kong residents. The real solution—the only solution that meets the needs of all the people—is to make major progress towards democracy in the colony and to make it so complete and tightly organised that dismantling it in 1997 would be virtually impossible. That is the policy that the Labour party advocates and will pursue in government.

Sir Peter Blaker (Blackpool, South): To how many Hong Kong Chinese would the Labour party give United Kingdom passports or the right of abode in this country?

Mr. Hattersley: The right hon. Gentleman anticipates a subject that I shall address in a moment. It is not our view that such matters are best decided by thinking of a number first and working out the categories afterwards.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): So the only thing that the Labour party will offer the people of Hong Kong is democracy. Has the right hon. Gentleman then not learnt anything from the experience of Tiananmen square? Democracy is not a magic wand to be waved in front of a Chinese tank. It needs to be supported by something; it must be supported by the right of those people to leave as they wish with British passports and come to Britain. Why does the Labour party hand democracy to Hong Kong with one hand and damage and wound it with the other?

Mr. Hattersley: The right hon. Gentleman will understand in a calmer moment that I am about to address some of the questions that he has asked me. But as he has intervened, let me make one thing absolutely clear. It seems to me that the most cynical policy of all is to pretend to offer entry to every citizen of Hong Kong on the basis and understanding that most of them will not take up that right. That sounds very noble when spoken in a single sentence, but it is not a policy that bears a moment's moral or intellectual examination.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Would my right hon. Friend not agree that it is somewhat cynical also to pretend that a Labour Government could introduce greater democratisation in Hong Kong against the Basic Law which has been passed with the support of Hong Kong delegates' votes? How does he possibly argue that a Labour Government could introduce that democratisation?

Mr. Hattersley: I propose to argue in a little detail, if given the chance, that the next Labour Government will pursue the path towards democracy at the speed that the people of Hong Kong have always asked for and that was once offered to the people of Hong Kong by the present Government. The Government have flinched from making adequate progress towards full democracy. I believe that the Bill is intended to disarm the most vocal and influential minority and therefore make it easier for the Government to follow that craven course. The Bill is the alternative to the progress towards democracy which Hong Kong needs and deserves.

John Walden, the former director of home affairs in the Hong Kong Government, has no doubt where the root cause of falling confidence lies. Writing in today's *The Times,* he says:

> "within a year of Parliament's endorsement of . . . agreement"—

of the joint declaration with China in December 1984—

> "Foreign Office officials had secretly agreed to China's demand that Britain slow down its plans for democratic reform."

He continued:

> "The collapse of confidence in the future of Hong Kong was precipitated not by the tragic events in Tiananmen Square in June 1989 but by Britain's failure to stand up to China in November 1985 and to secure the political safeguards written into the Joint Declaration."

Mr. Ray Whitney (Wycombe): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment, but I should like to make some progress first. I promise to bear him in mind.

Mr. Whitney: I am most grateful.

Mr. Hattersley: It has been claimed that the Bill discharges a debt of honour that we owe to the people of Hong Kong. However, no one explains how a debt of honour to 5 million people, 3·25 million of them British dependent territories citizens, can be repaid by selecting 50,000 of their number for special treatment. It has been claimed, in contradiction of opinion within Hong Kong, which I shall presently quote, that the Bill will increase confidence in the colony. However, no one explains what effect the Bill will have on the confidence of the overwhelming majority of residents who will not benefit from its provisions. The Bill legitimises the fear that an escape route is needed after 1997, but it offers the chance to escape to less than one resident in 20. There is not and cannot be such an escape route for the majority of the colony's residents. If general confidence is increased by the measure, it will be the first time that the morale of the other ranks has been improved by the announcement that the officers will retreat first.

Mr. Whitney: The right hon. Gentleman quoted with approval the article by John Walden in *The Times* today. Is he aware that Mr. Walden suggested that China's opposition is the best reason why the Government's Bill should be supported today? Does he therefore accept Mr. Walden's proposition?

Mr. Hattersley: I certainly accept Mr. Walden's proposition that the Bill is the best that we could get from the Government. Mr. Walden is saying that a very small amount of help is better than no help at all. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman can tell me whether he accepts Mr. Walden's package in total or whether he accepts only part of it. As he had a hand in these matters some years ago, I suspect that he knows very well the betrayal of Hong Kong by the British Foreign Office.

Mr. Whitney: Unlike the right hon. Gentleman, I take Mr. Walden's proposition seriously and I take the issue seriously, which the right hon. Gentleman is failing to do. Certainly it is right that we should stand up to Peking, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary suggested. The way to stand up to Peking and to make the Chinese Government understand their own interests is to pass and support the Bill. The way not to do that is to opt out and cop out of the issue in the way in which the right hon. Gentleman and apparently the majority of the Labour party intend to do.

Mr. Hattersley: I return to opinion in Hong Kong on the subject of the Government's plans. Mr. Lee Cheuk Yan of the Pro Democracy movement said that the Bill is

"only for 50,000 households . . . so for the majority of Hong Kong people is irrelevant."

That view, according to opinion polls, is shared by a vast majority of Hong Kong residents, as 90 per cent. of executives, professionals and entrepreneurs, the people whom the Bill is supposed to benefit, say that the Bill will not promote stability, and 88 per cent. of young Hong Kong residents—the future of the colony—regard it as of no significance. Most people in Hong Kong believe in a united territory which will move towards the genuine democracy and the Bill of Rights that will give reality to the concept of "two systems within one nation" after 1997.

The Government have chosen the diametrically opposite course. They have divided the colony between the favoured minority and the disregarded majority. No doubt they believe that by promising passports to Hong Kong's most vocal and influential residents, that has muted their opposition to the Government's failure to make proper progress towards the full democracy that Hong Kong needs and wants. The Office of the Members of the Executive and Legislative Councils was unanimous in calling for, a year ago, 20 elected members by 1991, 30 in 1995 and a fully elected Assembly in 2003.

Despite his predecessor's fine talk about the pace of democratic development reflecting the wishes of the whole community, the Foreign Secretary no longer even aspires to those figures and that result. Instead, he bends to the wishes of the Peking Government, and only half the Assembly's members will be elected by 2003. I want to ask him a direct question on this subject. Did the Prime Minister make any promises about Hong Kong when she dined, secretly as she thought, with the Chinese ambassador two weeks ago? Within 10 months of the Tiananmen square massacre, the Prime Minister was accepting Chinese hospitality. What hopes we had of the Prime Minister and the Government standing up for democracy in Hong Kong were extinguished when we discovered how she had spent her evening three weeks ago, allegedly in secret.

The Foreign Secretary's wish to accommodate China, which must be putting at risk the promised Hong Kong Bill of Rights, is a denial of the principle that his predecessor so often asserted—Britain's determination that it would not abdicate its right to govern Hong Kong in Hong Kong's interests before 1997. The Foreign Office and the Bill are now dividing Hong Kong to facilitate Chinese rule. The first step that Labour will take will be to increase confidence within the colony by moving towards real democracy at the pace demanded by the people of Hong Kong.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): Speaking on radio not many days ago, the right hon. Gentleman said, presumably while trying to play to the anti-immigration lobby in Birmingham, that the Labour party, if given the opportunity, would limit the number of people allowed into this country. He further said that he did not know how or how many. Has he had time to think since and does he now know how and how many?

Mr. Hattersley: Let me assure the hon. Gentleman about something that even he, on reflection, will understand. Whatever else is represented by the Member of Parliament for Sparkbrook, it is not the anti-immigration lobby.

We do not intend now, or ever, to play the numbers game. There are a number of people in express and specific categories who in our view deserve the right to enter Britain. In a moment, I shall describe those categories, but we leave the numbers game to those who used to be led by the Home Secretary until he was coerced into supporting the Bill.

I shall describe in a moment how we shall deal with immigration from the colony, but first I want to make it clear that under no circumstances will we introduce a system that requires residents, in theory equal before the law, to compete with each other for a limited number of passports. The system that the Government propose is arbitrary and divisive. Its effect will be capricious and its result will be unavoidably unjust.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: Not for the moment.

The Bill proposes that 50,000 individuals should be granted British citizenship. Why 50,000? Why not 40,000, 60,000 or 70,000, as the Foreign Secretary originally proposed? We know the honest answer to the question: 50,000 is the compromise between what the Foreign Secretary wanted and what the Home Secretary was prepared to agree. But, and I hope that the Foreign Secretary will answer the question precisely when he replies to the debate, what is the official explanation of 50,000? What is to be said to the men and women who just fail to qualify and who know that they are on the margin of qualification because they have compared their ratings in the absurd points scheme that the Government propose and have realised that they just missed out compared with more successful applicants? Why will they be told that only 50,000 will be allowed?

Mrs. Currie *rose*——

Mr. Hattersley: Not for the moment. I hope that right hon. and hon. Members who vote for the Bill——

Mrs. Currie *rose*——

Mr. Hattersley: The rule is that when I say that I shall not give way, the hon. Lady must sit down.

I hope that right hon. and hon. Members who will vote for the Bill tonight have studied the points scheme, by which British passports will be distributed. British citizenship is to be awarded on the basis of a calculation that most urban district councils would regard as too crude for the allocation of council houses. I invite hon. Members who doubt that judgment to read paragraph 23 of the proposed scheme:

> "In the event that a number of candidates scored equal points and all could not be accommodated within the places available for each group, the Governor would have discretion to choose whom to recommend for citizenship."

An urban district council that gave such power to a housing manager would be driven out of office. The Home Secretary understated the case when he told us that this is an unprecedented way of awarding British citizenship.

The House is being invited to take or leave the points scheme. It is being denied any opportunity to amend it. It is not part of the Bill, but as it clearly will not be changed year by year there is no reason why it should be hidden away in secondary legislation, except the Government's hope that debate on the contents of the points scheme can be hidden away in a 90-minute debate late one night. Given the scheme's contents, that is hardly surprising.

I give another example of the scheme's absurdity, to which I hope the Foreign Secretary will give an explicit answer tonight. Paragraph 34 of the scheme suddenly begins to refer to heads of households, 50,000 of whom will be granted British citizenship. How is a head of household defined? Is it a man? Is it the highest wage earner? If a woman earns less than her husband but qualifies in the scheme through education and experience, can she still be granted British citizenship?

What about children? Paragraph 34 says that children under 18 will not be allowed to accompany their parents if the Home Secretary is not satisfied as to their good character. Are the Government serious about that? Are they saying that when all the paraphernalia have been gone through, when the committee has sat, when the governor has recommended and when the Home Secretary has rubber-stamped the decision, somebody will say "You and your spouse can come, but your children under 18 are not, in the Home Secretary's judgment, of good character." Is this a serious scheme, or was it simply cobbled together overnight?

If the scheme were simply ludicrous, the tragedy would not be so great, but it is also arbitrary and contradictory in a way that should disqualify it from serious consideration. In *The Times* today, Mr. D. A. White of Hong Kong described one of its consequences, to which I hope the Home Secretary will listen. May I have the Home Secretary's attention?

Mrs. Currie: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you clarify for the House whether this is a debate or a statement from the right hon. Gentleman? Is it not time that he gave way to a Conservative Member?

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Is it on the same point?

Mr. Bell: I am seeking your protection as a Back Bencher. We are trying to listen to the debate, but Conservative Members are consistently intervening without any sanction from the Chair. I do not wish to challenge you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but we require the protection of the Chair against those who are deliberately disrupting the proceedings of the House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Home Secretary and the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) have been generous in giving way, but I remind the House that many right hon. and hon. Members wish to speak. Interventions inevitably prolong speeches.

Mr. Hattersley: I hope that the Home Secretary will concentrate on the example that I propose to give him in a moment as it reveals that he was wrong in fact in an answer that he gave earlier. Mr. D. A. White of Hong Kong wrote to *The Times* this morning describing the contrary consequences of the Bill. Mr. White is British; his wife is Hong Kong-born Chinese. As a result of the iniquities of our general immigration law, Mr. White does not have an unqualified and unfettered right to bring his wife to this country. The Home Secretary said that he did. In fact, Mr. White has the right to apply to bring his wife here, but she has to pass a number of tests, such as the primary purpose rule, to come to this country. Mr. White points out that if he were not British, but a British dependent territories citizen, he would certainly qualify for the points scheme and would thereby acquire the unfettered and unqualified right to bring his wife to this country. He says that he is penalised by the fact that he is British. He says finally that if he died before his wife, she would lose even the residual right to apply and to be examined. That does not seem right and I hope that the Home Secretary or the Foreign Secretary will justify such an anomaly.

Anyone who has residual doubts about the Government's fear that the points scheme is literally indefensible needs to read no further than clause 1(5). It says:

> "Neither the Secretary of State nor the Governor shall be required to give any reason for any decision made by him in the exercise of a discretion vested in him or under this Act and no such decision shall be subject to appeal or liable to be questioned in any court."

British citizenship is to be handed out according to a points scheme, which turns out, on examination, to be run not by the governor, but by a group of Hong Kong officials who may well themselves be applicants. The points scheme would be ridiculous were it not wicked. However, the comparison, which I made a few moments ago, with local authority housing allocation may have been unfair. No housing points scheme could be so subjective or crude. No housing committee would deny an aggrieved applicant the right of appeal. No local authority would be allowed to avoid judicial review of its housing allocation, yet all those iniquities and absurdities are built into the scheme by which the right to be British is granted by a committee of Hong Kong officials and then rubber-stamped by the Foreign Secretary and the governor of Hong Kong.

Mrs. Currie: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: The injustices inherent in the scheme were unavoidable once the Government decided on the principle—if "principle" is the right word—on which the Bill is based. The Government decided on a number and then had to decide how the total was made up. If the Government were determined to have a selective scheme, they should have begun by deciding which categories of

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residents they were prepared to allow to come to Britain and the number of entrants would then have been the total within those prospective categories.

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: We know that the Government chose the figure of 50,000 men and women of special merit and—

Mrs. Currie: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Couchman: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: I shall give way to the hon. Lady.

Mrs. Currie: It is noticeable in the House that the right hon. Gentleman is ploughing through his notes with his head down. I am glad—and grateful to him—that he has at last raised his head to answer a question. Is it not a matter of logic from what he is saying that everybody in Hong Kong who wants to come in should have a passport and be able to do so? As that is not acceptable and is unlikely to happen, he is saying that nobody should come. Would it not be better to put his points into a reasoned amendment and to support the Second Reading tonight?

Mr. Hattersley: I am sorry that the hon. Lady missed the television at 5.10 pm—*[Interruption.]* Of course, that is why I waited before giving way. What is right is that those with special needs should be allowed into the country. If she can bear to listen with patience, as the cameras are off, I am about to describe what those categories are and how we should assess them.

The net result of the strange compromise between the Foreign Secretary's pro-consular illusions and the Home Secretary's tabloid populism provides for people coming into this country who do not remotely conform to the criteria that the Government once laid down in the British Nationality Act 1981, such as the criteria of established relationship with this country or a determination to become permanently associated with it. More importantly, this strange, cobbled-together compromise will deny citizenship to men and women who need, deserve and want it. Such iniquities and inequities can be avoided only by the application to Hong Kong of this country's general policy on nationality and immigration—not the policy we have now, which is often unjust and discriminatory, but the immigration policy which we should have and which, under the Labour Government, we will have. Under that policy, there would be no general distribution of passports by Home Secretaries on the basis of schemes cobbled together from dubious principles and divisive practices.

When Lord Whitelaw introduced the British Nationality Bill, the Tory party used to believe that the award of British citizenship should be based on constant principles: birth in Britain, a long period of residence in Britain or a close personal association with Britain. British citizenship should be given away by the Government according to principles, not according to the mood of the moment. That remains our view. We should apply to Hong Kong the compassionate and consistent principles of our published immigration policy. For many of the citizens who thus came to this country, British citizenship might well follow.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: I will give way just once more, then I shall obey Mr. Deputy Speaker's injunction to make progress.

Mr. Bruce: The right hon. Gentleman is clearly a well-known international statesman, but he may not be as well known as his right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). The right hon. Member for Gorton said that any right of abode given by this Parliament under the Bill, or under any other, would not necessarily be maintained by an incoming Labour Government. Will the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) repudiate that particular statement?

Mr. Hattersley: Our position on that is clear. If the Bill is passed, we shall, of course, accept its provisions, but, as I have already pointed out to the House, the Bill is so constructed that the scheme that it governs can be changed from time to time. Clearly, the Government would not abandon the right to change the scheme in the Bill and neither would we. If the Bill is passed, we shall respect it. My right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) has never said anything remotely different from that.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): What are your principles?

Mr. Hattersley: I hear the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) say, with the wit and intelligence that I expect from him, "What are your policies?" Under our policy, some Hong Kong residents would qualify immediately for entry into this country. Many of them were recommended for special consideration by the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs. Their problems have often been ignored by the Government. Indeed, all four special categories recommended by the Select Committee were ignored by the Government until 4·5 pm today. I am sure that the so-called rebels on the Tory Benches will feel that if they have achieved nothing else in their endeavours, they have got the widows of ex-service men into this country. They have achieved that at least because the Government ran away from them on that particular and progress would not have been made unless the Government had feared defeat this evening.

The Government have not gone far enough. We will offer immediate entry to other groups because they deserve and need it. The Select Committee referred to "non-ethnic Chinese" who are mostly east African Asians who took refuge in the colony 20 years ago and who do not have full rights of residence in Hong Kong. In 1997, they will be stateless. Despite what the Home Secretary said this afternoon, the Government are offering them nothing. They do not qualify under the points scheme. We will grant them entry rights and I repeat that it is our published and established policy to allow the small number of war widows to come to this country. If I welcome nothing else that the Home Secretary said this afternoon, I welcome his concession on those widows and rejoice at his conversion.

We should also—as the Select Committee proposes—accept that time spent as a bona fide student could be included in the qualifying period for naturalisation. As the Select Committee also recommended, we should use section 4(5) of the British Nationality Act 1981 generously.

That section allows the Home Secretary to grant British citizenship to public servants who have worked abroad in colonial administrations. It enables the Government to offer citizenship to public servants of every rank, whereas the points scheme would clearly favour more senior officials. *[Interruption.]* How do I know? Who asked me how I knew? [HON. MEMBERS: "Langbaugh."] I should have guessed.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: No.

Mr. Holt *rose*——

Mr. Hattersley: I shall give way in a moment.

Mr. Holt *rose*——

Mr. Hattersley: I shall gladly give way to the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) if he will tell me the five basic principles of the points scheme that I have cited. Can he do that? *[Laughter.]*

Mr. Holt: The right hon. Gentleman—[HON. MEMBERS: "One."] The right hon. Gentleman—[HON. MEMBERS: "One."]—and those behind him may think that this debate is funny and that the lives of people in Hong Kong are not important. This is not a game; it is a debate about people's lives and futures and the right hon. Gentleman is not doing Parliament or his party any good by his behaviour this afternoon. I suggest that he is honest with the public and that he stands up and tells the House how many people from Hong Kong the Labour party would allow into Britain.

Mr. Hattersley: It is because I regard this matter as crucial that I reject and resent the fact that hon. Members such as the hon. Member for Langbaurgh will vote for the Bill this evening without understanding the first thing about what is involved.

Some public servants will no doubt wish—perhaps even need—to leave the colony after 1997. We shall certainly enable them to come to Britain. The Home Secretary's discretion—a major feature of both immigration and nationality legislation at present—can and will be used to assist other individuals—I emphasise individuals—who are in particular need of leaving the colony.

On 17 January the Foreign Secretary told the House that as we considered the Bill we should be mindful of our duty to the people of Britain as well as to the people of Hong Kong. It is to the consequences of the Bill for Britain that I shall now address my remarks. It now seems to be the Home Secretary's belief—it has always been the Foreign Secretary's belief—that most of the Hong Kong residents who receive British citizenship will choose not to come to Britain. The announcement by the Government of China that they will not recognise a second or dual nationality seems to me to undermine that conviction. My own view is that most of the 225,000 will not come immediately but will come eventually—in 1996 if they have not emigrated elsewhere. But I repeat that the number is not the issue. What concerns me—it is the nub of my passionate opposition to the Bill—is the damage that will be done to the interests and welfare of the black and Asian British. That damage will be real, practical and immediate.

This is an immigration Bill as well as a nationality Bill. It confers the right of entry into Britain on men and women who do not possess it at present. New rights to new immigration—the extension of immigration—must be seen, at least during the lifetime of this Parliament, against the background of the Government's established immigration policy. About the principles of that policy —if "principles" is the right word—Ministers have been brutally frank. The rigorous control of numbers is said to be essential. The then Home Secretary—now the Foreign Secretary—was explicit in his words to the House on 16 November 1987. These are his words, not mine; they are his opinions, certainly not mine:

"there is a limit to the extent to which a society can accept" ——

Mr. Couchman: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: No.

Mr. Couchman: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In July the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) said in the House that the Labour party recognised that 3¼ million Chinese could not be given the right of abode. On 20 December he said that 50,000 heads of households could not. I believe that the right hon. Gentleman——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is a matter for debate. It is not a point of order.

Mr. Hattersley: The then Home Secretary said on 16 November 1987:

"there is a limit to the extent to which a society can accept large numbers of people from different cultures without unacceptable social tensions. That remains our view. It is not an anti-immigrant view; it is a realistic view.

It would not be in the interests of the ethnic minorities themselves if there were a prospect of further mass inward movement. That prospect would increase social tensions, particularly in our cities."—*[Official Report,* 16 November 1987; Vol. 122, c. 779.]

I repeat that that is the Government's view—the established principle of their immigration policy. Successive regulations have put it into practice. They have had the effect of reducing numbers and Ministers have boasted about it. What is more, adminstrative delays hold back the entry of men and women who are entitled to come here. The Government consistently refuse to allocate sufficient resources to reduce the queue. My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) asked questions in the House during the week before the Easter recess. The answers that he obtained about the length of time that it takes, not to obtain the right to come here, but to demonstrate that right, was terrifying.

I have no doubt that if today we gave special priority immigration status to hand-picked residents of Hong Kong, the Government would hold back the entry into Great Britain of men and women with a far greater claim to British nationality. They would contrive more administrative delays and introduce new regulations. They would apply the primary purpose rule more rigorously. I remind the House that that is the rule that gives an immigration officer the power to read a husband's mind and announce that he cannot come to Britain because he is applying not because he wants to be with his wife but because he likes it here or wants a job here. The Home Secretary tells us that this is a Bill aimed at carefully chosen people with good jobs and good salaries. I know very well that he will compensate for that by keeping out

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people without good jobs and without salaries—husbands and wives who ought to be reunited with their families in Britain.

Men and women with an established right to come here will be passed over in favour of men and women for whom a new and absolute right is being created. Some of the most underprivileged families in Britain will be penalised while help is given to other individuals who, by definition, continue to enjoy a very great advantage.

I remind the House of the people to whom we currently refuse entry to Great Britain. Husbands of British citizens are prevented from joining their wives in this country on the most flimsy and artificial of pretexts. Dependent relatives are deprived of the right to spend their old age with their families. Many special voucher holders—east African refugees who were promised the right to come to Britain 20 years ago—have still not received visas. Perhaps worst of all, children of British citizens were denied entry because they were adjudged, in the notorious phrase, not to be related as claimed. Now DNA tests have proved that the Home Office was wrong—that they are the children of British citizens—but they are still being denied reunion with their families. Every week, I see families who are deperately damaged, materially and emotionally, by those exclusions—families who are separated when they should be together. While such exclusions continue, I do not propose to vote for the priority entry into Britain of men and women who qualify by a committee's judgment of such intangible attributes as

"special circumstances; experience and community service".

Mr. Waddington: Now that the right hon. Gentleman has fully developed his argument, we can understand it. He has said, first, that he is worried about the possibility of 50,000 people coming here from Hong Kong because of the effect that it may have on community relations—[HON. MEMBERS: "No. It was you."] No, that is exactly what the right hon. Gentleman said. On the other hand, the right hon. Gentleman said that he would allow some people to come here from Hong Kong. How, in the light of that, can he again refuse to answer the straight question that has been put to him now half a dozen times? If he thinks that 50,000 people coming here would be bad for race relations, but believes that some peple should be allowed to come here from Hong Kong, how many people does he believe should come here from Hong Kong?

Mr. Hattersley: I had no doubt that the Home Secretary would eventually ask me the numbers question because that enables him to support the Bill and still preserve his racist credentials. [HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw."] In the meantime—

Mrs. Currie: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I distinctly heard the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) talk about the racist credentials of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. That is surely unparliamentary and it was a disgraceful thing to say.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: If the right hon. Gentleman used a phrase that was unparliamentary I am sure that he would wish to rephrase it.

Mr. Hattersley: Of course, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Had I used a phrase that was unparliamentary, I should, as always, withdraw it without a moment's hesitation. However, the idea that the phrase "racist credentials", which I debase by saying that it is used in every debate on race that we have in this place, is in any way unparliamentary is, to put it simply, stretching it a bit.

I want to ask the Home Secretary a question about his policies.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is there precedent for the proposition that the word "racist" is unparliamentary?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope that the House will leave those matters to the Chair. There are remarks which some hon. Members find offensive. I did not feel it necessary to ask the right hon. Gentleman to withdraw that particular phrase, but I must tell the House that this is a very serious debate. There are strong emotions on both sides and these interventions prolong speeches.

Mr. Hattersley: The iniquity of what the Government propose for Hong Kong becomes clear when it is compared with the treatment now meted out to British ethnic minorities. For example, we are told—indeed it is the nub and basis of the Bill—that it is right that 50,000 selected Hong Kong residents should be allowed to enter Britain and bring their families with them. That is right because of their uncertainty about the colony's future.

If a Sikh woman from my constituency—Sikh and British—marries a man from the Punjab, that man will be subject to a searching examination of his motives and intentions if he applies to come to this country. If he says that he wants to come to Britain in part because he is uncertain about the future of the Punjab, he will be automatically denied entry to this country according to the primary purpose rule.

Anxiety about the future is a qualification for coming here if one lives in Hong Kong. If one is a husband wishing to join a British wife, anxiety about the future of one's country of origin anywhere else is an automatic disqualification.

I am familiar with the cliche that two wrongs do not make a right. Like most cliches, it is true. However, that cliche does not apply to this situation. Applying the principles of the Bill would do more than leave the black and Asian British in their present state of disadvantage. It would increase their suffering by pushing them further down the queue. Their relatives would be kept out as the new entrants were allowed in.

I have read that the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) has also expressed the view that Asian British living in his constituency would feel a bitter resentment if their husbands, parents, wives and children were kept out of this country while new candidates with no immediate claim on British citizenship were allowed in. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman is right. However, our attitudes towards the problem diverge from that.

For 10 years I have been arguing that husbands, wives and dependent relatives should be allowed into this country. For 10 years the right hon. Member for Chingford has been voting to keep them out. That shows a substantial difference in our attitudes towards the problem. I say to him and to others, whether he votes for the Bill tonight is no concern of mine. I shall vote against it because it is a bad Bill—bad in concept, execution, principle and practice.

5.34 pm

Mr. Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): I shall support the Government in the Lobby tonight—*[Interruption.]* Although in the past I have expressed doubts about some aspects of the Bill, I believe that it is the only course now open to the Government. What doubts I had were removed by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley).

I have seldom heard a less convincing speech than that made by the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook. We respect him because he normally puts forward an honest and convincing point of view from the Opposition Front Bench. However, to say tonight that the problem facing the Government can be solved by an extension of democracy in Hong Kong bears no relation to reality.

In the 1980s, I was one of those who strongly urged the Government to speed up the process of democratisation. I wanted that first stage to have been taken by 1989. However, we were unsuccessful in convincing the Government of that. I do not see now that the situaton in Hong Kong following Tiananmen square can be dealt with by saying that we will extend democratisation.

There is a lack of confidence in some quarters in Hong Kong. It does not exist in all quarters, and it may be exaggerated, but the uncertainty undoubtedly exists. The Government's obligation is to do their utmost to ensure that Hong Kong retains its stability and prosperity until the time comes to hand it over in 1997.

I differ from those who say that we have a moral responsibility to Hong Kong. I have always found it very difficult to understand how international affairs can be run satisfactorily on the basis of a particular chosen morality. The British have made a considerable contribution to the development of Hong Kong and to the welfare of its people. However, if we look at the figures we must also recognise that the Americans and the Japanese have made an even greater contribution in investment and trade. Very well—we do not criticise that, nor do we dispute it. All have contributed. Because we have helped to build up Hong Kong and its people, I cannot see that one can draw from that a moral conclusion as to what we should do now.

Our responsibility is clearly a political and practical one. We must ensure that, when Hong Kong is handed over to the People's Republic of China, it is as stable and prosperous as we can make it. The Goverment have quite rightly addressed themselves to the problem of securing that position. The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook failed to address that problem; that was the great weakness of his speech.

I readily agree that there may be difficulties with the present immigration law and that there are anomalies which should be changed. I do not dispute that.

Mr. Hattersley: You were the Prime Minister responsible.

Mr. Heath: Yes, I know. With time, one learns things. All that was 20 years ago. If anomalies have emerged, they can be changed. Nobody is arguing about that.

I see nothing in the Bill that will suggest that those who are waiting for relatives to join them will be affected. I am strongly in favour of those who have an entitlement to come here being granted that entitlement as soon as possible. I have always been in favour of that. Therefore, I do not see any problems arising from the Bill on that aspect of immigrants or the relatives of those who have already settled here coming to this country.

The problem is how to maintain the stability and prosperity of Hong Kong until 1997. The Government's approach has been to try to ascertain how many and who among those who are essential to public services and local services and to management should come here. They have then said, "Very well, we shall arrange for that to happen." I have always been worried about discrimination, but we have to solve the problem of maintaining stability and prosperity, and I believe that this is the only path open to us. The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook did not suggest any other.

We have heard that we do not want any discrimination in favour of the wealthy in Hong Kong. In my experience, the wealthy have already made their plans. They have already got out of Hong Kong. They are in Vancouver, building rather disagreeable high buildings in place of the natural type of architecture. They are looking after themselves. We do not have to worry about them and nor do the Government.

Others will seek a passport elsewhere. That is only to be expected until confidence is restored. It will require a period of residence overseas. However, we are also learning that those who have already followed that path and got their external residence are now returning to Hong Kong. If, by 1997, we have solved the bigger problem, to which I shall refer in a moment, those people will continue to remain and to work in Hong Kong because that is where they want to be. They are making the necessary dispositions themselves.

The larger problem relates to the attitude of the People's Republic of China. We are faced with the major task of restoring the relationship between Peking and Westminster and Whitehall and of both sides gaining confidence in each other. There is nothing to be gained from constantly dwelling on the tragedy of Tiananmen square, as did the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook—[HON. MEMBERS: "Why not?"] First, because we want to get the Chinese back on the path that they were on before that tragedy. They were being supported by investment and technology from all over the world. They are still being supported by a large amount of investment and technology from all the European countries. Our business men who are already there are continuing as before. What is required is confidence about the future at the political level.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): So we just forget about it, do we?

Mr. Heath: There is nothing to be gained by the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), who always has a grudge against something or some country, continually muttering under his breath about the tragedy, which we all deplore.

We must build up that confidence, because it will then give confidence to Hong Kong about what will happen after 1997. Therefore, I urge the Government not to despair and not to be dogmatic about this. I urge them not to regard it as an incident that will mean that for years and years we shall be further apart from Peking, but to find a way of moving closer to it so that they can influence it.

Mr. Adley *rose*——

Mr. Heath: No, I am sorry, but I shall not give way.

The democratic problems are not easy to solve. That was the problem in Tiananmen square. With a population of 1,050 million, it is not easy to say what democracy will be, how the people will vote or who will represent them —*[Interruption.]* Perhaps Opposition Front Bench spokesmen should take up positions at a university and explain the form of democracy to be brought about in a people of that size whose education has been developed to a high degree only in the past 10 years.

To restore confidence to Hong Kong, we must establish a relationship between London and Peking. That requires action from both sides—from Peking as well as London —if we are to give confidence to the people.

It is said that, if 50,000 families eventually come here, it will be the cause of great disorganisation. Having gone through the experience of the Ugandan Asians, I doubt that. I have heard it said that the Ugandan Asians tore the country apart. They did nothing of the sort. I have been looking up the records; they show that, like the rest of the world, this country felt that the British were doing the right thing in a difficult situation—as we did. We took 29,500 people from Uganda in the course of six weeks— not over a period of seven years. Those who came have been extraordinarily successful in this country, and have contributed an immense amount to it.

One thing on which I have formed a judgment about the Chinese is that, given an opportunity, wherever they are in the world, they will always be successful. It does not matter whether it is in the east end of London or in San Francisco—wherever there is a Chinatown, it is successful. Those who eventually come here will be successful and, I believe, will contribute to the welfare of this country.

I must emphasise that Chinese Governments have kept their undertakings in the past and, I believe, will keep to the undertakings that they have given about Hong Kong. It is said that they did not keep an undertaking about Tibet. However, the fact is that the agreement that was signed between Mao Tse-Tung and the Dalai Lama was broken by the military in Tibet, not by Mao or by the Dalai Lama. Therefore, that is not an example of the Chinese breaking an undertaking that they have signed. I think that they will keep their undertakings.

The Government are doing what is essential at this moment. They should be supported in that. However, they should back up their policy by re-establishing a relationship with Peking that will enable confidence about the future to exist in Hong Kong. If that can be achieved by 1997, some of the fears among my right hon. and hon. Friends and Opposition Members will prove to be groundless. I very much hope that that will be the case.

5.47 pm

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): As always, it is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), whose speech got to the heart of the Bill and of the bankruptcy of the Labour party's position.

I disagree with the right hon. Gentleman in one area. He said that the events of Tiananmen square are not relevant. I believe that he is wrong there. He is right to say that it is necessary to Hong Kong's future that we establish proper, stable relations with the Chinese Government, but he is wrong to ignore the Tiananmen event, because it is the shadow that hangs over Hong Kong at the moment, and the cause of its instability. It is not irrelevant to record that we are now within six weeks of the first anniversary of that appalling event, in which the Chinese state slaughtered its own young citizens in the main square of its own capital city. Today we are debating and deciding what safeguards and protections we should give our citizens whom we are about to hand over to that same state in a handful of years.

The House need be in no doubt about my party's position on this matter. We have stuck to it through thick and thin and we shall not vary from it now. I must advise the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup that we believe that Britain has a moral duty to honour the rights of all our passport holders in Hong Kong. That is not only the morally right thing to do; it is also the best practical thing to do. It provides the best way of ensuring Hong Kong's stability until 1997, and of preserving and protecting its democracy and prosperity after 1997. We believe that, if Britain had shown leadership and imagination, it would have been possible. It may still be possible to secure the international guarantees and agreements that would have reinsured our responsibilities to our passport holders with friendly countries in Europe, the Commonwealth and north America.

I wish to stress two points. First, as the Home Secretary properly said, we need to understand that the Bill is not an emigration policy for Hong Kong. It is a policy to discourage emigration from Hong Kong. It is about taking the measures that will give the people of Hong Kong the confidence to stay where they want to stay—in a free and capitalist Hong Kong. Secondly, we need to understand that Hong Kong is different from any matter on which the House has previously legislated. The House has legislated many times to transfer sovereignty over lands and people to self-government. But we have never handed a people over, most of them against their will, to another state, let alone a state from which many of them fled in fear of their lives.

The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup sought to argue that to allow the freedom of our citizens to be bartered away over their heads carried no moral obligation. I believe that it does carry obligations, and that it would be better if we faced up to them.

There was a time when Britain would have recognised those obligations and acted on them. In so doing, we should have won the respect of the whole world and furthered our interests in Hong Kong and the far east. But, since the Tiananmen square massacre, the activities of Ministers have fallen far short of that great tradition. They have ducked and weaved, moved forwards and backwards, hinted and warned, but they have never provided the leadership on this issue that was necessary even to make their own party recognise the gravity of the position.

Even now, the arguments that Ministers advance for not doing more for Hong Kong are the most disreputable that any Government could hide behind. When I hear Ministers say, "We should awfully like to do more for the people of Hong Kong but Parliament will not allow us to," I hear the clear echo of doublespeak. As if this Government had ever listened to the voice of Parliament. That is not leadership but the abdication of leadership.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight) *rose*——

Mr. Ashdown: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, but I hope that the House will understand that I have several points to make in my speech. I have no wish to detain the House longer than is necessary. I listened to the wise words of Mr. Speaker. I wish to allow other hon. Members the chance to speak. I shall give way to two interventions, one from the hon. Gentleman and the next intervention that I receive.

Mr. Field: I am genuinely obliged to the right hon. Member for giving way. He was talking about doublespeak. Can he tell the House why, in a campaign for a parliamentary election, the Liberal party tried to besmirch my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Mr. Fishburn) when he stood as candidate for the Isle of Wight by suggesting that he had a black girl friend and was living with a black woman? Where was the doublespeak on that issue?

Mr. Ashdown: That was such an awful intervention that I shall give way to two more.

What arguments are advanced by those who would not uphold honouring the full rights of all passport holders in Hong Kong? First, they say that Britain could not possibly grant right of abode to 3 million people. Let me remind the House that in 1987, when we passed the Single European Act, we granted right of abode in Britain to 250 million people. Where is the high moral principle that makes it acceptable to grant right of abode to 250 million people who live only a handful of miles from these shores, when we are told that it is unacceptable and dangerous to grant it to the tiniest fraction of that number who live 8,000 miles away but happen mostly to be Chinese? Is the House prepared to go along with so blatantly disreputable an argument?

The second charge against our ideas lies in the assumption that all those who were given right of abode would board their international jets and come to Britain the day after tomorrow. That is arrogant nonsense. Who would wish to leave Hong Kong, which has a higher growth rate, lower unemployment and an immeasurably better ordered society? Do we believe that people in Hong Kong will dash to Britain to enjoy the poll tax, record mortgage rates, a failing economy and social disorder? What a ridiculous notion. [HON. MEMBERS: "To enjoy freedom."]

If what the governor of Hong Kong has called Armageddon were to happen after 1997, a mass exodus would indeed take place. But in those circumstances, the Foreign Secretary has rightly accepted that Britain would have the first responsibility for the welfare of those who would in his words be "refugees". I note that he is nodding.

The difference between the Government's proposals and ours is that the Government would choose to offer sanctuary to penniless refugees on a scale that would dwarf anything that we have seen with the Vietnamese boat people. But we would have them come as free citizens who have, by way of insurance, made preparations by investing in property, jobs and firms in Britain beforehand. That is the difference.

Mr. Adley: I do not want to drag the right hon. Gentleman into the numbers game, but most people who moved to Hong Kong in the past 50, 40 or 30 years were well aware that the lease on the territory ran out in 1997. No one asked them to go to Hong Kong, and no one is asking them to leave. Does the right hon. Gentleman suggest that, even though Britain's lease on 97 per cent. of the territory finishes in 1997, we have an obligation in perpetuity? Does he envisage a date 10, 20 or 30 years after 1997 when our obligation would end?

Mr. Ashdown: The purpose of the policy is to ensure stability before 1997 and the survival of democracy afterwards. That means that we have an obligation to those who have British passports when the territory is handed over. It is as simple and easy as that.

Mr. Adley: It is not simple.

Mr. Ashdown: Why not, for those who have British passports? I remind the hon. Gentleman that, three years ago, he voted in the House—I do not know how he voted, but the House voted by an overwhelming majority—to give, not 3 million, but 250 million people right of abode. Did he ask then whether it was in perpetuity?

Sir Philip Goodhart (Beckenham): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: I was looking forward to an intervention from an Opposition Member, but I said that I would give way to two more interventions.

Sir Philip Goodhart: The right hon. Gentleman knows his constituency well. Does he believe that Yeovil could absorb 5,000 or 10,000 immigrants from Hong Kong during the next decade?

Mr. Ashdown: I remind the hon. Gentleman that he did not ask that question when he granted right of abode in Britain to 250 million people. If the hon. Gentleman wants me to say—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] I shall give an answer. If, in extremis, the people who are being crushed under the Chinese tanks in Nathan road in 1997 are British passport holders and my responsibility, and if someone asked me or my constituents to give them sanctuary, the unequivocal answer to that I, and probably my constituents, would give would be, "Yes, of course." *[Interruption.]* May I move on? [HON. MEMBERS: "Move on."]

Even in the circumstances described or alluded to in the hon. Gentleman's question, could Britain accept its obligations? Contrary to all the scaremongering, the evidence is that we could accept those responsibilities. The Corry report, supported by expert research from elsewhere and the writings of economists such as Samuel Brittan, concluded that, with proper preparation, Britain could actually benefit from such immigration, just as we have done in the past.

I stress that that is less likely to happen if we take the right steps today, and more likely if we take the wrong ones. The broader the right of abode we grant today, the stronger freedom will be after 1997 and the less likely the chance of Armageddon. The narrower the right of abode we grant today, the weaker freedom will be after 1997 and the more likely the chance of Armageddon after 1997 and the fear that the Government say they have at the top of their mind.

It is only late in the day that the Government have accepted the force of the argument from these Benches, and almost unanimously from Hong Kong, that it is the assurance of passports that will enable people to stay. I congratulate the Foreign Secretary, who has understood the force of that position and won a limited victory within the Cabinet. It is greatly to his credit that he pressed on with that.

[Mr. Ashdown]

Let me examine the logic of the Government's argument. They rightly say that giving 50,000 households the right of abode will persuade Hong Kongers to stay in Hong Kong. If that logic applies to the few, why does it not also apply to the many? If the 50,000 who get passports will stay, is that not more likely to be the case for the 315,000 households recommended by the Price Waterhouse study as the minimum required to ensure stability? If the argument applies to some British passport holders, why not to all who hold British passports?

The Bill shows that the Government know perfectly clearly what should be done, but do not have the courage of their convictions. The result is that the Bill is inadequate and apologetic. Against the scale of Britain's responsibilities, it looks puny and insufficient. It is concerned more with the troubled internal politics of the Conservative party than with our external obligations.

I warn the Government that there is a genuine risk that what they have done may turn out to be too little, too late. By pitching the numbers so low, they may well create the worst of all possible worlds by doing insufficient to secure stability, while creating a conduit for the emigration that they fear most. In their attempt to keep the numbers down, they have been forced to a system which is so selective that it must be divisive.

Mr. Foulkes: Yet the right hon. Gentleman will still vote for the Bill.

Mr. Ashdown: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to intervene, I shall happily give way to him. His position was cruelly exposed last night and this morning and he is not prepared to put it to the test again.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby) *rose*——

Mr. Ashdown: At last, an intervention from the side Benches.

Mr. Wareing: The right hon. Gentleman has made much of the inadequacy of the Bill, and I agree that it is wholly inadequate. Does he agree that the 50,000 people of Hong Kong who will be admitted are possibly the most articulate members of the community? If, as he has been saying, he wants a much more liberal attitude, should we not encourage that articulate minority to speak for the overwhelming majority in Hong Kong? Is he aware that to go into the Division Lobby with the Tories is to go against his whole objective?

Mr. Ashdown: Obviously the hon. Gentleman has not been listening to the voices from Hong Kong, because they have been articulating precisely that case.

The Government must understand that their failure of nerve to do what is right and safe for Hong Kong runs a great risk. It is on the judgment of that risk that my party will ultimately base its attitude to the Bill.

To answer the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), a clear and welcome principle is embodied in the Bill—that Britain must grant the right of abode to its passport holders in Hong Kong. We shall support that principle by voting for the Second Reading tonight, but we shall seek to strengthen and improve the Bill in Committee.

Apart from the question of numbers, there are four areas where the Bill must be improved. First, it must be made less divisive. That can be done only by increasing the numbers. Secondly, we must address the needs of the non-Chinese ethnic minorities. Thirdly, the Bill must correct the injustice being done to non-British spouses of British expatriates. Lastly, there must be an amendment to the outrageous proposal in the Bill that no decision should be challengeable in any court or by anybody.

The Government would be wrong to assume that any Bill was necessarily better than no Bill. There comes a point when the numbers are so small and the provisions so divisive that they will create emigration rather than stem it, that they will undermine the credibility of the Hong Kong authorities rather than support them and that they will increase instability in Hong Kong rather than increase the stability of the colony.

Mr. Tim Janman (Thurrock): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, but I said that I would not give way to two interventions. In that way, I shall give him a better chance of speaking later.

We will bring that lesson home to the Government during the remaining stages of the Bill, and our judgment of the Bill's value will be based on the extent to which Ministers accept and acknowledge that truth.

One thing is certain: unlike the Labour party, we will not play domestic politics with the freedom and livelihood of more than 5 million people in Hong Kong. I am sure that I have had as many letters as the Leader of the Opposition, urging me to add to the Government's political troubles by voting against the Bill. They point to the leadership crisis in the Conservative party and argue that this could be the moment when Thatcherism is toppled. All that may be true, but my party, unlike the Labour party, will not hawk its conscience around according to short-term political electoral priorities.

Mr. Foulkes: Rubbish.

Mr. Ashdown: I give the hon. Gentleman yet another chance. I note that again he is not prepared to intervene. He is willing only to speak from a sedentary position.

Mr. Janman: May I return to the right hon. Gentleman's comments about the Standing Committee stage of the Bill? I understand from his comments his desire to see the Bill fully debated in Committee. Given the wide diversity of negative comments about the Bill, does he agree that the whole House would have a greater opportunity to do so if the Committee stage were taken on the Floor of the House rather than upstairs?

Mr. Ashdown: I must disappoint the hon. Gentleman. We shall not vote for that. He knows perfectly well that those who vote against the Bill will lose. They want the Committee stage to be taken on the Floor so that they can win by another means. I am not prepared to go along with that. Those who argue for that are deeply irresponsible.

Nor will we seek, like the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), to play one ethnic minority off against another. There was a day when the Labour party, once the great defender of the rights of those who are vulnerable at home and abroad, would have responded without equivocation to the call from the people of Hong Kong; but not today. Today, the Labour party, in a grubby search for votes, is prepared to turn a blind eye to the terrible damage that would be done, if the Bill were defeated, to confidence in Hong Kong and to Britain's reputation in the world.

There was a day when the Labour party opposed the British Nationality Act 1981, with the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook to the fore; but not today. Today, he has defended that same Act to the last letter. He has argued that the only protection which should be given to British passport holders in Hong Kong should be the pathetic provisions of that Act which he, ironically, also on 4 June, committed his party to repeal. Then, he said:

> "the necessity for repeal . . . is all the greater, not least because the Bill is largely based not on Government theories about nationality, but on Government fears about immigration."—[*Official Report*, 4 June 1981; Vol. 5, c. 1159.]

But today, it is the Labour party that is helping to fan those fears about immigration.

Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman's attitude to the Bill is best summed up in his own words as quoted in *The Independent* on 3 April:

> "When we have decided the manner in which we will oppose the Bill, I shall vote on a matter of principle."

There is worse still, however, for Labour does not stop at just opposing the Bill; the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) has already said that it would not be committed to upholding its provisions were the Labour party to come to power. Thus, the Labour party adds irresponsibility to the abandonment of principle, as no statement is better calculated to increase instability in Hong Kong between now and 1997. What greater inducement could there be to emigrate from Hong Kong than the knowledge that all passport rights could be taken away by a future Labour Government?

What an irony that, in threatening to remove British passport rights, the Labour party is doing exactly what the Chinese Government have said they will do. Having joined the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) in voting against the Bill, the Labour party will then join the Chinese Government in seeking to nullify it. I wonder, has it any shame about the company it keeps?

The Labour party's only promise to the people of Hong Kong is that it will allow full democracy in the colony. Has it learnt nothing from the tragedy of the students of Tiananmen square? Democracy is not some kind of lucky charm that can be waved in front of a tank to stop it in its tracks; it needs to be supported and safeguarded. If democracy is to survive, it needs the most powerful safeguards. The most powerful safeguard for democracy after 1997 in Hong Kong lies in the freedom of its people to call in their passport rights as free citizens and go elsewhere. In denying them that freedom, Labour gives Hong Kong democracy with one hand and fatally wounds it with the other.

The retreat from empire was never going to be easy for this country. It created many difficulties and obstacles, but, for the large part, Britain has behaved honourably and responsibly. We have managed that retreat with dignity, and it is a record of which to be proud. I fear that we are in danger of besmirching that record tonight. The Government's weakness in front of Peking and the inadequacies of the Bill have done us and Hong Kong great harm.

I have no doubt that our forebears in this House would have responded to the challenges in a way that gave the House its great reputation as a defender of democracy. They would have understood the great issues involved. They would have guarded the importance of standing by a principle and accepted the need for leadership in persuading people of what should be done. They would have recognised Britain's long-term best interests.

I recall that, in the 1930s, when the Jews fled from Germany, we did not cavil that they did not have our passports, nor did we limit their numbers. We gave them sanctuary freely. Britain benefited and freedom was strengthened by that. Why is it that today we will not do the same for our own passport holders in Hong Kong?

Today, we rightly wring our hands over what we can do to assure freedom for Lithuanian citizens, bemoaning the fact that our scope for action is small. Why, then, do we turn our backs on those in Hong Kong who hold our passports and whom we have the power and the ability to help?

We shall vote for the principle of the Bill tonight, but will do so with little enthusiasm, and we shall seek to amend it in Committee. As it stands, it is the very least that Britain should do to honour its responsibilities. Its defeat tonight would amount to a betrayal of the best traditions of our nation, of Britain's long-term best interests in the far east and, above all, of the people of Hong Kong.

6.14 pm

Mr. Norman Tebbit (Chingford): I shall not follow the speech of the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), especially as his peroration amounted to 50 per cent. of his speech. I was, however, slightly mystified by the right hon. Gentleman's conclusion. Earlier he seemed to say that, although he would vote with the Government on Second Reading, unless the Bill was amended to remove what he saw as its defects he held out the prospect of voting against the Bill on Third Reading.

The right hon. Member for Yeovil then proceeded to call the Bill a betrayal. If it still constitutes a betrayal in his terms after its Committee stage, surely that would cause him to want to vote against it on Third Reading. Would the right hon. Gentleman like to make his position clearer?

Mr. Ashdown: I am sorry to intervene so early in the right hon. Gentleman's speech, but he has asked me a question. I said that the defeat of the Bill tonight would amount to a betrayal—a betrayal which the right hon. Gentleman seems to be prepared not only to join, but lead.

Mr. Tebbit: I understood that, but would it constitute a betrayal if the Bill were defeated on Third Reading? If that is so, the right hon. Gentleman will not vote against it on Third Reading whether it is amended or not.

Mr. Ashdown: It would be a betrayal if it was defeated tonight.

Mr. Tebbit: Oh! It would amount to a betrayal tonight only, so when we come to Third Reading it will be "Not tonight Josephine.". I can see why the right hon. Gentleman said he was standing on principle, unlike the Labour party.

Mr. Adley: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in view of what the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) has just said, an hour in politics is a long time as far as the Liberal party is concerned?

Mr. Tebbit: My hon. Friend is right, and that is particularly true of a Liberal speech lasting an hour.

The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) was asked on several occasions by the right hon. Member for Yeovil how many Hong Kong Chinese the Labour party would admit. I do not believe that the right hon. Member for Yeovil got a clear answer, but I can give him that answer in the words of the Labour party as written to a gentleman from Plymouth in a letter dated June 1987. One will appreciate that it has something to do with general election politics. The letter was from Mr. Bert Clough of the policy briefing unit of the Labour party on whose notepaper it was written. He thanked the gentleman from Plymouth for his letter concerning Hong Kong and said:

> "Neil Kinnock has asked me to reply on his behalf.
>
> Under our proposals British citizens in Hong Kong would become citizens of the British Dependent Territories. This would give them a meaningful citizenship with the right to enter, reside and work in Hong Kong but not the right to enter the UK."

The answer to the question posed by the right hon. Member for Yeovil about how many Hong Kong Chinese the Labour party would admit is simple—it is none. That was the Labour party's proposal at the time of the general election, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) has already observed, an hour in politics can be a long time and 18 months can be even longer. The Labour party is saying to one group of people that it would admit lots and lots of them, but to another that it would not admit any at all. In other words, it is traditional two-faced politics. I shall not go in for any humbug or evasion.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook should know more about the Bill that he is opposing. When one of my hon. Friends sought to intervene the right hon. Gentleman said that he would let him intervene if my hon. Friend could state the five criteria to be used for admission. I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that there are seven criteria —[HON. MEMBERS: "Where is he?"] I know where he has gone. He has gone to get a copy of the Bill to read it.

Although tonight there are clearly two groups of people —one, sadly, my right hon. Friends in the Government and one, the Labour party—who are intent on breaking their election commitment, I am intent on keeping mine. I welcome much of what my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary said today. Certainly no one knows more about immigration than him, which raises a most interesting point. I think that my right hon. and learned Friend said that this was not an immigration Bill. If it is not, it would perhaps have been better if my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary had taken charge of it rather than lumber the poor, unfortunate Home Secretary, who normally deals with immigration rather than foreign affairs matters. I think that I have my right hon. and learned Friend's support on that, at least, today.

My right hon. and learned Friend made a good speech, but it was not quite good enough. I do not believe that he had his heart in his own case at all times. I would not go all the way with the right hon. Member for Yeovil, but if 50,000 would offer a good measure of security, would not 60,000 offer 20 per cent. more, and would not 100,000 double the security? My right hon. and learned Friend says no, but I do not believe that he has confidence in the Bill.

I have one question for my right hon. and learned Friend which arises from his speech. He said that the Bill, if enacted, would do the work intended by section 4(5) of the British Nationality Act 1981. If that Act is not to be used, will it be repealed if the Bill is enacted?

Mr. Waddington: I must assure my right hon. Friend that I said nothing of the sort. I referred to the fact that it would replace the undertakings that we were prepared to give, and in some cases had already given, to those in sensitive occupations. At no time did I deal with section 4(5), which could not be used to fulfil the Bill's purpose because it deals only with the public sector and those who are servants of the Hong Kong Government.

Mr. Tebbit: I understand what my right hon. and learned Friend says, but, as I understand it, the Bill includes all those who would be included in section 4(5) of the British Nationality Act. So that section of the Act is no longer needed and could be repealed as it would perhaps be better as part of the Bill. We should not have two pieces of legislation covering exactly the same point.

Mr. Waddington: With respect to my right hon. Friend, section 4(5) does not deal just with Hong Kong.

Mr. Tebbit: Now we have the point—section 4(5) has a much broader application.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): The Home Secretary's intervention appears to go back on what he said in response to the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook). When the hon. Member for Orpington asked about section 4(5) of the British Nationality Act, the Home Secretary said that it was subsumed within the Bill. Therefore, the right hon. Gentleman is forcing the Home Secretary to admit either that he misinformed the House when the hon. Member for Orpington questioned him or he is misinforming the House now.

Mr. Tebbit: The right hon. Gentleman is over-excited and a little slow to take the point. As I understand it, my right hon. and learned Friend said that the Bill subsumed it in relation only to Hong Kong obligations, and he wished section 4(5) to remain to use for purposes other than Hong Kong. I believe that that is correct, but if I have not put it correctly, no doubt my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will put it right later.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary also said that there was no point in taking steps that would come to a dead end in 1997—I think those were his words —in relation to an accelerated process of democracy which would be unacceptable to the Chinese authorities. My right hon. and learned Friend nods, and I think that that is right. As the Chinese Government have said that they will recognise the passports that would be issued under the Bill for the use of, for example, entry or exit from Hong Kong, is not the Bill also proposing a dead end? Many Conservative Members are concerned about that.

I agree with the Bill's aims, which are to stabilise the position in Hong Kong and ensure its continuing prosperity so that it will be an asset to China in 1997.

I agreed with much of what my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) said about the need for the future of Hong Kong to be secured through the relationship between Great Britain and China. That is the only conceivable way in which it can be assured. I shared everyone's emotions on seeing the film of the massacre in Tiananmen square, but in the real world we must assess what can be done in the future as well as express our regrets about what has happened in the past. It is pretty certain that more people have died in civil disturbances in Russia under Mr. Gorbachev than died in Tiananmen square. Perhaps Mr. Gorbachev has a better public relations agency than Peking.

I agree that we must avoid, not encourage, further large-scale immigration into the United Kingdom. Above all, I welcome the fact that the Bill offers the protection of the right of abode here to those who would be most at risk, on political grounds, after 1997. My difference with the Government is that I believe that the Bill will fail on three counts out of four. There is no difference between any of us about the need to offer the security of a home here to those Hong Kong Chinese who served the Crown, police or judiciary, or might otherwise be at risk, if the mood of China was difficult after the takeover in 1977. [HON. MEMBERS: "How many?"] I understand that there will probably be about 5,000 or so, but it is a matter not of numbers, but of principle. We should stand on principle. I am standing on the principle on which I have stood for many years. Those people would not be those who, when they come from Vietnam, are known in Hong Kong as economic migrants, but true seekers of political asylum.

I am also concerned about the fate of Asians of Indian descent who are likely to become stateless and possibly refugees. They are clearly not Chinese or British, but Indians. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will intervene most strongly on their behalf with the Government of India to ensure that India undertakes its obligation towards its peoples who have been residing in Hong Kong.

I said that the Bill would fail in its major purpose, and I shall explain why. It is clear that the Chinese Government regard the Bill as incompatible with the spirit, if not the letter, of the accord. They have no use for the concept of dual loyalties and expect the people of Hong Kong to be Chinese and loyal to China. Clearly, the swearing of allegiance to the Queen and taking up of British nationality are either cynical charades performed for personal gain or require true allegiance to the United Kingdom, not China. In addition, as I understand it, China does not appreciate the almost fruitless efforts of my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, to persuade other countries to denude Hong Kong of its key people before 1997.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary may not recollect that a man cannot have two masters, but the Chinese certainly do. Therefore, after 1997, they will discriminate against the holders of British passports. What is more, the Hong Kong Chinese know that, too, and for them the British passport is not an inducement to stay beyond 1997, but a ticket to a new life elsewhere, either here, on the continent or wherever. What is more, the sooner the passports are issued, the sooner the 50,000 heads of families—by definition, the key people needed to be kept in Hong Kong—will leave.

What then? Will we be asked to provide for another 50,000, at least to keep the second eleven in position in Hong Kong? We all sympathise very much with the wish of Hong Kong Chinese to remain, if they had their choice, under the British flag in Hong Kong rather than under communist rule, but that option is not open to them. Their future as Chinese is in China, if Hong Kong is to have a future.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary made much of our debt of honour to the people of Hong Kong. I accept that debt in respect of those who might be at risk after 1997 because they have served the Crown, but have we a debt of honour to those who have served themselves? Are they not economic migrants no different from the Vietnamese whom Hong Kong is unwilling to accept? What about the debt of honour to the British people? Are not pledges made, not once but four or five times, also matters of honour? As far as I know, none of the people of Hong Kong was enticed there by agents of the Crown, or offered passports to go there; nor was there any doubt that, come 1997, it was certain that all but a tiny part of the colony would revert to China, and there was a clear expectation that the colony would do so, too.

Before I turn to immigration policy and my objections to the Bill on that ground, I want to make two other points about its drafting—first, on clause 1(5). That was the clause to which the right hon. Members for Yeovil and for Sparkbrook took such exception. It is an effort to judge-proof the Bill. If it is believed that this clause would actually stick in British law, it is a great pity that it was not put into some of our local government legislation.

Secondly, I welcome the fact that for the first time an immigration measure has been drafted to admit only those likely to be of discernible benefit to our economy as opposed to a liability to our taxpayers. That concept deserves rather wider application, but I am amazed by the extent to which the issue of United Kingdom passports should be delegated to persons not under any direct control of this House, who cannot be called to account in the House under any circumstances.

I turn now to immigration policy. For good reason, the Conservative election manifesto of February 1974 said this:

> "We have provided the country with the necessary means for preventing any further large scale permanent immigration and also with important new powers for preventing illegal immigrants . . . the number of new immigrants admitted in 1973 was the lowest since control was first introduced by the previous Conservative Government more than a decade ago . . . We intend that this decline shall continue".

A year later, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister became leader of the Conservative party, and in September 1976 an elector in Northamptonshire wrote to her about immigration and received a letter from her private office from which I shall quote the relevant sentence:

> "The last Conservative Government brought in the Immigration Act which from January 1973 stopped nearly all permanent immigration—with two clear exceptions (namely dependants and certain United Kingdom passport holders) . . . We believe that the numbers coming in must be restricted to the absolute minimum consistent with these undertakings".

In 1979, my right hon. Friend won the general election, campaigning then, as she has done since, for the strictest possible controls. In 1987, the pledge was repeated in full knowledge of the implication of the Hong Kong accord, in the following words in the party's manifesto. They are familiar to me more than to others in the House as I had something to do with the manifesto:

> "Immigration for settlement is now at its lowest level since control of Commonwealth immigration first began in 1962 . . . we will tighten the existing law to ensure that control over settlement becomes even more effective".

Those pledges were made because these islands of ours are already overcrowded and they were made in the belief that great waves of immigration by people who do not share

[Mr. Tebbit]

our culture, language or rules of social conduct and who, in many cases, owe no allegiance to our country, were and are destabilising factors in society.

During the Salman Rushdie affair, some who have lived here for years under the protection of the Crown and holding British passports clearly showed their contempt for our society and our laws. It became clear to many people that a dual system was operating in this country under which people who had been clearly seen inciting others to murder were not brought to book. I shall not rehearse all those arguments; I merely state that if we are not to see social upheaval arising from religious, cultural and ethnic differences, we have more than enough to do to integrate existing communities into British society without adding to that burden or exacerbating existing problems.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook referred to one of my views: how can I explain to my constituents of Indian, Pakistani or Singhalese origin that we have no room here for their families to join them but we have room for 250,000 Chinese?

Mr. Waddington: No Conservative Member has said that there is no room for the families of those who are settled here. The immigration rules give them the right to bring in their families and I pointed out in my speech how great a proportion of total immigration into this country such people constitute.

Mr. Tebbit: My right hon. and learned Friend says that there is room for them, but not just yet. If he believed that there was room, he would increase the resources available to process their applications, but I know that that is not being done——

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Tebbit: No, if my hon. Friend will forgive me.

I will not take any stick from Opposition Members over the processing of applications, because the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook was critical of the fact that almost 20 years after the Ugandan Asians came here there were some people who, although they appeared to have been entitled to come here, were still kicking around the world without visas—*[Interruption.]* I remind the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), who has just spoken from a sedentary position, that there was a Labour Government in the intervening period. What happened to the vouchers then? Why were they not honoured by the Labour Home Secretary when he was in power? The Opposition have no right to enter the debate with words of that kind.

Mr. Cormack: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Tebbit: I would rather not.

We all know what our constituents feel about this Bill. According to my secretary, I have received more than 10,000 letters on this issue——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): What, all from Chingford?

Mr. Tebbit: —so I have some idea of how other hon. Members' constituents feel, too. I have received 10,000 letters from all over the country, including, I suspect, some from Opposition Members' constituents.

A recent poll in *The Independent on Sunday* showed opinion to be split about 65 per cent. to 25 per cent. against the Government's proposals. Only 11 per cent. of the electors say that the Government should admit more Hong Kong Chinese, and by 84 per cent. to 13 per cent. the people of Britain say that there should be tighter restrictions on immigration. I might add that a rather higher percentage of Liberal Democrat supporters believe that than do supporters of the Labour party, which must be a great comfort to the right hon. Member for Yeovil.

I end by addressing a few remarks to some of my right hon. and hon. Friends. The poll that I mentioned also showed that no fewer than 59 per cent. of the electorate declared themselves "don't knows" when asked which of the parties had the best policy on immigration. They are confused and bitterly disappointed by the Government's policy U-turn——

Mr. Cormack: And my right hon. Friend is responsible for that.

Mr. Tebbit: —which they say, by 13 per cent. to 1 per cent., will make them less rather than more inclined to vote Conservative.

My hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) must recognise that since I made my views known in public immediately after the issue arose in the House of Commons I have given no television interviews or written any articles about it. The issue will be decided here tonight, not out there in the country. *[Interruption.]* I have sought to show what the state of opinion is out there and I believe that we should listen to that opinion, but I did not seek to cause that opinion to be made. It was there.

Mr. Cormack: My right hon. Friend knows full well that he has been portrayed throughout the country as the leader of this so-called revolt tonight. He knows jolly well that there has been no U-turn by the Government. As a former chairman of the Conservative party, he knows that manifestos cannot be cast in stone and that circumstances sometimes oblige Governments to change. He has done a grave disservice to the party which in the past he has served so well.

Mr. Tebbit: I did not want my hon. Friend to establish in the minds of many more people the enormous influence which he seems to think that I have. If he believes that I have created this wave of opinion in a matter of a few weeks, he must think that I am one of the most powerful politicians in Britain, and certainly that I have a much better rapport with public opinion than he has. I cannot imagine that he would ever be able to move public opinion to the extent that he has ascribed to me.

I agree with my hon. Friend. There are occasions when Governments have to say that, for good reason, they cannot deliver what was in their manifesto. But this is not a good reason. All the circumstances were envisaged when the manifesto was written and we should remain firm on it.

That is perhaps even more relevant. I had not expected to have the pleasure of hearing my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), but my mind went back to November 1972 when he introduced legislation to provide for state control of prices and incomes. It was a deeply unpopular Bill. It broke a clear and specific election pledge and it flew in the face of Conservative beliefs. My right hon. Friend believed that that Bill was in the interests of the country at that time.

In their hearts, a clear majority of Conservative Back-Benchers knew that the Bill was wrong. We should have defeated it on Second Reading, but the Government were unpopular and the Whips argued that the Prime Minister's authority and position would be seriously damaged if there was a revolt against the Bill. The Labour party, which has always hankered after such controls, did, of course, vote against the Bill. I was one of those who was persuaded, against his judgment, to vote for it. In February 1974, the Government were trapped by a miners' dispute which they could not settle without breaking their own prices and incomes laws.

So I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends whether they will make the mistake that I made in 1972. What would the Conservative party Whips be saying if this had been a Labour Government's proposal? Would we be supporting it in breach of our election commitments? If we would have voted against a Labour Hong Kong Bill, why should we vote for it just because it is brought forward by a Conservative Government? *[Interruption.]* A voice says, "What about the poll tax?" That was in the Conservative party manifesto and I have voted for it at every turn.

I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote against the Government tonight with a heavy heart. In 20 years in the House I have never yet voted against my party Whips.

Mr Cormack: Really?

Mr. Tebbit: Yes, really. My hon. Friend has a more vigorous record in voting against the Government than I have.

Tonight I have had to choose between the Government and the Whips on the one hand and my party and its clear commitment to the voters who elected them to office on the other. That is why I will oppose the Bill tonight and stand by my commitment to the electors which I made in 1987.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before I call the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), I should make plain that I have not selected for debate the amendment in his name and the names of his hon. Friends because it is beyond the scope of the Bill. He may draw attention to it in his speech without speaking to it.

6.44 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Whenever the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) seeks to persuade us that he is standing on principle, I—and, I suspect, some of the troops whom he is seeking to lead into the Lobby against the Government tonight—rush for cover.

I represent a constituency a third of whose inhabitants are of Asian origin. One of my endearing memories of the right hon. Gentleman as chairman of the Conservative party is the regular visits that he made to my city and other cities like it seeking to persuade black and Asian British citizens that the Conservative party was anxious to secure their electoral support and in government was doing everything possible to sustain and nurture the prosperity of black and Asian communities in Britain.

The right hon. Gentleman's speech tonight was in sharp contradiction to the statements that he made as chairman of the Conservative party on these matters and to the statements that he has made in recent weeks and months as we approached the debate on the Bill.

I thought that I heard gasps around the Chamber when the right hon. Gentleman sought to persuade us that he was not the leader of the campaign within the Conservative party against the Bill. Could I have been wrong? An avalanche of propaganda has been generated by the right hon. Gentleman seeking to persuade the British public that an army of Conservative Members of Parliament were anxious to follow him into the Lobby tonight to vote against the Bill.

Mr. Tebbit: First, I find nothing inconsistent between what I have said as chairman of the Conservative party, Secretary of State or in any other office that I have held, and what I have said this evening. As I said this evening, I believe strongly in the integration of immigrant communities into our country. That is the only way forward. New waves of immigration will hold back that process and that is one of the principal reasons why I am against new waves of immigration.

Secondly, with regard to generating waves of publicity, I should tell the hon. Gentleman that I have one employee only, a secretary, and that if she and I between us could have generated all the publicity, my goodness me, we should take over Conservative central office and do its work more cheaply than it is doing it at the moment.

Mr. Madden: I thought that the right hon. Gentleman did take over Conservative central office on one occasion, and I do not want to speculate on why he no longer holds that office.

But the campaign that I still believe the right hon. Gentleman has been orchestrating during recent weeks and months has fundamentally changed in character during that period. Initially, he sought to oppose the Bill on straight immigration grounds. Subsequently, he sought to argue that he was against the Bill because it would upset all those people in Hong Kong who would not be eligible for British passports.

The right hon. Gentleman cannot have it both ways. Nor can he conceal the fact that large numbers of people will shortly be eligible to come into Britain. We hear very little from the right hon. Gentleman or his acolytes about the 300 million EEC nationals who, after 1992, will be able to enter Britain and seek employment without a work permit. They will be able to establish businesses without any evidence of funds. They will also be able to bring their spouses, children aged up to 21, parents and grandparents.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): In this case I do not agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) about the fundamentals of the Bill. Does the hon. Gentleman agree, however, that there is a big difference between the European Community's reciprocal rights of residence, work and abode and the right of immigration into a country?

Mr. Madden: What I will say is that most of these people will be white. That is why we do not hear very much from the right hon. Member for Chingford or his supporters about the 500,000 citizens of Macau who have been given a right of abode by the Portuguese Government, and who can also enter the United Kingdom after 1992 under the same rules. We do not hear anything from the right hon. Gentleman or his supporters about the 1 million British citizens in South Africa who could also come into this country without difficulty in the near future, or about the 8 million to 9 million British citizens in the old

[Mr. Madden]

Commonwealth who have the right of abode and could enter. Between 300 million and 400 million people could flood into the United Kingdom in the foreseeable future, but we hear nothing about that from Conservative Members, especially the supporters of the right hon. Member for Chingford.

I must declare an interest: I was invited to Hong Kong last week by the Hong Kong Government. It was a valuable opportunity for me to have discussions with a large number of individuals and organisations between the publication of the Bill and this debate. Hon. Members from both sides of the House were also present, and I am sure that we all found the visit helpful.

It was clear to us that the vast majority of people in Hong Kong regard the Bill, and the scheme to allow just 50,000 heads of household to have British citizenship and the right of abode here, as a complete and utter irrelevance.

The vast majority of Hong Kong people do not want to leave Hong Kong, which they regard as their home. Many do not want to come here because they cannot afford to leave; the option of emigration is not theirs because they have not the money to exercise it. However, large numbers —1,000 a week—are now leaving, and that exodus is a potential threat to the viability of the Hong Kong economy. We need to consider what action needs to be taken now to stem it, and that is what the Bill is all about.

We hear much about democracy and the lack of it. If there is any blame for the absence of democracy in Hong Kong, I suggest that the accusing finger should be pointed at successive Governments of both political persuasions, spanning more than a century. For 150 years, Britain has administered Hong Kong—some say paternalistically; many would say in a most authoritarian way. If any criticism is to be made about the absence of democracy and the lack of enthusiasm for it among the Hong Kong people, surely the blame lies squarely with those Governments, but I question whether such an absence of democracy is a modern reality in China.

On our visit, we were shown photographs of the 1 million people in Hong Kong who came out on the streets before the Tiananmen square massacre to show their solidarity with the people of China—their relatives, their friends and their own people. They came out on to the streets to demonstrate their solidarity with the movement towards democracy, and stood in silent empathy and solidarity with the Chinese people. The massacre of 4 June had an enormous impact on the Hong Kong people. For months afterwards, they wore black armbands to show their solidarity, and their disgust with the actions of the Chinese Government. Even now, armies of Chinese police, agents and others are scouring the campuses of China to try to identify those who were active in the democracy movement, especially its leaders.

Every day 75 refugees go legally from China into Hong Kong; more than 100 seek to enter it illegally, and many who are detected are sent back. I plead with the House to understand that democracy is an extremely fragile entity in Hong Kong, and I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) that we must do more to ensure that it progresses.

When my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) replies to the debate, I should like to hear what the next Labour Government would do to ensure that there is one person, one vote—full democracy—in Hong Kong before 1997, when the Chinese take over. If our claims to support the extension of democracy are to be credible, or to command support in Hong Kong and in Britain, we must spell out clearly whether we would take unilateral action to ensure that that full democracy was introduced in Hong Kong before 1997. We must have firm and clear assurances about the methods by which we would seek to do that. Few of the people to whom I spoke in Hong Kong last week, from the governor down, gave any hint or made any suggestion that the Chinese Government are any more amenable now to progress towards full democracy in Hong Kong than they have been in recent years since the negotiations took place.

We all recognise that there are major defects in the Bill. In my view—and in that of other hon. Members who would have wished to support the amendment—the figure in the Bill should be removed: such matters should be dealt with on the principle of fairness and justice. However, once we enter the numbers game, we are inevitably in the business of arbitrary and highly subjective criteria, which in this case are totally secret. There will inevitably be divisiveness if people do not know the basis on which the selection is made.

A fundamental reform must include the right of appeal for those people who are refused British citizenship and the right of abode here. Surely basic justice demands such a right of appeal. One of the long-standing grievances of the British Nationality Act 1981 is that people are given no explanation of why their application has been refused, and they have no right of appeal against that refusal.

We must remove the nonsense of the 500 top business men who will be invited by the governor to apply: that is wholly unacceptable, and should be deleted. We should also snuff out the proposal—still lingering on—that would effectively enable British companies to nominate people to become British citizens. That is wholly unacceptable and undemocratic. I hope that the Minister will make it clear that that scheme is dead and buried, and will not be revived.

We need to protect and safeguard political activists who have been in the vanguard of building democracy in Hong Kong and who are totally excluded from the scheme. We also need to ensure that there are genuine provisions for public service and local government workers. At the moment, there are no provisions whatever for social workers, who are leaving Hong Kong in large numbers and who are vital for the future of Hong Kong. Of course we need to ensure that those who are entitled to a British passport are not cash-limited by that arbitrary figure of 50,000.

Many in Hong Kong obviously consider British passports as an insurance policy; however, people are leaving Hong Kong for various reasons. There are those who are leaving to improve their economic prospects. Others are leaving because they are desperately worried about the safety of their families. Others are leaving, particularly for Canada, Australia, America and Singapore, to secure an overseas passport, and they have to live in those countries for two or three years to get the necessary residential qualifications.

The brightest and the best in Hong Kong do not want to come to Britain. Many of those who want to emigrate are not seeking to come to Britain. They do not see their future here, but they want an insurance policy. I hope that we shall make proper safeguards for the non-Chinese ethnic minorities. I am totally dissatisfied with the assurances given so far by the Home Secretary. I should like to see much better safeguards for the non-British spouses of British citizens in Hong Kong.

I urge the House to understand that it is not just a matter of insurance policies. The most important aspect of giving British citizenship to the largest possible number of people in Hong Kong is to place an effective sanction and to put effective pressure on the Chinese Government so that they know that, if they treat Hong Kong badly and unfairly after 1997, a significant number of Hong Kong British citizens will be able to vote with their feet and leave Hong Kong safely and in an orderly fashion.

That is what the Bill is all about. It is a totally inadequate and defective measure. It represents a shoddy and shabby compromise of a debt of honour to a country from which we have derived enormous economic benefits over 150 years to people who thought they were British citizens and who look to Britain as their home and to Parliament as their House of Commons and their democratic defence. It is a shoddy and inadequate Bill.

I shall abstain tonight and I shall seek with others to improve the Bill in the ways that I have suggested. I urge those who seek to demolish the Bill for motives which many of them do not have the guts to articulate publicly to think very carefully indeed. Not only are they playing with the lives of many in Hong Kong: they are playing with the destiny of that country and the relationship of Britain with mainland China.

I agree with the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) that that is an important matter. If we seek further to appease China, the plight of the people of Hong Kong, with or without democracy, will be extremely difficult up to and after 1997. Let us agree that the Bill is of modest help. Let us seek to improve it and, above all, let us remember that the best interests of the men, women and children of Hong Kong lie in offering British citizenship and the right of abode. The vast majority do not wish to exercise that option, but they need our reassurance and commitment. The Bill goes a little way towards offering that commitment and protection.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Speeches between now and 9 o'clock are limited to 10 minutes.

7.4 pm

Sir Peter Blaker (Blackpool, South): The hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) made some good points, but I disagree with the view that a faster pace towards democracy is the answer to the problem which the Bill seeks to address. Indeed, if a faster pace towards democracy were to lead to confrontation with Peking, confidence in Hong Kong would be weakened rather than strengthened.

I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) has left the Chamber. His speech set a new record for prevarication and obfuscation. So far as I could make any sense of what he said about granting passports or the right of abode to Hong Kong Chinese, it appeared that fewer passports would be granted but there would be more rights of abode granted to people from the Caribbean and south Asia. There is an important distinction between those groups. The people from Hong Kong would not want to come here whereas the others would come here at once.

The House knows of my lifelong interest in Hong Kong. For the past 20 years I have had no financial interests there, but I have a deep political interest in doing what we can to perpetuate the amazing success that Hong Kong has achieved. The rejection of the Bill would be damaging to Hong Kong and the United Kingdom. The Hong Kong brain drain would certainly accelerate and there would be a decline in the economy. Other countries such as Canada and Australia are not worried about inviting people from Hong Kong who are of great merit or importance to Hong Kong to emigrate to those countries.

Nor should we be worried about the fact that those to whom passports will be granted are the people who are most important to Hong Kong. If the Bill were rejected, more raids would be made by other countries on the skilled people of Hong Kong. Recently, a United States medical centre wrote to all 74 radiographers in Hong Kong inviting them to join that organisation and offering them help in obtaining United States passports. Qantas sent recruiters to Hong Kong to lure away several hundred mechanics from the Hong Kong Aircraft Engineering company. Fortunately, those efforts met with little success, but such attempts would be accelerated if the Bill were rejected. Other countries would increase their quotas for immigration from Hong Kong in the misguided view that that would help.

The Bill is a credit to Her Majesty's Government, especially the new concept that selected people from Hong Kong would be able to get United Kingdom passports without having to spend several years working here first, thus damaging Hong Kong's prospects.

The rejection of the Bill would also be damaging to the United Kingdom. It would certainly damage our reputation for fulfilling our obligations. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will attach importance to that. It would damage our economy. Our visible and invisible exports to Hong Kong represent more than £2 billion a year. If the Hong Kong economy is damaged, those exports will suffer. The total net assets of companies in Hong Kong controlled from the United Kingdom are £6 billion. The gross stock market value of British-owned, controlled or managed companies in Hong Kong is £19 billion and those companies would suffer. If sufficient damage is done to the economy of Hong Kong, that will reduce the value of Hong Kong to China, and the economic value of Hong Kong to China is its most important safeguard.

I believe that the Chinese intend to observe the joint declaration and agreement of 1984, but I profoundly believe that a bit of Chinese self-interest is a better guarantee still. As long as Hong Kong continues to carry one third of China's foreign trade, and to account for one third of China's foreign exchange earnings and for two thirds of the value of foreign investment in China, that is a good safeguard that China will observe the joint declaration.

By damaging confidence and the economy in Hong Kong, rejection of the Bill would increase the possibility that we might see what the governor described as the "Armageddon" scenario. There might be a flood of refugees from Hong Kong whom we would be obliged to do our best to take, and we might be obliged to take more than those for whom the Bill provides passports.

[Sir Peter Blaker]

I have received representations from several British companies with business interests in Hong Kong. I shall read a letter from Geoffrey Maddrell, chief executive of the Tootal Group, which I received in November before the Government announced the policy encapsulated in the Bill. He explains the links that his company has with China through Hong Kong. He says:

> "The total turnover of companies"—

that is in the Tootal Group—

> "dependent on supplies out of China is around £75 million this year"—

1989—

> "and earns approximately 10 per cent. in pre-tax profit. The continued success of our investment and interest in China depends very largely on our key managers in Hong Kong",

who are working in China supervising Tootal's joint ventures. He continues:

> "However, in the current uncertainty surrounding British Government Policy all the senior managers are preparing to emigrate to obtain citizenship of Canada and Australia. They are taking this course of action as an insurance for the future, not because they wish to leave Hong Kong. In consequence, should they be offered right of abode in the UK, it is not their intention to exercise that right."

He says later in his letter, and I repeat that it was written before the announcement of the Government's policy:

> "Tootal would seek rights of protection for some 25 managers and their families by issuing them with a full British Passport with right of abode in the UK."

I spoke two days ago to Mr. Maddrell to discover his reaction to the Government's policy. He said that his managers are waiting to see whether the Bill is passed. If it is rejected, they will accelerate their attempts to move to Canada or Australia.

Mr. Tebbit *rose*——

Sir Eldon Griffiths (Bury St. Edmunds) *rose*——

Sir Peter Blaker: I am afraid that I do not have time to give way.

That letter shows two things: first, that the few passports that will be given to key people in Hong Kong will make a tremendous difference; and, secondly—this is the key point—that we are talking not about people who are keen to leave Hong Kong but about people who want to stay there.

7.13 pm

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): I agree with the right hon. Member for Blackpool, South (Sir P. Blaker) that all of us may face far heavier obligations and much more difficult problems in 1997 than we face today. We may have to take on far greater obligations to meet a disaster at that time than we are faced with at present.

Nobody can contribute realistically to the debate who is not prepared at least to identify the problem and to seek to remedy it. The problem will be between now and 1997. We are all agreed that there has been a massive loss of confidence in Hong Kong since the events of Tiananmen square. There is a heavy outflow of people who have the skills and responsibilities essential to the successful running of the colony over the next seven years and to its prosperity.

That is the problem. How will we—"prevent" is too strong a word—mitigate or slow the outflow of people from Hong Kong who are necessary to it? I believe that my right hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) and for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), who I understand will wind up the debate, have somewhat misled themselves in their arguments. My right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook said that his solution to the problem is to introduce democracy in Hong Kong. I am very much in favour of that and it is not impossible for Britain to do so—after all, we remain masters of the colony until 1997—but China has issued the Basic Law and everyone in Hong Kong knows that. However far democracy has advanced in Hong Kong, if the Chinese wish to roll it back they have the power to do so. Therefore, unless there is a great change in China, we cannot offer additional confidence to the people of Hong Kong by telling them that a Labour Government will introduce democracy in Hong Kong. It is no way out to say that we shall introduce democracy and restore confidence in Hong Kong between now and 1997. My right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook has misled himself on that point.

My right hon. Friend also misled himself on another major point—his assessment of the reaction of other ethnic communities in the United Kingdom to the passing of the Bill. I represent a large ethnic community and I can assure him that no such anxieties have been expressed by my constituents. I am certain that the grievances that my right hon. Friend properly expressed on behalf of the immigrant communities will be dealt with when a Labour Government take office. As my right hon. Friends and I expect that there will be a Labour Government within the next two years, putting right the grievances of the ethnic minorities should not be used as an excuse for denying people in Hong Kong the possibility and prospect of coming to the United Kingdom. My right hon. Friend has misled himself on two quite major matters.

I shall deal briefly with the criticisms that have been made of the Bill. It has been said that the scheme is selective, which is so, but is anyone, except the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), realistically arguing for a general, all-embracing and non-selective United Kingdom scheme? With the exception of the right hon. Member for Yeovil, I have heard no one arguing for that. Critics say that we need different categories for selective admission in addition to those already in the Bill. To some extent, that is so, and I wholly share the views of those who have expressed the unsatisfactory position of the non-ethnic Chinese in China and the need for far stronger guarantees for their future, otherwise they will be citizenless after 1997.

I was glad to hear what the Home Secretary had to say about war widows and other widows, but there are other categories, including students, for whom the Select Committee recommended we should make special provision in assisting them to obtain nationality. I should like to see those categories included.

The categories are no substitute for a scheme to help to stem the exodus of key personnel from Hong Kong. War widows do not help in manning difficult positions in the Hong Kong police force, civil service or business, nor necessarily do ethnic minorities who are unfranchised or denied citizenship. Students certainly cannot assist in that respect. We must return to the main point and say that we must have a scheme to help to stem the exodus of key personnel from Hong Kong.

It has also been said that the proposal is elitist, not merely selective. In a sense, it is because the people concerned are key personnel. However, the House should bear it in mind that the main categories cited in the Bill and in the supporting papers are very similar to those in the work permit scheme, which we have operated under successive Governments for the past 20 years. I shall read out the list in the latest 1980 edition of the work permit scheme. Whom do we allow in other than relatives—who are a separate matter? We allow in

> "(a) those holding recognised professional qualifications;
> (b) administrative and executive staff;
> (c) highly qualified technicians having specialised experience;
> (d) other key workers with a high or scarce qualification in an industry or occupation requiring specific expert knowledge or skills;"

Sir Eldon Griffiths: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Shore: I am sorry. I cannot give way because of the time factor.

I do not accept that the scheme can be described as elitist because of the perfectly sensible and open categories that are established. The scheme includes—and we must be clear on the range of people—judges, civil servants, Customs and Excise officials, the fire service, the immigration department, the Independent Commission Against Corruption, the Royal Hong Kong Police, the military garrison, engineers, architects, air traffic controllers, editors, doctors, chemists, midwives, nurses, physiotherapists, teachers and education administrators. Those categories add up to no fewer than 24,000 of the 50,000 promised passports. Many of the remaining 26,000 passports will have to go to managers and executives, but the balance may be wrong and overloaded in favour of those categories. That is a matter to be debated later.

The scheme has a number of obvious defects and some have been well expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden). The lack of review procedure and clause 1(5) are intolerable, as is the lack of help for people who may be in political danger in Hong Kong because of their expression of opposition to the Chinese Government. Such help must be included. There can be no guarantee that the Bill will succeed, but no serious alternative has been proposed. It is essential that the people of Hong Kong should not be given the impression that we have washed our hands of their problems. That would have a disastrous effect on the people there and on the international community, whose help we may need far more in 1997 if the Chinese tear up the joint declaration. For those reasons, I shall not vote against Second Reading and I hope that many of my right hon. and hon. Friends will join me.

7.22 pm

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): I had prepared some remarks today that sought to expose the rather hollow and internally contradictory nature of the speech by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) on the basis of what he had said before about the Labour Government's contradictory position on the issue. However, it has turned out to be unnecessary for me to make a speech on those lines because the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) has just made it for me most persuasively. I hope that Opposition Members have listened carefully to what he said. His speech was most persuasive and could be taken as an argument in support of the Bill, although he has said that he intends to abstain.

As we debate the Bill today, people are leaving Hong Kong at the rate of about 1,000 a day and it is important to bear that background in mind. Many are the most able and entrepreneurial people whom the colony badly needs to keep it going as a thriving community. It is, therefore, not a day too soon for the House to be asked to approve the Bill, which has my strong support. It is clear that the Bill's prime purpose is to staunch the outflow of people from Hong Kong and to encourage what the Americans call the "movers and shakers" to remain in the colony until 1997 and, we hope, well beyond that. The Bill will help to do that and it is a necessary confidence-building measure.

The upper limit of 50,000, which is on the face of the Bill, is fewer than many in the Hong Kong community would have liked and it is certainly fewer than they argued for originally. However, it is equally far fewer than the number who might have to come here in a future crisis if the policy goes wrong. On the other hand, the figure is many more than some of my right hon. and hon. Friends seem prepared to accept, for the reasons set out so cogently by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit). Ministers may be tempted to feel that they have got it about right as they find themselves between the Scylla and Charybdis of the two positions. I believe that it is the least that we should be offering in the circumstances to the people of Hong Kong and I shall explain why briefly.

First, the Bill is an insurance policy, as many other hon. Members have said, which should give many of the key people the confidence to remain in Hong Kong. That is the cardinal point. Whether it will succeed in that venture is a matter of judgment and cannot be proved at this stage. Secondly, it is only if Britain takes the lead in this way and at least in part fulfils one of its last colonial responsibilities that we shall be able to look to other nations to play a fuller part in any rescue operation that may be needed in the event of the Peking regime reneging on its solemn commitment of 1984. I strongly hope that does not happen, but when one enters the realm of insurance policies, one must guard against all risks and one has to think of the chances of the Government persuading their partner nations such as the United States and those in the Commonwealth and elsewhere to pull their weight in the event of that coming about.

Thirdly, the Bill is wholly consistent with the terms of our agreement with the Chinese, which never precluded our right to grant full British citizenship to people in Hong Kong. Fourthly, it can always be argued that any immigration arrangements run the risk of causing bitterness and resentment for some, especially those who cannot fulfil their wishes or who fall just the wrong side of some official dividing line. The point was made by the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney and it is not an adequate argument against having the criteria for selection that are envisaged in the Bill. As the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney said, all such measures from time immemorial have involved a degree of selection and the House must face that reality.

Fifthly, even if as many as 250,000 people, as distinct from passport holders, come from Hong Kong to Britain in the future, I am convinced—and I know that a number of my constituents are convinced—that they would prove to be a great asset to this country. The key point is that as long as the policy works—and I have already said that there can be no certainty that it will work 100 per cent. —these people will remain an asset in Hong Kong and will

[Mr. Nigel Forman]

be to our own considerable economic and trading benefit, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Sir P. Blaker) said.

On the other hand, if the policy were not to work as intended and if all those who were entitled to do so came to this country, they would be a great asset to us in due course. All the evidence from the Hong Kong people who are already established in this country—and I remind the House that there are many of them—suggests that would be so. Similar evidence of Asian people who have settled on the Pacific coast of the United States and in Canada corroborates that conclusion. One has only to ask people who know of those circumstances. Asians have solid family lives, they believe in the value of education and getting on, and they tend to be self-sufficient high achievers. In short, they are exactly the sort of people—and I emphasise this to my right hon. and hon. Friends who may have doubts about the Bill—whom we should welcome if they ever felt the need to come to this country.

The opposition to the Bill is rather shabby. It is disingenuous in the case of the Labour party and distasteful in the case of some of my right hon. and hon. Friends. The Bill is a sensible and timely response to an important problem which is principally the responsibility of this country and this Government. The Bill has my strong support.

7.29 pm

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Honour is not a common component of political conduct, and in matters to do with nationality and immigration, British Governments over the years have behaved with craven dishonour. This mother of Parliaments—this exemplar of parliamentary democracy—has, over the post-colonial years, evaded and abandoned its responsibilities. It has dishonourably created a series of lesser, second-class nationalities. The French and Portuguese, with the same sort of history, have behaved with much greater rectitude and responsibility.

Now we have come to these convoluted arrangements over Hong Kong. We have a direct responsibility for the people of Hong Kong until 1997, and of the two major parties neither the Government nor the Opposition are facing up honourably to those responsibilities. I grudgingly admit that it is perhaps the Liberal Democrats who are being truest to those responsibilities.

The only just solution would be—and must be—the restoration of full British citizenship to all British nationals in Hong Kong. Then, of course, the scream would go up, helped by some of the more disreputable characters in the House, "You are letting in $3\frac{1}{4}$ million Chinese." What a load of rubbish. Of course nothing of the sort would happen. And who in their senses would want to come to Thatcher's Britain, with its inequality, its collapsing public services, its general tattiness—[HON. MEMBERS: "Us."] You fellows cannot get away; you are stuck here. [HON. MEMBERS: "What are you doing about it?"] I am trying to improve matters; I usually seek to try to improve the state of Britain.

There is little evidence that many of the $3\frac{1}{4}$ million Hong Kong Chinese who hold British passports without right of abode would want to settle in Britain anyway. An opinion poll taken in the colony early last year showed that, of the 38 per cent. who would emigrate given the chance, only 6 per cent. would choose to come to Britain, so the nonsense about $3\frac{1}{4}$ million Chinese coming to Britain is easily dismissed. Incidentally, what a shot in the arm an influx of Hong Kongers would give to the tired, underperforming economy of this damaged country.

The Bill and the proposed scheme are profoundly unsatisfactory. Their purpose is supposedly to restore confidence in the colony and staunch the flow of emigrants, which reached 50,000 this year. But the arbitrary and limited figure of 50,000 households is a one-off arrangement that does not ensure Britain's continuing commitment to Hong Kongers. In effect, the Government are saying to most of Hong Kong's many millions, "We are concerned only about those of you who are close to us—those of you who work with us, who are successful and whose future we choose to ensure. Come 1997," the message is, "the rest of you can go hang."

That is not a proposition that I am prepared to support. The chosen few will have been nominated within a year or so. Where is the flexibility in the scheme to allow us to deal with changing events in the years up to 1997? Perhaps the Labour party should consider that there is a possibility that a Labour Cabinet and a Labour party conference may have to cope with the unfolding crises in those years.

The scheme should be flexible, and open to review as events develop in China and in Hong Kong, to ensure the healthy functioning of that territory. Anyone whose application for registration under the scheme is turned down will be given no reason for the refusal and will have no possibility of appeal. Absolute discretion is vested in the Home Secretary, and with a Home Secretary of the calibre of the present incumbent—whose premise when he had responsibility for immigration matters was that if immigration control was not hurting, it was not working—that is not a heartening prospect.

The scheme's most damaging flaw is its disregard for the non-Chinese ethnic minorities who have no nationality other than British and who will become stateless after 1997. In all justice, special consideration should have been given to that category in a loading of points. Better still, those people should be given special dispensation to gain full and proper British citizenship. I trust that the Labour party will do that if we come to government.

The Opposition's amendment to commit the Bill to a Committee of the whole House I shall, of course, support. But what would we do in government? I was not reassured by the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley). The Chinese have passed the Basic Law, and we should be foolish, if we came to government, to try to reopen that issue.

We shall not be able to increase the number of elected Members in the process of democratisation that we have promised in the Government of Hong Kong before 1997. The Chinese will not budge from the figure of 20 elected Members of the Legislative Council. I hope that we shall be wise enough not to try to stir up difficulties and further damage confidence in the last two or three years of our responsibility by attempting to increase that figure to 40 or 60. The urgent need is to try to maintain confidence and economic performance in Hong Kong now.

So how must I vote? I had hoped that the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) would be here. He has pretended some interest in this matter and taken on himself the leadership of the faction in the Tory party that fans every skinhead eruption of racism. His mail bag which he quoted proves that. For years, his only distinguishing feature has been his viciousness. A character such as he could only have flourished under a Thatcher Administration, with their mean-mindedness, and their lack of concern and conscience. He will vote against the Bill. For all the Bill's inadequacies and selectivity, I shall support the Government tonight, if only personally to cancel out the vote of that disagreeable and non-admirable right hon. Member for Chingford.

7.36 pm

Mr. Paul Channon (Southend, West): As usual, the hon. Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds) has gone over the top. His remarks about my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) were ludicrous, as the House well understands. One may or may not disagree with my right hon. Friend, but he represents a point of view that he is wholly entitled to express.

On the other hand, at least the hon. Member for Warley, East made his position clear. We know where he stands, just as we know where the Liberal Democrats stand, and although I disagree with him, I believe that he has done the House a service in that respect. We must ask the Labour party what it would do. Our debate tonight is being watched not only here but in Hong Kong, and the people of Hong Kong are entitled to know what a Labour Government would do. It is wholly unreasonable for the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) to take refuge in a whole collection of clichés and weasel words designed to obscure, rather than saying clearly to the people of Hong Kong what the Labour party would do if it won a general election and came to power.

The hon. Member for Warley, East was entirely right about democracy. Of course we should all like to see more democracy in Hong Kong, and that is conceivable; it is possible that, as the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) said, we could get a little more democracy, but in view of the Basic Law recently passed in Peking, that seems improbable even if it is worth trying. It is no good building a policy on the flimsy, implausible and improbable assumptions outlined in the speech of the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook.

The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), who is not here at present but who will wind up the debate, also has a lot to answer for. Whatever he may or may not have said in Hong Kong, his remarks have been widely misunderstood. I hope that he will speak clearly to the House so that people in Hong Kong, who may have misunderstood his remarks, may know what will happen if the Bill is passed and a Labour Government come to power.

In view of the presence of my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow), I should at once declare an interest by saying that, like the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), I have been to Hong Kong recently. That was well worth doing, because I think that I now have some impression of what the state of opinion in Hong Kong is.

The House must answer two questions. Will the package that the Government propose lead—as many of my hon. Friends believe it will—to large-scale immigration into Britain? The question whether it would matter if it did is a different question altogether. Secondly, will the package actually work in Hong Kong?

In many ways, the package is unfair and flawed, but any package would be unfair and flawed. I do not kow how anyone could devise a package which was not unfair and flawed. I agree with many of the criticisms of the Bill. I agree in particular with the criticisms of clause 1(5) and the fact that there is is no appeal against an arbitrary decision which may mean the difference between a happy and successful life and a life that could be very unhappy indeed.

Many small groups will be unfairly treated. I was grateful for the comments by my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary. I would be extremeley grateful if he would consider the position of non-United Kingdom spouses of British citizens. For example, as I understand it, if a British husband was to die in Hong Kong now, his wife would have no right to come to this country. That would be invidious when we consider what would happen in the case of a Hong Kong citizen who is given a passport and whose wife would have automatic right of entry. Many other questions must also be answered later.

I believe that the package might work for a while, but I do not have any great confidence in its long-term future. The only important factor that will settle the future of Hong Kong is the attitude of the Chinese Government to what happens in Hong Kong. We do not really know what that attitude is or what it will be after Tiananmen square. Do the Chinese Government still believe that Hong Kong is so valuable to them that it is worth preserving, or do they see it as a hotbed of people trying to intrigue for democracy against the wishes of the Chinese People's Government? That is the great difficulty.

If the Chinese position improves, people will stay in Hong Kong. If not, they will go—if not now, then later. I fear that, in many cases, our policy towards Hong Kong is waiting for something to turn up. Perhaps it will and perhaps it will not. We do not know whether the Chinese Government will change before 1997 and, if they do change, whether they will be any better. Some people believe that the Chinese Government will be better, but that is a flimsy basis for policy.

The package is designed to make people stay. I believe that people will stay for a few years. Some may stay until 1997 and see what happens. Others will not take that risk; who can blame them, when the Chinese Government make statements like those that they have made recently?

There is a risk that the package will work for just a short time and that the House will have to return to the issue before 1997. We delude ourselves if we believe that the Bill will be the last word. What we should do about the situation goodness only knows, but I believe that the issue will not go away.

There is some evidence that people will stay for the time being at least. Singapore has offered many places. People are not leaving Hong Kong for Singapore, but they have the security that Singapore provides. I believe that it matters if people leave Hong Kong. A dramatic outflow of skilled people that will weaken the Hong Kong economy is in no one's interests.

Even from narrow British self-interest, that is true, because Hong Kong receives billions of pounds of United Kingdom investment. If we include invisible investments, I suspect that British investment is greater than that of America or Japan. However, the Hong Kong Government have historically always played down our investment, I believe quite wrongly.

I do not believe that people from Hong Kong will come here to stay. The hon. Member for Warley, East referred

[Mr. Paul Channon]

to a recent poll that showed that of those Hong Kong citizens who wanted to leave, 4 per cent. wanted to come to Britain, as opposed to 37 per cent. who wanted to go to Canada. I believe that people from Hong Kong may well use us as a staging post.

We must ask the Government tonight to tell us more about what other countries are doing in that respect. I agree that we have a British responsibility. However, the issue may become a great international problem. Apart from Singapore and France, which will take a handful, and a few other countries that will take a handful, what countries will help in what might become a serious problem?

The package is flawed, and it can give hon. Members no pleasure. All political parties are in a false position, and we can derive no pleasure from having to debate the Bill today. However, having thought about the issue with much care, I believe that it is worth buying the breathing space that I believe the package will bring. I do not believe that it will lead to large-scale permanent immigration to the United Kingdom, and I believe that those fears have been greatly exaggerated.

The Bill will need amending in Committee or on Report. It is full of holes and that is inevitable in a package of this kind. However, on balance I believe that the House would be wise to accept the Bill. If it does not, the disillusionment in Hong Kong and the skills outflow in the early stages could lead to a situation which might be more serious than it is now in Hong Kong, and one which the House and the people of Hong Kong will come to regret.

7.44 pm

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): The right hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon) is right. The future of Hong Kong will be decided, whether we like it or not, in Peking. How we handle China over the next seven crucial years will be of the utmost importance.

I believe that the Foreign Secretary was right to pursue democratisation as far as he did and to accept at this stage that there was no further give in the Chinese position. I do not believe that that necessarily excludes a rather larger number for direct elections in 1995. We should pursue the argument for further democracy.

The Foreign Secretary was right to refuse to accept Chinese statements criticising the granting of passports to a select group of people in Hong Kong. Anyone who has had any passing involvement in Hong Kong, let alone anyone who has held office as Foreign Secretary, knows how delicate is the governance of Hong Kong. That is a quite exceptional colonial responsibility in which confidence is everything. Confidence can disappear literally in a matter of hours.

In the negotiations for the agreement, I think at the ninth meeting, the failure to reach an agreed statement between the British and Chinese negotiators, and their refusal to accept the word "constructive", caused a run on the Hong Kong dollar and a serious lack of confidence. The situation is that fragile. If the House was to vote against the Bill tonight, there is no doubt that the run on the dollar overnight—as we now have 24-hour exchanges—would be devastating. Therefore, we must watch everything that we say and do.

I am glad that the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) has returned to the Chamber. From time to time I have some affection for the right hon. Gentleman. But, to put it bluntly, his actions over the past few months have had a devastating effect in Hong Kong. If he seeks the highest office in this country—to be Prime Minister—and he cannot understand the damage that he has caused over the past few months, his chances of ever holding that office have been considerably damaged.

The chances of our carrying through the next seven years to a successful transition to China are uncertain and no one can be sure whether we will succeed. However, we must do all in our power to achieve that end. As we are losing key personnel from Hong Kong daily, we must be selective. We must try to help those people who contribute so crucially to the success of Hong Kong as it is at the moment.

If we manage to staunch the flow of those key people, the prosperity for the millions of people in Hong Kong will be enhanced. The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) must consider my argument. If we can get it right for the few, we will get it right for the many. However, we will not succeed unless our actions carry conviction in Peking.

That is why I believe that the Prime Minister was absolutely right to talk to and have dinner with the Chinese ambassador. He understands the delicacy of the question and it is important to keep a dialogue going with the Chinese at all costs even when we disagree with them. The Chinese do not mind people who disagree with them. They would prefer open and honest dealing and in the past they have kept all their treaties. There is still a chance of a highly successful transition despite the horror of Tiananmen square.

The events in Tiananmen square proved the right hon. Member for Chingford wrong. It is no good quoting manifestos from 1979, 1983 and 1987. Those have been completely blown apart by what happened in Tiananmen square. No one likes waves of immigration. I am sure that no Conservative Member under their Government liked accepting the 28,000 Ugandan Asians. We all lived through the traumas of the Kenyan Asians in 1968 and the question of restricting Commonwealth immigration in the early 1960s.

It is a delicate and difficult issue. Many hon. Members would like to be more generous about immigration than we know would be acceptable in the country. That is the reality with which we have been grappling in these delicate years.

For us not to respond to a traumatic event such as occurred in Tiananmen square would be dishonourable. That is the argument against those manifestos. Let us assume that those statements were given in good faith. Nevertheless, the statement about "swamping" before the 1979 general election is one reason why the official Labour party is not abstaining tonight, but is voting against the Bill. That statement has caused deep and continuing resentment.

However, we must put such resentments behind us because we are dealing with the position in Hong Kong now. I share much of the criticism that the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook deployed against current immigration policy. There is no doubt that there should be more generosity towards the relatives of immigrants who have already been accepted into full citizenship of this country. It is a scandal that we are not more generous, but that is no reason for voting against the legislation. Although it is a fair debating point, it is no reason to cause problems in Hong Kong.

At this stage, we need to bolster the confidence of the key people in Hong Kong because if they stay, in a year or two years' time, there will be the chance of achieving a better atmosphere in Peking. Just as Tiananmen square was traumatic for us and for Hong Kong, we must accept that it was also traumatic in Peking. The atmosphere there is delicate. However, I believe that we shall find a more responsive attitude in two or three years' time and that the Chinese Government will accept as a fait accompli the decision that we have taken on passports. There is a chance that we shall see greater democratisation, but in the meantime the next few months are crucial.

If we are to gain support from the international community, Britain has to show the lead. It is no use asking other countries to give extra passports to the Hong Kong citizens who work in their national firms. They will not be generous if they see the House of Commons rejecting this Bill. If that is the case, we can forget all about expecting generosity from others. If we are to urge other countries to be more involved and if we are to pave the way for possible greater international response if something went wrong, we must show that we are ready to take our burden and our share.

It is in that spirit that the Social Democratic party will vote for the legislation. We shall vote against the Bill's Committee stage being taken on the Floor of the House because we believe that that is purely and simply a delaying tactic. What is more, we shall vote for the Bill on Third Reading.

7.52 pm

Mr. John Maples (Lewisham, West): The right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) has focused the attention of the House on the central issue of this debate—the stability and the future stability of Hong Kong. The issue of this debate is not which Hong Kong citizens have the best claim to live in the United Kingdom; it is how we exercise and discharge our responsibility for the future stability and prosperity of Hong Kong. We are faced with a serious exodus of skilled people from Hong Kong which threatens its stability. I do not know whether our responsibility to do something about that is moral, historic or practical, but we clearly have a responsibility. It is set out in paragraph 4 of the joint declaration, which states that we have a

"responsibility to maintain the continuing prosperity and stability"

of Hong Kong until the middle of 1997.

Apart from the fact that we have that responsibility, we must remember that we have extensive commercial interests in Hong Kong, not only before 1997 but—we hope—afterwards which it is in our interests to protect. China has similar extensive commercial interests. The fact that China has not exercised its practical power to take back Hong Kong in the past 40 years can be related to those extensive commercial interests, and China, too, has obligations. It has the same obligations under the joint declaration.

In such debates, we often lose sight of the fact that the purpose of China's policy is not only to get Hong Kong and Macau back into the Chinese fold—its main target is Taiwan. In the not-too-distant future, China wants to be able to do a similar deal with Taiwan and to bring it back into a greater China. To do so, China must be able to show the people of Taiwan the successful arrangements that it has made to work in Hong Kong. Therefore, it is in China's interests to honour its agreements and to ensure that it inherits and maintains a prosperous and stable Hong Kong.

If we accept that we have an obligation to do something to maintain Hong Kong's stability, the question is, what should we do? I do not believe that it is practical to consider admitting to the United Kingdom either the 3·3 million United Kingdom passport holders or the 5·7 million people who live in Hong Kong. To put it in practical terms, it would amount to 8,000 people per constituency, although those people would not be distributed averagely across the country. That is not a practical proposition and to hold it out as such is irresponsible.

However, we must do something. We cannot simply wash our hands of this and say that we are not prepared to grant any passports. We cannot simply let history take its course. We must do something and that necessarily involves a compromise. I do not know whether the right number is 40,000 or 60,000, but 50,000 seems reasonable. If the worst came to the worst, that would not be an impossible number of people to admit to the United Kingdom. On the whole, they would tend to be extremely useful people. The number is probably sufficient to give the boost to Hong Kong that we want to give.

If we accept that we are to grant a number of passports under 5·7 million, there must be an allocation system which will necessarily be unsatisfactory. If we focus our attention on our purpose of stabilising what is happening in Hong Kong, we must grant those passports to the people whose continued presence in Hong Kong is likely to help to enhance that stability. If we do so, we shall discharge our responsibility in a way that is ultimately seen not as divisive, but as positive. It would give such people an insurance policy.

To those of my right hon. and hon. Friends who say that that insurance policy will not work, I simply say that it is what thousands of Hong Kong citizens have been seeking and acquiring for themselves over the past 10 or 20 years. They have been going to Canada, Australia and the United States, fulfilling their residency requirements, acquiring foreign passports and returning to Hong Kong. We are simply offering to make that facility—that insurance policy—available to them without the need to leave Hong Kong for two or three years.

The opposition to the Government's proposal has fallen into three categories. The Social and Liberal Democrats have taken the principled but thoroughly impractical position that everybody should be admitted. The Labour party has not only been impractical, but thoroughly unprincipled. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) has got his party into a box of all or none. The right hon. Member for Birmingham Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), was not very successful in trying to wriggle out of that box today. The right hon. Member for Gorton has consistently opposed every proposal and whenever the Government have brought this proposal to the House for discussion, he has disparaged and denigrated it, but he has never offered an alternative. He must know that if there were a Labour Government—I am sure that this is recognised by many Opposition Members—they would have to do something similar to what the Government propose. The right hon.

[Mr. John Maples]

Member for Gorton has sunk to a new low—even for him—in his cynical and opportunistic exploitation of these events for party political advantage, dangerously regardless of the international consequences. If we ever needed further evidence of how totally unfit he is to be a British Foreign Secretary, we have had it in his contributions to this problem.

The more interesting opposition has come from my right hon. and hon. Friends. They circulated a letter to all my right hon. and hon. Friends in which they set out their concerns about the Government's proposal. Basically, they said that they were worried about the future of Hong Kong, but they must realise that the people of Hong Kong want this proposal. They do not regard it as too much—if anything, they regard it as far too little. It is not for us to second-guess what is in their best interests. If they want the provisions, it is not for us to say that they are not good for them.

The second point made by my right hon. and hon. Friends is that China will deny its citizenship to United Kingdom passport holders. Although that is what China is saying, I think that it is extremely unlikely that it will do that. The people to whom we will have granted passports will, in the main, be exactly the people whom the People's Republic of China wants and needs to remain in Hong Kong after 1997. Even if that is not the case, those in Hong Kong who have acquired British passports will have a choice between Chinese and British nationality. Even if they chose to retain their British nationality, under the terms of the joint declaration they would continue to have the right to reside in Hong Kong. Again, we should leave that choice to them. It is not for us to make such a choice on their behalf.

The third and perhaps the most serious reservation of my right hon. and hon. Friends is that China will see the provisions as a deliberate attempt to undermine the joint declaration and the stability of Hong Kong. That might be what China is saying, but I cannot believe that that is how China genuinely sees it. Both China and the United Kingdom have an obligation under the joint declaration.

Clearly we are trying to enhance stability, not to undermine it. It is so much in our interests and in the interests of China to maintain stability that I cannot believe that the Chinese will interpret the Bill as undermining the joint declaration. The Chinese have such enormous, overriding interests in the future prosperity of Hong Kong that I do not believe they will see the Bill as undermining our obligations to the future of Hong Kong.

My right hon. and hon. Friends were a little disingenuous in their letter. Their real anxiety—which is a legitimate one—was that the Bill might be seen as a breach of United Kingdom immigration policy. But they must face the fact that this is a unique situation. It is not an immigration problem but a unique colonial inheritance which cannot be solved by granting independence. The problem has been exacerbated in the past year by events in Tiananmen square. We cannot ignore that. People in the United Kingdom will see Hong Kong as a unique case for which we have some responsibility. If that involves one-off granting of British passports to people in Hong Kong, they will accept it as the price that we must pay for that obligation.

My hon. Friends are wrong not only about the reaction of people in the United Kingdom but about that of the Chinese Government. I ask both Conservative and Opposition Members who may be thinking seriously of voting against the Bill to reflect on the consequences outside if the Bill is rejected. In Hong Kong it will be seen as a betrayal and there will be a far greater and accelerated exodus of skilled and valuable people from Hong Kong in the immediate future. That will undermine stability to an extent that we have not yet even contemplated. There will be serious consequences not only for our future commercial interests in the far east but the intervening period of British administration of Hong Kong will be made extremely difficult, if not impossible.

Rejection of the Bill tonight will be seen in China as a sign of immense weakness. It will weaken our negotiating position with the People's Republic of China in a devastating way. It will feel that it has the measure of us. In the world at large rejection of the Bill will be seen as Britain failing to honour its clear obligations.

8.1 pm

Mr. Jim Sillars (Glasgow, Govan): On the issue of Hong Kong, we face a problem because of past conduct, attitudes and judgments and neither the Tory nor Labour Front Benches have anything to be proud of. That was demonstrated in the debate this afternoon. If one reads the debates in the House from 1984 until just before Tiananmen square, what strikes an objective person—I can claim to be objective because I was not present—is the combination of naivety and stupidity on the part of both Front Benches. A self-satisfaction ran through all the debates about how well the negotiations with the People's Republic of China were handled and how everything in the garden of Hong Kong and China would be lovely. We are now paying the price for that lack of judgment.

There has also been a failure of nerve on the part of both Front Benches, on the moral issues. I was remarkably surprised to hear the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), argue earlier that morality and international politics did not run hand in hand. I concede that a great deal of practice in human history might demonstrate that, but the essence of the argument for democracy is built on morality. It is morality that says that individually we grant other people, every man and woman, the right to be wrong, as we see it. That is a moral judgment that has been built up into democratic societies in western Europe and other places.

I listened carefully to the arguments about the need for more democracy in Hong Kong. I argued for that many a long year ago, before I came to the House in 1970 and during the 1970s. We have left it a bit late. Democracy is not just about one man, one vote, but about building up democratic institutions capable of taking the stresses and strains of political debates. It is the creation of political classes, if one likes to put it that way, which can deal with each other in a civilised way and contain all the passions within a society without allowing them to overspill into violence. I am afraid that we have left Hong Kong too few years to build up democratic institutions. The Government's proposals will not fulfil our responsibilities to create democracy there.

There is another point of shame for the Labour Front Bench, particularly the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley). I was utterly appalled to hear him engage in divide and rule tactics between immigrant communities. I never thought that I would hear that from him. He asked why people from the Indian subcontinent should find themselves in difficulty because people from Hong Kong had been allowed in. His premise was not sound. Dependants and others from the Indian subcontinent who are waiting to come to Britain and people in Hong Kong have one thing in common. They both have a relationship with this state because of the colonial past of the United Kingdom. I am sorry that the right hon. Gentleman did not recognise that.

I wish to put on record in the time available to me the joint Scottish National party-Plaid Cymru position. The House of Commons has a responsibility for the status of the Hong Kong Chinese. The House has the power to exercise that responsibility. We know to what type of regime we are prepared to hand over those people. When I was in Hong Kong earlier this year—I have no interest to declare because I paid my own way—I read in one of the newspapers a statement by the person who is supposed to be the head of the Supreme Court in the People's Republic of China. He said that the word of the Communist party was above the law. If I were in Hong Kong without a passport and a means of escape, I should be extremely nervous.

For generations the House has brayed about morality. I remember the first time that I went to Hong Kong as a young service man, when there was a great outpouring of refugees from mainland China into Hong Kong. I read in the newspapers and was told in current affairs sessions held in our Army unit that we were there to defend democracy, freedom and the free world. Morality mattered very much in those days. There has been a great deal of preaching about morality but the present package offered by the Government and what the Labour party offers demonstrate that moral words have not been met by moral deeds.

Our position is exactly the same as that of the Liberal Democrats. We believe that all people in Hong Kong with a claim to British citizenship should be granted British passports and the right of abode. The SNP and Plaid Cymru also deplore the racist basis of the denial of passports to 3·25 million of the 3·28 million Hong Kong Chinese.

In other debates I have heard hon. Members argue that we cannot give millions of people a passport and an open-ended commitment to allow them to come to Britain at some time in the future. We have been told that it is impracticable. But what about the 1 million people in South Africa who have passports and the right to come here at some indeterminate point in the future, or the 8 million or 9 million people in north America and the old Commonwealth countries of Australia and New Zealand? They have the right to come here at any time in the future, yet no one seems to be terribly worried about that. Of course, they have white skins and that is what makes the difference. If Chinese people in Hong Kong were regarded, to use the racist term, as "our kith and kin" we should have a different Bill before us and different speeches would have been made from both the Front and Back Benches. I regard the Hong Kong Chinese as intellectual, political and human kith and kin as much as any white South African with a passport.

The Bill is not the best one that could be brought before the House. It does not match the need for justice, as several other hon. Members have said. It has been cobbled together as an expedient to meet a crisis.

We shall support the Bill because it does two things in principle, although perhaps inadvertently. First, it is an open acknowledgement of our collective ability to meet our collective responsibility in the House of Commons. Secondly, it breaches the Government's previous argument that we cannot give passports to people in Hong Kong and expect them to stay there. That was the argument, yet it is precisely the opposite argument that the Government are putting now.

No one knows what the position will be on mainland China between 1990 and 1997. If China again demonstrates a willingness to kill people and suppress democratic movements, we have in the Bill markers on which later we can state the case for everyone who is entitled to receive a passport and the right of abode.

Given the political difficulties of the Conservative Government, it is tempting to use the Bill further to upset the Government, but the SNP and Plaid Cymru will not lend ourselves to that. The Bill deals with human beings and they are far more important than tactics in the United Kingdom's internal politics. We should like to offer a rescue and insurance package to all the 3·28 million Hong Kong Chinese, but it is not in our power to do so. Tonight we have an opportunity to do that for 225,000 of them and we shall vote to do so.

8.11 pm

Sir Rhodes Boyson (Brent, North): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars). I do not agree with him. It is a question of the right to be wrong. Either he is or I am. It was also a pleasure to listen to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples).

I was in the East Indies fleet when Hong Kong was reoccupied in 1945, so my memories of the area go back a long way. I wish to deal with two sides of the issue: first, the effects on China and Hong Kong and, secondly, the effect on the United Kingdom if the Bill is enacted.

Hong Kong is part of China. In 1984, we signed a treaty for its return, as we had neither the naval, military nor economic strength, nor the wish, to retain it. Its future lies entirely with China. I agree entirely with my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) that our relationship with China is vital to its future. The 1984 treaty changed the whole position. The future of Hong Kong now depends solely on Peking. Whether it survives or dies depends on the relationships of Hong Kong and the United Kingdom with China. That important point must always be remembered.

I am a layman and we in the House are generalists. Indeed, our strength is that we are generalists and representatives of the people. I believe that we have irritated China on two issues. It is interesting that Taiwan is not offering to take people from Hong Kong. People in Taiwan to whom I have spoken believe that China's stand on passports and democracy in Hong Kong is right, and the Taiwanese better than the British Foreign Office should know the Peking Government's attitude.

We were in Hong Kong for a long time, yet we did little for democracy. It was ruled as a colony and the governor had the power. Suddenly we are in a hurry. It may not be

[Sir Rhodes Boyson]

a legal breach of the 1944 treaty, but if I were Chinese I would consider it an odd moral breach that we should expedite democracy when in a few years time Hong Kong is to return to China. I know that it is a question of one country, two systems, but whether it is capitalism against socialism or also democracy against some form of totalitarianism has never been properly worked out.

The Bill will enable us to give 50,000 passports to 250,000 people who will then come under a foreign power, Britain. Knowing the historical attitude of China to people from the west, that is the silliest step that we have ever taken. I do not put it more strongly than that. It has irritated the Chinese. They do not believe in dual nationality. As far as I know, the Foreign Office would not employ people of dual nationality. I may be wrong, but we have positive vetting in sensitive areas. Those people with British passports would probably be in charge of sensitive areas, so it is inevitable that they will be dismissed at the beginning in 1997 for being servants of a foreign power.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Hear, hear.

Sir Rhodes Boyson: It is nice to have the agreement of my hon. Friend. I feel more certain in my views now, having carried at least one hon. Friend with me.

The whole question of the 50,000 passports is suspect.

We must work with Peking; otherwise, there will be no future for the people of Hong Kong—not just the 250,000 whom we have selected—the bureaucrats and those who have made money—but for anybody. What belief can the Chinese Government have in the pledges of a British Government who have reneged on their pledge to the people who elected them that there will be no more large-scale immigration? Only rarely do I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup, but he rightly argued that we must look into the Chinese mind and see what we can do there. If one breaches a pledge to one's own people, how can anyone believe that one will keep a pledge to other people?

There was no consultation on the Bill, not even with the Conservative party. We on the Back Benches were landed with it. There was no democracy about it. There was about as much democracy as there is in Hong Kong. I do not say that unpleasantly, but I put it on the record to cheer everybody up. We wonder what will happen next.

Hon. Members have referred to the immigrant community in the United Kingdom. Obviously, the Bill affects them. At some time, people will say that we have enough immigrants. We may agree that there should be 100,000 or whatever, but at some stage there must be a bar. Everybody, and certainly the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), has dodged the question of numbers.

Mr. Budgen *rose*——

Sir Rhodes Boyson: I must not give way. I have only five minutes and today I shall finish in time. Last time, I was cut off even before my peroration. Not that I need one, but I intend to make one this evening.

I have probably more constituents from immigrant stock than any other Conservative Member. I am continually trying to get in relatives of people who live here and who should be here. My priority is to look after my people first. They are here. One case of a couple will show how bad it is. The grandfather of the wife was a brigadier in the imperial British Army. Her father was a group captain in the Indian air force and provided great defence contracts to this country. The father of the husband was an inspector in the imperial police when we ruled India and won 40 commendations for gallantry. His only child is here.

The couple have two children, one of whom needs constant attention, for which they pay. They want the wife's parents to come to this country. They can live on their pension. It will cost the United Kingdom nothing. They will not breed at that age, unless there is a great miracle. Nobody can have any objections. For 18 months, I have been trying to help those people to immigrate, but I still cannot get them in. There is no way that I can defend the Bill when I have to deal with such matters in my constituency. That has to do with the Bill, and those of us involved in such cases know that it does.

My Chinese community do not want the Bill. They tell me that they came here because they wanted to, not because they were running away.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Yes. It was a positive decision.

Sir Rhodes Boyson: Again, I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her agreement. I am undoubtedly carrying the House with me this evening.

What happened elsewhere at the end of the British empire? We often handed peoples over to one-party dictatorships. Did we provide passports then? Some funny things have happened in some of those countries. Did we help? Thank goodness we helped the Ugandan Asians, and in Kenya, but in some of the others, no help was given. The provision of passports has been highly selective.

At the beginning, I would take in all those who have served in Her Majesty's forces and their widows. I would start from there. I would say no more than that at present. I am sorry to say this with the Foreign Secretary present —we served together in Northern Ireland—but it is a matter of personal integrity and I must say that Foreign Office policy on China has been wrong and has irritated China. It should be changed to working with China, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup said. He will not thank me for continually quoting him. He may think that he is in bad company, but I will do so again. He said that we must get on with the Chinese. We must get it right.

If the Bill is enacted, it will further damage our relationship with China. My sympathies lie with China on this matter. It will do nothing for my people who want their families united now. I do not want to hear promises of other people coming here and worrying about where they will end up. Sad as it may be, I shall have to vote against the Bill's Second Reading.

8.19 pm

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): Tonight, we have witnessed a number of attempts at sophisticated racism, especially in the speeches of Conservative Members. It is a measure of Opposition Members' hostility to the Bill that those Conservatives have been forced to try to hide their racism in sophistry. One such attempt was made by the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit), who talked about the Hong Kong Chinese queue-jumping. It is disgraceful that someone who was directly responsible for keeping black and minority ethnic people from joining their families in this country should now cry crocodile tears about those people having to wait while the Hong Kong Chinese queue-jump. My right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) also referred to this matter.

Hong Kong Chinese are already in the queue to get into this country because they have been caught up by the racist immigration legislation now in force. It is absolutely wrong to argue that black and ethnic minority people whose relatives or friends are waiting in queues in Karachi, Jamaica or wherever object to Hong Kong Chinese coming here. The people to whom I have spoken understand the circumstances now facing the Hong Kong Chinese.

It is important to understand how this Bill has come about. Partly it is a result of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962, followed by the British Nationality Act 1981 which changed the status of Hong Kong citizens, who then became citizens of the British dependent territories. The citizens of a number of other colonies, for example Gibraltar, the Falklands and Montserrat, also had their status changed. Since that time the British Government have given full citizenship rights of entry and abode to the people of Gibraltar and the Falklands, but those rights have been denied to the citizens of Hong Kong purely on the basis of colour, although the Government will try to argue the numbers game.

The best thing I can do is to quote from the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants whose 1985 report states:

> "The barrier to acceptance of a residual moral responsibility for people who have lived under British rule, and whose future has been negotiated over their heads is the same barrier which has for twenty years obstructed justice and morality in British nationality and immigration law: the fear of non-white immigration to Britain. It is not merely a question of numbers, but of colour. Millions of other people from overseas have an absolute right to enter Britain: between three and nine million Commonwealth citizens, from Australia, Canada and New Zealand; over 200 million nationals of EC countries; about a million white South Africans. Almost all the people concerned are white; their right to enter Britain is unquestioned and does not lead to any public fears of being 'swamped' by immigrants."

The Bill demonstrates what it is all about.

I contrast the behaviour of the British Government with the way in which Portugal has acknowledged its responsibilities to its territory of Macau, which is also due to be handed back to China in 1999. The people of that territory have been granted full Portuguese citizenship rights, including the right to live and work in Britain after 1992. Unlike Britain, Portugal has recognised its responsibilities towards its colony.

The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) tried to make out that Britain has no moral responsibility for the citizens of Hong Kong. I was a citizen of a previous British colony and I can tell the House what a colony is all about—possibly I am unique in the House in that respect. If one lives in a British colony, one must learn English and follow British traditions. Britain tries to mollycoddle such colonies and tries to engender a parent-child relationship with them. Because of that, and because it has exploited it economically, Britain has a clear moral responsibility to Hong Kong. The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup said that Britain has given a lot of money to Hong Kong, but I assure the House that it has taken a lot more out.

As a colonising power, Britain took on the responsibility for protecting the citizens of Hong Kong. It has a responsibility for their internal and external security and that is why there is a governor of Hong Kong. It is an absolute disgrace that Britain can just relinquish such responsibilities on a whim. The British attitude appears to be, "We do not mind what happens to the rest; we shall take just a few."

Britain is further culpable because of its failure to honour its commitment to ensure at least a measure of democracy in Hong Kong before 1997. In Macau, the people can vote in the Portuguese presidential elections and for two seats in the Portuguese assembly. Britain has no such arrangements.

A number of my colleagues and I have discussed the draft Basic Law and people have expressed their concern about human rights. We were teasing such things out until 4 June and the tragic events in Tiananmen square. Those events caused panic among the people of Hong Kong and they turned to Britain, the mother country—the protector of those people—for support. What they got from the Government was this Bill saying that, with a bit of luck, a quarter of a million people can come here if they pass the test.

It is important to consider the test that the Government have set. The points system is a disgrace. If one is aged between 30 and 50 and one passes the other criteria, one is allowed to come to Britain. However, if one is under 30 or over 50 one does not receive the 50 points necessary. Therefore, people over 50 will automatically leave Hong Kong by other ways. I do not understand how the Government can say that the Bill is intended to keep people in Hong Kong.

Fifty points are awarded under the proposed points system if one is proficient in English. If the Bill is designed to keep people in Hong Kong, surely one should get points for proficiency in Chinese.

Hong Kong needs to establish the ability to govern itself. The position in Hong Kong demands that the Bill of Rights which the former Foreign Secretary promised to the people of that territory be enacted soon. Secondly, there should be rapid progress towards democratic Government, directly elected by the people of Hong Kong. Thirdly, all British passport holders in Hong Kong should have restored to them full rights of citizenship, including the right of entry and abode in the United Kingdom. The British Government should accept their responsibility for all the people who are legally and lawfully resident in Hong Kong.

I intend to abstain from voting on the Bill. I agree with my Front-Bench spokesmen that the Bill is elitist and that the method of selection is bad. I must, however, support the principle of allowing people to come to this country. I am not prepared to go into the same Lobby, however, as the right hon. Member for Chingford on this or any other issue to do with race. For those reasons I shall abstain in the main vote and support my hon. Friends' motion that the Bill should be discussed in a Committee of the whole House.

8.30 pm

Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes (Wimbledon): I speak on this subject with some trepidation, because I know of the expertise of many of my right hon. and hon. Friends. From the tone of today's debate, it would seem that there

[Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes]

is general acceptance of our duty to do all in our power to ensure the stability of Hong Kong during its last years as a British colony and the lead-up to its time as a special administrative region of China in 1997. When I say "in our power", the House will recognise that this is limited, not least because China has essentially held all the cards in the lead-up to the Sino-British joint declaration of 1984 and thereafter. However, our influence is still considerable and the measures before us today reflect that.

When the Government announced the quota system for British passports for Hong Kong citizens, I was extremely sceptical of its merits. Well intentioned though it may have seemed, I thought that it was arbitrary, apparently flew in the face of our manifesto commitments on immigration and was potentially invidious in its application. It was with those preconceptions that I went to see the position for myself, in an unsponsored visit to Hong Kong during the Christmas recess. The object of my visit was not only to see the territory but, more importantly, to see the problem within the context of China as a whole.

I learnt a salutary lesson, because the Chinese authorities left me stranded for four days in north-west China. Perhaps that is the best possible reason to make a sponsored visit rather than an unsponsored one. However, it gave me a chance to see more of the real China. My visit took place during the imposition of martial law following the horrors of Tiananmen square. Perhaps at no other time has the contrast between the vibrant prosperity of Hong Kong and the depressing mood and relative poverty of China been so marked.

For the first time, I recognised the justification for the sense of vulnerability and real fear of the Hong Kong Chinese, many of whose families had fled communism in the civil war. On the other hand, the People's Republic of China has been relatively pragmatic in its treatment of Hong Kong during the years. It has refused to recognise the cession of Hong Kong island and Kowloon or the lease of the New Territories, but it has tolerated an historical legacy. By doing so, it has benefited enormously from Hong Kong's economic links with the outside world. It is not only in its own interests but in those of Hong Kong and British business for the territory to remain stable.

While we cannot predict the outcome of the unresolved power struggle in Peking, the lesson of recent history is that even hard liners from Mao Tsi-Tung onwards recognised that Hong Kong's special status was to everyone's mutual benefit, and that any interference—which was possible at any time—would be counter-productive. Even if we take the bleakest view of China's future—that if, in the absence of any history of democracy or any sizeable ethnic minorities that could break away, China were to remain the last bastion of communism in the world—there is little, if any, incentive for China totally to disrupt Hong Kong's unique way of life. However, while that possibility exists, it is for us to take what steps we can to stabilise the position, pending the reforms that we hope to see in Peking. I heartily endorse the comments from hon. Members on the importance of establishing and maintaining a civilised exchange of views with Peking.

The Chinese have consistently argued that all Hong Kong inhabitants of Chinese race are their compatriots, and thus any granting of British passports could in itself be interpreted as provocative. Any force-fed process of democracy in that territory is even more provocative. Therefore, we are talking about compromise and how many passports must be issued to anchor the key people in Hong Kong. The general feeling seems to be that we have got the number about right. China's greatest incentive to respect Hong Kong's position is that Hong Kong continues to be its gateway to trade in the outside world.

I went to Hong Kong and China as an agnostic. Many Conservative Members will continue to doubt the wisdom of my right hon. and learned Friend's policies, but having made the offer, the consequence of withdrawing it now would be catastrophic. There would be a crash of confidence in Hong Kong, and all our responsibilities towards the territory's inhabitants would be thrown out of the window. The combination of my right hon. and learned Friend's policies and the long-term interests of China in the region combine to give the best chance of solving this delicate issue in an honourable way.

We have heard a great deal today of the Opposition's so-called policies, but they constitute unprincipled, empty opportunism. The Government's proposals should be supported on practical, political and moral grounds.

8.37 pm

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Had it not been for the events of 4 June in Tiananmen square, this debate would not be taking place. Therefore, it is necessary to measure the Bill against the necessities that arise from the events in Tiananmen square. The Bill is totally inadequate because if we consider whose human rights are most at risk as a result of Tiananmen square, it is not necessarily the business men, the people with skills and those who are being selected as a result of the Bill who have most to fear from the Chinese after 1997.

What astounds me particularly about the Tory party is its willingness to appease Stalinism in China as it was never willing to appease Stalinism in the Soviet Union during the Stalinist period and afterwards. The right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) made a remarkable speech on that point. He made an apologetic speech for the Chinese regime.

There will come a time, I hope in the not-too-distant future, when changes will take place in China as they are now taking place in eastern Europe. I do not want to be pointed at as one who refused to support the democrats when they had their backs to the wall in Tiananmen square and for the way in which they are now being dealt with by a Government who are willing to give way to the Chinese. The Bill appeases the Chinese Stalinists in Peking. It in no way seeks to protect the people who will be most at risk such as the students who led the way in demonstrating in Hong Kong their opposition to the Peking regime. Many of those who demonstrated in Hong Kong had fled from Stalinism in the years before 1989. Those who have most to fear are the students who, when I was at the terminus to the Star ferry last August, were collecting petitions full of signatures of people to support their counterparts in Peking. We must measure the Bill in terms of human rights and it totally fails to deal with that problem.

The Labour party has put forward a belated argument for democracy. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) rightly said, it has been neglected during the decades by successive Governments of both parties.

However, it must be said that Hong Kong is a unique colony in that its population never sought independence, unlike, say, India or Cyprus. People did not form independence parties in Hong Kong when they became politically active. On the contrary, those who were politically active there took the side either of the Chinese Communist party or of the Kuomintang.

Now we need to look at the rights of the people of Hong Kong. My right hon. Friends the Members for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) and for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) have made it perfectly clear on a number of occasions where the Labour party stands in respect of the democratic rights of the people of Hong Kong. Long before 1997—indeed, by next year—they should be moving towards full democracy and a Legislative Council that is wholly elected by the people of Hong Kong. That is one way in which we can exert pressure on the Chinese Government.

It is not, however, the only way. When Conservative Members argue that the Labour party proposes no alternative, they are wrong: there is another way. My right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton has spelt out other groups of people who should be considered for the right of abode in Britain. My hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) made it clear on Radio 4 this morning that a Labour Government would act with the international community. Britain has its connections with the European Community and the Commonwealth——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Woolly.

Mr. Wareing: It is not woolly. Most of the people who leave Hong Kong for western countries do not go to Britain, so there must be some accord with Canada, Australia and Singapore. Between 1981 and 1986 no fewer than 197,887 Hong Kong people went to western countries, of whom only 9,257 came to the United Kingdom—just 4·79 per cent. Quite apart from their natural dislike of Thatcherite Britain, we do not exactly have the cultural atmosphere to attract many people from Hong Kong.

It is ludicrous to say that handing out passports more liberally to the people whom it is the responsibility of the British Government to protect would result in an invasion of 6 million people. To bring pressure to bear on the Peking regime we need an international conference to discuss the problem of the colony.

It is a peculiar argument, advanced by the Government, that we must prevent people with skills from leaving Hong Kong since Hong Kong's economy demands that skills remain there—we do not want a run on the Hong Kong dollar, or people fleeing from the colony. So it is strange that the only 50,000 people to be offered the right of abode in the United Kingdom will be precisely those with the skills. Hong Kong does not have an abundance of skills. The plastic mould and dye industry of Hong Kong is desperate for more skilled workers; it is an industry that is basic to everything else—toys, electronics and so on—and it is suffering.

There is much opposition in Hong Kong to the attitude of the Singapore Government, who have offered access to Singapore to 25,000 Hong Kong people over the next five years, because the sort of people whom they are taking are not the sort who will suffer because of their political views—dissent from Peking over Tiananmen square, for instance—but the sort who have skills and who can help the Singapore economy.

Not only is this legislation appeasement of the Stalinists in Peking, but it is hasty legislation that should have been brought before the House only after full discussion with our international partners. Even under a Tory Government the Canadians have been far more generous and imaginative than this Government have ever been under this Prime Minister.

Despite the fact that I dislike the attitude of some of the Conservative Members whom I shall be joining in the Lobby tonight, I have no compunction in saying that this is a thoroughly bad Bill that I cannot support.

8.45 pm

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): I do not know whether being called at this late hour means that I am supposed to start winding up the debate from the Back Benches, but one theme that has clearly emerged from the debate, most of which I have sat through, is the widespread revulsion at the bizarre and opportunistic manoeuvring of Labour Front-Bench spokesmen. Those of us who have tried to seek an all-party approach to the difficult problem of how to keep people in Hong Kong and prevent the collapse of the territory have been baffled by the stance of the official Opposition. How can they seriously argue that elitism applies to midwives, physiotherapists, or police or fire officials? To do so is to get the whole issue out of perspective. The position of the Labour Front-Bench spokesmen was devastatingly destroyed by the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore), who made a fine and honest speech. There is no glory in the position adopted by Labour Front-Bench spokesmen and it is sad to think that these are people who might one day seek to form a Government of this country.

Some of my right hon. and hon. Friends are worried about the impact of the legislation. Of course if our immigration laws and our defences against further mass immigration were to be weakened by legislation, that would be a matter of grave concern and those who expressed such concern would deserve the fullest sympathies of the Government and of those of us who support the Bill. I should not support it if I felt that it opened the way to more mass immigration into this crowded country.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) and some of his supporters have been kind enough to send a letter to Conservative Members. It was nice to get a letter from my right hon. Friend; I do not get many from him. In his polite letter he set out his fears and those of his colleagues, which fall into two categories. There are immediate worries, and there are longer-term worries—in both cases, that the Bill will not work.

The immediate fears of my right hon. and hon. Friends, reiterated by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), are that a group of people now somehow stuck in Hong Kong will be released by getting their hands on British passports and coming here. That is a travesty of the truth. In fact, thousands of people—key workers—are leaving Hong Kong in droves day after day, week after week. They are heading as fast as they can for Australia, Canada, the United States and even South Africa, with a consequent haemorrhage of talent. It is not a question of our provisions releasing those people

[Mr. David Howell]

and allowing them to escape—to use the misleading verbiage of the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook; it is a case of enabling them to stay, because key workers of Hong Kong are moving out in enormous numbers and those numbers will increase.

Almost everyone who can find a way through to an overseas passport is doing so—not only the living. I read that some of the dead are also being moved out of Hong Kong by their relatives: people's ashes are leaving the colony. When a licence has not been procured for the removal of the remnants of those who have died, they are taken aboard the nearest Boeing in carry-on luggage and transported overseas.

The idea that people have been kept in the colony and that our provisions will release them is an inversion of the reality. The reality is that our provisions are the one thing that will ensure that those people stop going so fast. That is the thing that we must concentrate on and that is what we must watch to see whether the legislation achieves it. My understanding and my belief is that it will have a considerable effect in slowing down the present exodus of talent.

There is also an argument that in the short term we cannot do anything because China is in a bloody-minded mood, that that is what undermines confidence, and that merely passing the legislation will not increase confidence.

I agree that in the longer term China is the key to confidence, prosperity and stability in Hong Kong. But there are things that we can do in the shorter term and are seeking to do. We have made a move on the Vietnamese boat people and, as a result, we have the welcome news that the number of Vietnamese boat people is falling dramatically. We have made some moves on democracy. I happen to agree more with some Opposition Members than I do with my Government on that. The Select Committee had strong views about pushing the democracy issue as fast as possible. Every effort should be made to make the Chinese understand that a fast development of democracy is right. By 1995 we should certainly open up the issue again.

Finally, we are seeking, through this measure, to keep in Hong Kong some of the key workers who otherwise are leaving at a great rate. That is what we are doing in the short term. The issue of them escaping and how many we allow into Britain, or what numbers will crowd into this or that part of the United Kingdom in the short term, simply does not arise. It is hard to find anyone in Hong Kong among those who now wish to emigrate who wants to come here anyway. I do not believe that they will. Anyway, that is not the purpose of the legislation. This is not an immigration issue in that sense, and viewing it through that lens has led the Opposition into their miserable and ill-supported stance on the matter.

As for the long term, those of my hon. Friends who are doubtful say that after 1997, or even before, everyone who has one of the passports will come to Britain because the Chinese will take a hostile attitude to foreign passport holders and see them off. I must tell those who have doubts that if by 1997 or before there is still hostility and extreme surliness about Hong Kong in Peking, regarding it as a centre of subversion, it will be not 225,000 people coming, but 3,225,000, or indeed even 5 million people, all of whom will regard the United Kingdom as a place of asylum. Under the United Nations refugee convention of 1951 we are pledged to provide asylum to genuine political refugees. That is the nightmare that lies behind the undermining of confidence now. That is why we must work night and day to reassure Hong Kong now in the convalescent years of the early 1990s, to see that somehow we avoid that horrific prospect.

I do not agree with those who say that the Chinese do not really understand these things. They understand them very well indeed. They understand that there is a case for people having a passport as a form of reassurance. A senior Chinese Minister told the Select Committee when we visited Peking before Tiananmen square that he understood quite clearly, because in China there was a saying that a clever rabbit has two boltholes. The Chinese had no difficulty in understanding exactly what is intended. I know that since then they have taken a rather more hostile tone, but they understand the position exactly.

I should have liked to see a right of entry or right of abode being given, not passports. But that perfectly sensible idea was yet one more thing dished by the manoeuvrings of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) and his colleagues who said that they would reverse anything of that kind that was put forward. That is why the Government had to go for passports.

We shall need much greater and more vigorous international efforts than we have seen so far to get others to combine in the reassurance process over the next few years. The operation will need to be monitored by the House. I am not offering or volunteering, but the Select Committee might have a part to play in seeing how policy develops in Hong Kong over the next few years.

I must tell Opposition Members and my right hon. and hon. Friends who see the issue in the narrow terms of apparent great influxes of immigrants that that is not the prospect. The question is whether we can get Hong Kong through the immediate difficult years that lie ahead. The Bill will not solve everything by any means. But it is a litmus test of whether we are a nation that understands the wider world or whether we have turned in on ourselves in a pititful mood of short-termism and parochialism. I know where I stand on that issue.

8.55 pm

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): The House will not turn its back on the residents of Hong Kong or relax its continuing concern and commitments to their welfare. The question is how that is best achieved. It was always known that Hong Kong would not obtain independence like other colonies. We cannot escape, or wish away, the facts of the geography or history of Hong Kong. One of the central realities is that the lease runs out in 1997. The position in international law is clear.

We cannot tow the colony away, nor is it remotely realistic, as some have suggested, to imagine that we can transport the population of some 6 million halfway round the globe and put them in Surrey, Sussex, Somerset or our inner cities. A moment's reflection shows how unbalanced and inappropriate such a proposition is from every point of view.

The essential truth is that the future of Hong Kong cannot possibly be separated from that of China. It is the relationship with China that is all-important, and it is that which we have to get right and on which we should concentrate.

In December 1984, Britain negotiated the joint declaration with the People's Republic. It was a first-class agreement. It allowed basically for one country but two systems. Hong Kong is to be allowed to keep its social system and economy and considerable autonomy for at least 50 years. Remembering that the alternative to the agreement with China is no agreement, merely the expiry of the lease and the reversion of sovereignty, it was a satisfactory and beneficial agreement.

The joint declaration is a solemn international agreement registered at the United Nations. The Chinese and British Governments have entered into commitments and obligations under the joint declaration, and the Chinese have recently reaffirmed them. The terms of that agreement should be strictly adhered to by both sides. We should do nothing to damage, threaten or jeopardise the agreement. Its implementation is by far the best prospect for the future.

But then came Tiananmen square, the bloodshed and the brutal suppression of the demonstration a year ago. There was, rightly, worldwide revulsion and condemnation, especially in Hong Kong. Everyone was appalled. But are we to say that what happened in Tiananmen square is somehow China's last word for all time? Are we to say that that will be an inevitable regular occurrence; that in all perpetuity the Chinese army will regularly attack its own people; and that in 1997 the Chinese army will march into Hong Kong and massacre everyone? Should we expect that to be the most likely prospect, so that the agreement is now worthless?

In considering that, the events in eastern Europe should encourage us. We all remember the tanks on the streets of East Berlin, Budapest and Prague. Yet we have now seen genuinely free multi-party elections and the blossoming of freedom and democracy. Why assume, almost as an act of wish fulfilment, a worst-case scenario? Why forecast Armageddon in China?

We know that even last year there were different views in China, even at the highest level, on what to do about the demonstration in the square. It would be mistaken to believe that there are no sane voices. One thing is certain: the geriatrics who ordered the bloodshed will not be around much longer. There have been many upheavals and much turmoil in China over the past 40 years which have baffled outsiders—the great leap forward, the cultural revolution and the changes in leadership. However, I think I am right in saying that throughout that period China has kept to its international agreements. No hon. Member knows what the position will be in seven years' time. Why should we assume that it will be worse rather than better?

The Basic Law, for the mini-constitution passed on 4 April in Peking, set out the rights for Hong Kong citizens after 1997. It said that, after China resumes sovereignty over Hong Kong, it will nevertheless enjoy

> "a high degree of autonomy"

as a "special administrative region" of China. It said that Hong Kong's capitalist system and "way of life" will remain unchanged for 50 years. It will have independent finances and its own tax system, keep its currency—the Hong Kong dollar—and remain a free port outside the Chinese customs area. While overall responsibility for defence and foreign affairs will rest with Peking, Hong Kong will be authorised to handle "relevant external affairs" on its own. All that was agreed last month. That is obviously the best way forward for Hong Kong. Everyone concerned should strive to see that it works, and not take steps that will jeopardise it.

No one can prophesy what the world will look like in seven years' time, who the personalities in power in Peking will be or, for that matter, who they will be in London; but there is no reason to suppose that the international agreement will not be adhered to. It will be in everyone's interests, including China's, to adhere to it.

At this stage, it is the opposite of helpful for people to talk about Armageddon. Such a nightmare "end of the world" scenario would have to be dealt with not by this Parliament or the next, but by the Parliament after that. It would be the height of irresponsibility to start moving populations round the world now on a permanent, irrevocable basis because of transient factors or hypothetical future circumstances. I doubt whether those concerned or their offspring would have cause to thank us for that.

What the Government propose in the Bill is a bizarre lottery with 50,000 British passports, catering for some 250,000 people, as prizes to be competed for under a grotesque points system. For example, anyone over the age of 51 would incur negative points; those who have laboured long in the British service would therefore be discriminated against. The majority would be from the private sector. For business men, the points would take account of earnings

> "as a measure of success and value to Hong Kong."

For ordinary residents there is nothing. Those passports would obviously be highly prized and much sought after in an unseemly scramble in which there would be winners and losers, and many disappointed people.

Donald Tsang, the Hong Kong director of administration, says that 750,000—15 times the number of passports—will apply, and that most will be disappointed. As a neat Thatcherite touch, all applicants will be charged a fee, whether they are successful or not. All that is supposed to bring confidence to Hong Kong. How does it give confidence to those on the lower deck to tell them that it is necessary to give out lifebelts, but only to a few of the chosen on the bridge? This move will encourage everyone to think that they should have a passport; lack of confidence is thereby engendered as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

As for the inane idea that giving passports will stop people leaving or using them, why in that case not give them to everyone? There was no consultation with the Chinese, who have said that they will not recognise them, or dual nationality. The passports cannot be used to enter or leave Hong Kong after 1997. Ownership of them will almost oblige their holders to leave before 1997; which is the opposite of what the Government say they intend.

Let no one pretend that the Bill can do anything for confidence. It will be totally counter-productive. Andrew To, a student leader, said that it would not restore confidence. He said that he was against any scheme that tried to divide Chinese loyalties. Instead of precipitating and encouraging a mad rush for British passports to get out of Hong Kong, and thus destabilising the colony, the Government should work to reaffirm and make a success of the joint declaration, which gives Hong Kong a further 50 years of autonomy after 1997—much the best prospect for the future. If—although there is no evidence of it yet

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—things look as though they are likely to go badly wrong, it will be for a future Parliament to address the problem, and not for us foolishly and irresponsibly to precipitate it unnecessarily now.

9.3 pm

Sir John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): In the few moments I have, I wish to speak briefly on the effects of the Bill on the British people. After 40 years of mass immigration, although considerable numbers are still coming in, people were beginning to think that at least primary immigration was over. People looked to the Conservative party to be stricter on immigration controls than any of the other parties. The Conservative party has promised to end mass immigration, but now we are talking of allowing up to 250,000 Chinese people in Hong Kong the right to come and live here, let alone their dependants and others who may follow them. It is no use the Government saying that only a proportion will exercise that right; that is far too much of a gamble for most people in an uncertain situation.

Speaking against the Bill is an occasion for immense sadness for me, because it is the first time that I have ever differed from my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on an important matter. My admiration for her is unbounded, and I am deeply sorry to find myself opposed to her when her great services to Britain are being forgotten and she is the subject of so much attack and vilification in the press and the media. She always has a close understanding of how the ordinary people in these islands think and feel, and I can only assume that she was charmed by some of the emissaries from Hong Kong and persuaded by her Cabinet colleagues to go against her own fundamental instincts.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, whom I admire, was originally opposed to the Bill. I was disappointed that his opening speech did not contain a single sentence about the effect of the Bill on the British people for whom he is ultimately responsible. That leaves my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and the Foreign Office. The position of Foreign Secretary is one of the greatest in the land and he has to defend our interests abroad and at home. In the last resort, even the humblest among us must look to the Foreign Secretary for protection. In this particularly difficult situation, it would appear that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has preferred to look after the interests of the Chinese people in Hong Kong rather than the interests of our people at home. I do not understand how my right hon. Friend can defend that judgment.

What have the Hong Kong Chinese done to be given such special privileges over and above the rights and duties that the Foreign Secretary owes to ordinary English men and women who have never voted for immigration, who never liked it and who wish it to stop? They do not want or like a multiracial, multicultural and multi-religious society compared with the old wonderful social cohesion that we had in these islands which made our history so successful and unique. We are now facing the problems of that mixture in our small island. The Bill will reopen all those old wounds and produce a further loss of confidence in the Government when they are going through a difficult patch.

Some will say that these immigrants are millionaires, cultured people and entrepreneurs. They may be marvellous people—I saw them in Hong Kong and there was much there that I admired—but they are still people of foreign extraction and we have too many of those here now. Therefore, I oppose the Bill with all the feeling that I can command. My entire political life has been to try to preserve all that is best in England. If I were not to oppose the Bill, I would be declaring all my political life to have been one long lie.

I am extremely sorry that we should make such a serious decision. It will not please the Chinese Government, it will worry the Chinese in Hong Kong, it will be extremely difficult to work out and it will have a most depressing effect on the people of this country. I have not received a single letter in favour of the Billl, from the immigrant population or the indigenous population in my constituency or from anyone else; but I have received many against it.

What are we doing as a Conservative Government, the trustees for the ordinary people in this country, but letting them down in such an appalling way? It is a matter of great shame to me, and I cannot understand why it is being done. I am sure that it has been hurriedly thought out and not thought out properly. I fear that the debates here, which will be long and hard in this difficult summer, will create awful problems for the Government. When the Bill is passed, it will cause further problems and headaches for the governor and officials of Hong Kong.

Nor do I like officials in Hong Kong, who are not accountable to anybody, deciding who should enter this country and be a subject of the Queen. This is a new Bill and a new change, as the War Crimes Bill was a new Bill. We must stop bringing such new Bills before the House. We do not like this Bill, we do not want it, and I hope that it will be defeated.

9.9 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): The House should be well aware that the Labour party has firmly opposed the intention behind the Bill ever since it was first announced more than nine months ago. We described it as a charter for those with influence and affluence, and as elitist and unworkable. When it was published before Easter, our view was decisively confirmed. Before I sit down, I shall take the opportunity of replying to the debate to set out in detail the Labour party's policy on Hong Kong.

We said that the scheme was unworkable. In 1988, the Home Office processed 70,800 citizenship applications, with 361 staff employed for that purpose. For the processing of the hundreds of thousands of applications for passports expected under the Bill, seven officials will be specifically allocated. That is what the financial memorandum to the Bill states.

We said that the Bill was elitist. Under its scheme, points for passport eligibility are to be awarded, as my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-East (Mr. Leighton) said, on the size of earnings as a measure of success as well as for substantial financial investments. I am not surprised that, deriving from a party that once traded in the sale of honours, Social and Liberal Democrats support a Bill that introduces a trade in passports.

We said that the scheme was elitist. Two categories in the Bill, totalling 6,800, will mainly confer those passports on privileged persons invited to apply by the governor of Hong Kong, basing his decision on personal knowledge and contacts. That is a recipe for favouritism and cronyism in the award of United Kingdom passports.

We did not realise that the Government's proposals would be such a complete muddle. The hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Sir J. Stokes) rightly described the Bill as "not thought out properly". We do not know even now whether the complete scheme is before the House. During his ludicrous visit to Hong Kong last week, the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, as he clowned his way around the colony, referred to an additional passport plan under which British companies will be able to second senior employees to Britain for a period that would make them eligible for passports. That would introduce a novel and totally unacceptable principle under which recipients of British passports would be selected by private individuals running companies.

Nor could we have forecast that the scheme would be so nonsensical. On the age criterion, positive points are awarded only for applicants aged between 30 and 40. At all other ages, points decrease. Under the experience criterion, 10 points may be awarded for each year of relevant work experience up to a maximum of 15 years. Between the ages of 25 and 30, and between 40 and 45, applicants will gain points for experience but lose points for being either too young or too old.

To understand the full absurdity of the scheme, let us consider the case of a woman aged 64 holding the office of Prime Minister. She would probably be regarded by the Home Secretary as a key worker. For the experience factor, she would receive a maximum of 110 points, and for education and training, she would receive up to another 100 points. British links could get her a further 50 points, and knowledge of English would probably clock up another 50, despite her tendency to confuse the singular and plural first person pronouns.

Under the special circumstance heading, as the criteria are subjective and non-accountable, she might win 50 more points for exceptional merit or outstanding achievements. On the other hand, she would win no points for public or community service, as such service in an official capacity is excluded from the scheme. So far, she wins up to 360 points out of a possible 800. However, she loses 200 points for being over 60, and ending up with only 160 points, she unfortunately would not qualify for a passport.

The scheme is not only ridiculous, but is being put forward on an unprecedented basis. As his colleagues have done before him, the Home Secretary, echoed by the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), said that the intention behind the Bill was that passport holders would not take up their right of entry to Britain. This is the first time in my 20 years in the House that I have heard a Government ask Parliament to enact a Bill on the explicit assurance that it will not be implemented. It is hypocritical to ask the House to pass any Bill unless the Government intend it to come fully into operation.

The Government are seriously misleading the House by claiming that the Bill will anchor passport holders to Hong Kong. The Chinese Government have made it brutally clear that, after Hong Kong becomes part of the People's Republic in 1997, the passports issued under the Bill will not be valid for leaving or entering Hong Kong, and that, to quote the words of a senior official of the Chinese Government who is dealing with these matters, the passport holders

> "will be considered Chinese citizens and thus will not be entitled to British consular protection after 1997."

In the light of such repeated pronouncements by the Chinese authorities, those awarded passports under the scheme, far from being anchored and encouraged to continue the administration and business life of Hong Kong, would be far more likely to use them to come here while the going was good and while the passports could be used. The Home Secretary was completely wrong in his response to the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) on this matter.

Mr. Adley: To get the point clear, will the right hon. Gentleman agree that his point about the Chinese Government's attitude to the passports has not just emerged, but was referred to specifically in two memoranda, both of which were signed by both Governments in 1984?

Mr. Kaufman: The Chinese Government have made their position increasingly clear. On the very day that the Foreign Secretary announced the scheme, they made their position clear again. The Government should have been in no doubt on the subject.

In an effort to stampede support for the Bill, the Government have made much of what they call the "flow of emigration" from Hong Kong. The Home Secretary did so again this afternoon, as did his right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell). They claim that only this scheme can staunch the flow of emigration from Hong Kong. The fact is that, although there is, understandably, great concern in Hong Kong about its future after 1997, substantial emigration from the colony is nothing new.

When the House debated Hong Kong in July 1988, almost a year before the Tiananmen square massacre, the then Foreign Secretary, now Leader of the House, said:

> "I turn now to another source of concern—emigration from Hong Kong . . . There can be no doubt that it is real, particularly among the professional and middle classes. Even so, the scale should not be overstated. We should remember that Hong Kong has had a tradition of emigration throughout its history. In the early 1970s the numbers emigrating were higher than they have been in the last few years."—[*Official Report*, 15 July 1988; Vol. 137, c. 702.]

The latest figures show that, whereas in 1989—which included the six months following the Tiananmen square massacre—those emigrating from Hong Kong numbered 42,000, in 1988 the number emigrating was 3,800 higher, at 45,800. I do not seek to minimise the understandable apprehension caused in Hong Kong by the massacre but it was always inevitable—even without such horrific events—that there would be substantial emigration as 1997 approached. The Bill will not stem that emigration; it will give it added impetus.

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): The right hon. Gentleman seems to be suggesting that people who obtain passports will come here as quickly as they can. Is he aware that, since last July, the Singapore Government have accepted applications from 17,000 heads of household in Hong Kong, of whom 600—just 3·5 per cent.—have taken up passports? Is it not likely that the same would occur here?

Mr. Kaufman: The fact is that China will not take over Hong Kong until 1 July 1997, so there will be a considerable period during which passports will be available after the Bill is passed. All the indications are that the impetus will be there for those who are awarded the passports to use them for travel while the Chinese Government will not prevent them from doing so.

Mr. Budgen: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kaufman: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, but after that I hope that the House will forgive me if I impose a moratorium on interventions.

Mr. Budgen: I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will deal with the Opposition's important motion proposing that the Bill should be committed to a Committee of the whole House if it gets its Second Reading. He will reflect that the House recently spent four days debating the Budget, which is likely to be a matter of transitory interest within two or three months. The Bill will affect the whole country for a generation. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will do his best to persuade as many right hon. and hon. Members as possible that it would be a grave abuse of Parliament were the Bill merely pushed upstairs into a Standing Committee.

Mr. Kaufman: This is a constitutional Bill dealing with nationality, and I should have thought that the Government would volunteer to have it dealt with by a Committee of the whole House. The Government not having done that, I am surprised that the Liberal Democrats—the Liberal party was once a great constitutional party—should be voting with them to smother debate on the Bill.

There are some Conservative Members who seek to use the possible arrival in Britain of those holding passports under the Bill to provoke a racist scare. Any debate on Tory manifesto pledges on immigration must be a matter for disputation on the Conservative Benches; it is no concern of ours. The Opposition are concerned about the serious and unfair distortion of immigration policy that the Bill will bring about.

It is no good saying that the Bill does not have an immigration policy aspect. Let me tell the House about my constituent, Koon Tai Chan, a Hong Kong Chinese about whom I have received a letter from the Manchester law centre only this week. He is the brother of a British citizen, the husband of a British citizen and the father of a baby born here. He is at present subject to a deportation order. Unless the Home Secretary relents, which so far he shows no sign of doing, Koon Tai Chan will soon be permanently separated from his wife and child and sent back to Hong Kong. The only way in which his British family can stay united with their husband and father is to accompany him to Hong Kong—a place whose future the Government regard as so precarious that they propose to provide a lifebelt under the Bill for 225,000 of the colony's most influential and affluent citizens.

Koon Tai Chan is not essential to Hong Kong's business life or administration; he is simply a cook. The Home Secretary would no doubt add that, as an overstayer under the terms of the Immigration Act, he is what the Home Office calls a "bad case". To me, Koon Tai Chan, with a British wife and a child in my constituency, is a better "case" than all those who will receive passports under the Bill, and there is no way that I propose to agree to the passage of a statute that will perpetuate—indeed, make far worse—the heartless injustices of the Government's immigration policies.

Such injustices apply to citizens and residents of this country originating not only from Hong Kong, but from the Indian sub-continent and from other areas as well. Those who will get passports under the Bill will not have to submit to DNA testing, to humiliating medical examinations or to the primary purpose rule. They will not be subjected to offensive questioning of the kind that I heard in the immigration department of the British high commission in New Delhi last week. A man who wanted to come here for a short visit to attend a wedding was subjected to a catechism that included inquiries about how many acres of land he rented and what the annual return was on that land.

The people who receive passports under this Bill will not have to wait hours in a hut for an interview, as did an Indian university professor last week at the New Delhi high commission. Under this Bill, if he was a Hong Kong Chinese, he would probably get enough points to qualify for a British passport. However, as an Indian, he had to wait for hours simply to plead for a tourist visa.

In any case, the Bill is not even increasing confidence among its prospective beneficiaries. While awaiting publication of the Bill, Dame Lydia Dunn of OMELCO stated on 4 July last year that the creation of categories would be divisive and difficult to defend. She said that the creation of such categories would make it more difficult to govern Hong Kong. I am baffled as to why she has gone back on a series of such statements.

Many of her fellow residents of Hong Kong continue to be uninspired by the Bill. A trade union leader, Lee Chuk-Yan, said:

> "It gives one more choice to people who already have lots of choices. It gives nothing to those who have no choice."

An opinion poll in Hong Kong a few weeks ago showed that 90 per cent. of executives, professionals and entrepreneurs—the people whom this scheme is designed to impress—doubt whether the package will achieve its objective, while 86 per cent. of younger Hong Kong residents regard the passport plan as irrelevant.

Rev. Lo Long-Kwong who leads a group called "Hong Kong People Saving Hong Kong" said of the Bill:

> "It is unbalanced and people who do not fall within these categories will feel deserted and unimportant. This does not help the whole society to face the confidence crisis."

A scheme that divides employees in both the private and public sectors into selected and rejected will make the colony harder, not easier, to run.

I cannot understand the Home Secretary's argument that the 96 per cent. of the Hong Kong population who will not qualify will somehow gain confidence from the knowledge that 4 per cent. of their wealthier and more influential compatriots are to be passengers on Waddington's ark.

No doubt it is that adverse reaction among alleged beneficiaries that led the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonealth Office, the hon. Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. Maude), to indulge in Hong Kong last week in his comedy performance, when he went around blithely promising Hong Kong residents passports from West Germany, Belgium, Canada, Australia, France, Luxembourg and numerous other countries, amounting to 50,000 passports in all. All the countries concerned instantly repudiated what the Minister of State had said.

For example, the West German Government stated with some perplexity that the Minister of State's statement was "a strange thing". More curtly they describe it as nonsense. No wonder the Minister of State gave journalists a telling off for what he called

> "interpreting the syntax in an excessively fastidious way."

It seems that the Minister of State picked up his strange ideas from reading newspapers—a method of acquiring information that the Prime Minister would certainly not recommend. We are told that the Foreign Secretary will deal with that subject when he replies tonight. I hope that any information that he has for the House is more firmly based. The fact is that the Government's policy has been an inconsistent mess.

Mr. Couchman *rose*——

Mr. Ian Bruce *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kaufman: I give way to the hon. Member for Dorset (Mr. Bruce).

Mr. Bruce: Whether it is true or not, the people of Hong Kong believe that the Labour party would take away the right of abode in the United Kingdom from people for whom that was included in their passports. It would be helpful if the right hon. Gentleman could state whether that would be Labour policy.

Mr. Kaufman: That is a useful intervention and I shall certainly respond to it. [HON. MEMBERS: "When?"] Now —at this moment. When the Foreign Secretary made his statement about the scheme on 20 December, I said:

> "If the scheme is embodied in an Act, a Labour Government, on coming to office, will examine how far it has gone and how it has worked . . . A Labour Goverment will not be bound to continue it".—[*Official Report*, 20 December 1989; Vol. 164, c. 366.]

By that we mean, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) repeated earlier, that we shall of course observe the law as passed by Parliament, but as the Bill expressly provides for alterations to the scheme of allocation, I am sure that the Government would not abdicate the right to alter the scheme, and neither shall we. That is our position.

Mr. Marlow: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kaufman: No I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman; I am afraid that he is rising to be helpful, which I should much prefer him not to be.

On the one hand, the Foreign and Commonweath Secretary offends the Chinese by the passport scheme, but in every other way the Government cosy up to them and bend the knee to them.

When, immediately after the Tiananmen square massacre, I urged the present Leader of the House, then the Foreign Secretary, to cut off Government funding for a trade mission that was soon to go to China, the right hon. and learned Gentleman called in aid

> "the advancement of the cause of respect for human rights in China—[*Official Report*, 12 July 1989; Vol. 156, c. 967].

as justification for the Department of Trade and Industry financing a mission that was planned to meet the man who gave the orders for the massacre.

Then, in September, I revealed the breach of the Government's own arms embargo on China with the sale of head-up displays and radar equipment for use with Mig fighter planes. We all know that, a couple of weeks ago, the Prime Minister slipped out of Downing street to attend a private dinner with the Chinese ambassador at his embassy. What signal was that cosy social occasion meant to send to the people of Hong Kong?

The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have long been determined to "converge"—to use the fashionable word—with China at all costs. The most unforgivable sell-out has been on progress in establishing democracy in Hong Kong. I state clearly that, in the past, Governments of both parties have had a sorry record on this issue. My hon. Friends the Members for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) and for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing), as well as the right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson), were right about that. Both parties have failed to give Hong Kong citizens the right directly to elect their Legislative Council. I readily acknowledge the culpability of past Labour Governments on that matter.

However, with the signing of the joint declaration in 1984, a new opportunity arose for direct democracy in the colony. We in the Labour party joined representatives from Hong Kong in urging the holding of elections. The present Leader of the House brushed aside our plea for elections to begin in 1988 and eventually announced that only 10 Members—18 per cent.—of the Legislative Council would be elected in 1991.

After the Tiananmen square massacre, we urged the Government to give confidence to the people of Hong Kong by speedily increasing the number of Legislative Council Members who were to be elected. When, in June last year, the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs recommended that 50 per cent. of the Legislative Council should be directly elected in 1991 and 100 per cent. in 1995, on behalf of the Labour party I gave immediate support to that recommendation.

When representatives of OMELCO came to Britain this January and called for one third of the Legislative Council to be elected in 1991, 50 per cent. in 1995 and 100 per cent. in 2003, we supported their case, although it was a retreat from our position and that of the Select Committee. Indeed, the present Leader of the House, when speaking to the House last June, seemed to favour OMELCO's 2003 target for 100 per cent. direct elections. [HON. MEMBERS: "What about the policy?"] We shall come to the policy.

When, after eight months of procrastination, the present Foreign Secretary announced the Government's decision in February it was for only 18 directly elected Members next year—less than a third—followed by a third in 1995 and 100 per cent. not in 2003 but possibly in 2007. As was made clear by the Home Secretary's response to the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), the Government have sold out to Hong Kong on democracy by making a deal with those same Chinese to whom they finance trade missions, break their embargo and sell arms and with whom the Prime Minister secretly dines. Now, as a fig leaf to conceal that sell-out, they have put forward this muddled, self-contradictory and discriminatory Bill.

The Bill does everything for the most favoured. For useful citizens such as social workers——

Mr. Tebbit: I sensed that the right hon. Gentleman was coming to the end of his speech, having given himself very little time to say exactly how his policy would work. His right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) said that the Labour party

[Mr. Tebbit]

had defined the categories of Hong Kong citizens whom it would admit. The right hon. Gentleman must know how many that amounts to. What is the number?

Mr. Kaufman: The Cabinet has played a numbers game within itself—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] For his own purposes, the right hon. Gentleman is also playing the numbers game. We refuse to play a numbers game on immigration. We say that the Bill offers nothing to useful citizens such as social workers, or to students who risk Chinese wrath by demonstrating for democracy as they did only a few days ago. It does nothing for trade unionists, who are always at risk from authoritarian regimes. It does nothing for specific groups which will undoubtedly be disadvantaged by Chinese rule.

The Opposition believe that action is necessary but that it should be action far different from that contained in the Bill. We agree with the Select Committee that the right of abode in Britain should be given to the Hong Kong ethnic non-Chinese, the Indians. We would give them an effective right of abode with a nationality, something that the Government have not done.

Although we cannot accept the Select Committee's recommendation of limited relaxation of United Kingdom immigration law, we agree that the Home Secretary's discretion under section 4(5) of the British Nationality Act 1981 should be used generously on an individual basis to confer British citizenship on public servants who might be at risk. We would also use the Home Secretary's discretion on an individual basis to allow entry for certain other people who might be at risk under Chinese rule, such as trade unionists, journalists and political activists.

We do not believe that it is possible to obtain or offer definite international guarantees, such as those proposed by the Select Committee, for British dependent territory passport holders, but we agree that international discussions should take place with a view to obtaining assurances about policy in the event of a crisis after Hong Kong is transferred to China in 1997. Above all, we do not accept the Government's agenda or that of their opponents on their own Benches which creates the impression that the Hong Kong issue revolves solely around immigration and nationality issues.

We believe that confidence in the colony among the overwhelming mass of the population who are certain to remain there after China takes over must be buttressed and reinforced in other significant ways. That is why a Labour Government on coming to office will look positively at the position and, as time allows, at the possibility of increasing the number of directly elected Members on the Legislative Council. It is not enough simply to keep the colony in satisfactory working order for Chinese sovereignty.

We, accepting the limitations of our power, assert that, until midnight on 30 June 1997, the United Kingdom remains the sovereign power in Hong Kong and should act accordingly. We do not see doling out a number of passports, as provided in the Bill, as a proper, let alone sufficient, exercise of that power. It is a substitute for it. This is a bad Bill, and we shall vote against it.

9.40 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): As often happens when discussions take place across party lines, this has been a good, robust debate. It is remarkable that until 8·30 pm, although we had a string of Labour speeches, not one from the Back Benches was in support of the party line. Having just heard it, we can understand the reasons for that.

We are grateful for the solid, shrewd support of my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, South (Sir P. Blaker), my hon. Friends the Members for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Forman), for Lewisham, West (Mr. Maples) and for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes), who went to Hong Kong, saw the position for himself and changed his mind, and of my right hon. Friends the Members for Southend, West (Mr. Channon) and for Guildford (Mr. Howell), who has long experience of these matters. I listened carefully to the critical speeches from my hon. Friends and to the criticisms in the speeches of our supporters.

The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) asked about heads of households. That simply means the individual selected under the scheme who will be eligible for registration. In theory, a husband and wife could both apply, but only one would be awarded citizenship as the principal beneficiary. He asked about character checks on children. I think that he was confusing the immigration rules, where character would not be an impediment, and the provision in the Bill, which has parallels elsewhere, that a character requirement is relevant for citizenship. If one thinks of a 17-year-old with a criminal record, one can see the reasons for that.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West pressed my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary about the widows of British citizens. In *Hansard* tomorrow he will see that my right hon. and learned Friend covered the point, but if he is dissatisfied, no doubt he will pursue it. The hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) and the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore)—I am sorry that I missed both speeches—asked specifically about vulnerable people, such as political activists and journalists. They are covered by the group 3 undertakings and would be eligible under the sensitive services scheme which is part of the Bill.

One of the main themes of the debate has been our relationship with China. My right hon. Friends the Members for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) and for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) all touched on that. We must tread a tightrope in our dealings with the People's Republic of China over Hong Kong. We stay in close touch with China and I make no apology for that. We seek to influence China and I agree that in that respect we have a big task ahead of us. We have no wish to pick quarrels with the Chinese or to complicate the transition to the eventual transfer of power. The constitutional arrangements for the start of the democratic process in Hong Kong next year showed that policy of ours in action. We were much criticised and have been again today by the Opposition and the press in London for reaching an understanding with the Chinese on that point. Yet my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford supported me on that occasion, as did other sensible people. I think that we were right. The House should not take it that, between now and 1997, we will simply listen to every view from Peking, whether whispered or shouted, and then follow it. We did not act in that way on the constitutional question, as those who followed it know, and we shall not act in that way on the nationality question.

We are using many means to persuade the Chinese of our good faith and good sense in putting forward the Bill. Once they see that a spoiling exercise will not succeed I hope that they will come round to share our view of the Bill's merits. The truth of the matter is that we must act between now and 1997 on the judgments that we, as trustees for Hong Kong, make on what is best for Hong Kong. I do not believe that the House would wish it otherwise.

The right hon. Members for Sparkbrook and for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) came back to the issue of democracy. I believe that the policy that they now advocate is unreal. Compared with the White Paper of 1988, we have speeded up our plans, as the right hon. Member for Gorton acknowledged, for democratic reform. In the past few months, the Government had to choose to make a steady start towards democracy in the Legislative Council next year in a way that will be sustained and improved by the Basic Law after 1997. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford that we should look for opportunities for improvement before then, for example, in 1995. The choice was between making a start next year in a way that could be sustained and improved or starting next year at a higher level, which would have been immediately denounced and eventually reversed by the People's Republic of China. The more I think about it, the more I think we were right in our conclusion and that view is increasingly shared in Hong Kong.

It has been argued that the attitude of the People's Republic of China to the Bill will make the scheme unworkable. We have taken pains to explain to the Chinese that the main objective of the scheme is to stem the exodus of talented and enterprising people from Hong Kong and thus maintain Hong Kong's stability and prosperity. That is one of our obligations under the joint declaration. The provisions of the joint declaration and the Basic Law state that British and other foreign nationals may continue to serve in or be recruited to all but a small number of top posts in the future Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government. China is willing—it is in the Basic Law—to accept that up to 20 per cent. of the Legislative Council after 1997 can be foreign passport holders.

The right hon. Member for Gorton referred to recent statements by the Chinese on consular protection. We shall ensure that the interests of British citizens will be protected to the fullest possible extent under international law. The joint declaration and the Basic Law provide that people in the SAR after 1997 will have the full protection of the law, including basic human rights as enshrined in the international covenant on civil and political rights and the international covenant on economic, social and cultural rights.

The question is whether Hong Kong people are free to come and go as they please. Freedom of movement is guaranteed by the joint declaration and the Basic Law and they provide that Hong Kong people

> "may use travel documents issued by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, or by other competent authorities of the People's Republic of China, or of other states."

I promised to deal with the question of international support. Hong Kong is an international centre and it has huge international investment, and its major trading partners have a strong interest in its continuing stability and prosperity. On that basis, some countries, already of their own volition, have started to provide such international support and we have encouraged others to do so. Singapore has already introduced a scheme covering up to 25,000 heads of household. Within the European Community France has already implemented a scheme to provide for the right of entry to employees of French companies and their families. In the past few days the Belgian Government have announced a similar scheme and Germany and Luxembourg are finalising schemes broadly of the same nature. The House may know of the proposal being considered by the United States Congress that would enable Hong Kong people granted the right to settle in the United States, up to 20,000 a year, to defer settlement there until 2002. Such measures, whether they are specifically tailored to Hong Kong or reflect the general immigration policies of the countries concerned, are helpful. Taken together, they could already add substantially to the impact of our scheme.

A number of Governments are still considering schemes—this is a continuing effort on our part, and, we hope, on theirs. However, it should be clear to the House that, while it was right for us to take the lead, our scheme will have substantial backing from others. If the Bill were to fall, as *The Times* leading article said today, others' efforts would also be liable to fall.

British citizens from Hong Kong will have exactly the same rights as any other Community country citizen to work and settle in any part of the European Community. I have been asked about that. When we speak about those who might come here from Hong Kong as a result of the Bill, by "here" we mean not just Britain, but anywhere in the EC. We can imagine that a sizeable proportion of those who come will go to other EC countries.

I shall refer next to the main thrust of criticism from my right hon. and hon. Friends who have spoken against the Bill. I think that they would accept that in the past four months I have never joined in any criticism of Conservative Members who criticised our proposals, because I strongly endorse the need for firm but fair immigration controls. I believe, to quote our manifesto, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford did, that firm, fair immigration controls are essential for harmonious and improving community relations. I have not only preached that policy, but practised it, in contrast to the right hon. Members for Sparkbrook and for Gorton. Both my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and I have worked on such matters before.

The Immigration Act 1988, put through by the Home Office, tightened the controls in the way that we promised in 1987. Consideration of immigration control has been in our mind throughout this discussion, but there is another consideration that was not there in 1987, because the 1987 election was fought before the events in Tiananmen square. The further consideration is the need to keep Hong Kong going, as our last big colony, at the level of prosperity and stability that the British interests and reputation require. We have had to reconcile those two considerations.

We decided that, due to the first consideration, we could not accept the advice of the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown), which he repeated today, and let in all the 3·25 million British dependent territories citizens——

Mr. Ashdown: We would not be letting them in.

Mr. Hurd: —or rather, give them right of abode. We decided that that option was not compatible with our stand on immigration control. We decided that, due to the second consideration—what one might call the Tiananmen consideration—we could not say a flat no to Hong Kong.

I readily agree, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon said, that a compromise has emerged in the Bill. It is criticised by some as going too far, and by others as not going far enough. I think, as did my hon. Friend, that we have probably got it about right.

If we had sat back, said nothing, failed to produce a Bill, and said that it was all too difficult, and if our other policies had failed and Hong Kong had degenerated into chaos and anarchy, we might have faced a refugee problem that neither law nor administration could prevent. People could have come and claimed asylum as refugees, conceivably on a scale that would make the present measure look small.

I can understand Opposition Back Benchers who genuinely favour a massive liberalisation of our immigration laws. I have listened to them for four years. I do not agree with them, but I respect their point of view. However, why is it that the Opposition Front Benchers, having voted time and again for the relaxation of particular aspects of immigration law, oppose the Bill? Is it because the people who are being offered passports are the Queen's subjects in our last big colony, rather than citizens of an independent Commonwealth country? Surely the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook can see the difference between our attitude to them and to a Sikh wishing to come from the Punjab, the stability and prosperity of which is a matter of interest to us, but for which we do not have the responsibility that we have for those in our last big colony of Hong Kong.

Mr. Hattersley: The responsibility that I believe we have in the case that I cited is to the British woman living in Britain who has a right to be united with her husband but is denied it by the Government.

Mr. Hurd: The record will show that the right hon. Gentleman equated anxiety about the position in the Punjab with anxiety about the position in Hong Kong.

Is the opposition to the Bill on the part of Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen because these are professional people who we hope will stay in Hong Kong but who, if they came to Europe, would make a strong and immediate contribution to our society? Is it because some of them work successfully in a capitalist society or in public services of high reputation? Why do Labour Front-Bench spokesmen discriminate against those key people in Hong Kong? It makes no sense in terms of the principles that I am accustomed to hearing from the Opposition; it makes sense only in terms of an unprincipled effort to embarrass the Government.

The mask of the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook slipped when he accused my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary of seeking to preserve his racist credentials. The mask slipped and a nasty little bit of prejudice peeped out.

It is not true to say that the scheme will be of no benefit to the whole community in Hong Kong, which wants the public services, the prosperity and the stability of the colony to be maintained. The whole population of Hong Kong has an interest in the success of the scheme.

The right hon. Members for Sparkbrook and for Gorton were both continuously pressed by Conservative Members about numbers, but as they dodged the missiles it became clear what they would propose. I do not know which right hon. Gentleman would occupy this never-never land, but one of them would come to the House with a series of complicated propositions about immigration from Hong Kong without giving the House any idea of the numbers involved. But numbers are important when making judgments on any matter to do with immigration control.

What would the Opposition have said, what would the uproar have been, if we had produced the Bill without including numbers in it? We decided to grasp this difficulty, to fix a total and to put it on the face of the Bill, where it now is. That is the honest and straightforward way to set about a difficult problem of this sort, and it contrasts favourably with the weasly way in which the Opposition propose to set about it——

Mr. Janman *rose*——

Mr. Hurd: Adjectives such as divisive, elitist and privileged which have peppered the Bill in Opposition speeches were, I am told, effectively dealt with by the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney. Of course a selective scheme has to select. Any process of selection, examination or even election separates those who succeed from those who do not—so much is inevitable. There is disappointment among the people who do not succeed, but I repeat that the services, the jobs, the success and the stability that we are seeking to maintain in Hong Kong benefit the whole community, not just those who get passports.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Sir J. Stokes) greatly exaggerated my influence in this matter, as I assure him historians will record. He sought to draw a contrast between the interests of Britain and those of Hong Kong, but on a material point they are closely linked. Hong Kong is one of our largest overseas markets. Our trade with it, at £4 billion a year, makes it our largest export market in Asia after Japan, and the gross stock market value of British-owned, controlled or managed companies in Hong Kong has been estimated at about £20 billion. So an impoverished Hong Kong would be bad news for jobs and prosperity in this country.

The basic point, however, is that this is not a Bill for millionaires. In this world my experience is that millionaires tend to be able to look after themselves. The Bill is apt to the particular character of Hong Kong, which is a capitalist society, owing its success largely to that fact and to the Chinese genius for making a success of institutions of this kind. But it works only because it is allied to high public standards within the public and the private sectors. It is the combination of free enterprise and high standards—British standards—which has made Hong Kong a success and which the Bill's aim is to maintain by keeping in Hong Kong those responsible for the high standards.

The Bill will serve not only those who obtain the passports but all those who benefit from the standards. We do not want those standards to run down. We do not want our last big colony to end in second rate shabbiness. This is a case where our interests and our reputation run together. The Bill is not the whole answer; it is an essential part of the answer, and I commend it to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 313, Noes 216.

Division No. 163] **[10.00 pm**

AYES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Alton, David
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cartwright, John
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*

Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fallon, Michael
Faulds, Andrew
Favell, Tony
Fearn, Ronald
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*

Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kennedy, Charles
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*

Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Salmond, Alex
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Sillars, Jim
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Wallace, James

Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Alastair Goodlad and
Mr. Tony Durant.

NOES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Adley, Robert
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Aspinwall, Jack
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bevan, David Gilroy
Bidwell, Sydney
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boyes, Roland
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Budgen, Nicholas
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Corbett, Robin
Cran, James
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Dover, Den
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evennett, David
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Farr, Sir John
Fatchett, Derek
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gardiner, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Gill, Christopher
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Irvine, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Knapman, Roger
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudd, David
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Patchett, Terry
Pawsey, James
Pike, Peter L.
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shersby, Michael
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stokes, Sir John
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Thorne, Neil
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Ward, John
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ray Powell and
Mr. John McFall.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put, That the Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House.—*[Mr. Hattersley.]*

The House divided: Ayes 213, Noes 328.

Division No. 164] **[10.14 pm**

AYES

Adams, Allen *(Paisley N)*
Adley, Robert
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Bendall, Vivian
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Bevan, David Gilroy
Bidwell, Sydney
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blair, Tony
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Buchan, Norman
Buckley, George J.
Budgen, Nicholas
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Tom *(Monklands W)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank

Doran, Frank
Dover, Den
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gardiner, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Gill, Christopher
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janman, Tim
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max

Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Miller, Sir Hal
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mudd, David
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Redmond, Martin
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Stanbrook, Ivor
Steinberg, Gerry
Stern, Michael
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas

Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ray Powell,
Mr. John McFall.

NOES

Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Alton, David
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Tom *(Hazel Grove)*
Ashby, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cartwright, John
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*

Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fearn, Ronald
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Gow, Ian
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Griffiths, Sir Eldon *(Bury St E')*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hannam, John
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hunt, David *(Wirral W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*

Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kennedy, Charles
Key, Robert
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
Maclennan, Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Miscampbell, Norman

Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Owen, Rt Hon Dr David
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Portillo, Michael
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Wyn *(Conwy)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Salmond, Alex
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sillars, Jim
Sims, Roger
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas

Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stradling Thomas, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian

Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Wallace, James
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Alastair Goodlad and
Mr. Tony Durant.

Question accordingly negatived.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

10.27 pm

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I think that it is generally understood that the main political parties have been on a three-line Whip this evening. Obviously, when a vote involves almost the entire membership of the House, a large number of hon. Members are to be seen milling around, looking for the right Lobby in which to vote. I myself saw several Labour Members in the wrong Lobby during out first Division. I wonder whether you, Sir, might try to ensure that at least some control is exercised at the entrance to the Lobby in such circumstances so that Opposition Members know where they are going.

Mr. Speaker: The Lobby in which hon. Members vote and the way in which they cast their vote are not matters for me.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): On a similar and related point of order, Mr. Speaker. Has the Leader of the Opposition made any request to you to be allowed to make a statement about the enormous rebellion in his ranks that has so depleted the Opposition's voting numbers?

Mr. Speaker: That has never been my responsibility.

British Nationality (Hong Kong) Bill [Money]

Queen's Recommendation having been signified—

Motion made and Question proposed,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the British Nationality (Hong Kong) Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(a) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any administrative expenses incurred by the Secretary of State under that Act;

(b) payments into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

10.29 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate, especially as it concerns the allocation of additional resources for the purpose of immigration control. I listened carefully to what the Foreign Secretary had to say about the operation of immigration control under the Government. It is right to place the Bill in the context of the Government's approach to immigration control over the past 10 years —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will hon. Members not remaining for the debate on the money resolution please leave the Chamber quietly?

Mr. Vaz: The Foreign Secretary and the Home Secretary seemed unaware of the misery, anxiety and distress caused by the Government's immigration and nationality policy.

I had an opportunity recently to see the way in which the Government have failed to provide the necessary allocation of resources to solve the problems in posts abroad. In particular, I refer to the position in Bombay, Karachi, Islamabad and Dhaka. I wonder whether the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department has visited, as I have, the Mahatma Gandhi building in Bombay. I visited that building a month ago and found that people who want to apply for entry clearance, not just to come here as visitors, but——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This debate is about Hong Kong.

Mr. Vaz: Indeed it is. We are debating the money resolution and my argument is that the allocation of resources for this Bill will have a direct effect on the way in which the Government conduct immigration policy. My argument falls within the scope of the money resolution because resources will be denied to those who want to apply to come to his country from other posts.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The money resolution refers to this Bill, not to any other immigration measure.

Mr. Vaz: Indeed, Mr. Speaker. However, my argument is that the money that will be allocated for this Bill should be allocated for other purposes of immigration control to ease the burden on people who apply to come to this country from other posts. I want to refer to the position in Peking which will be directly affected by the Government's proposals.

If the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department was to visit Bombay—as I did—he would note that people who want to make applications must arrive at the building at 6 am. When I arrived at 10 am there were more than 400 people waiting to be interviewed by the immigration authorities. By 11 am——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): I am finding it very difficult to relate the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the money resolution. Can he tell me and the House how his remarks relate to the money resolution?

Mr. Vaz: Certainly, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The resolution concerns the allocation of resources for a piece of legislation to do with immigration control. My argument is quite simple. If that money is to be made available for the British Nationality (Hong Kong) Bill, it should also be available for other aspects of immigration——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. No, the hon. Gentleman must remain within the terms of reference of the money resolution, which refers to administrative expenses. His remarks must be directed to that in relation to the Bill.

Mr. Vaz: I am sure that the Government would accept that if money is being made available——

Mr. Jeremy Hanley: (Richmond and Barnes): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Vaz: No, I will not give way.

If money is being made available in this money resolution to make it easier for people to come here from Hong Kong, administrative expenses should be made available in other posts. That is my argument. I hope that the Government will be able to provide those extra resources.

Mr. Hanley: The hon. Gentleman may not be aware of the fact that five years ago I visited the building in Bombay that he has described. I was part of a delegation that was so ably led by my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler). Does the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) agree that for every category of immigration applicant, the numbers waiting now are less than half what they were and that the queues have shrunk beyond all recognition——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should not try to lead further astray the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), who is doing his best to keep within the terms of the money resolution and the guidance that I have given.

Mr. Vaz: I am doing my best, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I shall not be tempted down the road suggested by the hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley), who is well aware that the queues in Bombay currently stand at six months for people who wish to apply to join spouses in this country——

Mr. Hanley: It was 18 months before.

Mr. Vaz: I shall not be tempted down that road. The wait is six months in Bombay and a good deal longer elsewhere.

The situation in Peking will be affected by the money resolution, especially for those who seek to come to Britain through Peking and have to be referred to Hong Kong. I am speaking specifically about the case of my constituent, Mr. Peter Flack, a British citizen who went to China as a teacher, seconded by his local authority—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] If Conservative Members will contain themselves,

[Mr. Vaz]

I shall try to explain how Mr. Flack's position is directly dependent on the money resolution. If additional resources are to be provided for Hong Kong, will the situation of persons in Mr. Flack's position—a British citizen who is married to a Chinese citizen—be improved? Currently, a case that is dealt with in Peking must first be referred to Hong Kong. In this case, Peng Ling, Mr. Flack's wife—who was involved to some extent in the uprisings in Tiananmen square—could not make an application to go to Hong Kong from China. She first had to apply to join Mr. Flack through the British embassy in Peking. She was told that she would have to wait from March 1990 until November 1990 to get an interview.

I hope that in his reply the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department will tell us whether, under the terms of the money resolution, he will allocate resources to process those cases more speedily. It is my contention that for someone to wait for eight months to join a British citizen in this country is an onerous length of time—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman again, but he must not invite the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department to go out of order. I shall be a little more specific because I realise that money resolutions are not always easy to understand. This money resolution refers specifically to clause 4(1) and (2), dealing with administrative expenses. Any remarks within that scope will be in order, but any remarks outside would be an abuse of our Standing Orders.

Mr. Vaz: I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am drawing my remarks to a conclusion. The administrative expenses that are provided for in clause 4 and in the money resolution should also be used to deal with the scandalous delays at Lunar house in Croydon. The Government are still unable to complete the task that they began in 1981 and to clear the backlogs. I very much hope that some of these resources will be directed to that effect.

10.37 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): You will know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that unlike one of my hon. Friends who also represents the city of Bradford, I do not have the same propensity for speaking on money resolutions. Nevertheless, as I contributed to the Second Reading debate, during which there were numerous references to the financial administration of the Bill, I should like to ask the Under-Secretary of State a number of questions that I hope he can answer. If not, I should be grateful if he would write to me, because there will be considerable interest in several aspects of the Bill.

One of the difficulties that now arises from the Government's decision to resist committal of the Bill to a Committee of the whole House is that many hon. Members will be anxious to raise matters relating to the Bill, but will not be members of the Standing Committee, and will therefore have great difficulty in getting the information that they will need to answer the numerous inquiries that we shall all undoubtedly receive.

As you have said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, clause 4 provides that the Hong Kong Government will pay the Home Office for the costs of the administrative provisions of the Bill and the Act, if the Bill is enacted. Paragraph 38 of the explanatory note states that the scheme would be financed by fees paid for by applicants for consideration under it and by extra fees paid for registration by successful applicants.

It is my view, which I am sure is shared by many others, that it is unacceptable that people should have to pay even to have their applications for full British citizenship put into the hat or lottery by which applicants will be considered under the scheme. There is no indication of what the fee for entering one's application will be, but as it is expected that the additional cost will be about £800,000 per annum, clearly it could be substantial.

I hope that the Minister will tell us what the application fee will be and that, if the application is not successful, the application fee will be refunded. I hope that he will also tell us what the registration fee will be for applicants who are successful in the lottery. On Second Reading, my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) referred to the staff implications projected in the explanatory note. We all share his amazement at the suggestion that only seven extra staff will be needed to process the estimated half a million applications. That assumes a much higher level of productivity than the Home Office nationality division, which has 361 staff in Croydon and Liverpool and processed 70,800 citizenship applications in 1988.

It is stated that the majority of places would be distributed in the first tranche as quickly as administrative processes in Hong Kong permitted. The Hong Kong immigration department is already very busy. I can bear testimony to that, because I have had discussions with the director of administration for the scheme. He is well aware of the enormous administrative burdens that will be placed on him and his staff under the scheme.

If the scheme is to be administered with the speed that Mr. Donald Tsang, the director of administration, intends —he told me last week that he hopes to have the first passports in the hands of applicants by the end of this year or early next year—many of us are worried that the projected staff implications set out in the explanatory note may not be realistic. I strongly suggest that the Minister make urgent inquiries into the staff implications in his explanatory note. Many of us believe that it would be wholly impossible for the targets that the Hong Kong administration has set to be met.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) made clear, the scheme has direct implications for the granting of British citizenship here to people who now have to wait two years and one month on average for the granting of British citizenship. Many of us would be worried if further resources were stripped from the British nationality division in Croydon and Liverpool to help deal with the flood of applications anticipated in Hong Kong.

We should be anxious if there were any suggestion that the fees that applicants here for British citizenship have to pay will be increased still further. We should be worried if the burdens on the Hong Kong administration were underestimated by the British Government in the Bill and the explanatory note, and resulted in even longer delays than our constituents now experience in obtaining British nationality.

The Under-Secretary of State will need to consider my final point, and I should be grateful if he could write to me about it. On Second Reading, several hon. Members, including me, referred to the urgent need for several reforms of the scheme which would have important implications for cost and the level of administration. We referred to the urgent need to introduce both a right of explanation and a right of appeal for applicants who are refused British citizenship under the proposed scheme.

Obviously, more administration will be required if applicants are to be told why their applications are refused and if an effective and comprehensive right of appeal is introduced. The Government will be pressed hard in Committee on those matters. In readiness for our debates, they should have clear information about how the administration would need to be improved to facilitate the suggestions that many hon. Members have made in tonight's debate and what the implications would be for the financial package.

I should be grateful if the Under-Secretary could tell us what the application fee and the registration fee will be for those who are granted British citizenship, and if he could give some indication of what contingency arrangements have been made to facilitate the improvements to which I have referred. Can he give information to justify what many of us believe is a ludicrously low estimate for the additional staff requirements, which the Government believe to be just seven extra officers?

Those are important matters, and I apologise for delaying the House. For the reasons that I have given about the inability of the vast majority of Members to participate in the Committee proceedings, it is important that we have answers tonight or early letters in reply.

10.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): The hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) has placed me in some difficulty, as you made clear to him, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because the Bill deals only with Hong Kong. It is difficult to reply to his points. I shall not mention that the queues in the Indian subcontinent are much shorter than in 1979 when we came to office, nor that there was a further sharp fall last year compared with 1988 because we had increased the number of entry clearance officers. However, I can set his mind at rest on the matter of cost. It will not affect immigration activities in any other way because the cost will be met by the Hong Kong Government, as the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), who seems better briefed, said.

The hon. Member for Bradford, West wondered at what level the fees would be set. We do not know because they will be set by the governor when the Bill is on the statute book, as we hope. I am certain that he will want to set the fees at a level that is reasonable for those who will apply. I am interested that the hon. Gentleman is worried about this subject. According to most Opposition Members whom I have heard, only very rich people in Hong Kong need apply. The hon. Gentleman has a principled approach and I know from his comments that he understands that many of those coming will not be wealthy, but will have skills and can make a large contribution.

The hon. Member for Bradford, West asked why only seven United Kingdom officials were mentioned in the explanatory and financial memorandum, which he considered was too small a number for the large exercise of processing all the applications. The seven officials who will be stationed in Hong Kong will not be responsible for administering or processing the scheme. They will be there to receive the recommendations of the governor on who should become British citizens, to satisfy themselves that the recommendees are of good character and, if they are, to register them as British citizens. Their job comes after the selection exercise has been carried through. We estimate that seven officials will be quite sufficient for the purpose as their job is not to administer the scheme, but to register those whom the scheme produces.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about charges and costs, and he is right that those questions will no doubt arise in Committee. He asked a specific question about appeals. We have never had appeals on questions of British nationality, only on rights of entry and abode. Basically we are dealing with nationality and I believe that a selective scheme of this nature is not susceptible to the appeal process. No doubt that matter will be discussed again in Committee.

I hope that the House has been helped by my short account of the factors that lie behind the estimates provided in the explanatory and financial memorandum. I hope that the House will support the motion.

Mr. Madden: I am grateful to the Minister and I thank him for his kind remarks about what I said. Unlike some of my colleagues, I believe that the Bill will open doors to non-European rights to nationality in this country for the first time in 30 years. I see it as a way to try to improve the overall standard of nationality and immigration procedures. In addition to the other points that I have raised in principle, can the Minister tell me whether the application fee, as opposed to the registration fee, will, in principle, be refunded to those applicants who fail to acquire British citizenship?

Mr. Lloyd: That is a matter for the governor, but I believe that he is not minded to do so.

Question put and agreed to.

PETITIONS

Human Embryo

10.52 pm

Sir Rhodes Boyson (Brent, North): I have the honour to present a petition on the protection of the human embryo from Father Tim O'Connor and 410 parishioners of St. George's church, Sudbury, in my constituency—a petition with which I entirely agree:

> Wherefore your Petitioners pray that the House of Commons will take immediate steps to enact legislation which forbids any procedure that involves purchase or sale of human embryos, the discarding or freezing of human embryos, their use as sources of transplant tissue, or as subjects for research or experiment (unless this is done solely for the benefit of the embryo concerned); and forbids all forms of trans-species fertilisation.
>
> And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): I want to present two petitions on the subject of the protection of the human embryo. The first is from the congregation and clergy of the Holy Name Roman Catholic church, Denham, Buckinghamshire and the second is from the congregation and clergy of Stoke Poges Roman Catholic church at St. Andrew's church centre, Rogers lane, Stoke Poges.

[Mr. Tim Smith]

The petitions are identical or similar to that presented by my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson).

To lie upon the Table.

Second Severn Crossing

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Fallon.]*

10.54 pm

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): This debate follows the Secretary of State for Transport's announcement on 4 April, in answer to a written question tabled by the hon. Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones), that he intends

> "to accept the proposal from the John Laing/GTM Entrepose consortium to design, build, finance and operate the second Severn bridge".—[*Official Report*, 4 April 1990; Vol. 170, c. *613*.]

With great respect to the hon. Member for Cardiff North, I must say that the project will not be constructed in the leafy suburbs of Cardiff. That leads me to my first point. The announcement was vital to Wales. It should have been made on the Floor of the House. The decision and the manner of the announcement are yet another illustration of the contempt in which Wales is held by the Government.

I do not want to bore the House, but my mind is drawn back to my first Adjournment debate on this subject—on 28 October 1983—when I revealed the contents of a previously secret report prepared by an eminent firm of consultant engineers, which said that the existing bridge was in a bad state.

Leaking the report gave impetus to the demand for a second Severn crossing. A few days later, the Welsh Labour group made an urgent request for a meeting with the then Secretary of State for Transport. When we met the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley), he told us in his own inimitable way that he would not dig another hole in the ground. Nevertheless, the crucial importance of a second crossing was recognised and the demand for it continued unabated.

Eventually, on 24 July 1986, the Secretary of State for Wales, in a statement to the House, gave the Government go-ahead. If I may be cynical for a moment, with their announcement of 4 April, at least the Government have stuck to the contention of the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury about not digging another hole in the ground. Rather, they have handed over the whole project and the existing bridge to a French-backed consortium. It is a shocking and disgusting decision. The Severn crossing is vital to the Welsh economy. It is our main access point. Much industrial and commercial activity depends on it. This Thatcher Government decision will not be forgotten in Wales for a long time.

Doubts are being expressed about the likely design of the bridge and its visual impact. It must blend into the landscape. What assurances can the Government give in that connection? On the English side, access points seem to have evolved into part three-lane and part two-lane dualling, provision being made to make the latter three-lane if the need arises. This is a mistake that could prove costly. It will mean bringing the contractors back some years hence. In addition, when there are difficulties on the existing bridge—there have been plenty in recent months—they will involve a wholesale diversion of traffic to the new bridge. A two-lane carriageway could not cope with such additional traffic. I urge the Government to think again.

There will be difficulties with motorway service areas. The new road schemes will make it impossible for many motorists to use the Aust service station. What plans do the Government have to deal with that?

Then there is the major issue of tolling policy. All the signs are that heavier and heavier tolls will be applied on both crossings. This is an additional tax on Wales, which is still a relatively depressed region. To put it mildly, it is most unfair. Both crossings should be in the public sector and toll-free.

The French-backed consortium will require a higher return on its investment, over a shorter period. That will necessitate higher tolls. That is the prospect for Welsh industry and commerce. Mr. Ian Kelsall of the Welsh CBI has been warned.

Some estimates seem to suggest that the cash flow for the consortium is unlikely to yield a profit until the year 2010. Such estimates are based on initial costs of opening of about £450 million, including the cost of the new crossing, finance charges and debt on the existing bridge. On top of that there could be annual costs of perhaps £80 million, including financing of debt, operating and maintenance costs. Assuming a flow of 25 million vehicles in 1995, the bridge could produce revenue of £40 million. It would seem, therefore, that the financial viability of the project rests on the assumption of a substantial increase in traffic from 1995 onwards.

There are a number of important questions to which answers from the Government are required. First, what assurance is there that tolls will be £1·40 in 1995? Are there to be allowances for increases other than inflation? Secondly, what are the assumptions about future traffic levels, and what is the basis for the Department's claim that tolls would last for only 21 years? Thirdly, are any costs to be carried by the public sector at any stage in the concession period? Is the capital debt on the existing bridge to be written down? Are the loans to be underwritten or supported in any way by central Government? If the Minister cannot provide answers to these questions tonight, I respectfully suggest that he writes to me about them in due course.

I come now to what could be called the jackpot question: what if construction costs escalate? Such increases are known in the industry as cost overruns. The overruns on the Channel tunnel have been considerable. In the event of cost overruns and of the total revenue being insufficient to meet debt and operating costs, what guarantees are there for the long-term future of the crossing?

In France, the Government have effectively had to nationalise toll motorways when the operators have pulled out. If that were to happen with the Severn crossing, the Welsh economy would be in jeopardy. The consortium has no previous experience of constructing a comparable estuarial crossing. What a way for a British Government to treat the economic lifeline of Wales. We are just being treated as an economic guinea pig in another doctrinaire experiment by this utterly discredited Government.

Early-day motion 779 stands in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn), and I have given him notice that I shall be raising the matter. It is entitled "Second Severn crossing" and it first appeared on the Order Paper on 22 March. When I read it, I was a bit puzzled, because it gave me the impression that a Government announcement had already been made. I proceeded to make exhaustive inquiries and I discovered that no such announcement had been made. It appears that, at that stage, a last desperate attempt was being made to prevent the French-backed consortium from gaining the contract.

The parliamentary Labour party has a rule that the Chief Whip must be consulted before an early-day motion is put down. I believe that the Conservative party has a similar rule. However, I understand that no such authorisation was sought or granted for early-day motion 779. My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West is a Front-Bench spokesman on social security matters.

The matter was further complicated because my hon. Friend appears to have been a little confused about where the new bridge is to be situated. He told me that it was to be in the constituency of the hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland), and it appears that he gave the same impression to the Chief Whip who spoke to him about the matter. Several representatives of the media told me that he had said the same thing to them. It would seem reasonable to suggest that, before going into such an issue with both feet, it would at least have been wise to be sure of the location of a project, not to mention the propriety of raising a matter that affects another Member's constituency.

I have in my hand a letter dated 11 April from Monmouth borough council, signed by the electoral officer, saying that plans available to him show that the second Severn crossing will be in the Newport, East constituency. I am sure that the Minister can confirm that this evening.

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Robert Atkins) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Hughes: On the other side of the channel, the bridge will be in the constituency of the right hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Cope). We have already had preliminary discussions about how best we can help our constituents. The fact has to be faced that, when the heavy lorries and equipment move in, there will be a lot of muck and dust, together with a good deal of congestion, and people will be upset.

I remind the House that that will be happening not in Allt-yr-yn or Bassaleg in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West, but in Caldicot and the surrounding villages in the Newport, East constituency.

I conclude by saying that Opposition Members are looking forward to the early return of a Labour Government. Wales and, I believe, the rest of the country are simply fed up with Thatcherism. That incoming Labour Government will be faced with many problems. It is perfectly understandable that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition is reluctant to make commitments at this stage, and that is wise. But that incoming Government would do well to concentrate first and foremost on getting the economy right. We need much new investment, particularly in the regions, to generate long-term growth. As we know from what has happened in the Soviet Union and elsewhere in eastern Europe, it is no use redistributing less and less. To take over the two bridges and get rid of tolls would give an immediate shot in the arm to the Welsh economy, as well as providing long-term benefits.

[Mr. Hughes]

We have been promised that the whole issue of tolls on estuarial crossings will be reviewed. I accept that promise, and hope that something useful will emerge from it.

11.10 pm

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Robert Atkins): I hesitate to become involved in a quarrel between the hon. Members for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) and for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn). Clearly, however, as the hon. Member for Newport, East has raised the matter—I congratulate him on being able to do so—I must answer the points that he made.

So seriously do the Government take the issue that, unusually, the Secretary of State is present, having broken an engagement for that purpose. Also present is my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Welsh Office, who has taken a considerable interest in the matter.

Given the hon. Gentleman's comments, it could be imagined that the Government's proposals for the second Severn crossing represented an iniquitous plot designed solely to impose swingeing taxes on the Welsh economy, and to subject the Principality to the whims of foreign financiers. The reality is wholly different. We are proposing to more than double the road capacity across this vital road link within the next six years. Some increase in the cost to users will be inevitable to cover the massive investment required to finance the new crossing, but we are satisfied that the Government's selected proposal represents the best overall value for money for all concerned.

The case for providing a second road crossing of the Severn estuary is not at issue. The present Severn bridge provided ample capacity for the traffic envisaged at the time of its opening in 1966, but since then the growth in traffic nationally—particularly motorway traffic—has been enormous, as I am sure that everyone is well aware. That, coupled with the successful regeneration of the south Wales economy in recent years—we might not have realised from the remarks of Opposition Members that it had taken place, but my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Welsh Office, who has been largely responsible for the improvement, is only too well aware of it—has meant that traffic using the bridge has tripled since its opening, from fewer than 6 million to over 18 million vehicles a year. In turn, that has begun to lead inexorably to congestion at peak times or during repair and maintenance works. A particular problem for the present bridge, given the exposed nature of the site, is that high winds occasionally require restrictions on high-sided vehicles, or—in extreme cases—complete closure of the crossing.

All that led the Government to conclude, as long ago as 1986, that a second crossing should be provided. Two years later, in 1988, we announced that the private sector would be given the opportunity to participate in the financing and operation of the crossing. That decision followed directly from the innovation of private funding for roads infrastructure that had been so successful in the competition for the third Dartford-Thurrock crossing.

The detailed terms for the second Severn competition were issued almost a year ago to the four selected consortia that had put in the strongest pre-qualifying proposals. The terms for that important competition confirmed the Government's objective of securing directly comparable bids from the tenderers on a privately and publicly financed basis.

The bids were received last October. After an intensive initial evaluation, we were able to reduce the list of contenders to two—the John Laing/GTM Entrepose consortium and one comprising Trafalgar House and Balfour Beatty. Both designs were established to be technically and aesthetically sound and to comply with the Government's strict engineering requirements. The final decision between the two bidders and between the financing options came down essentially to which offered the better overall value for money. The assessment took account of the costs of the scheme to users of the crossing arising from tolls and to taxpayers arising from the residual costs of the scheme to Government, taking account also of the tax receipts generated by the scheme.

As the House knows, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, who, I emphasise, is here tonight to support this important project, announced before Easter our conclusion that the privately funded proposal from Laing/GTM offered the best value. Negotiations are starting on the detailed terms of a comprehensive concession agreement. We shall, of course, keep the House in touch with developments on that front.

Implementation of these proposals will naturally require new statutory powers, and my right hon. Friend hopes to introduce legislation at the earliest opportunity to seek parliamentary approval for the scheme. If all goes well, we hope that construction could start at the beginning of 1992, and that the new bridge could be open to traffic by the end of 1995. It is a great and significant development for south Wales and the western part of England.

It is a most exciting and vital development for the future of south Wales. It reaffirms the Government's commitment to the continuing economic development of this part of the country, by helping to ensure that its communications with the rest of the United Kingdom and with Europe are second to none. The bridge itself will be an international showpiece; at some 5 km long it will be the longest water crossing in the United Kingdom, and it will incorporate the longest cable-stayed span in the United Kingdom. The entire crossing will provide windshield protection for traffic—a world first on such a scale and structure.

Against that background, it is most disappointing—if, sadly, hardly surprising—that we have to record the carping, negative criticism which the proposal has received tonight and on other occasions from the Opposition. It is not untypical that the hon. Gentleman's criticisms, when he was not dealing with the particular problems he had with his neighbour, went over the top. The Welsh people, who rely greatly on my hon. Friend the Minister of State who represents their interests so well, will understand that the hon. Gentleman has taken the matter too far.

The hon. Gentleman made particular reference to tolls. We have heard a great deal of complaint about the level of tolls and, as hon. Members will know, there was a debate about the tolls on the existing Severn bridge. Complaints have been made about the principle of whether tolls should be charged at all. I put on record for all to see and hear that the hard fact is that it has been the policy of successive Governments over very many years—including Labour Governments—that those who derive exceptional benefits from the provision of major estuarial crossings should contribute towards the exceptional costs of putting them there. Indeed, it is worth reminding the House and everyone listening to the debate that a Labour Government were in power in 1965 when the Severn Bridge Tolls Act was enacted. That Act provides for tolls to be levied for a period of up to 40 years to cover the costs of constructing, maintaining, operating and improving the bridge, and it is on that basis that tolls are now charged.

Mr. Roy Hughes: Does the Minister appreciate that all the arrangements for the construction of the bridge had been prepared beforehand and that the Labour Government had only just taken office in 1965?

Mr. Atkins: I do not dispute that, but I repeat that the legislation under which the tolls are now charged was enacted by a Labour Government. It is no good the hon. Gentleman trying to evade responsibility for his party's commitment in that regard.

Under the Government's proposals for the second crossing, the existing bridge will be transferred to the private sector consortium, which will collect tolls on both bridges on a common basis. The promoter's powers to collect tolls will be tightly controlled. The tolls will be specified in the forthcoming legislation and the promoter's tolling period, which will not exceed 30 years, will be tied to a formula based on revenue from traffic. The more traffic which goes over the crossing, the sooner tolls will stop. On current forecasts, tolls will be needed for about only 21 years, barely half the period envisaged for the original bridge.

I accept that some increase in tolls will be needed. The proposals envisage, ultimately, an increase of about 40 per cent. for most users. That increase will be phased in up to 1995 to reduce the initial impact. For goods operators, the increases will be rather higher, but it should be recognised that the present £2 toll for goods vehicles is something of a bargain, given the value to operators of the time saved by using the crossing. On present expectations, the tolls will cease in the year 2013, only seven years after the date on which tolls for the present bridge are due to end. That is quite an achievement. All in all, we regard the proposed tolls as a reasonable price to pay to cover the £270 million capital cost of the new crossing. The overall cost to the community of this scheme will be less than any available alternative, whether it be privately or publicly financed.

Concern has been expressed tonight about the Government's selected proposals on the grounds that the consortium includes a French contracting group and that its backers include a French bank. There has been concern that the consortium's scheme may not use British materials and suppliers to the same extent as the unsuccessful Trafalgar House/Balfour Beatty alternative.

Those concerns are fundamentally misconceived. The Government most emphatically do not discriminate against British suppliers, which will be able, and well placed geographically, to compete for work related to the new crossing, but they will need to compete for that work and that includes competing with suppliers from other Community countries, just as we compete with other European companies on building projects in their countries, and are jolly successful in so doing. It is worth reminding the House that we hope that construction will start in 1992.

There is no question of the crossings being compromised by the transfer to a private sector promoter or by the involvement of overseas companies. The powers of the promoter and the operation of the crossings will be strictly controlled by the proposed legislation, in tandem with the concession agreement. Moreover, I can assure the House that under the proposals my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Transport and for Wales will remain the highway authorities for these roads and that the police will have all the usual powers to deal with traffic.

Our decision to go ahead with the second Severn crossing on the basis of the privately funded Laing/GTM proposal represents the best practical deal for south Wales. It offers the most effective means of securing the new crossing as soon as possible. The House naturally has a close interest in how the crossing will be provided, and there will be a full opportunity to debate the principles and the details of the proposal when we discuss the necessary legislation in due course.

I hope that the House will reject the carping and unnecessary criticism of the hon. Member for Newport, East and his hon. Friends about the importance of the bridge and how it will be constructed and that it will welcome the Government's positive initiative on this most vital scheme.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-three minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 20 April 1990

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Orders of the Day

Licensing (Low Alcohol Drinks) Bill

Not amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Clause 1

LOW ALCOHOL LIQUOR NOT TO BE INTOXICATING LIQUOR FOR THE PURPOSES OF THE LICENSING ACT 1964

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone): I beg to move amendment No. 8, in page 1, line 6, leave out from '1964', to end of line 12 and insert

'for the words "not exceeding 1016° and of a strength not exceeding 1·2 per cent." there shall be substituted the words "not exceeding 1009° and of a strength not exceeding 0·5 per cent."'.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following amendments:

No. 1, in page 1, line 11, leave out '0·5 per cent.' and insert '0·05 per cent.'.

No. 9, in page 1, line 11, leave out '0·5 per cent.' and insert '0·1 per cent.'.

No. 10, in page 1, line 11, leave out '0·5 per cent.' and insert '1·2 per cent.'.

No. 2, in page 1, line 11, leave out 'cent.' to end of line 12.

No. 3, in page 1, line 12, leave out from 'sale' to end.

No. 4, in page 1, line 16, at end insert

'at the time of the sale or other conduct in question'.

Miss Widdecombe: After that enthusiastic reception, may I apologise first to you, Mr. Speaker, and secondly to my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) for the fact that I shall be unable to stay for the whole of the debate? However, I am grateful for this opportunity to speak to the amendments that stand in my name.

One of the effects of the otherwise excellent Bill that has been promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton is that it will make it very much easier to obtain low-alcohol liquor outside the context of licensed premises. My amendment would bring the Bill back into line with the Licensing Act 1964, but with a reduction to 0·5 per cent. alcohol and its corresponding level of specific gravity. I am most reliably informed by a professor of physics, since I have no knowledge of physics whatsoever, that that is 1009 deg Gay Lussac. I have tried to accommodate my hon. Friend by incorporating the reductions he suggests, but I have also tried to bring back within the scope of the Licensing Act all sales of low-alcohol drinks, wherever such sales take place.

If the Bill is not amended, it will be possible to obtain that which is classified as non-intoxicating liquor—but which can in fact contain an alcohol level of 0·4 per cent., or even 0·49 per cent.—outside licensed premises. Alcoholic drinks of that kind would therefore be available to children if they were sold in unlicensed premises. According to the Bill, drinks with an alcohol content of below 0·5 per cent. will be available in all sorts of premises which do not have to be licensed to sell alcohol.

A child will understand only one thing: here is some excitement, here is a drink with some alcohol in it. Unfortunately, due to the efforts of our advertising industry and the image projected by the drinks industry, children are inclined to think that there is something glamorous, grown-up and desirable about a drink with alcohol in it. If, therefore, alcoholic drinks are readily available—perhaps with an alcoholic content of only 0·1 per cent., although it could be as high as 0·4 per cent.—children will have access to them.

We know that the problem of under-age drinking and the crimes associated with it are increasing. Therefore, it would be ill-advised for my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) to leave in an otherwise commendable Bill a loophole that would promote under-age drinking. If the Bill were enacted in its present form, teenagers and fairly young children of perhaps nine or 10 would learn to consume alcohol and, what is infinitely worse, taking it for granted.

Unlike an adult, a child cannot reasonably be expected to compute the sum of the drinks that he or she is consuming and work out the likely effect. The child will think that it is fun and exciting to consume alcohol, but that it will do no harm because it is low alcohol. But if a child consumes five or six drinks which contain only 0·4 per cent. alcohol and are therefore deemed low-alcohol, and not dangerous, he will have taken in a fair quantity of intoxicating liquor.

There are obvious dangers to a child or a young teenager whose constitution has not developed sufficiently to absorb that. If alcohol becomes a habit and children treat such drinks as if they were Coca Cola or orangeade, they will gradually develop an alcohol habit, however low. The mood of our legislation, all that the Home Office has said in recent years and certainly the social perception are that we should move in the opposite direction and encourage young people not to form a drink habit.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that the problem of alcohol is just as relevant in Northern Ireland, and does he join me in regretting that the Bill does not seem to apply to Northern Ireland?

Miss Widdecombe: I absolutely support what my hon. Friend says. I might well have mentioned that point, but, as my hon. Friend feels strongly about the issue, he may wish to touch on it later.

If low-alcohol drinks are available they affect the problem of drink driving. At present, the law is fairly clear. If one visits licensed premises and drinks more than a low quantity of alcohol, if one is driving one is likely to be over the limit and guilty of a criminal offence.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): Further to the intervention by my hon. Friend for Hendon, South (Mr.

[Mr. Andrew Mitchell]

Marshall) has my hon. Friend noticed that clause 1 does not apply to Scotland, but that clause 2 does? Does she not find that an extraordinary anomaly? In tune with what my hon. Friend said about Northern Ireland, should that not be addressed at this stage so that we can do something about it?

Miss Widdecombe: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: the anomaly applies to Northern Ireland and to Scotland.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): To avoid any wrong assumptions, we should be clear that, as is so often the case, the law in England is different from that in Scotland, so it was necessary to table an amendment to part II of the Bill to deal with the law in Scotland, while the amendment in part I of the Bill deals with the law in England. It is my intention that the two clauses achieve the same legal definitions and legal structure in England and in Scotland. As my hon. Friends from Scotland are nodding in agreement, I am glad that I am giving the House the right information.

Miss Widdecombe: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his explanation and his clarification of the part of his Bill that applies to Scotland. Without meaning any offence to my hon. Friends from Scotland, drink is a considerable problem in Scotland.

Mr. John Marshall: I must ask my hon. Friend to withdraw that comment. I spent Easter in Scotland, and I can assure my hon. Friend that I saw no excess of alcohol. My hon. Friend is clearly referring to what prevailed in Scotland 10, 15 or 20 years ago, when one could find a drunk at Glasgow central station at any time of the day or night. Following the changes in the Scottish licensing law and the civilisation of Scottish public houses, it is no longer true that one can find drunks at any time of the day or night. Scotland is not the alcoholic country that my hon. Friend envisages. She does a disservice to the good people of Scotland.

Miss Widdecombe: I, too, spent Easter in Scotland and it was most enjoyable and pleasant. I did not spend my Easter on Glasgow central station, so I have no idea whether the level of drunkenness to be observed there has changed. I did not mean to impugn the Scots or to suggest that they uniquely have an alcohol problem. I merely said, —presumably my words are on record in *Hansard*—that there is a drink problem in Scotland. There is also a drink problem in England and in most of Europe.

9.45 am

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Let me add to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South. My experience in Scotland is entirely the opposite of what my hon. Friend suggests. Every summer I spend the short amount of time that I allow myself to spend away from my constituency in the north-east of Scotland. Staying near Tain on Easter Ross, I found it extremely difficult to find a drink at all. One has to travel so far to find a drink, that I spent much of my short holiday there drinking low-alcohol drinks and canned beer that I had brought with me from England. I found Scotland to be an extremely abstemious place where it was difficult to get a drink.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Miss Widdecombe: I am being extremely generous in giving way, so perhaps before I give way again perhaps I can answer my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell).

Once again, he has misunderstood what I said. I did not suggest that there was an undue level of drunkeness in Scotland compared with anywhere else. I am sorry that he had a problem finding a drink during his Scottish holiday. I took the precaution of staying on licensed premises. I must admit that I did not see any signs of excessive drunkeness. I said that there is a drink problem in Scotland, as there is in England and the rest of Europe.

Mr. Walker: I would normally be in Scotland on Fridays, except when there are matters in the House that affect Scotland, as the Bill does, and I was on the Committee that considered the Bill. My hon. Friend was referring to the problem of under-age, drinking which is a matter of great concern. She is quite correct to say that there is such a problem, but I would remind her that 90 per cent. of Scotch whisky, which is Scotland's most famous export, is exported and not drunk by the Scots. I am a teetotaller. I do not drink it at all.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that we have established that there is no undue drink problem in Scotland.

Miss Widdecombe: Perhaps I can conclude the discussion of the drink problem in Scotland by apologising unreservedly if I have offended any of my hon. Friends. I did not intend any slur on the Scots.

Before my hon. Friends intervened, I was referring to drink driving. If one visits licensed premises and consumes intoxicating liquor, one knows that one must limit one's consumption severely, if one must drink at all. I should favour a law which prevents people from driving after drinking any amount of alcohol, but the present law requires only that one should severely limit the amount of alcohol one drinks. That is fairly easy to compute, and is readily understood.

If low alcohol liquor is outwith the licensing laws, the temptation will be to confuse it with alcohol-free liquor and that because one is drinking something that is only 0·3 or 0·4 per cent. proof one is not consuming alcohol. Someone may be tempted to have two drinks in a public house, which should be sufficient, and instead of drinking orange juice or lemonade to think "I will be safe because this is so entirely innocuous that it need not be licensed." He therefore consumes a drink that is so low in alcohol that it has been removed from the licensing laws. That is dangerous, and I suspect that many people may take that incremental amount of alcohol when they would normally stop because they have been deluded by the licensing laws into thinking, "This is not really alcohol at all, is it?" That is my fundamental objection.

Combining what I was saying about children and drivers drinking, and about low-alcohol drinks not being subject to the licensing laws, there will be official guidance saying, "You needn't worry about this; it isn't really alcohol." People will take their cue from that. If we are to ensure that children do not have ready access to drink, and that drivers are not deluded into thinking that a low-alcohol drink will do no harm, society and the law must lay down extremely clearly that it is intoxicating liquor, that it is subject to the licensing laws and that it is available only at licensed premises.

If society does not give that guidance, it is understandable that people will tend to think that it does not matter how much low-alcohol drink they consume, that it cannot be habit-forming because its strength is so low and that it does not matter, because if it did matter and if it was habit-forming, surely the law would require a licence to be granted. That is the mentality with which many people will approach the liberalising proposals in the Bill.

Mr. Richard Page (Hertfordshire, South-West): My hon. Friend is raising spectres that worry me. I do not want people in licensed premises to be deluded into drinking low-alcohol beer, driving their motor cars, being breathalysed and losing their licences. Has she made any estimates of how much low-alcohol beer an average man, who legally can drink almost two pints of full-strength beer, will have to consume to be over the limit? How many pints of low-alcohol beer would have to be consumed to put that man near the limit?

Miss Widdecombe: It is proposed to reduce the requirement from 1·2 to less than 0·5 per cent. Assuming that the man was drinking a 0·4 per cent. strength drink, he would have to drink about three times as much as intoxicating liquor. If he were drinking low-alcohol beer as if it were lemonade or bitter lemon—one can drink six or seven of those drinks without realising it—he would be gradually consuming the equivalent of one pint of beer or one measure of spirit.

The prospect that alarms my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, South-West (Mr. Page), of people losing their licence, is not the most terrifying one. The most terrifying prospect is of people getting behind the wheel of a car when not in a fit state and causing accidents and deaths. It is more desirable that they should lose their licences as a sharp warning than be allowed to cause accidents.

I say again—I am well aware that it is outwith the scope of the Bill and that I would be called to order if I developed the point—that it is high time that we had a rule preventing people from driving when they have consumed any alcohol. That is the only way to guarantee safety.

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): Is my hon. Friend aware that the nomenclature of different beers can confuse prospective purchasers? The word "light" has been misinterpreted many times. A court found special reasons for not disqualifying a person who was over the limit because he had been informed that a beer was low in alcohol because it was called light beer. Does my hon. Friend think that there is a need for much caution, particularly among brewers, in the names given to beers, which may or may not be low-alcohol?

Miss Widdecombe: I agree with my hon. Friend and I am grateful to him for making that point. There is massive confusion, which will be compounded if certain forms of alcohol, which undeniably are alcohol but have a low content, are not subject to the licensing laws.

My hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) raises an important gap in our approach to drink; that is in education. People should understand what they are purchasing and consuming. It is unlikely that they will if a licence is not necessary to sell certain forms of alcohol.

Imagine trying to explain to a child that all alcohol is dangerous, is potentially habit-forming, should be avoided when one is driving, has some effect on the brain cells and does this, that or the other. The child would say, "If that is so, why don't you need a licence to sell low-alcohol drinks? Surely it can't be dangerous, and can't be alcohol." The mentality that worries me, which would grow under these proposals, is: "This is not really alcohol, is it?" If it can be purchased only on licensed premises and is subject to the licensing laws, it will be regarded more as alcohol and as having all the potential dangers of higher alcohol drinks.

Education is important. I can well understand someone consuming light beer thinking that it is something to do with its light content. Such confusion is rife in our alcohol laws.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): I am listening carefully to the hon. Lady, and I agree with most of her arguments. I hope that she will be a little hesitant about the nomenclature of beers. There are traditions in this country on what we call beers, which are respected and well-known. To start talking about light beers as alcohol-free is pushing it a little. There is a tradition of what we call bitter, mild and all the other lovely names that British beers have. I hope that she is not suggesting some EEC mentality about what we must call different British beers. I should like to know when I am drinking a non-alcohol beer, but we must be cautious. I and most hon. Members know what a light ale is.

Miss Widdecombe: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I represent a hop-growing area, where the EEC mentality definitely is not the flavour of the month. It would be hard for me, even should I want to do so, to make a case for introducing further legislation to assault well-established British institutions.

I was saying—if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, it is reasonable to say so—that people are confused. He may be well up in the traditions of British beers, but I am not. He may understand the description of every beer on offer, but many people, particularly first-time drinkers, do not and are confused by the terminology. I was proposing not that we should remove those terms but that there should be proper education. I was not proposing that we should amend our laws and start trying to standardise descriptions—I would not do anything so dull or dreary—but there is a strong argument for proper education.

I am particularly worried, as I have made clear throughout the debate on the amendment, about under-age drinkers. People going into public houses and learning the traditions of beers for the first time, or going into supermarkets and purchasing alcohol, do not have the benefit of the knowledge of the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), and could be confused. That is an argument for education, and I sincerely hope that he did not think that I was proposing to become legislative, because my line has always been that we should reduce, rather than increase, legislation.

10 am

Mr. John Marshall: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way with her usual courtesy and for the frequency with which she has done so. She mentioned the problem of under-age drinking resulting from individuals going into supermarkets, does she not think that it is an unfortunate social trend that, whereas 20 years ago it was almost impossible to buy cans of drink in supermarkets, it is now far too easy for far too many young people to do so?

Miss Widdecombe: It is perhaps one of the most regrettable social trends that we have seen, but at least if a supermarket sells alcohol it must have a licence to do so, and as long as the definition of alcohol covers even those of low alcohol content, such drinks must be licensed. My big worry about the Bill is that a group of alcoholic drinks will be taken out of that requirement for a licence and will therefore be available in supermarkets and other shops that do not have to have a licence to sell alcohol.

Sir Peter Emery: It is terribly important that we are clear about the argument that my hon. Friend is advancing. My Bill strengthens what she wants. It will stop beers or any alcoholic drink between 0·5 per cent. and the present level of alcohol being sold in shops or elsewhere. Therefore, I hope that, if my Bill is passed, it will meet my hon. Friend's arguments. I am delighted to hear her propose them because they strengthen, rather than weaken, the Bill.

Miss Widdecombe: They would strengthen the Bill if it went as far as my amendment proposes, which is to take into account also those alcoholic drinks below the 0·5 per cent. level. I am grateful, as ever, for my hon. Friend's intervention and his clarification.

I am worried that children will be able to consume 0·1, 0·2, 0·3 and 0·4 per cent. alcoholic drinks freely, without having to buy them from premises with a licence. They will have no idea of the build-up effect and will form a drink habit. They will not understand that such alcohol, in cumulative quantities, affects the brains and organs in the same way as high-level alcohol in smaller quantities. Those children will be affected if the Bill goes through unamended.

I am worried about adults who will be lured into thinking that what they are drinking is not alcohol and will therefore think that it is safe to drink it in addition to what they have already allowed themselves before driving. I am worried that, if a range of alcoholic drinks appears saleable without a licence, it will be regarded, in general, as not really alcohol, and the social problems of drinking will not be solved by these proposals.

Therefore, I propose what, I admit is a draconian amendment. It is right and in the social interest, and before the Bill reaches the statute book, I commend my hon. Friend at least to think about whether it needs strengthening. It is likely to be on the statute book for a long time, and its social effects are likely to be far-reaching.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): The hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) has done a considerable service to the young people of this country in bringing forward his proposals. I wish them well.

The hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) wondered if the Scots took offence at what she was saying. This Scot takes no offence because, in candour, there is a problem, and those who do not recognise that would be deluding themselves. There was some banter about the position in Scotland. I was taken aback and appalled to be taken by the police in my constituency, in the early hours of the morning, to the Bathgate town centre to see the amount of drink being taken by people who, if they were not under age, were nearly under age.

My contribution has one purpose: to ask the hon. Member for Honiton to outline the contact that he has had with various Scottish authorities, because he has worked on this issue. As a Member of Parliament, it behoves me to say, bluntly, that I am not an expert on licensing and I do not pretend to be so, but it is an important issue. Therefore, I should like the hon. Gentleman to outline the contacts he has had with the various Scottish organisations, not least those representing the trade, which has a problem involving under-age drinking. How does one tell how old people are, if they are not familiar when they come into a licensed premises or a supermarket? It is easy, particularly with girls, to confuse 13 and 18-year-olds in good faith. That is part of the under-age problem.

I support the Bill and look forward to hearing from the hon. Gentleman about the Scottish contacts that he has had.

Mr. Ian Gow (Eastbourne): I join the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) on his excellent Bill. It has been drafted with the care which has characterised my hon. Friend's parliamentary career. It came as no surprise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, just as it came as no surprise to the Comptroller of Her Majesty's Household, that the Committee stage of the Bill began at 10.30 am and lasted for less than half an hour. The Committee rose at 10.42 am on 28 February. That is one of the shortest Committee stages in the history of this place.

Mr. John Marshall: In view of the subject we are discussing, should that fact not be entered in "The Guinness Book of Records"?

Mr. Gow: I said that it was one of the shortest Committee stages in the records of this place. The conclusion I drew from that was that the Standing Committee, composed of formidable intellects, decided that the Bill should receive not one amendment in Committee. That is a tribute to the draftsmanship of my hon. Friend and the intellect of those who served on the Committee.

I wish to remind my hon. Friends, some of whom are not familiar with these important matters, of the formidable intellects who adorned the Committee. First, my hon. Friend—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): No doubt this is interesting, but it is a long way from the matters before the House. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] The amendments deal with variations on the definition of intoxicating liquor, and I hope that we can get back to that.

Mr. Page: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I had the privilege of serving on that Committee, and I have never in this House been called a formidable intellect. I was looking forward to the opportunity of being described as such by my hon. Friend, and I would be grateful if he could be given the chance to do so.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are not debating amendments about the hon. Gentleman's intellect.

Mr. Gow: We are discussing the level of alcohol in drink. Neither my hon. Friend the Comptroller of Her Majesty's Household nor I would claim to be an expert on low-alcohol drinks. From time to time, my hon. Friend the Comptroller has summoned me to his own house for consultations. When I receive a summons from my hon. Friend, I naturally obey and the summonses are always for the hour of noon. At that very moment, my hon. Friend takes bottles from the cupboard. Are those bottles filled with low-alcohol drinks? They are not. Indeed, although I have frequently been my hon. Friend's guest over many years, there has not been one occasion when he has offered me a low-alcohol drink. That may underline the need for the Bill and the validity of the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), whose arrival in this place we welcomed, although we deplored the departure of her predecessor.

I want to remind the House of another important event a moment ago, which passed unnoticed even by my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery). For a short period of the debate, seated side by side on the Treasury Bench were the Comptroller of the Household and the Treasurer of the Household. I and my hon. Friend the Comptroller know that my hon. Friend the Treasurer —like my hon. Friend who sometimes wears a kilt, the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker)—is a non-drinker, or teetotaller. I do not think that one would describe my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone as a teetotaller.

Miss Widdecombe: Not at all.

Mr. Gow: Although neither my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone nor I am addicted to low-alcohol drinks, we are still entitled to a view on the Bill. I see that my hon. Friend the Comptroller assents to that proposition.

There is merit in amendment No. 8. I shall be listening with the closest attention——

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): My hon. Friend referred to our hon. Friends the Treasurer and the Comptroller of Her Majesty's Household. My hon. Friend the Treasurer would regard amendment No. 8 with grave misgivings, because he regards low alcohol as being as bad as any amount of alcohol. He believes in non-alcohol. If we had been able to debate new clause 2, as well as amendment No. 8, my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone would have had the opportunity to draw a distinction between non-alcohol and low-alcohol. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) is not wholly correct when he describes the attitude to the amendment of our hon. Friend the Treasurer. Our hon. Friend would be utterly opposed to the amendment, because it refers to low alcohol, whereas he believes in non-alcoholic drinks.

Mr. Gow: I hope that our hon. Friend the Treasurer will be in his place later this morning.

Mr. Brown: I have seen him.

Mr. Gow: But he was not on the Treasury Bench. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) will ask our hon. Friend the Treasurer to come in to clarify the point himself. I shall add only that I have been the recipient of the most generous—not to say munificent—hospitality at the hands not only of my hon. Friend the Comptroller, but of my hon. Friend the Treasurer. You may be rather shocked to hear, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I have received only full alcoholic strength drinks when I have had luncheon or dinner at the house of my hon. Friend the Treasurer. I have even been summoned for cocktails at the agreeable residence of my hon. Friend the Treasurer. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Mr. Dorrell) is not leaving the Chamber, as I was about to refer to him.

Mr. Allan Stewart (Eastwood): As well as referring to our hon. Friends the Treasurer and the Comptroller of Her Majesty's Household, my hon. Friend referred to our hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker). My hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North has had to slip out of the Chamber to take part in a television programme—I do not know whether it is on the Bill—but I can reassure my hon. Friend that he is coming back.

10.15 am

Mr. Sheerman: I have heard the hon. Gentleman make some excellent speeches in this Chamber. However, as I sit listening to his present speech, I wonder quite what the recounting of the munificent, wonderful and abundant hospitality received in various places in and around the House has to do with this serious Bill.

Mr. Gow: This is only the preamble; I shall be coming to more detailed aspects of the Bill later.

One important truth may have escaped even my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department. Today is the anniversary of the birth of his late imperial majesty, Emperor Napoleon III of France. Why do I mention that? [HON. MEMBERS: "Brandy."] That is the point. I do not want to be discourteous to the imperial household of a friendly power, but it is said that the Emperor Napoleon III died as a result of overdoing the brandy. I do not say that the allegation is true. Even the solitary representative of Her Majesty's Opposition, the shadow Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), seems to assent to the proposition that his late majesty may have died of an overdose of brandy. If the Bill had been on the statute book during the lifetime of his late majesty, he might still have been with us.

Mr. John Marshall: I know that Queen Mary died with "Calais" written on her heart. Is my hon. Friend suggesting that, if the Bill had been on the statute book at the time of the reign of Napoleon III, we should have tried to apply it to France? We should have had to have extra-territorial powers, which no British Government have claimed for a long time.

Sir Peter Emery: Even I am not claiming that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) will now seek to address himself to the amendment. He has been speaking for 11 minutes and I doubt whether he has yet referred to the amendment. Will he please do so or resume his seat?

Mr. Gow: You will have studied the text of the amendments with the same care as I have, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I believe that we are discussing the group of amendments Nos. 8, 1, 9, 10, 2, 3, and 4. Some of them

[Mr. Gow]

have been tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown), the parliamentary private secretary to our hon. Friend the Minister for Industry. Those amendments relate to the strength of alcohol and how we should describe the alcoholic strength. I had great sympathy with amendment No. 8, which was moved so ably by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: I want to go back to the point about territoriality and the question whether the Bill applies outside our shores. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) is on to an extremely good point here. As I hope to demonstrate in my speech, if I catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is considerable confusion about the way in which EC directives apply on low alcohol here and in other countries in Europe. It is impossible to divorce the laws that we pass in the House, which affect this country, from the decisions and directives made by the European Community and their effect upon the definition and distribution of low-alcohol drinks, not only here but throughout Europe.

Mr. Gow: My hon. Friend anticipates a point that I had intended to address later in my speech. I shall be referring to the European Commission. I shall also refer to the former right hon. and learned Member for Richmond, Yorks., who used to be Home Secretary and then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, before his regrettable departure from the Treasury Bench. I shall be referring to the Commission, because the amendment would include in the Bill the words

"not exceeding 1009°"—

Hon. Members will note the little nought above the figure—

"and of a strength not exceeding 0·5 per cent."

Those are very important words. I wonder—as does my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton—whether, if we include those words, the Commission in Brussels will apply its mind to the question whether we are acting in accordance with Community law. We do not want to make the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone only to discover that the Commission proposes to overrule us.

Mr. Michael Brown: I had some difficulty with the little nought to which my hon. Friend referred, but my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) tells me that it means specific gravity.

Miss Widdecombe *rose*——

Mr. Gow: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone.

Miss Widdecombe: The little nought does, indeed, mean specific gravity, and in this case 1009° is 0·5 per cent. and 1016° is to 1·2 per cent.

Mr. Gow: I know that I can rely on my hon. Friend the Treasurer of the Household to instruct me in specific gravity. We warmly welcome the Treasurer, who is already in his weekend attire. For those in the Whips Office, the weekend begins early, while some of us have to man the barricades and do the best we can to understand specific gravity and all sorts of other problems. My hon. Friend the Treasurer will be able to comment later on the extent to which he favours my hon. Friend's amendment.

This is a momentous occasion: we now have the Treasurer and the Comptroller seated side by side, with a Lords Commissioner sitting even closer to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We have a kind of Trinity on the Treasury Bench. I shall not lay myself open to the charge of blasphemy by trying to describe their different roles. In the centre is the Treasurer and on either side are his guardians. It is the Treasurer to whom we referred earlier in the debate, and who will continue to feature prominently—because, along with my hon. Friend the Member with the kilt, he opposes the consumption of alcohol. I am sure that both my hon. Friends will be in favour of the amendment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone made a moving speech. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), who has made a journey to Scotland, agreed with my hon. Friend. What we do not know—we all await the answer with some expectation, and my hon. Friend the Member for Gelding——

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Gedling.

Mr. Gow: My hon. Friend the Member for Gedling is son to his father. I noted that, during an earlier intervention, my hon. Friend used the word "Ireland". He did not mean that; he meant "Northern Ireland". If I rebuke him it is because his father served as Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department also served at the Northern Ireland Office, did he not?

Mr. John Marshall: He was a PPS.

Mr. Gow: Yes, he was a Parliamentary Private Secretary. We ought not to refer to Ireland. As my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling knows very well, there was a meeting of the Anglo-Irish Conference yesterday, and this afternoon the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic, who has made a journey from Dublin, is to wait on the Prime Minister.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: I stand rebuked for using the wrong terminology earlier. Let me offer my hon. Friend this deal: if he will forgive me for describing Northern Ireland inaccurately, I shall forgive him for inaccurately describing my constituency.

Mr. Gow: I apologise to my hon. Friend. I transposed the letters d and l. Perhaps my hon. Friend will table an early-day motion recording my apology.

Mr. John Marshall: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way, with his customary charm and courtesy. He referred to the Anglo-Irish Conference and the fact that the Prime Minister of Ireland has made a journey from Ireland to the United Kingdom. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is most unfortunate that a number of criminals have not made that journey?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are supposed to be discussing specific amendments that are before the House. I have heard no direct reference to them for the past half hour, and I hope that the House will now address itself to them.

Mr. Gow: I was addressing myself in particular to amendment No. 8, which stands in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone. We have clarified matters so that we now know that the little nought above the figure 1009 refers to specific gravity. The key question is, should we insert the words? My hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone wants the words inserted because she wants added protection to be given to teenagers; that was the burden of my hon. Friend's remarks.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow made a short intervention. In his short speech, he made his point more vividly than some people make theirs in longer speeches. I was impressed by the hon. Gentleman's intervention. The problems of under-age drinking and the difficulties in deciding whether a girl is 13 or 18 years old are not confined to Scotland: we have the same problems in Eastbourne, and it is a serious matter. I hope that later the hon. Member for Linlithgow will suggest how we might address ourselves more effectively to that problem.

Mr. Dalyell: Nothing is as likely to persuade hon. Members to make short speeches as the fact that they are responsible for business which could be talked out. If the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) is really so well disposed towards me this morning, perhaps he will bear it in mind that the third item on the Order Paper is my important private Member's Bill dealing with certain aspects of the Security Commission. I had hoped that perhaps my Bill might have the hon. Gentleman's blessing.

Mr. Gow: I have no wish to injure the glittering political career of the hon. Member for Linlithgow but I must tell him that I almost called him my hon. Friend, and I really think of him in those terms. I hope that that will not injure his prospects. I am aware—we are all students of these matters—of the business that is before the House. We are now discussing the Licensing (Low Alcohol Drinks) Bill. Incidentally, I tabled an amendment to shorten the title, because the titles of our Bills tend to be too long. I know that one must never ever criticise the Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I regret that my amendment was not selected. Perhaps it is no criticism of the Chair to express one's regret.

I want to come back to amendment No. 8. Other amendments are grouped with it, but it deals with the key issue. Do we change the wording of the Bill? If we do, will that help to protect young people who are led astray in the way that my hon. Friend described?

There is real merit in amendment No. 8. Whether my hon. Friend will press it to a Division I do not know. I assume that, after contributions from others of my hon. Friends—I do not think that the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) can speak again—we shall all listen with bated breath to the first of today's speeches by my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), because he will advise the House whether to accept the amendment moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone. If my hon. Friend should advise against her amendment, I do not know whether she will press it to a Division. Only time will tell.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone will press her amendment to a Division. We could even vote on amendments Nos. 1, 9, 10, 2, 3 and 4, some of which stand in the name of the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Under-Secretary of State.

10.30 am

Mr. Michael Brown: Can I advise my hon. Friend that, were my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone to press her amendment to a Division, I would most emphatically oppose it? I would recommend to the House and urge upon my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton, the sponsor of the Bill, support for my amendment No. 1 instead.

If, during the course of the day, I should catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall urge upon the House the merits of amendment No. 1, rather than amendment No. 8, which is an alternative to that amendment.

Mr. Gow: The House is a little puzzled by some of the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes, because they do not make reference to the specific gravity problem.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: I am grateful that my hon. Friend has given way a third time. Further to the comments by the parliamentary private secretary to the Minister for Industry, were the amendments to be put to a vote I would also emphatically, although apologetically, oppose the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone, and would urge the House to support my amendment No. 10 which, if I am fortunate enough to catch your eye Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall seek to suggest to the House is worthy of serious consideration.

Mr. Gow: My hon. Friend has overlooked an important point. His amendment does not address the question of specific gravity either. My hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone was kind enough to explain to me what that little nought meant. At least I admitted to my ignorance on that matter. Of course, my hon. Friend the Comptroller is an expert in specific gravity—I am told that he wrote a treatise on the subject—so there was no need to give such information to him. You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, knew at once what that little nought meant. It was only I who was unable to follow it. It perplexes me why none of the other amendments refer to specific gravity. The scholarship of my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone made her refer to specific gravity in her amendment; that is why, despite interventions by some of my hon. Friends, I prefer Maidstone to Brigg.

Mr. John Marshall: Surely it is not surprising that my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone is so expert in these matters. After all, Maidstone is in the centre of Kent, which is the hop-growing county of England. Therefore one would expect representatives from a hop-growing county, including my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale), to——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have a duty to the House and to all those other hon. Members who are awaiting an opportunity to present and argue the case for their Bills. Twenty more Bills are waiting to be dealt with, and I hope that hon. Members will have some sense of their responsibility and obligation towards the other hon. Members who are waiting for the House to deal with their Bills.

Mr. Gow: In view of that advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall resume my seat.

Mr. Michael Brown: As I said in an earlier intervention, I tabled amendment No. 1 before the Easter recess and I should like to recommend consideration of it. Since I tabled it I have been in correspondence with Guinness plc regarding the amendment. The manager of public affairs, Mr. Mark Leverton, wrote to me as follows:

> "I have been sitting on your Christmas card for months . . . I have heard about your promotion from the Back

[Mr. Michael Brown]

> Benches. . . I would like to take this opportunity to point out that we seem to have common interests in the Licensing (Low Alcohol Drinks) Bill. I see that you have tabled various amendments at the report stage and it might be of interest and advantage for you to know that over the last 12 months Guinness has been trying to persuade the Home Office"

and subsequently my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery)

> "that 0·5 per cent. is too high as a definition of intoxicating liquor for the purposes of sale in unlicensed outlets. We have not of course been successful."

Miss Widdecombe: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way so early in his speech. I want to refer to what he has just said about 0·5 per cent., because I was sorry not to have the opportunity to respond to the last issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) on specific gravity. I would like the House to address, I was about to say the gravity of this issue, but that is not quite what I had in mind. It is a most important matter. The specific gravity refers to what happens in the process of producing the alcohol, and that is ignored in amendment No. 1. Under my proposal, if, in the process of making the alcohol, specific gravity rises to higher than 1009 degrees, it is very intoxicating. My amendment tries to link the final product with the process so that there is no stage at which highly intoxicating liquor is produced as a by-product. Does my hon. Friend intend to address the important problem of degrees of specific gravity?

Mr. Brown: Yes, and it is for that reason that my hon. Friend's amendment is unnecessary. Were we to pass amendment No. 8 it would have no effect on the Bill, as it seeks only to define; but amendment No. 1 seeks to change the Bill. In line 11 of the Bill we see the figure 0·5 per cent. by volume of alcohol. I wish to delete 0·5 per cent. and insert 0·05 per cent. Therefore, my amendment will have a major effect on the Bill.

I have a suspicion that my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) will be unable to accept my amendment at this stage. However I hope that he may be more favourably disposed by the time I have finished my speech.

I have known Mr. Mark Leverton for many years. I sent a Christmas card to him and received one from him. He is the manager of the public affairs department at Guinness and in the last sentence of the third paragraph of his letter he said, in relation to his efforts to persuade the Home Office and my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton:

> "We have not of course been successful and I note that one of your amendments relates to this point. In view of this I am attaching a note which I have prepared which I hope will be helpful to the debate on 20 April . . . I should also point out that we were put on the spot"—

by my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton—

> "who accepted our concern, in general terms."

My hon. Friend the Member for Honiton is a reasonable man. I find it reassuring to know that he has addressed the concerns expressed by Guinness about my amendment. However, at the end of the day my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton chose to ignore those concerns. He wrote 0·5 per cent., not 0·05 per cent., into his Bill.

It is fair to say that Guinness would be happy with half a loaf if it cannot have the whole loaf. I have no doubt that Guinness would prefer to see the Bill enacted rather than for it to fail. However, Guinness has made it clear that it would prefer 0·05 per cent. rather than 0·5 per cent. in clause 1. Mr. Leverton continues in his letter:

> "Naturally we chose the former"—

that is, 0·05 per cent.—

> "but we were not particularly happy about it.
>
> You may also know that definitions of 'alcohol free' and 'low alcohol' are under some threat from Brussels, which is likely to complicate matters."

Although I make no criticism of the Chair's selection, I had hoped that we could have addressed the issue of alcohol free and low alcohol as distinct from non-alcoholic and separate from de-alcoholised. We could have considered that under new clause 2. However, I believe that in the context of amendment No. 1 it is relevant for the House to consider the distinction between low-alcohol and non-alcoholic drinks because my amendment seeks to bring us closer to the non-alcoholic position.

Mr. Page: My hon. Friend has come to the nub of the difference. In introducing the Bill, my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) is trying to introduce a practical aspect rather than a theoretical one. In response to an intervention, my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) said that there was something in existing law like a 3:1 ratio of the amount of drink one must consume to reach a specific alcohol level. That is highly dangerous and could be confusing. The Bill as presently drafted reduces that figure to the extent that if a man went into a pub he would have to drink about 15 pints of low-alcohol beer at 0·5 per cent. to reach the same alcohol level.

I suggest that amendment No. 1 moves us into the realms of—dare I say it—the ridiculous. A man would have to drink 150 pints of beer at the low alcohol level suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) in amendment No. 1 to have the same practical effect. Surely we are concerned with practice rather than theory.

Mr. Brown: Clearly my hon. Friend has not studied the issue seriously. Guinness, as a responsible company, would not have invited me to table amendment No. 1 and offered me its full support if it believed that this was just an esoteric or theoretical discussion. My hon. Friend has not had an opportunity to read the study carried out by Professor Li Wan Po, whom we all know is at the department of pharmacy at Queen's university, Belfast. He has studied the effects on the human body of the consumption of quantities of alcohol at 0·5 per cent. by volume. I am sure that my hon. Friend will realise that his comments were completely untrue. I will show that it is possible to get very drunk, very quickly by consuming relatively low volumes of alcohol in so-called low-alcohol beer.

I have very grave misgivings about low-alcohol beer. Like the Treasurer of Her Majesty's Household, I believe that if we are to talk about low-alcohol beer, we should be honest and talk about non-alcoholic beer. I will consider the non-alcoholic beer products that are threatened by the Bill.

Mr. Sheerman: Guinness has also corresponded with other hon. Members. Those of us who want to get this point right want to be clear about the issue without talking about the Government Whips Office ad nauseam.

I believe that the Guinness case is as follows; someone may believe that he can normally drink one and a half pints of beer and still drive safely. That is something that many of our citizens still believe. If that person then switches to low-alcohol beer at 0·5 per cent., he can quickly become a drunk driver. If he were to switch to 0·05 per cent. beer, that danger would not exist. That is the crunch. I have been waiting with great interest to hear what the hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) has to say about that.

10.45 am

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman has hit the nail on the head. That is precisely why I tabled the amendment.

A very serious point is at issue here. I believe that no motorist should consume alcohol before sitting at the wheel of a car. However, for better or for worse, legislation has permitted a motorist to consume a certain amount of alcohol to a level beyond which it is illegal for a motorist to climb into his car and drive it away. The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) has outlined the problem about which Guinness is concerned and which prompted its support for my amendment.

It is possible for someone to go into a public house and consume up to two and a half pints of beer of full, normal alcoholic strength and then decide that he is near to the limit. He may then decide to change from beer of full alcoholic strength to low-alcohol beer. As I shall show in a moment from studies carried out by Professor Li Wan Po, it is possible for someone to switch to low-alcohol beer at 0·5 per cent. by volume as recommended by my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton in clause 1 and then climb into his car under the impression that he was driving safely within the limit. It is likely that that person would be over the limit and would fail a breathalyser test.

Although my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) made a persuasive speech, I believe that we should reject amendment No. 8 and consider amendment No. 1.

Mr. Waller: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Brown: I will give way in a moment.

There is an industry concern. Companies like Guinness have successfully developed and marketed non-alcholic beers and drinks. I believe that that is the route that we should follow if we want to reduce the consumption of alcohol.

Mr. Waller: My hon. Friend spoke about the risks inherent when someone who intends to drive changes from a full-strength to a low-alcohol beer. We live in an imperfect world; is it not possible that an individual who was planning to drive would be prepared to transfer to a beer containing little alcohol at some point in the evening, but, if faced with the choice of transferring to a beer with negligible alcohol—as my hon. Friend proposes—might stick to the full-strength beer with which he started? It is not as simple as my hon. Friend suggests.

Mr. Brown: I think it is. Let me cite a product that I have had the opportunity of consuming with great pleasure. Kaliber is a beverage that contains not negligible amounts of alcohol but no alcohol whatever. We should be encouraging such products, but they have not been as successful in the past as I hope that they will be in the future because our legislation militates against their production. The taxation policy in our budgetary legislation has given a strong steer to consumers to buy unleaded petrol. Similarly, our taxation policy and any reforms that we make to the Licensing Act 1964 today should always err on the side of non-alcoholic beers rather than favouring alcoholic beers, whether of full, medium or low strength.

A Mr. Lisscomb, managing director of Guinness Brewing GB, sent a letter to my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton—and may have sent it to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State and a number of my other hon. Friends who are taking part in the debate. The letter, which concerns my amendment, talks about the consequences of the existing legislation, which

> "limits the availability of 'low alcohol' and 'alcohol-free' beers by making them available only in licensed premises. Section 201(1) of the Licensing Act 1964"

—which this Bill seeks to amend—

> "stipulates that: any drink that has an alcoholic strength of 1·2 per cent. alcohol by volume or more must be sold through licensed premises.
>
> Moreover, any drink of less than that strength, but which was stronger at any time during its manufacture, must also be sold through licensed premises."

I accept that that is what my hon. Friend's Bill rightly seeks to change. I do not criticise what he is seeking to do with regard to the selling of low-alcohol beers in unlicensed premises; that is not the concern of my amendment, although it is the concern of his Bill.

The letter continues:

> "These criteria were formulated well before there was any demand or adequate technology to produce 'low alcohol' or 'alcohol-free' beers."

The debate on the Licensing Act 1964 was the last occasion on which we had the opportunity of considering this issue at some length, and with a certain amount of serious discussion on both sides of the House. That Act now guides the sale of alcohol in licensed or unlicensed premises; it has been on the statute book for 26 years. The amendment of my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton to it is the first of any significance that makes some reference to the new beers that were not on the market when the 1964 Act was framed.

In those days we were a nation without speed limits and without the breathalyser. Those of my hon. Friends who have been successful in the ballot for private Members' Bills have sensibly decided, now that the breathalyser puts so much pressure on the motorist, that it is proper for us to amend the 1964 Act.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He referred to Kaliber; does he agree that it is partly because of its success that we have reached a different phase in the market, and low alcoholic and non-alcohol beers are now being marketed heavily for reasons other than those connected with drink-driving?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend is probably right. The current position has resulted not only from the drink-driving legislation, but from the fact that today we are far more aware of the evils—including the social evils—of alcohol than we were in 1964; the greater concern that the public now have for their health; and the government's policy on preventive medicine. There has been a general and voluntary move away from alcohols of full strength to alcohols of low strength and non-alcoholic beers. It is generally acknowledged that there is much greater public demand arising naturally, notwithstanding the drink-driving legislation. I am prepared to concede my hon. Friend's point: we may agree on one point, although we disagree about the various reasons.

[Mr. Brown]

There is now the public demand and adequate technology to produce low-alcohol or alcohol-free beers and the past few years have seen the emergence of such beers. To be brief, I will use the jargon of the trade and refer to NABs, non-alcoholic beers, and LABs, low-alcoholic beers. As my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) said, the consumer demand for such beers is growing rapidly.

NABs and LABs, the letter says,

> "are important alternatives to the usual range of alcoholic drinks and give the consumer greater choice. They are particularly important in the context of the Government's strategy against alcohol abuse".

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will confirm that the Home Office accepts the anomalies that have been outlined by me, and by Guinness. It may not be possible for my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to give me the information today—he may prefer to write to me—but I would like to know whether the ministerial group on alcohol misuse—I forget who chairs it now that my right hon. Friend the former Patronage Secretary has been transferred to the Department of Energy, but it involves several Government Departments—has had an opportunity to consider the Bill and my amendment. My amendment would certainly be in line with the group's concerns.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): The ministerial group has welcomed the Bill as it stands.

Mr. Brown: I welcome that only as far as it goes. I would have expected my hon. Friend to go one stage further and say that the Committee would also welcome amendment No. 1 which goes in the direction of the objectives that the Committee has set itself. Nevertheless, I am glad to have my hon. Friend's assurance that at least that committtee has considered the Bill. It contains an anomaly. We are concerned that the Bill redefines intoxicating liquor as having no more than 0·5 per cent. alcohol. We have been talking about 0·5 per cent. alcohol and about the alternative measurement of specific gravity. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne reprimanded me for not being precise in my amendment.

11 am

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is now 11 o'clock. May I ask whether you have had any request from Ministers for a statement on the alleged pressure on Customs from Government Departments not to prosecute firms in relation to the Iraqi gun export order? I have raised this matter with the responsible Treasury Minister, and he knows about it. Has there been any request for urgent clarification of the authority given to the Ministry of Defence press office to suggest that the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Sir H. Miller) was less than clear in his warnings?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have not received any request for permission to make a statement to be made to the House.

Mr. Dalyell: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I ask whether from now on—this is a matter of some importance—Members of Parliament giving warnings to Governments have to do it in——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot say to the House what he might have had the opportunity to say following a statement.

Mr. Dalyell: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Has there been any request for a statement on when Ministry of Defence Ministers first knew about this matter? The question that I put last Wednesday——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have told the hon. Gentleman that I have not received any request for permission to make a statement of any kind whatsoever to the House.

Mr. John Marshall: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was somewhat saddened to hear you say that, because I was wondering whether you had received any request to make a statement on the ever-worsening situation in Lithuania, which is a cause of——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have told the House that I have not received any request for permission to make a statement of any kind whatsoever. Perhaps we can now get back to the business before the House.

Mr. Dalyell: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I thought that I had made it clear that I have dealt with it.

Mr. Dalyell: It was suggested that one Government Department, the Department of Trade and Industry, is pointing a finger at another Government Department——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must realise that, if I allow him to make those comments, in all fairness I must allow other hon. Members to make comments on the same matter. I cannot allow that. We are debating a private Member's Bill. I call Mr. Brown.

Mr. Michael Brown: As I was saying, the Bill redefines intoxicating liquor as having more than 0·5 per cent. alcohol. I was upbraided earlier for some lax draftsmanship in my amendment. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne said that amendment No. 8 defines the terminology in terms of specific gravity. I used the term "0·5 per cent." We are talking about 0·5 per cent. alcohol by volume. I concede that I should have defined the term in my amendment. I assume that anybody taking a serious interest in the Bill—including my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne—would have readily understood that the alternative way of measuring alcohol is commonly referred to as 0·5 per cent. alcohol, and we normally understand that to mean alcohol by volume. I accept my hon. Friend's apologies.

If it is possible in the House of Lords, should my amendment be accepted, and should it be necessary for drafting purposes to redefine it, I should be willing to accept, perhaps, the addition of the words "by volume". I should have thought that it is such a small drafting amendment that if the other place were pleased to grant a Second Reading to the Bill it would be quite possible to add the words "by volume" to my amendment. I am prepared to accept my hon. Friend's injunction, but I am surprised that he, of all people—he is normally very precise in his use of language—did not recognise that I should have added those two words.

Drinks with a strength of 0·5 per cent. by volume or less would be able to be sold in unlicensed premises.

Sir Peter Emery: If my hon. Friend looks at the definition in the principal Act, he will see that his point is not necessary, because there is the use of percentages in the original Act, and it is made clear that it is by volume of alcohol within the totality of that being tested. There is no difficulty, and my hon. Friend's amendment would be in order.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton for his help. I am seeking to amend my hon. Friend's Bill, which would amend an Act that is already on the statute book. That Act is the reference point for him and, therefore, the ultimate reference point for me. I accept my hon. Friend's case.

There is a strong case for redefining intoxicating liquor at 0·05 per cent., not 0·5 per cent.

Mr. Page: I suggested earlier that we are dealing with practicalities rather than theories. With respect, my hon. Friend is confusing a marketing policy for no-alcohol beers and full-strength beers, and not considering the practicalities of the amendment to the licensing laws. I hope that we shall hear about the immortal research by Professor Po to see how dangerous is the proposal of my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) as against the theory being advanced by my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown).

Mr. Brown: I am delighted to advise my hon. Friend that, if only he will be patient, all will be revealed. I have in my hand, and the Minister has in his file, several pieces of paper; they are the study that was carried out by Professor Po. If my hon. Friend will be patient, he will see that I am not talking theoretical nonsense. I am talking practicalities. My hon. Friend continues to be muddled. I am anxious to get us away from low-alcohol beers. I regard them in the same way as my hon. Friend the Treasurer of Her Majesty's Household would regard them. They contain alcohol; they are alcoholic. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone that if the Bill is passed unamended it will be possible for a child to purchase low-alcohol beers from unlicensed premises. I am not sure whether that child would be breaking the law. I have a suspicion that, if the child were breaking the law, the supermarket sales girl at the cash checkout would be unaware whether the law is being broken.

Hon. Members must realise that I am seeking to put low-alcohol beers on one side. They are a dangerous commodity. For the reasons that the hon. Member for Huddersfield outlined in his intervention from the Opposition Front Bench, it is possible for low-alcohol beers to contribute to people committing a motoring offence, albeit unwittingly. Therefore, I should prefer that the House accept my amendment. It would then be absolutely clear that there is no danger whatever.

The current definition of intoxicating liquor excludes products which at any time in the process exceeded approximately 1·2 per cent. by volume. All are agreed—certainly my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton agrees—that that is a nonsense. Low-alcohol and no-alcohol beers are normally made by evaporating the alcohol from normal strength beers. The move to define the strength at the point of sale is welcomed by all.

At 7.45 this morning, when my clock radio alarm woke me, I heard the dulcet tones of my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton coming through loud and clear. He was challenged by the interviewer, Sue MacGregor on the "Today" programme, on the attitude of the brewing industry. He reassured her, the nation and me—4 million people heard him—that the move to define the strength at the point of sale is welcomed by the industry.

Sir Peter Emery: As is my Bill.

Mr. Brown: As is the Bill. On that point, the Bill is welcome unamended.

However, my hon. Friend and I part company on whether the definition of intoxicating liquor at retail should be left at 1·2 per cent. or put at some lower figure. Some of my hon. Friends have challenged me about the matter, but 1·2 per cent. is quite high. There seems to be general agreement that the figure should be lower. The case for putting it at 0·05 per cent., as in my amendment No. 1, rather than 0·5 per cent., is based on the following three reasons that I can think of. You may be able to think of 33 reasons, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne may be able to think of 333 reasons. However, there are three good reasons that should command the full support of the House.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood said, consumer demand can be met by current technology for beers of 0·05 per cent. alcohol or less. It has been suggested—I am glad to see that my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone has returned—that even at no-alcohol levels, and certainly at low-alcohol levels, alcohol must be made from full-strength alcohol and a dilution process then takes place. However, the technology that now exists has proved successful in manufacturing no-alcohol and low-alcohol beers at 0·05 per cent. alcohol by volume. Those tests have been successful to the extent that no-alcohol and low-alcohol beers below 0·05 per cent. now have a 30 per cent. share of the market. Both the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton may challenge me on whether it is technically feasible to manufacture low-alcohol beers at less than 0·05 per cent.

11.15 am

When I took my amendment to the Public Bill Office, the Clerks were at first disinclined to accept it on the grounds that Mr. Speaker would not select it because low-alcohol beer could not be made at 0·05 per cent. Like me, they did their researches, as they always do. We are well served by all who work in the Public Bill Office. One cannot bounce them into anything, because they are experts and they are never wrong. On this ocasion they were not wrong. They did their research and noted, as I have noted, that 30 per cent. of the market for no-alcohol and low-alcohol beers is accounted for by beers of a strength of 0·05 per cent. alcohol by volume which are on sale and available. Therefore, my amendment was not only tabled but selected by Mr. Speaker.

We have proof positive that if, in the early stages, there is any element of doubt in the Public Bill Office about an amendment, it will get its facts right before recommending to the House an amendment that cannot be anything but in order.

There is no technical reason for stopping, as my hon. Friend wishes to do, at 0·5 per cent. alcohol by volume. To bring it down to 0·05 per cent. would remove all danger of anyone becoming intoxicated from low-alcohol beer. I forget which of my hon. Friends said in an intervention that one would have to drink vast quantities—pints and pints or gallons and gallons—of beer at 0·5 per cent. alcohol by volume before one could become intoxicated. As my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne would say, I beg to be in respectful disagreement with my hon. Friend.

It seems sensible to avoid the danger of intoxication from the sale of low-alcohol beer from unlicensed premises. I shall use as evidence for my remarks the report to which I have already referred by Professor Po at Queen's university, Belfast. I shall refer to it in a moment.

Mr. John Marshall: My hon. Friend has referred more than once to that learned report. He said that he had sent it to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, or that it found its way to him. Did he send a copy to my hon. Friend the Treasurer of the Household, who has a deep interest in these matters? As it is from a professor in Northern Ireland, did he also send a copy to my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), who also has a deep interest in these matters?

Mr. Brown: I did not send the report to my hon. Friend the Minister. Ably briefed as ever, and suspecting that I might refer to the report, he has a copy on the Front Bench with him. I spoke earlier of the way in which Back Benchers are served in the House. Not only do we have brilliant and accurate advice from the Public Bill Office, but we can be assured that, when a Back Bencher refers to a report that others might regard as obscure but which he regards as eminently important, my hon. Friend the Minister has it available for his reference. I am only sad that he has not learned the lessons of the conclusions of the report, which I shall reveal to the House in a moment.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for giving way. He has cited the report more than twice. Does he have additional copies for me, and my hon. Friends and Opposition Members to peruse before he takes us through it, as I hope he will?

Secondly, will my hon. Friend tell the House a little more about Professor Li Wan Po? If we are to attach great weight to what he has said, we need to know a little more about where he did the treatise and about his experience. I feel sure that that would enable the House to give sufficient regard and weight to his report.

Mr. Brown: If only the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for Energy would be patient, all will be revealed. You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are in the Chair when the Chancellor of the Exchequer makes his Budget statement. Before he does so, you always say that copies of the Budget speech and related papers are not to be passed around the Chamber until the Chancellor has sat down. When I have completed my speech, I shall take such copies as are necessary for the hon. Member for Huddersfield, my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) and any others——

Mr. John Marshall: What about the Treasurer of Her Majesty's Household?

Mr. Brown: I shall come to the Treasurer in a moment. I shall take copies of the report with great pleasure, so that, if any hon. Member doubts what I am saying about my amendment and wishes to challenge me, he or she can do so with all the evidence. Therefore, the answer to the questions of my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling is yes, but when I have sat down.

I am aware that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are the same Mr. Deputy Speaker who is in the Chair on Budget Day and who takes a dim view of papers and copies of reports being circulated while the Chancellor is making his speech. We have to wait until the Chancellor sits down before papers and copies of reports relating to his speech can be circulated in the Chamber. Therefore, once I have concluded my speech, I shall go straight to the photocopying machine and take such copies as are necessary.

Nobody can challenge the evidence of a professor at the University of Belfast——

Mr. John Marshall: Why?

Mr. Brown: Because as my hon. Friends the Members for Eltham and for Eastbourne will testify, that university is probably one of the best institutions of academic learning in the United Kingdom.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) has referred to the Treasurer of Her Majesty's Household. I have a suspicion that the Treasurer of Her Majesty's Household has read the report and that it was he who sent the report to the Minister. Everything in the report supports all that the Treasurer has said about the dangers of alcohol both in the Chamber and outside the House during the 11 years and two months that he has been a Member.

I said that there were three reasons to support my amendment. So far I have adumbrated two of them, so here is the third. If the level were confined to 0·05 per cent. of alcohol by volume, consumers in unlicensed premises would need to make no judgment about the level of alcohol. That is highly desirable in this already confused area. Consumers have difficulty distinguishing no-alcohol brands from low-alcohol brands, as is clear from some of the interventions made this morning. That is perfectly understandable. We glibly talk about "low-alcohol" and "no-alcohol" drinks, but there is not only confusion in the public mind; there is still greater confusion in the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Honiton is seeking to clear up that confusion, and I have no complaint with the general tenor of what he is seeking to do.

If the definition of "intoxicating liquor" were pitched at 0·05 per cent., matters would be much simpler. All products with a "low-alcohol" descriptor would be confined to licensed premises and all products with a "non-alcoholic" descriptor would be available in both licensed and unlicensed premises. What could be simpler? The simple test would be, if there is any alcohol in it, it must be sold in licensed premises only; if there is no alcohol in it, it can be sold in unlicensed premises. Surely that is even simpler than the clarification that I fully acknowledge that my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton is seeking to bring to section 201(1) of the Licensing Act 1964. However, there is still an element of confusion in my hon. Friend's Bill.

Sir Peter Emery: I know that my hon. Friend would not want to use words that might mislead the House, but surely he accepts that some of the products that are marketed as containing 0·05 per cent. alcohol nevertheless contain some alcohol. As they contain the slight 0·05 per cent. of alcohol, my hon. Friend's argument that there is no alcohol in such drinks is misleading, and I am sure that he would not want to mislead the House.

Mr. Brown: I see the point that my hon. Friend is making. I must acknowledge that even non-alcoholic beer may have contained alcohol at, say, one part per million —*[Interruption.]*—perhaps it is one part per 100 million —but it might be even less than that. Alcohol may have been involved because of the process of manufacture that my hon. Friend has described.

That is where the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South is absolutely correct. One would have to drink a swimming pool full of such a drink before there was any danger of one registering even 1 mm on the breathalyser. If one consumed such a quantity of drinks of 0·05 per cent. alcohol by volume to register that level, one would almost certainly be dead from causes other than alcoholism because one would have had to drink several times one's body weight.

I accept the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton about not misleading the House. I certainly do not want to do that, but I am sure that he will agree that it would be impossible for somebody to become intoxicated in any way—even a seven-year-old—if my amendment were accepted. As I have said, by the time that one started to register as intoxicated on any breathalyser machine, one would almost certainly be dead for other reasons.

Sir Peter Emery: Much of my hon. Friend's argument has been about topping up the extra amount that one would have to drink if one were to be positively breathalysed on leaving a bar. If a person with 79·97 mg of alcohol in his blood per 100 ml leaves a bar and is breathalysed, that person is not considered to have committed an offence. We may deprecate the fact that he has that amount of alcohol in his blood, but he will not have committed an offence. However, if, with a reading of 79·97 mg per 100 ml in his blood, that person then drank something with 0·05 per cent. alcohol by volume, he would be over the top. Therefore, there is no absolute factor to suggest that, even if my hon. Friend's amendment were to be accepted, topping up would be done away with. As much of my hon. Friend's argument rests on that point about topping up, he should admit my argument. I accept that the level that he is proposing is not as great as that which I have proposed, but a level still exists and must be accepted as still existing.

Mr. Sheerman: Before the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) resumes his speech——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We cannot have an intervention on an intervention. I call Mr. Brown.

Mr. Brown: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) in a moment. My hon. Friend the Member for Honiton is technically correct, but it is impossible to measure the degree of accuracy to which he has referred on any breathalyser machine——

Sir Peter Emery: Is my hon. Friend sure?

Mr. Sheerman *rose*——

Mr. Brown: Well, I believe that the hon. Member for Huddersfield is sure, at any rate.

Mr. Sheerman: We are not doing full justice to the scientific evidence. It is not just a question of Professor Po's evidence. I have similar evidence from King's college and other universities and institutes, which all points to the fact that it is impossible, in terms of the research carried out on the capacity of the human body, to reach the 79·95 level and then to become over the limit by an alcoholic content of 0·05, although an alcoholic content of 0·5 could put one over the limit. The hon. Gentleman is not doing full justice to his case.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We should not rely only on Professor Po's research. I have all the other evidence to which the hon. Gentleman has just referred.

Mr. John Marshall: And my hon. Friend is coming to it.

11.30 am

Mr. Brown: Yes, I am. I have also the report of Professor Tipton of the university of Dublin and the report by Dr. Badawy, a top-grade biochemist with the South Glamorgan health authority. The hon. Gentleman's point is also confirmed by Professor Merton Sandler of the postgraduate medical school at the university of London. I have also the policy statement of Professor Timothy Peters, FRCPath. of the King's college school of medicine and dentistry, King's college, London, regarding the top-up question. I shall return to that statement in a moment, but not until I have dealt with the university of Belfast report.

Mr. John Marshall: Much of the discussion has centred on whether taking another drop of alcohol would push someone over the breathalyser limit. Does not my hon. Friend agree that the discussion should centre on whether a person's ability to drive would be impaired? There is a great deal of evidence that the driving of many of those who are below the breathalyser limit is impaired, that they cause unnecessary accidents and that they may cause unnecessary loss of life. That is the real issue, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: But that is not the purpose of the amendments. I hope that the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) will return to that purpose.

Mr. Brown: You are absolutely right, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You were quite right to rule my hon. Friend's intervention wholly out of order. It had nothing whatsoever to do with the amendment, which addresses the top-up question. The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) has always been concerned about the effect of alcohol on driving. He knows a great deal about the subject. He has demonstrated his expertise and knowledge whenever he has served on Standing Committees that have considered transport Bills.

If my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South had wanted to challenge me, he ought to have questioned me on the top-up policy by referring to the Guinness policy statement on the top-up question.

Mr. Page: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Brown: Before my hon. Friend starts to challenge me on the top-up question, which is wholly in order insofar as it relates to the amendment, I ought to tell him about the top-up question. If the blood alcohol level is 78 mg per

[Mr. Brown]

100 ml of blood, one pint—that is, 568 ml—of low-alcohol beer containing 1 per cent. by volume of ethanol, consumed over 20 minutes is almost certain to increase the blood alcohol level of many adult subjects to a value above the legal limit for driving of 80 mg per 100 ml of blood.

Mr. Page: Who says?

Mr. Brown: Dr. A. Badawy, a top-grade biochemist, says that. He represents South Glamorgan health authority.

Mr. Page: I chide my hon. Friend for the way in which he is presenting his case, but it pains me to do so. Normally, one produces the evidence in scientific matters and draws conclusions. My hon. Friend has been drawing conclusions for a considerable time. I hope that we shall soon hear about the valuable evidence of Professor Po, on which the whole of my hon. Friend's case rests.

Mr. Brown: If I had walked into the Chamber, picked up Professor Po's report and read it, you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would have immediately called me to order and asked what it had to do with the amendment. You would also have ordered me to resume my seat. We have to keep within the rules of order and we have to speak to amendments. If we do not, we are ordered to resume our seats, or we are called to order. An amendment is tabled to do this or to change that, and we have to consider the basis is for wanting to make the change. We have to provide a basis for the argument. Then we use the evidence. It ought to be done my way, or hon. Members would be ordered to resume their seats. We make our case and then introduce evidence to support it when we are challenged by colleagues, as I am being challenged.

I hope to be able to rebut those challenges, at least to the satisfaction of the Chair, as each challenge is put to me, by revealing my evidence. The Minister is in possession of all the evidence that I have in my hand. I am not making up these names. Every piece of paper that I possess is also possessed by the Minister and can be found in his files. He has the report by Dr. Badawy of South Glamorgan health authority. He also has the report on the Guinness policy statement on the top-up question from Dr. Timothy Peters and also the report from Dublin university by Professor Tipton, who is the head of the department of biochemistry at Trinity college. If my hon. Friend does not believe me, I hope that he will believe the Minister when he refers to the evidence.

I said earlier that the House should support my amendment rather than the amendments of my hon. Friends the Members for Maidstone and for Gedling for three reasons. My hon. Friend the Member for Gedling has been absolutely irresponsible in tabling his amendment. According to amendment No. 10, the level of 0·5 per cent. would be deleted and would be replaced by a level of 1·2 per cent. Dr. Badawy, of South Glamorgan health authority provides the evidence on which we should reject my hon. Friend's amendment. Dr. Badawy says that it is possible for someone to consume 1 per cent. by volume of alcohol ethanol over 20 minutes and that in the case of many adults that alone will mean that they are above the legal limit for driving. According to my hon. Friend's amendment, that limit would be raised to 1·2 per cent. He wants people to drive while they are under the influence of alcohol.

My hon. Friend's amendment is irresponsible. I do not believe that he intended it to be irresponsible when he tabled it. It is quite possible that he may catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and rebut the charge that I have levelled at him, but I prefer to use the evidence of Dr. Badawy, a top-grade biochemist, as the basis on which I shall cast my vote if my hon. Friend is irresponsible enough to call a Division on his amendment. I hope that he will not even move the amendment. If he does, I hope that he will not press it to a Division, but if he does that, I urge the House to reject it utterly. The amendment is irresponsible, but my hon. Friend is the Parliamentary Private Secretary to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy, so he cannot be irresponsible, but that is the effect of the amendment. I shall give way to my hon. Friend and I hope that he can account for his amendment.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: My hon. Friend makes an uncharacteristically intemperate attack on my amendment. If I am fortunate enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall certainly move amendment No. 10 and I shall demonstrate that, far from being irresponsible, I am seeking to join the rest of the House and act in the spirit of the Bill in making it safer for children and those who drive having consumed modest amounts of drink, by making the definitions clearer. If my hon. Friend stays to hear my brief intervention in the debate, I hope that he will realise that my amendment has the same intention as his, but I am approaching the same common task with a slightly different emphasis.

Mr. Brown: I am sorry, but that will not do. I am seeking to reduce while my hon. Friend is seeking to increase. It is that simple.

Mr. Mitchell: I am seeking to maintain the status quo.

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend is wrong. He is not seeking to maintain the status quo. The Bill reduces the limit from 1·2 per cent. to 0·5 per cent. I am proposing that it should be 0·05 per cent. My hon. Friend says that he is in favour of the status quo, but he is in favour of returning to the limit set in 1964, which is not the base from which we should be starting now that there has been a 30 per cent. growth in the market in low-alcohol and non-alcoholic beers.

Mr. Mitchell *rose*——

Mr. Brown: Does my hon. Friend really want to intervene again after what he has just heard?

Mr. Mitchell: I merely wish to stress that I am seeking to maintain the status quo. The Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) is not yet law, so the status quo is currently 1·2 per cent.

Mr. Brown: Why do we change legislation? Why do we seek to alter the status quo? Because we are not satisfied with the present position. The Government have been in power for 11 years. On 4 May 1979, when the Prime Minister first appeared at the Dispatch Box, she did not say that we had just been elected as a Conservative Government and we were here to maintain the status quo. We are not here to maintain the status quo; we are elected to implement our beliefs and to make changes in legislation. We are here to make improvements. My hon. Friend should not defend the status quo, which is indefensible. Clause 1 of the Bill amends section 201(1) of the Licensing Act 1964. It is a move in the right direction, but it does not go far enough. It rightly amends the status quo that was set in 1964 and that is unacceptable in 1990. It has to be changed for the reasons that several hon. Members, certainly the hon. Member for Huddersfield, have mentioned. The status quo once left us without the breathalyser and without speed limits. We changed the status quo because it was wrong. I have no doubt that my hon. Friend will seek to make a case for his amendment, but he has not made a case for it in his interventions so far.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): I, too, hope to catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My hon. Friend has quoted a statistic several times. He said that 30 per cent. of the market represents low-alcohol and non-alcoholic beers. The House might find that slightly misleading. Perhaps my hon. Friend can explain what proportion of that 30 per cent. represents low-alcohol beers and what proportion represents non-alcoholic beers.

11.45 am

Mr. Brown: I cannot do that as I should need to take advice from Guinness Brewing G.B., as that was the source of the statistic that I quoted. Unfortunately it did not break down the figures within that 30 per cent. into LABs and NABs.

Mr. Sheerman: I do not want to prolong the hon. Gentleman's speech, which has lasted for more than one hour and 10 minutes, but the letter that I received from Guinness pointed out that its products at 0·05 per cent. alcohol now represent 20 per cent. of the LAB and NAB market.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that information, which answers the question posed by my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale).

I have set out three reasons why we should accept my amendment in preference to the status quo, to the figure that my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton suggests, to the figure chosen by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone in her amendment No. 8 and most certainly in preference to the amendment that my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling seeks to move later this morning.

If the definition of intoxicating liquor were to be struck at 0·5 per cent., there would be three categories: low-alcohol products allowed to be sold in licensed premises only; low-alcohol products allowed to be sold in licensed and unlicensed premises and non-alcoholic products allowed to be sold in licensed and unlicensed premises. In those circumstances it is possible that there would be a move to reclassify 0·5 per cent. alcohol by volume as alcohol free to avoid consumer confusion. My hon. Friend the Member for Honiton would be the first to say that that would be utterly misleading.

I referred earlier to the note that Guinness Brewing G.B. sent to my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister also received a copy of that letter.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Although it seems an awful long time ago, I have heard all this before. I very much hope that the hon. Gentleman is not getting repetitive.

Mr. Brown: You have not heard it all before, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I quoted paragraphs 1 to 4 and I referred to paragraph 5. I referred to the report of Professor Li Wan Po of the department of pharmacy at Queen's university, Belfast. I did not refer to that report in detail; I merely referred to the author, the title and the author's credentials. Most emphatically, I deliberately did not do so because I knew that if I were to read out paragraph 5 of the letter and I then returned to the report, you would probably call me to order, so I took great care not to refer to Professor Po's report in the context of my amendment.

I left out paragraph 5 of the letter, as the record of my speech will show, and with your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I must stress that that study showed the following fact to be true. A calculation has been made. If you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, think that you have heard this all before I shall stop, but I do not think that you have. The intake of a single bolus—I may have to define that for hon. Members who are not familiar with the term—of one pint or steady drinking of two to three pints per hour of beer containing either 0·5 per cent. by volume of alcohol or 1 per cent. by volume of alcohol—0·2 per cent. by volume of alcohol less than the status quo—increases the blood-alcohol level, whereas the intake of beer containing 0·5 per cent. of alcohol by volume is perfectly safe. Who says that? Not me. Have I said it before this morning? No, because there must be verification of the fact. My hon. Friend the Member for Gedling upbraided me for stating a conclusion without first giving the evidence. To keep myself in order, I have just given the conclusion.

The evidence of Professor Li Wan Po——

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Seventy-seven minutes into his speech, is it in order to move that the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) no longer be heard and that we hear the Minister and the hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery)?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I very much hope that the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) will take that as a message of resentment about how speeches have been needlessly protracted. I remind the House that more than 20 private Member's Bills are on the Order Paper. At the end of every Session, there are complaints from hon. Members who have been frustrated in their efforts to bring their Bill before the House and make progress. I hope that hon. Members will bear in mind the interests of other hon. Members and my duty to safeguard them.

Mr. Brown: Most certainly, but you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will acknowledge that before the Bill, which was a balloted Bill, is put on the statute book, we should consider its implications. In its present form, the Bill may mislead people outside into believing that by consuming low-alcohol beers, having consumed two and a half pints of full-alcohol beer, they are safe. They may be endangering themselves and others by being over the limit.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I have your guidance? Is there a qualitative difference between balloted Bills and ten-minute Bills a legitimate parliamentary procedure whereby hon. Members have had the sweat of queueing at the Public Bill Office? May I have a ruling on whether balloted Bills are qualitatively more important than and different from ten-minute Bills?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The position is quite clear. All the Bills on the Order Paper have equal status, except in terms of the sequence in which they come before the House.

Miss Widdecombe: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I, more than any other hon. Member, have experienced the frustration of even a second-placed Bill failing because the debate before it was protracted, sometimes deliberately. Many amendments have been tabled to the Bill, which reflects serious interest in it. I have spoken to an amendment about which I feel extremely strongly. I am interested in the points being made by my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown). He is addressing not one, but a series of amendments. If his speech is lengthy, surely it has been in order and surely he is addressing the Bill. As it has precedence, we are entitled to do so.

Mr. Brown: I apologise for detaining the House, but I remember that when the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone was before the House there were 30 or 40 Bills following it. We debated the Bill until 2.30 pm, but it did not proceed beyond the first amendment. I do not remember hon. Members expressing much concern about that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The concern that was expressed to the Chair on that occasion prompted my remarks this morning. I hope that the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) will bear in mind her resentment of how some hon. Members treated her Bill when considering the rights and interests of other hon. Members. Let us get on.

Mr. Brown: I shall deal now with the report from Queen's university, Belfast, but I do not know how to do so. Should I read out the facts or the summary? From what you have said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will be satisfied —if you are satisfied, other hon. Members will be—if I simply paraphrase it.

Theoretical modelling of alcohol pharmacokinetics in humans was carried out to investigate whether low-alcohol beers could raise blood-alcohol levels to toxic level. A literature search was carried out to obtain the prerequisite parameters for alcohol pharmacokinetics in humans. Data published in studies were pooled and described statistically to provide mean values and variance data. Simulation using those parameters was carried out with the computer packages non-lin and minitab. Non-lin is a general non-linear programme, while minitab is a general statistics package. The conclusions that can be drawn from the current study are:

> "Wide inter-subject variability exists in alcohol elimination from the body. Factors known to alcohol elimination rates and effects include gender, previous exposure, age, genetic variability in enzyme activity and social setting and a blood-alcohol level 800 mg per ml is reduced to half that level in about two and a half hours."

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: These are complex scientific matters. May I emphasise that it would be helpful if hon. Members could have a copy of the research that my hon. Friend is producing?

Mr. Brown: I have been generous in giving way. I have had rather more interventions than I should have liked, but as soon as I sit down I shall photocopy the report and ensure that it is available to hon. Members so that they may challenge what I am saying if they wish. You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, thought that you heard me say something before. I am happy to provide you with a copy, and perhaps the Clerk might like one in order to assist you. It is an important report.

Conclusion No. 4 shows that a pint of non-alcoholic beer had a negligible effect on blood levels. A pint of low-alcohol beer may increase the blood level to over 150 mg per litre. That is almost twice the legal limit for you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to drive to Doncaster or for me to drive to Cleethorpes.

There can be no doubt that this is a serious amendment that deserves the serious consideration of the House. My comments have been challenged, but I have not relied on my intuition or my statistics and I have not made them up. I have not relied only on the views of Guinness, although it must be acknowledged that it has a vested interest in how the Bill gets on the statute book. I have relied on medical and academic evidence, not just on the report from Queen's university Belfast. I have relied on a host of other medical experts, so I hope that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will be the first to agree that I have approached the debate reasonably and responsibly.

Mr. Page: My hon. Friend is at last coming to the evidence on which he has based his case so far. I accept the learned professor's words when he says that if one drinks 0·5 per cent. by volume of alcohol, more alcohol will be put into the blood than if one drinks 0·05 per cent. One does not have to be a professor to reach that conclusion.

Did I hear right? Did my hon. Friend say that the learned professor said that if one drinks one pint of the 0·5 per cent. by volume low-alcohol beer, it could reach levels of 150 per cent. in the blood?

Mr. Brown: Yes, my hon. Friend heard precisely that. He was the one who intervened in my speech earlier to say that someone would have to drink gallons and gallons of low-alcohol beer for it to have a negligible effect. If my hon. Friend wants further evidence, my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton has the very report.

12 noon

Sir Peter Emery: It is 1 per cent., not 0·05 per cent.

Mr. Brown: It is contained in conclusion No. 5 in the report. If my hon. Friend wants me to refer to the evidence, I must turn to page 12. I have a suspicion that while I do not think that I would be out of order, it appears that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, might think that I was out of order if I were to refer to page 12, but my whole case rests on conclusion No. 5, and I think that I would be perfectly in order to draw that to Mr. Deputy Speaker's attention.

I shall turn to conclusion No. 6, on page 13, which states:

> "Drinking non-alcoholic beer at a rate of 1 pint per 20 minutes does not increase alcohol levels beyond 15 mg per millilitre."

There is even more damning evidence in the report, where it states:

> "Drinking low-alcohol beer at a rate of one pint per 20 minutes may raise the blood-alcohol level"—

wait for it—

> "to 800 mg within three hours."

[Interruption.] I thought that that would cause some murmurs and raise the temperature. The report continues:

"Rapid drinking of one pint of de-alcoholised beer when the blood-alcohol level is already at 800 mg per ml, will increase that level to higher levels for half an hour."

Mr. Gale: Really?

Mr. Brown: Yes, but you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I represent northern constituencies. It is not unknown for people in the north, if they do not today, to have drunk such quantities in the past. That is what we are dealing with. I think that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as Member for a constituency not far away from the one that I represent, will agree that we have problems with people who drink such volumes of alcohol.

Mr. Gale: If we get the opportunity to debate this matter further, some of us may wish to refer to the report and demonstrate that it has already been widely debated nationally, and not all its conclusions are as readily accepted as my hon. Friend would seem to say. Does he not accept that anyone who drinks nine pints of beer in three hours might consider that he should not drive anyway?

Mr. Brown: Yes, but if that person was drinking low-alcohol beer, he would say, "Oh, but it is low-alcohol beer. I have drunk nine pints of low-alcohol beer, so I am all right. I shall get in my car and drive away." When the person is breathalysed and the breathalyser goes through the roof and virtually blows up the police car as well as the machine, he will not think so any more.

Much levity is expressed about this issue in certain quarters, but it is serious. Someone may drink nine pints of low-alcohol beer, get into his motor car and think that he is safe from prosecution. Nothing could be further from the truth, as paragraph 8 of the learned professor's report shows.

Mr. John Marshall: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. He has suffered from a great deal of injury time this morning. We should not complain about the length of his speech in view of his courtesy in giving way. Does he not agree that some of the advertising of low-alcohol beers is highly misleading? A well-known brand is advertised as 100 per cent. Tennents and 1 per cent. alcohol. Would not anyone reading that advertisement assume that he was quite safe to drink an unlimited supply of Tennents low-alcohol beer?

Mr. Brown: That is the nub of the question. Low-alcohol beer is not safe to drink in vast quantities. The type of person who might be encouraged—because he likes to drink a lot of alcohol in terms of volume—is the type of person who may well be inclined to drink beers such as my hon. Friend mentioned.

The report from the department of pharmacy at Queen's university, Belfast contains another 23 conclusions that support my amendment. I have drawn the attention of the House to only six of those conclusions, and the outrage and shock expressed by my hon. Friends at those conclusions suggests that they will be incapable of coping with any more.

My hon. Friend the Member for Honiton is drawing to the attention of my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, South-West (Mr. Page) some of the more incredible facts, supported not only by the department of pharmacy at Queen's university, Belfast, but by the university of Dublin and a number of others.

Therefore, I hope that I have made my case. There are another 20 conclusions that I shall not draw to the attention of the House. I shall photocopy the report and ensure that it is in the hands of my hon. Friends should they wish to catch Mr. Deputy Speaker's eye. If they want to challenge anything that I have said, I shall happily reply.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak in today's interesting and important debate. I shall try to follow some of the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown), but at less length, because I am conscious that a number of my hon. Friends wish to speak both on this Bill and the next. I see that the proposer of the next Bill is present. It is appropriate that, for a Bill dealing with horses, he should attend on us in his riding gear and apparel.

For the sake of good order, I start by declaring a loose interest in the debate as a shareholder and adviser to a family business in the wine trade. As far as I am aware, no low alcohol drinks are sold in that business, so my comments are not related to that. My constituency contains the Home brewery, an outstanding supplier of ales of all kinds to my constituents and others in the Nottingham area. I have not spoken directly to the company on this issue, although I have meetings with the management on many matters of local concern, and am aware of its views. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) will catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and have a chance to give the brewing industry's professional view on many of these matters because that is extremely important.

Every day 40,000 pints of low-alcohol and non-alcoholic drinks are drunk. We are dealing with a growing and important market. That was one reason why I was so surprised that Northern Ireland was excluded from the Bill. Scotland is also excluded from one of the first two clauses. I am grateful for what my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) has already told us informally, and I believe he will say more in his speech.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton on bringing before the House an important matter that needs our attention. I propose my amendment No. 10 as a probing amendment. Before today's debate I was not fully decided about the matter and I shall listen with great interest to the Minister.

There is clear agreement in the House about what we seek to achieve. We want clearer definition and a greater ability to understand the effects of alcoholic drink and to ensure that the consumer is able to understand those effects. I listened with intense care to the peroration of my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes. Although he produced a great deal of complicated evidence, he was not successful in persuading the House that we should all adhere to his aim.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton on the way in which he has guided the Bill. He has brought it to the House in a form that is largely acceptable and I make no bones about that. He has also managed to steer it through Committee with little unrest and without disturbing any of the professional lobbies. The only group that has made representations to the House is Guinness plc, and I am sure that we are all grateful to Guinness for giving us its view.

[Mr. Andrew Mitchell]

I have tabled a probing amendment, and I wish to speak about the other amendments in the group, too. Amendment No. 10 seeks to leave out "0·5 per cent." and to insert "1·2 per cent." As we have already established, I wish to maintain the status quo. I shall dwell on a number of aspects, especially the labelling of spirits and beers, and the way in which amendment No. 10 would bring about some rationality in the market which does not exist at present.

My hon. Friend the Minister has already referred briefly to the ministerial group on alcohol misuse, which is more generally and rightly known as the Wakeham committee. Many of us regarded it as an important contribution and we were pleased by the high prominence that the Prime Minister gave to that committee, which sought genuinely to make some inroads into the tragedies caused by alcohol misuse. I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to give us a few thoughts on what came out of that committee and on what progress it made.

I also hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will pay tribute to the considerable good work of the working group on alcohol and young people which produced the Masham report. I am sure that we need to hear something on that. In addition, we need a qualitative statement from the Minister about the report to which my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes referred and about the detailed scientific evidence on which he touched. Even now, he is circulating copies of the papers to which he referred.

I am content to leave the decisions on the scientific evidence to the Minister. If the Government support the Bill—I am pleased to see that they do in effect—my hon. Friend will, no doubt, have already considered the weight that should be attached to the evidence. He should be able to give us the benefit of the Government's and his Department's views of the detailed scientific evidence, which is too much for me, a humble Back-Bencher, to weigh in the balance.

One area of concern today has been to find out the precise alcoholic strengths of various drinks and to know how they compare with other alcoholic drinks on sale. I want briefly to shed some light on that. I have managed to persuade the Library to provide some information. In beers generally, the alcohol content varies from 2 per cent. for some of the mild Scandinavian varieties to about 8 per cent. in especially strong beers. Most American beers vary from 4 per cent. to 5 per cent.

The natural, unfortified and dry wines, such as Burgundy, Chianti and Sauternes contain between 8 per cent. and 12 per cent. alcohol and most American varieties contain between 12 per cent. and 14 per cent. Vermouth and aperitif wines usually contain about 18 per cent. Cocktail wines, and dessert and sweet wines, such as sherry, port and moscatel, contain 20 per cent. to 21 per cent. That is the magnitude of the range of wines with which we are comparing low-alcohol beers and it is important for us to be aware of those figures.

12.15 pm

It is also extremely important to hear what the Department of Health feels about the Bill and about the alcohol content of the drinks that we are discussing. The central point of my case is that I fear that 0·5 per cent. may be the worst of all worlds. That is a point made by the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), who has kindly sat through our debate this morning. The tipping-over-the-top effect may be made worse by having a 0·5 per cent. level.

We discussed briefly the importance of specific gravity and whether that was the issue, but I do not believe that it is. It is more important for us to focus on the signals that we send to children who will be able to buy these goods and to people who may drive following a drink and who may be even more confused as a result of the Bill than they would be otherwise. It is helpful for our deliberations to have with us the Minister for Roads and Traffic with whom we so often discuss what he can do to enhance the safety of roads in our constituencies. I am sure that he would have a signal contribution to make, if he were to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on what he considers to be the Bill's likely effects.

I had two major concerns in tabling a probing amendment. It will be difficult for us to pass the Bill unless we are certain of the signals that we send to children and of the effect it may have on those who drive after a modest amount of drink and who want to be clear where they stand. They have no wish to go anywhere near the limit. We must not send them false signals which fail to help them to carry out their perfectly legal and law-abiding aim to have a modest drink and then to be able to drive.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes gave three good reasons for a figure of 0·05 per cent., in respect of which he has tabled an amendment. I do not find the argument as compelling as he did. I am content to leave the analysis to my hon. Friend the Minister who will be able to set our minds at rest. However, it is important to recall that my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes made an eloquent and accurate tribute to the Public Bill Office for the way in which it handled the advice on all the amendments which, although closely related, are slightly different. I am sure that all of us join him in that tribute.

I mentioned earlier that the Home brewery, which is now owned by Scottish and Newcastle Breweries, is a distinguished and important business in my constituency. I shall touch briefly on some of the technical problems with 0·05 per cent., the figure that was so eloquently and lengthily supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes. Near beers—that is, beers that are not full strength—are produced with more alcohol than normal. That alcohol is then drawn off to create beers with an alcoholic content of, for example, 0·05 per cent.

The first of my two great concerns is that there may be severe technical problems with the process. I am not an expert, but I understand that the industry has advised that such problems might arise. My other fear is that if most of the alcohol is drawn off, leaving only 0·05 per cent., the resulting taste will not be as attractive or the drinks as palatable as beers containing slightly more alcohol. If we set the limit so low, the product may not prove at all popular and may not sell well, and that will undermine an important aim of the Bill.

Mr. Gale: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The net effect of the proposal of my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) that we reduce the limit not to 0·5 per cent. but to 0·05 per cent. would be to make many of the products so upalatable that people would choose stronger beers rather than opting for the low-alcohol beers whose consumption the Bill seeks to encourage.

Mr. Mitchell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is more knowledgeable than me about the brewing industry. I suspect that he knows more than many of us about the technical aspects of the production and marketing of such products. He has cast some doubt on the first hour of the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes and I am sure that the House will be grateful to him for his intervention.

It is perhaps an illustration of the unity that exists on these matters that I can support absolutely one of the points of my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), who said that under the Bill children might learn more easily about alcohol and might learn to consume alcohol. She said that ease of access by children to alcohol and near-alcohol was highly undesirable. She also said that children cannot commute the amount of alcohol that they have consumed. She was worried about alcohol addiction—the habit-forming nature of the product—and mentioned the possible effect of alcohol on brain cells, which is a matter of scientific evidence.

I should like to hear what my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton has to say on the subject of children and it would also help to hear the Minister's view, not so much on the health aspects but on matters affecting the Home Office. Under the auspices of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, then the Home Secretary, the Home Office set up a group designed to work to make parents more responsible for the actions of their children as a means of combating juvenile crime and ensuring better parental control. Clearly, the Bill can be seen in that context. I shall find it more difficult to support the Bill if my hon. Friend the Minister cannot tell us that it is likely to make it easier for parents to exercise control over their children. We regard that as fundamental to the credo of our party on law and order, which we wish to see enforced and enhanced. I shall be interested to hear from the Minister what the Home Office thinks.

Hon. Members have argued eloquently about the topping-up effect on drivers. We must be clear of the effect that the drinks will have on drivers and the drivers themselves must be clear of it if the Bill is to have a beneficial effect. Many people were not in favour of the introduction of seat-belt legislation—a cause that I know is near to your heart, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Those who work in the National Health Service have seen the significant effect of that measure in reducing driving accidents. My wife, who worked some years ago in a major hospital close to the M4 and often had to deal with road accidents, is an avid supporter of the measure because it has greatly diminished the frequency with which she had to deal with the sad and tragic results of road accidents. As important as the argument about children is the argument that drivers must be able more easily to see the effects that drinking the products will have. It is important to keep both those considerations at the forefront of our minds.

It has been suggested that six or seven pints of low-alcohol beer could be treated in the same way as six or seven pints of lemonade and that the levels are potentially misleading. There is always the fear that low-alcohol drinks will be regarded as effectively non-alcoholic and that the Bill will serve only to create confusion and diminish responsibility. That was the consideration at the heart of my probing amendment and that was what led me to believe that there was considerable merit in maintaining the status quo.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow), I almost regard the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) as my hon. Friend because of his kindness to me on my first day in the House. He emphasised the dangers of encouraging under-age drinking, and I cite his remarks to support my case.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne spoke in a style and manner unique to this place and made famous by him. He eloquently supported my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone. He made it clear that he favoured the focusing of attention on specific gravity. I listened carefully and with an open mind and I thought that he put a good case in favour of the House accepting my hon. Friend's amendment rather than mine.

I hope that in his winding-up speech my hon. Friend the Minister will clarify the amounts and their effects. I hope that he will also consider carefully the interests of other Departments in the Bill. It will have an effect on the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, as well as on the EEC, which introduces measures affecting the definition and labelling of low-alcohol drinks. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department and I have suffered a calamity today. When we cannot be in our constituencies we reside in the borough of Islington, where the community charge bills have been delivered this morning. I fear that no amount of alcohol-free lager will be able to mitigate their appalling effects on my hon. Friend and me.

Mr. John Marshall: My hon. Friend referred to the fact that he received his community charge bill——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. What has the community charge to do with it? Let us get back to the amendment.

12.30 pm

Mr. Mitchell: I am extremely grateful for your protection, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because my hon. Friend was seeking to guide me down a route which was clearly out of order. I was making the point that whatever amendment, if any, was included in the Bill could not make up for the tremendous size of the community charge bill which I received in the letter box this morning, and on which it would not be appropriate for me to comment further despite my hon. Friend's inducement. Nor would it be appropriate for me to mention that one third of the charge is to finance the special arrangements that the authority made and should not have made.

As the Bill stands, for drinks to be sold legally in unlicensed premises, they will have to contain 0·5 per cent. alcohol at the time of consumption or supply rather than during manufacture. When my hon. Friend sums up, could he advise us and make it quite clear whether the change in the way in which the level of alcohol is calculated has any other significance that we should be aware of? For example, alcohol commuted during fermentation may have a different relationship to the level of alcohol commuted during production. Can he give us advice on the difference between those two at the time of sale?

My hon. Friend the Member for Honiton has been careful to make it clear that the Bill rationalises a position which has previously been confused. We need to know

[Mr. Mitchell]

whether eliminating the tests during preparation will have any other effects. Also, if the figure was 1·2 per cent. in 1964, what good reason is there for changing it now?

Amendment No. 1, which would leave out 0·5 per cent. and insert 0·05 per cent., would be too restrictive, and is therefore not compelling. Amendment No. 9 comes close to the amendment standing in my name. It would reduce the figure from 0·5 per cent. to 0·1 per cent. and is similar to amendment No. 1, proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes.

Amendment No. 2 aims to delete all words after "per cent.", but there must be a point of definition, so it would be helpful for us to know the thinking behind that amendment. In amendment No. 3, what does "other conduct in question" mean? That is a relevant point that needs to be explained.

I have already dealt with amendment No. 4, which is important because it would bring Scotland into line with England. Generally, we are in favour of that, particularly in some areas of public spending, where I would strongly favour that.

Mr. John Marshall: Hear, hear.

Mr. Mitchell: I think that my hon. Friend is thinking of the National Health Service—and who can blame him when the Scots can spend 25 per cent. more than we can? However, that is an avenue down which I would not wish to advance, or I would try your patience, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

One effect of the Bill will be to align some of the provisions of the licensing laws on the sale of drinks in unlicensed premises with requirements about the labelling of non-alcoholic and low-alcohol drinks. However, I fear that the Bill, if passed in its original form, may create new anomalies.

As I understand it, the Bill would mean that drinks containing up to 0·5 per cent. alcohol by volume would be allowed to be sold in unlicensed premises but that 1·2 per cent. alcohol by volume would remain the lower limit for the purposes of excise duty. By deviating from the 1·2 per cent. figure, we will create an additional anomaly: there will be a potential range of drinks between 0·5 per cent. and 1·2 per cent. which will come within the new definition of low alcohol, which may only be consumed on licensed premises but on which no excise duty will be payable. The 0·5 per cent. limit corresponds with the labelling requirements for de-alcoholised wine and beer.

There seems to be a division of opinion about the minimum level of alcohol required for a drink to be intoxicating, and after our discussions today, I am not sure whether any of us are clearer about that. In a consultation document issued in 1988, the Government stated:

> "drinks below 1·2 per cent. alcohol are non-excisable and generally regarded as non-alcoholic . . . there is evidence which suggests that it is not possible to become intoxicated from the consumption of drinks with a strength of up to 1·5 per cent."

What has changed the Government's view since then? No doubt my hon. Friend the Minister will want to address that point.

Later, a concentration of 1·2 per cent. was described as "unlikely to be intoxicating." That statement was made in a press notice from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 8 September 1988.

A consultation letter that appeared on 19 April 1989 stated that low-alcohol lagers can contain 0·9 per cent. It continued:

> "Ministers are concerned to ensure that consumers are not misled into thinking that such drinks are lower in alcohol than they are in reality."

In a debate led by my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton on 26 January, there was some discussion about the significance of the 0·5 per cent. threshold in terms of its effects on blood alcohol levels, particularly on drivers who had already been drinking normal strength drinks. It is difficult to know what is meant by the term "non-intoxicating" in that context even when the Government use it.

A cat's cradle of different levels of alcohol is being referred to in different ways by different Departments. There is a danger that that could be misleading. We all know that different amounts of drink affect different people in different ways. A former Opposition Member, Mr. Russell Kerr, was acquitted of a drink-driving charge because he managed to show that something in his gut generated alcohol. That was a most ingenious defence; and it shows that applying absolute levels in the way that the Government have applied them in different press releases can be extremely misleading for people who want to know what they have drunk.

Mr. Sheerman: The hon. Gentleman is just talking the Bill out, and he knows it.

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. I very much hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) will be able to speak to his Bill later. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton will be successful and also that the next Bill will reach the statute book.

There is bound to be confusion in the labelling of low-alcohol beers. A recent press release from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on labelling controls on low-alcohol beers, stated:

> "This is a rapidly expanding sector of the drinks market. While my colleagues and I believe that existing labelling laws are broadly sufficient to ensure that lower alcohol drinks can easily be distinguished from normal strength products, we think it would be sensible to restrict the use of the term 'low alcohol' to those drinks not exceeding 1·2 per cent. alcohol by volume. Such drinks are unlikely to be intoxicating. It is important that the term 'low alcohol' should apply consistently to the whole range of alcoholic drinks if it is to be helpful to consumers."

That is a very definite statement, and we need to know whether the Government's view has changed.

Almost exactly a year ago—on 19 April 1989—a letter from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food outlined a proposal to restrict the use of the description "low-alcohol" and similar terms. The second paragraph of the letter made it absolutely clear that the Ministry wished

> "to restrict the use of the description 'Low-alcohol' and similar terms to alcoholic drinks not exceeding 1·2 per cent. alcohol by volume."

That is very different from the terminology that is used in the Bill. It is the burden of my amendment, and it is important that we should consider that.

A press release from the Ministry of Agriculture dated 15 May 1989 referred to the strength marking of alcoholic drinks and to

> "New regulations giving consumers details about the alcoholic content of the drinks they buy".

The release goes on:

"The regulations, which were laid before Parliament today, will implement EC legislation making alcoholic strength marking compulsory for prepackaged drinks with an alcoholic strength of more than 1·2 per cent. alcohol by volume. The regulations also require strength marking indications to be given for a representative sample of dispensed drinks offered for sale in retail outlets such as public houses, wine bars and restaurants. The requirement for dispensed drinks is subject to a maximum sample size of six for Community-controlled wines and 30 for other alcoholic drinks and the information can be added to existing price boards or wine lists."

The last bit is incomprehensible Eurospeak. However, the first part is clear: it shows that the Government have examined the issue carefully, and reached the conclusion that 1·2 per cent. is the right cut-off level.

Let me complete my brief speech by congratulating——

Mr. Sheerman: Brief?

Mr. Mitchell: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I have spoken for much less time than other hon. Members. I am sure that he does not wish to prolong my speech.

On all these points, it is the Minister and the Bill's promoter, my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton, who will be able to clarify the different amendments and the effects that they will have. I have tried to put the case for my amendment. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton both on his subject and on the skill with which he has steered the Bill towards its position today. I shall be supporting him. I shall not request a Division on my amendment.

The House and the country owe my hon. Friend a debt for introducing a Bill which—subject to the points on which I seek clarification—will be of great benefit to society, especially in the two or three respects that I have identified.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I am privileged to follow the expert speeches of my hon. Friends. Perhaps I can reassure the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) that I do not propose to detain the House for longer than 10 minutes or so.

I will start by declaring that—as stated in the Register of Members' Interests—I have an interest as consultant to the Brewers Society. In that position, I can confirm what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery)—that the Bill is welcomed by the society and by the industry. There is a clear need for the definition that it introduces. It is also welcomed by Alcohol Concern and the Health Education Authority.

Let me refer to some of the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) about what has happened in the marketplace. I shall refer specifically to a review in the *Brewing Review* of January 1990 of low-alcohol and alcohol-free beers. In view of the time, I will not go into the details of the review, but it is worth putting on the record its summary, which points out that, in two years, the market in the United Kingdom for low-alcohol and no-alcohol beers has been transformed. It is the fastest-growing sector of the drinks marketplace, and has accelerated more rapidly than any other drinks type in living memory. There has been a remarkable shift in consumer attitudes. The industry deserves credit for that, because the marketing has undoubtedly improved.

Until 1987 or so, the sales of no-alcohol and low-alcohol beer suffered from a lack of credibility because of the poor perception that many drinkers had of product quality. However, today there is a new scenario. The most important fact is that regular beer drinkers now believe that no-alcohol and low-alcohol beers are a perfectly acceptable choice of drink—and not just when they are driving. That traditional perception has now changed, as is proved by the sales figures, which show year-on-year increases of more than 100 per cent. and more and more brands entering the market.

My hon. Friend the Member for Honiton is to be warmly congratulated on bringing forward the Bill and on his expertise and, I hope, on seeing it complete its passage today. Hon. Members will be used to Scottish Members asking, "What about Scotland?" in tones varying from genuine inquiry to artificial outrage. I put myself on the side of the genuine inquirers.

Mr. John Marshall: As always.

12.45 pm

Mr. Stewart: I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall).

However, I should not accuse my hon. Friends of overlooking Scotland. My hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) visited Scotland recently. My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes is renowned for the expertise that he demonstrated on the Standing Committee that considered the Self-Governing Schools Etc. (Scotland) Bill, when he covered many aspects of the history of Scottish education. My hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) referred to his recent experience in Scotland.

Unless I have completely misunderstood the position, all the amendments exclude Scotland. They relate only to clause 1. The House should think seriously before passing a Bill that would impose different percentages north and south of the border. Licensing legislation does not need to be uniform throughout the United Kingdom. The Bill does not apply to Northern Ireland. I imagine that that is because of the complexities of Northern Ireland legislation. The Bill would have been much longer if it applied to Northern Ireland. However, clause 2 applies to Scotland, and states:

"from 'an analysis of' to the words '1·2%' there shall be substituted the words 'is of a strength not exceeding 0·5%'."

My hon. Friend the Member for Honiton referred to the Licensing (Scotland) Act 1976. My copy of that Act may be out of date and it does not contain that wording. It refers to degrees of proof and not to 1·2 per cent.

Sir Peter Emery: I wonder whether my hon. Friend has a copy of the amendments to that Act, which was amended in 1971 and 1982 and which I took into account.

Mr. Stewart: I am referring to a copy of the Act, which was reprinted in 1986. I may have misunderstood the position, but the meaning is the same although the wording may be a little different.

With his customary expertise, my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes made an extremely well researched case. Technology is constantly improving. My hon. Friend referred to the Guinness product with 0·05 per cent. alcohol. We should not encourage people to drink to the limit if they are to drive. It is absurd to think that people can work out for themselves whether they are at a level of 78 per cent., 79 per cent. or 80 per cent. My

[Mr. Stewart]

hon. Friend the Member for Gedling put some technical points extremely well. In view of the time, I shall not repeat them.

On Second Reading, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall) referred to my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton. I am sure that my hon. Friend will have spotted a misprint in *Hansard*. It says:

> "The general feeling is that a bear with an alcoholic content of 0·5 per cent."—[*Official Report*, 26 January 1990; Vol. 165 c. 1243.]

That raises all sorts of visions. The obvious error is that the word should have been "beer".

I make my final point to my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes on amendment No. 4. The point behind my hon. Friend's amendment on point of sale is correct. My hon. Friend the Member for Honiton will advise the House but I do not believe that in terms of the Licensing (Scotland) Act 1987, the amendment is necessary.

Mr. Dalyell: Has the hon. Gentleman had any information—this is a genuine inquiry—from the brewers about their view on the vexed and complex question of points of sale? Have they a view on that point?

Mr. Stewart: Is the hon. Gentleman referring to points of sale in supermarkets?

Mr. Dalyell: Yes.

Mr. Stewart: I am sure that the brewers have a view on any legislation of that nature that comes before the House. That point is referred to in the Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Scotland) Bill, which is currently in another place and will be considered by this House later this Session.

All the amendments would result in the Bill being different north and south of the border. That is undesirable. Therefore, I hope that the House agrees that it would be sensible for the excellent Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton to proceed to another place unamended.

Mr. Sheerman: I shall not detain the House long on this Bill, which I broadly support. Indeed, the majority of Members of the House support it, although, as it is a Friday, they are not here in great numbers.

I wish to make a general point before I mention the matters dealt with in the amendments. The Opposition believe and have believed for a long time that licensing laws are in something of a mess. The Bill will take a small step towards tidying up one corner of that mess. There should be a much broader inquiry into licensing laws and the problems caused by drinking in many communities.

I agree with all the hon. Members who have spoken that under-age drinking is one of the most serious problems for crime prevention in Britain today. Any of us who live anywhere near even a small urban centre know that it is almost dangerous to go into town and city centres on a Friday or Saturday night if one is a"a respectable person" who hopes to keep out of any trouble. The extent of alcoholism and bad behaviour makes many towns and cities almost no-go areas. If the Bill makes a difference to that, we shall certainly support it.

However, there are serious problems with the Bill. The hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) referred to some of them in his rather long speech. I am sorry that he is not here to hear my comments on his speech. He mentioned the problem of identifying young people when they buy alcohol to drink on the premises or from a shop. The Government must grasp that problem. We must require proof of identity to drink, and to buy alcohol to take away.

We all know that the law on drinking under 18 is widely disregarded by the young and those who sell alcohol, whether in supermarkets, corner shops or public houses.

Mr. Gale: I do not seek to delay the hon. Gentleman, but will he concede that that is perhaps a case for the voluntary identification cards for which many of us have pressed for a long time?

Mr. Sheerman: Personally I am enamoured of such identification cards. If one wants to enforce the law on drinking under 18, it is logical that there must be some way of identifying who is 18. I have never pushed for the drinking laws that are in force in most of the states of the United States of America where one cannot drink legally until one is 21. I have always campaigned vigorously for implementing the law of drinking at 18 which has been widely disregarded. It is about time that we not only implemented it, but offered an alternative to young people. One problem is that there are few institutions, social occasions or social outlets where young people can drink anything other than alcohol. If the Bill provides a basis to ensure that our young people are not pressurised into drinking high concentrations of alcohol in large numbers, it will be welcome.

The Brewers Society and the major brewers have taken a responsible attitude to informing Members about the Bill, but the Government should reconsider the advertising of alcoholic drinks and the way in which the consumption of alcohol is presented to young people. Much of the targeting of under-age drinkers—of 15-plus rather than 18-plus—is irresponsible.

Again, we must present our young people with a choice and with socially congenial places in which they can mix with others of their own age where they do not feel that getting drunk is incumbent upon them. I am afraid that at the moment many young people believe that there is no alternative.

I have already outlined one of the Opposition's worries about the Bill is an intervention in the speech of the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes. I am sure that when the hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) speaks, he will be able to put our minds at rest on the point about the evidence relating to the 0·5 per cent. and 0·05 per cent. alcohol by volume. We believe that the Government must reconsider that point and, having listened to the debate, it is clear that although the scientific evidence has come from only one side of the argument, there is cause for concern about the top-up problem. I am sure that that point can be met because I have always believed that if we can take a firm step in the right direction, it is better to take that step than not to take any steps at all.

With that caveat, I reiterate that the debate has pinpointed some of the real problems of alcoholism and the consumption of alcohol and about what it can do to people's social and family life and to young people if they are encouraged to drink much too early in their lives, when they are not educated.

I do not often agree with the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), but she made an excellent point about the need for education about alcohol consumption. Education should teach people to drink sensibly and the lack of such education is all too often at the heart of our concerns about young people. I belong to a generation whose education on this was probably better carried out—and more abruptly. In those days, if someone tried to buy a drink when he was obviously under age, he got short shrift from the landlord who often knew him, his parents and the community as a whole. Unfortunately, that sort of thing does not happen today.

I am glad that the Minister for Roads and Traffic has just come into the Chamber. I have been concerned for many years about drinking and driving. Over the past few years, the low-alcohol option has made a profound difference to drinking and driving. Although I should like other steps to be taken, such as random breath-testing, there is no doubt that the availability of low-alcohol or alcohol-free drinks has made a big difference to the problems for which we must make policy.

We back the Bill warmly and wish it a fair wind. I just hope that the Minister will answer the few questions that have been put to him.

1 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): I am encouraged by the speech of the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman). I agree with him that the Bill will help to deal with the problems that worry him. However, it would not be appropriate to discuss them fully at this stage, since we are dealing with amendment No. 8. It will be appropriate, nevertheless, to comment in turn on each of the interesting amendments that are grouped with amendment No. 8.

Amendment No. 8, which was ably moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), would restore in form, but with a different specification for both original gravity and alcohol by volume, the existing definition of intoxicating liquor in section 201(1) of the Licensing Act 1964. Even though the new specification in my hon. Friend's amendment is the same as the one that my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) has included in his Bill, I am afraid that I cannot commend her amendment to the House. Nevertheless, I appreciate the concern that my hon. Friend expressed that people may be confused about the level of alcohol in certain drinks. That, however, is a matter to be addressed by the labelling rules. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will give close attention to those rules if, as I hope, the Bill reaches the statute book.

The problem created for the manufacturers and retailers of low-alcohol drinks by the existing definition of intoxicating liquor in the 1964 Act cannot, I am afraid, be overcome simply by tinkering with its references to a drink's original gravity and strength in terms of percentage of alcohol by volume, as my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone would do—as my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) so astutely observed in his first and shorter intervention. More fundamental change, of the kind provided for by clause 1 in the Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton is essential if these problems are to be resolved satisfactorily.

The present definition of intoxicating liquor in the 1964 Act needs to be changed because of the growing numbers of low and no-alcohol beers and wines now coming on to the market. Some of my hon. Friends referred to that problem. Broadly speaking, the Licensing Act 1964 prohibits the retail sale of intoxicating liquor in England and Wales without a justice's licence. It also makes it an offence for a licensee to sell intoxicating liquor to someone under 18 years of age. Intoxicating liquor is defined in the Act as spirits, wine, beer, cider and any other fermented, distilled, or spiritous liquor.

However, the definition goes on to exclude from licensing controls any liquor which is found, on an analysis of a sample thereof, at any time to be of an original gravity not exceeding 1016 deg and of a strength not exceeding 1·2 per cent. alcohol by volume. My hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone would therefore leave the underlying problem as it is.

The interpretation of the law is, of course, a matter for the courts, but in the absence of a ruling from them on the point we have taken the view that this definition brings within the scope of intoxicating liquor a considerable number of the low and no-alcohol drinks now on the market. This is because they are produced, in the main, from full strength brews from which some, or nearly all, of the alcohol is then taken out. Such drinks may, when they are sold, contain less than 1·2 per cent. alcohol.

Some, like Kaliber and Barbican, may even qualify for the term "alcohol-free" because they have an alcoholic strength by volume at point of sale of less than 0·05 per cent., as my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes told us at some length this morning. Nevertheless, the inclusion in the present definition of intoxicating liquor of the reference to an original gravity not exceeding 1016 deg and the words "at any time" mean, we believe, that they must be regarded as intoxicating liquor for licensing purposes.

The existing definition of intoxicating liquor was drawn up before low and no-alcohol drinks were produced and promoted, certainly on the scale that they are now. There must be considerable doubt that it was ever intended to have the effect it has in relation to low and no alcohol drinks.

Mr. John Marshall: My hon. Friend will have heard the comments that clause 3 of the Bill means that it does not apply to Northern Ireland. He is an expert on the constitutional arrangements that affect Northern Ireland. Do the Government intend to move an Order in Council that would make the provisions of the Bill apply to Northern Ireland?

Mr. Lloyd: The Northern Ireland Licensing Act 1971 is not amended by the Bill. It is a transferred matter that should be dealt with by Order in Council as has been the custom since direct rule. If the Bill reaches the statute book, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will be considering sympathetically whether he should bring Northern Ireland legislation into line.

There is, therefore, general agreement that the Bill my hon. Friend, the Member for Honiton, has introduced is a timely and sensible measure, although there were some questions about exactly how he should present it.

One of the fundamental changes my hon. Friend is seeking to make to the definition of intoxicating liquor is to ensure that, in future, the test to be applied when considering whether a liquor licence is required before a

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particular product can be sold is its alcoholic strength at point of sale—not how strong it once was at some stage in the process of its manufacture.

Such a change would end some of the anomalies to which the present law can give rise—for example, the situation in which some drinks containing between 0·05 per cent. and 1·2 per cent. alcohol at point of sale may be sold without a licence because in the course of their manufacture their original gravities did not exceed 1016 deg and their strengths 1·2 per cent. while others of comparable, or even weaker, strengths at point of sale may not, because when they were being produced, one or both of the limits specified by the law were exceeded.

For that reason, clause 1 of my hon. Friend's Bill seeks in effect to delete from the present definition of intoxicating liquor the references to the original gravity of a drink and the words "at any time". I see my hon. Friend nodding in agreement.

It is essential, if the purpose of clarifying this area of the law and ending the anomalies to which it can at present give rise is to be achieved, that those words no longer appear in that context. The amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and spoken to with her characteristic energy would, I regret, reintroduce the offending words into the definition of intoxicating liquor in the 1964 Act and thereby perpetuate the confusion and amomalies that she and the Bill are seeking to remove.

I hope that my reply and the arguments to come of my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton will prove sufficient to persuade her to withdraw, if she is still here to do so.

I now turn to the three amendments relating to alcoholic strength thresholds: amendment No. 1 in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes, amendment No. 9 in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) and amendment No. 10 in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell).

In our consideration of the issue, we have been most concerned to look very closely at what, if the law were to be changed, should be the new threshold—that is the percentage alcohol by volume it would be safe to permit in drinks which could, in future, be sold without a licence. That concern was central to the remarks made by the hon. Member for Huddersfield. It would mean, for example, that such drinks could be retailed freely from unlicensed premises such as sweet shops, grocers and corner stores.

Mr. Dalyell: I intervene to raise an issue that has been raised in the past by the Scottish Consumer Council which said:

> "Much has been made, in Parliament and elsewhere, of a recent study by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys on under age drinking, which suggests that many young people do buy alcohol over the counter in various types of off-licenses. However, that study did not distinguish between small shops"—

which the Minister mentioned—

> "and large supermarkets as a source of illegal sales. Amongst 17 year old boys in the survey, twice as many said they bought alcohol from off-licenses as from other types of shops, and evidence from other sources suggested that large national supermarkets were less likely to sell alcohol to minors than some small shops."

It concludes:

> "Despite all that, the government decided earlier this year to back legislation which singled out the larger supermarkets and their customers for attention. That measure failed because of its impracticality. However it seems as though supermarkets and their customers are still in the government's sights."

Will the Minister clarify whether supermarkets are still in the Government's sights?

Mr. Lloyd: I confirm that the problems of under-age drinking are in the Government's sights. The problems are extremely complex, partly for the reasons implied by the hon. Gentleman, such as the variety of sources of drink. I shall not go down that path now, although I have registered the point that the hon. Gentleman made.

The Bill aims to tackle the problems positively and makes available to youth clubs and other organisations where young people congregate the possibility of supplying a range of non-alcoholic or low-alcohol drinks, which they could not otherwise do, with the expectation and hope that at least some of the excessive under-age drinking can be diverted or diminished. It also aims to enable non-alcoholic or low-alcohol drinks to be freely sold in premises that already had justices' licences, such as public houses, hotels, off-licences and supermarkets. We have always recognised that this is a fairly complex question to which there is no simple answer. It seemed to us right that what might be termed the medical considerations should be paramount when deciding the right threshold to adopt.

We therefore sought advice from the Department of Health on the issue. The advice that we received was that the most immediate concern is the short-term intoxicating effect of alcohol on young people. That is not to say that the possibility of long-term health consequences owing to chronic misuse of alcohol was not acknowledged, but rather that the short-term effects of consuming alcohol were considered more important for the purpose of this exercise.

We were advised that the most important short-term physical effect of consuming any alcoholic drink is to produce a rise in blood-alcohol level. The higher the blood-alcohol level, the greater the risk of harm to the individual concerned. No alcoholic beverage can be said to be completely safe; even low-alcohol drinks will produce some rise in blood-alcohol level when consumed.

The eventual level of blood-alcohol achieved will depend upon a variety of factors. First, the concentration of alcohol in the beverage; secondly, how much is drunk and how quickly; thirdly, the body weight of the drinker and whether the person concerned is male or female; fourthly, whether the drink is accompanied by food; fifthly, the extent to which the drinker is accustomed to alcohol; and, sixthly, individual differences in body chemistry.

Setting aside the separate question of whether the consumption of a low-alcohol drink is likely to affect the attitude to alcohol in general of the young person concerned—that was the gist of part of the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone—and concentrating simply on the physical effects of consumption, we were advised that it was necessary to take certain steps to make a judgment about the maximum percentage of alcohol which should be permitted in drinks that were to be made freely available from unlicensed premises.

It is first necessary to decide what is the maximum level of blood alcohol which would be regarded as acceptable in a young person. The advice that we were given was that 20 mg of alcohol per 100 ml of blood was an acceptable upper figure in this context. The legal limit for driving is 80 mg per 100 ml—four times as high.

Secondly, sensible, arbitrary assumptions have to be made about the various factors that influence eventual levels of blood alcohol. I said earlier that those must be based on the likely pattern of the social use of low-alcohol beverages by young people. A minority of young people may consume such drinks to get drunk. If that is actually what they are intent on doing, it seems more likely that they will choose full-strength drinks from one or other sources from which they may obtain them.

Mr. Dalyell: Forgive my curiosity and inquisitiveness, but where does that Home Office advice come from? I am sure that it is good, but I was asked from where it came.

1.15 pm

Mr. Lloyd: I had hoped that I had mentioned that. It comes from the Department of Health, the opinion of which will be the distillation of the medical advice it has received which, in turn, will be a distillation of the research and opinions of outside experts. The Home Office bases its advice on those contributions. We do not pretend to be experts on this matter. I would be surprised if there was any substantial expert on the subject whose opinions were not known to the Department and, therefore, had not influenced its opinion.

There is a wide range of opinions on these matters. We have heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes about Professor Li Wan Po. Research has also been undertaken by the university at Frankfurt and Charing Cross hospital that suggests that 0·5 per cent. alcohol beer—the upper limit in my hon. Friend's Bill—does not raise blood-alcohol level because the alcohol is metabolised by the body faster than it can be consumed. There is a wide range of opinion among the experts. I am providing a distillation of those opinions by the experts in the Department of Health, rather than representing any one, specific, expert view.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown), having spoken for an unconscionable number of minutes, does not do his own Minister the courtesy of at least coming to hear the answer. Such behaviour does the House of Commons no credit.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): The hon. Gentleman has referred to some of the courtesies of the House. As he knows, they are not matters for the Chair.

Mr. Lloyd: I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes has been drawn from the Chamber for a few minutes by an important cause.

I shall continue with the assumptions that have to be made when coming to a decision about what constitutes a reasonable threshold in law.

It would be reasonable to assume that the majority of young people will seldom drink more than an average of two pints in one hour, six pints in three hours or eight pints in four hours. The percentage of alcohol by volume it would be safe to permit in drinks which are to be freed from licensing restrictions would then be a figure that would allow a typical young person to consume a reasonable quantity of such drink without exceeding a blood alcohol concentration of 20 mg per 100 ml of blood. Various methods exist to make such a calculation, all of which are approximate. The particular method on which the advice we were given was based uses as an example a young drinker who is a 15-year-old girl, 4ft 6in tall, weighs 5 stones and whose habitual consumption is one pint of 0·5 per cent. alcohol beer per week. That is probably not representative of any hon. Member, except my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone who, I am glad, is in her place.

Drinking 1 per cent. beer, two pints in an hour without food would produce a blood alcohol level of 30 mg per 100 ml. That is above the limit regarded as acceptable and leads me to advise the House against accepting the amendment put down by my hon. Friend, the Member for Gedling, although he made his point persuasively and intelligently. As he said, his is a probing amendment, and I hope that my answer will satisfy him.

Drinking 0·5 per cent. beer, the young girl in this example could consume up to six pints over three hours without any food and still remain within the acceptable blood alcohol level of 20 mg. Of course, the threshold for which my hon. Friend, the Member for Honiton has made provision in his Bill is that very one, of 0·5 per cent. Drinking 0·05 per cent. beer, the one recommended by my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes, it would be virtually impossible for the young lady to exceed the acceptable limit of 20 mg. Even if she drank 32 pints in one hour, her blood alcohol concentration would still be only 15 mg.

It is clear from all this that the amendments tabled by my hon. Friends the Members for Brigg and Cleethorpes and Hendon, South deserve the most careful consideration by the House. However, on the basis of the medical evidence that we have received at the Home Office, the Government see no compelling reason why the threshold should be set as low as these amendments provide.

Moreover, if the amendments were to be accepted, only a very few alcohol-free beers would be freed from licensing restrictions. Most low-alcohol beers and virtually all de-alcoholised wines would remain subject to the licensing regime. It seems to us, therefore, that in making provision in the Bill for a threshold of 0·5 per cent. alcohol by volume, my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton has got it about right. The Bill, as presently drafted, would free from the licensing requirement some 10 or so low-alcohol beers and all de-alcoholised wines. The latter, to qualify for that description under labelling law, must not exceed 0·5 per cent. alcohol by volume, which is the figure used in the Bill.

Amendment No. 2, which has also been tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes, seeks to delete the words:

> "at the time of the sale or other conduct in question."

My hon. Friend the Member for Honiton, the promotor of the Bill, has chosen to include the words

> "at the time of the sale or other conduct in question"

in the revised definition of intoxicating liquor in section 201(1) of the Licensing Act 1964 for which the Bill provides. I understand my hon. Friend's desire to clear up once and for all the confusion to which the inclusion in the present definition of intoxicating liquor of the words "at any time" has given rise. Intoxicating liquor is there defined as

> "spirits, wine, beer . . . cider . . . and any other fermented, distilled or spiritous liquor".

However, the definition goes on to exclude any liquor which is found, on an analysis of a sample thereof at any

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time, to be of an original gravity not exceeding 1016 deg and of a strength not exceeding 1·2 per cent. alcohol by volume.

The interpretation of the law is a matter for the courts. However, in the absence of a ruling from them on the point, we have taken the view that the inclusion of the present definition and the words "at any time" would serve to bring a considerable number of the low and no-alcohol drinks that would be released on to the market within the scope of that definition. I appreciate what my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes seeks to do, although my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton has advised the House that it would not be desirable to accept amendment No. 2. If we did accept it, I believe that it would probably make little difference to the effectiveness of the Bill.

Amendment No. 4, also tabled by my indefatigable hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes seeks to bring the revised Scottish definition of alcoholic liquor into line with the equivalent English definition by adding the words:

"at the time of the sale or other conduct in question."

Mr. Dalyell: The hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) is not indefatigable enough to come to hear the Minister's answers. That is disreputable and I hope that the hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery), who is the Chairman of the Select Committee on Procedure, has his own thoughts on that.

Mr. Lloyd: Amendment No. 4 would not be as helpful as I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes intended it to be, as the additional words would seriously impair the proper operation of the Licensing (Scotland) Act 1976. To expand the Scottish definition in that way would render the point of sale or "other conduct in question" as the material time for determining the alcoholic strength of liquor. The amended definition would confuse interpretation and enforcement of Scottish licensing law which, at present, eschews all reference to material or other times. In particular, I am advised that the amendment would handicap the prosecution of various offences under the 1976 Act such as unlicensed trafficking in liquor or under-age consumption of liquor in a bar. I hope that my hon. Friend, if he returns to the Chamber in time, will be persuaded to withdraw the amendment, or at least not to push it to a vote, if that was his previous intention. I hope that I have managed to deal with all the major points in the debate. I hope that the House will accept the Bill as drafted.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Under-Secretary has made a carefully thought-out speech on a subject that is important to a great many people throughout Britain. An unconscionable amount of time was occupied by the hon. Members for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) and for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow), yet they did not even have the courtesy to be present to hear what the Minister had to say. I shall leave manners out of this because such behaviour goes beyond manners; it brings great discredit on the House of Commons. I shall write formally to the Chairman of the Procedure Committee to draw his attention to exactly what has happened today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has drawn attention to the normal courtesies of the House, and I am glad that he has done so but as I have already said, this is not a matter over which the Chair has authority.

Mr. Lloyd: On a related point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I should explain that my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) approached me courteously before he left to express his regret that he could not be here to hear my response to the debate.

Mr. John Marshall: First, let me join other hon. Members in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) on his luck in the ballot and on his good sense in promoting the Bill.

If brevity be the spice of wit, there has been little wit about our proceedings this morning. although we have had some wisdom, some academic learning and a great deal of concern about the impact of alcohol on society. The very fact that we are debating the Bill reflects strongly on social trends over the past 20 years. Twenty years ago, we might even have been laughed out of court because for someone to say then that he would not have a drink because he was driving was regarded as almost effete. Today, the folly of drinking and driving is recognised by virtually everyone. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for his work when he was Minister for Roads and Traffic and to the present incumbent of the post, who is in his place and happy to be listening to our debate today. We are pleased to have my hon. Friend here because he is the true representative of the red rose of England—unlike those politicians who have merely hijacked the red rose for their temporary electoral advantage.

The problems of under-age drinking are of great concern. Several hon. Members have related under-age drinking to the problem of crime. It is a fact that people are most likely to commit crime at the age of 15 or 16. That may well reflect the tedium of the last year at school, but it also reflects the cost and folly of under-age drinking.

The second problem to which I wish to refer briefly is that of drinking and driving. We have had much discussion of whether taking that extra draught of low-alcohol beer might push someone over the limit. It must be said that many people who are well below the breathalyser limit are a menace on the roads because the alcohol that they have consumed has made them less safe drivers than they would otherwise be. Those of us who speak in such terms, do not wish to be killjoys. We merely seek to get rid of unnecessary, unwanted accidents.

As the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) said, my hon. Friend the Minister made a moving and wise speech, and in an effort to help the House to make progress I should say that I propose not to press my amendment.

Mr. Gale: I remind the House that I have a properly declared interest in Scottish and Newcastle Breweries. Also some years ago I had the good fortune to train as a counsellor in alcohol-related problems, and I hope that my credentials in the field are not questioned by the House. I have a particular understanding of the problems that alcohol misuse can cause and that understanding is certainly shared by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), who spoke on behalf of the Brewers Society, and by members of that society collectively and individually.

Brewers are in the business of providing pleasure and creating the environment in which their products can be enjoyed properly. They have no interest in sending people out of public houses roaring drunk to cause public affray or to climb into cars and cause accidents. That is the worst possible publicity. It is for precisely that reason that the Brewers Society has invested enormous sums of money in education programmes targeted at young people who are certainly at risk. That is also why it has invested many millions of pounds in the development of the products that we have been discussing all morning and that are referred to in the Bill.

1.30 pm

There has been and there remains a major problem with under-age drinking. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) referred to that earlier in the debate. He criticised my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) for leaving the Chamber, but I see that he, too has now left the Chamber.

Mr. Sheerman: My hon. Friend has left the Chamber on my behalf with a message and will be back directly.

Mr. Gale: Perhaps sometimes one should look at the beam in one's own eye before criticising the mote in another's. My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes has equally pressing business in his constituency. We all understood and seek to observe the courtesies of the House, whether or not the cameras are upon us, and whether or not we wish that our Bills might have been reached.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow referred to the difficulties that publicans face over identification. It is hard for a publican to differentiate in a crowd of people who are 15, 16, 17 or 18.

I was pleased that the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) was able to acknowledge the proposal —which some hon. Members been putting forward for some time—that it would be enormously helpful to people running licensed houses, among others, to have available an officially recognised national but voluntary identity card scheme. I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will accept that. It would be better to have one organised, recognised, national scheme rather than a plethora of amateur schemes, but that is not the subject of this debate.

The problems of low-alcohol and non-alcoholic beers have been fully discussed this morning. It is a fact that, as the law stands, until it is changed by the Bill there is an anomaly relating to the production of low-alcohol beers and to the reference in the Bill to "at any time" during the process. That has meant two things: first, that outlets supplying young people have been unable to supply those products; and, secondly, that the legislation has favoured imported products, in which the gravity at the point of sale is known but the alcohol content or gravity reached during production is not known. I can think of one German brand which has benefited—I shall not publicise it by naming it—whereas others produced to an excellent standard in this country have failed.

Considerable technical problems exist in the reduction of alcohol to low and non-alcoholic levels. It is a fact that the flavour of products which contained alcohol during the production process but which are reduced to non-alcoholic standards suffer. For that reason and given the enormous growth in that market to which my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood referred, the major slice of that growth has been in low-alcohol beers rather than in non-alcoholic beers. It would be a tremendous shame if the amendment moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) in her excellent speech and amendment No. 1 in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes were accepted and the level was reduced to the point that unpalatable products were offered to people who might want to buy low-alcohol beers. They might prefer a better taste and therefore purchase beers with a much higher alcohol level and in that respect I am thinking in particular of the young.

I shall refer to an incident in my constituency, and I am sure that all hon. Members will have had similar experiences. Representatives of the Cabin youth club approached me a couple of years ago with the same problem that my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) is seeking to solve with his Bill today.

Those representatives told [illegible] that, by implication, they had many young members under the age of 18 who liked to have a drink. They told me that those young people enjoyed low-alcohol beers and lagers and that Kent county council had told them that they could not supply those drinks because the youth club was not licensed. Because those beers and lagers reached a prohibited limit during their manufacture, although that limit did not apply now, the club could not sell them. I raised the matter with Kent county council and was informed, correctly, that the council was operating the law properly. I was told that my local youth club could not supply the young people with the product that they wanted. The result—something to which my hon. Friend the Minister referred earlier—was that the young people, who were quite happy to mix and meet in that largely non-alcoholic environment, went instead to local pubs because they wanted a pint of beer. The law had precisely the opposite effect to that which we all wanted.

I hope that the amendments will be withdrawn or rejected because I would hate to see a counter-productive measure introduced into what is otherwise an excellent Bill. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton on his Bill. I wish it God speed and I hope that it reaches the statute book very soon.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): As a sponsor of the Bill, I must tell the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) that my earlier absence from the Chamber—I was present at the beginning of the debate—occurred because I was carrying out duties that Scots frequently have to carry out on Fridays. I had to do my stint on television and radio and I am sure that the hon. Member for Linlithgow does his share of that. Inevitably that duty required me to leave the Chamber.

As so many hon. Members have said, the Bill will go a long way towards dealing with the ghastly problem facing us today of the young who cannot find a place in which they can have refreshments without infringing the law. Reference was made to the possibility of an identity card system. When I was young, people under the age of 18 were not a problem. Those of us over 18 were usually in uniform and those who were not carried identity cards. There was no problem about access to premises. However, things change.

When I was under 18 I participated in activities where there was no drink. However, the pattern of life has

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changed. If someone wants to run a disco he cannot do so without a licence if he wants to offer any light refreshment of the low-alcohol strength that the youngsters want.

The problem has grown progressively worse over the years, because—sadly—more and more young people are infringing the law, simply because it has not accommodated the change in our society and the changing pattern of demand. My hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) is to be congratulated on introducing a Bill to deal with this dreadful problem.

In an earlier intervention I mentioned that we have a problem in Scotland with under-age drinking; it is a common problem throughout the United Kingdom, but I hope that the Bill will go a long way towards resolving it. I hope that my hon. Friend will reject the amendments, because the Bill as it stands is perfectly adequate, and will deal with what my hon. Friend set out to do. I congratulate him, and hope that the Bill has a swift passage.

Sir Peter Emery: It is probably unusual for any hon. Member not to speak to his Bill until four hours and 10 minutes into the debate. Although, in another role, I suggested that speeches should be limited to 10 minutes, perhaps if I go over that limit by a minute or two I shall be forgiven.

What does my Bill set out to do, and how do the amendments affect it? The Bill will establish a considerable limitation on alcohol consumption by under-age people, and that must be welcomed. It also stands an excellent chance of showing that social drinking is possible without people having to consume alcohol. Later I shall discuss the way in which that affects youth clubs and all that goes with them.

A letter from Sir Donald Maitland, chairman of the Health Education Authority, will perhaps say more in support of my Bill than the kind remarks made by my hon. Friends and Opposition Members:

> "At a meeting this afternoon of representatives of the Health Education Authority, Alcohol Concern, the Brewers Society and the Wines and Spirits Association, we agreed to urge you"—

that is the Minister—

> "to do all you can to ensure that Parliamentary time is made available to ensure the passage of Sir Peter Emery's Private Member's Bill on the Sale of Low and No Alcohol in Unlicensed Premises."

People have asked who supports the Bill. As that letter shows, the answer is "everyone". That is most unusual —and necessary, if a Bill comes 16th in the ballot.

When I examine the amendments, I feel that much of my job has been done. Sitting here, I felt slightly like a Secretary of State as the Under-Secretary did my job for me in answering so ably. I thank him for his support. Most of the questions were raised in the amendments, so I do not intend to go over many of the points.

My hon Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) made a thoughtful and provoking speech, raising a number of matters. However, the weakness of her amendment—which does little to alter the intention of the Bill—is that it would limit the clarification in the Bill about the production levels and the way of production, so that the judgment made is of alcohol at the point of supply and sale, not of how it has been produced before it is supplied or sold. That is of great importance. I am certain that the producers of low-alcohol drinks feel that that is essential in meeting their ability to supply low-alcohol drinks.

Much of the debate has been about that little extra amount of alcohol that could mean that a person would find himself over the limit and would commit an offence if he drove an automobile. I make it absolutely clear that the Bill has nothing to do with topping up. Hon. Members are trying to ensure a definition of low-alcohol beer. I do not wish to encourage people to drink so that they must question whether they should have another alcoholic drink, a non-alcoholic drink or something else. They should not be at that level and then get behind the wheel of a car.

1.45 pm

The topping-up argument has nothing to do with the Bill. We do not want people to think that because they had just one extra non-alcoholic drink having boozed themselves silly at an earlier time, they can drive a motor vehicle.

I thank the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) for his kind remarks in supporting my Bill. He asked me two questions, one of which was about my contact with the Scottish authorities. I have been in touch with the Scottish Office and certain representatives of the trade in Scotland. As the hon. Gentleman will know, my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) and the hon. Member for Glasgow, Springburn (Mr. Martin) are sponsors of the Bill. We tried to ensure that there was full and proper Scottish participation in the presentation of the Bill.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow also asked me about the age problem. That question has been asked elsewhere. The Bill does nothing to solve the purchasing problem, but I hope that it will encourage many more youngsters to believe that there is no need to buy beers or wines. There will now be de-alcoholised beers and non-alcohol beers that will be quite adequate for them.

The only way in which we shall overcome problems with retail outlets is by having identity cards. I support the introduction of national identity cards. We had them during the war and they were all right then. Nearly every other country in Europe has them. The only people who object to identity cards are those who break the law and do not wish to be found out. That subject is not part of the debate, so I shall take it no further.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Gow) apologised for the fact that he could not be here because he had another parliamentary commitment. I thank him for his support, although I do not believe that I had to rely on Emperor Napoleon III. My hon. Friend posed an interesting question about specific gravity. We have simplified the matter. We do not need to refer to specific gravity because we do not need to refer to production structure; we need refer only to the percentage of alcohol in liquor at the time of sale. That is a helpful aspect.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) said that he would try to wait for my speech, but he had to leave. He asked whether I could answer his questions by letter if he was not here. That is the polite way of dealing with the matter, so of course I shall do so.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) provided evidence from Guinness Brewing GB. Much of the evidence that he quoted was on drinks with an alcohol content of 1 per cent., not 0·5 per cent. as the Bill sets out. The Minister's case, which was put much better than I could have done, made it clear why we have settled on 0·5 per cent. I wanted a level that was widely accepted throughout the industry. We must consider not only the brewers but the wine, cider and shandy producers. My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes entirely forgot about those products in his argument.

I am afraid that the matter raised by Guinness Brewing GB is a vested interest. If the amendment were carried, the company would be in almost a monopoly position. It alone would be able to provide low-alcohol and no-alcohol drinks and everything else would have to be licensed. That would do us no good in respect of youth clubs or letting the housewife know that children can go to the corner shop and buy any drink, and that it will not contain alcohol that could affect them. It would be wrong to put one brewer in that position, which would be the effect of my hon. Friend's amendment.

The flavour of drinks and their ability to attract people to consume only those drinks would be massively reduced if the amendment were accepted. There would not be the variety of tastes. Certainly, wines and ciders could not be reduced to the level of alcohol in my hon. Friend's amendment. I hope that that will find favour with hon. Members and that they will reject the possibility of proceeding to 0·05 per cent.

Mr. Gale: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way because I have had more than my fair share of time today. Will he reaffirm that, unamended, his Bill will allow a wide range of good British-made products to be made available to the public and in youth clubs?

Sir Peter Emery: Yes, yes and yes again.

The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) made some helpful and interesting remarks from the Opposition Front Bench. He made several genuine points. Further clarification of the licensing laws is something that we should all like. I have already dealt with under-age drinking. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his support from the Front Bench.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) also supported the Bill. He raised a genuine point about the accuracy of some of its wording. I believe that we have got it right, but I shall look at it again to make certain that, before it goes to another place, it is right.

In the hope that we shall not have many more speeches, I believe that the Bill will set a new era for youth clubs and make young people realise that it is not necessary to go to the pub and break the law in order to enjoy a social occasion. They can enjoy social drinking of low-alcohol drinks. Parents can encourage their children to participate in such occasions and Churches, youth club leaders and educationists can sponsor the social activities that my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) mentioned. I hope that I can persuade my hon. Friends not to press any of the amendmets and that we can get on with the Bill.

Amendment negatived.

Clause 3

SHORT TITLE, COMMENCEMENT AND EXTENT

Miss Widdecombe: I beg to move amendment No. 7, in page 1, line 20 leave out from 'appoint' to end of line 22.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this we shall take amendment No. 11, in page 1, line 21, leave out '30th June 1992' and insert '1st January 1994'.

Miss Widdecombe: I shall not detain the House for long on amendment No. 7 because I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) wishes to speak to his amendment, amendment No. 11, which is a halfway mark between what I wanted to do and what the Bill currently proposes. I am happy to leave the matter in his capable hands instead of pressing my amendment because I am aware that other hon. member wish to speak.

I fully understand the frustrations of the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) about what has happened this morning. However, some of us have a solid record of speaking on licensing matters. I do so regularly and felt strongly in principle about the amendment that I moved earlier, although in practice it proved to be wrong. I apologised at the beginning of my speech for the fact that there would be times when I would be absent from the Chamber. I am now happy——

Mr. Dalyell: I acknowledge straightaway that the hon. Lady has shown me absolute courtesy. What I object to is hon. Members making speeches as long as that made by the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr Brown) and then not being present to hear the Minister's reply.

Miss Widdecombe: I do not wish to delay the House any longer by arguing the toss on that one. I am happy to withdraw my amendment in favour of that of my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) can speak to his amendment, but if he wishes to pursue it, I shall ask him to move it formally later.

Sir Peter Emery: I have been persuaded to give a longer period to Government before the essential introduction of the Bill and to extend the date from the middle of June 1992 to 31 December 1994.

I am not willing to see the Bill pass through the House only to sit, like some private Members' legislation, on the shelf without being introduced simply because it requires a statutory instrument from the Government. I wanted to ensure that there was a date on which the provisions had to be implemented. I am happy for the Government to introduce the provisions earlier and we have given them the powers so to do through a statutory instrument.

I have been persuaded by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food that because of the need to attempt to reach an agreement in the European Economic Community on labelling, and so that the industry would not have to implement two labelling alterations, implementation of the provisions might take longer than the period up to mid-1992. That being the case, it seemed reasonable to accede to the Ministry's request. I thought that another 18 months was long enough for the industry to get its finger out and to get on with the job. I hope that that is agreeable to the Government.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Government are grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery). The original provisions allowed insufficient time for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to bring in the necessary labelling changes because they involved EEC regulations. The extra time will be extremely valuable to

[Mr. Peter Lloyd]

my right hon. Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton that the Government not only want to see the legislation on the statute book, but want it brought into effect. There will be no delay on the Government's part and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his co-operation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Do I understand that the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) wishes to withdraw amendment No. 7?

Miss Widdecombe: Yes, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendment made: No. 11, in page 1, line 21, leave out '30th June 1992' and insert '1st January 1994'.—*[Sir P. Emery.]*

Motion made and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—*[Mr. Greg Knight.]*

1.58 pm

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): I shall detain the House for only a moment. While I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) on the great progress that has been made today in bringing this Bill towards the statute book, I should like to comment on the role of the law in backing up the splendid efforts of not only my hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic but his predecessor, in encouraging the brewers to produce and market effectively lower-alcohol and non-alcoholic beers and other beverages. Remarkable progress has been made during the past few years. This step, more than any other, has had an effect on drink driving.

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): Does my hon. Friend agree that a great virtue of the British system of Government is that this progress has been made voluntarily and by the action of independent interests rather than, as happens in so many countries, by means of statutory regulation?

Mr. Waller: I agree with my hon. Friend. The effect of random breath testing would be minuscule compared with the work that has been done to encourage people to drink beverages that are unlikely to lead them to drive while under the influence of alcohol. My hon. Friend the Member for Honiton has backed up that approach by introducing sensible legislation which will work hand-in-hand with the voluntary efforts being made. I congratulate him on promoting the Bill and I look forward to it becoming law.

2 pm

Mr. Dalyell: May I address, through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the hon. Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) in two different capacities? First, he should be congratulated on promoting the Bill. However, there is a great lacuna in the House of Commons. We pass legislation, but there is no systematic monitoring of what we have achieved. In a year or so, therefore, it would be interesting if there could be an Adjournment debate on how the proposals have worked out in practice and whether they have led to the strides forward for which some of us hope.

Secondly, the hon. Member is the Chairman of the Select Committee on Procedure. I hope that he will not just go away and forget what has happened today. There are lessons to be drawn from this debate. The Select Committee on Procedure should consider how we go about our business.

2.1 pm

Sir Peter Emery: I very much liked the first suggestion of the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). I hope that both he and I will be able to consider monitoring not just this Bill but other private Members' Bills to find out whether they have been brought into operation and whether they are achieving what it was hoped they would achieve. We need to follow up what [illegible] have passed to find out whether we have been successful. If one is trying to make profits, that is particularly important. There is just as much reason to do that for social and educational reasons. That applies especially to those who are concerned about the consumption of alcohol and drunkenness.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will write to me about the second matter that he has drawn to my attention. If he does, it will, as he knows, be dealt with by the Select Committee on Procedure.

I thank my hon. Friends and Opposition Members for their support; it has been excellent throughout the passage of the Bill. I thank, too, the Government for their support. I was praised for the drafting of the Bill. It would be unfair not to acknowledge that I had assistance from the Home Office to ensure that the drafting was correct. I should not want that fact to be unknown. I thank the Minister sincerely for his support.

When the Bill becomes law, I hope that we shall send out a message to youth clubs, Church organisations and all those who are trying to deal with the problem of alcohol consumption by young people that this new structure will allow them to provide for the consumption of low-alcohol drinks in youth clubs and at other social gatherings. Parents will have the assurance that their children can go to those gatherings knowing that there will be no fear of drunkenness or alcoholism. If we have achieved that today we shall have gone a long way towards dealing with one of the social problems with which society has to deal.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Horses (Protective Headgear for Young Riders) Bill

As amended (in the Standing Committee), considered.

New Clause 2

PROVISION OF HEADGEAR

'Any person who owns, controls or possesses horses which are or may be available to be ridden by young people under the age of 18 (whether or not for hire or reward) shall be under a duty to make available a supply of headgear which satisfies the provisions of regulations issued under Section 2(b) of this Act.'.—*[Miss Widdecombe.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

2.5 pm

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

I shall not be pressing any of the other amendments that have been selected by Mr. Speaker, but I feel particularly strongly about new clause 2 and wish to speak to it, even given the restrictions on time.

The new clause seeks to put an absolute legal obligation on anyone who has horses available for riding without it having to be a commercial enterprise. The horses do not have to be available for riding for financial benefit or reward, they merely have to be available to be ridden by young persons. If I have any regret about the scope of the Bill, it is that it is limited to young riders and does not cover everyone. That said, it would be wrong for headgear to be made compulsory only in those establishments where young people could pay money to hire a horse and not if someone was lending a horse to the daughter of a neighbour, for example.

Most of us who derive great pleasure from riding are aware of the necessary protection that headgear provides. But I am sad, because the design of riding headgear could have been tidied up, specified and made subject to statutory regulation within the scope of the Bill. I speak with some feeling, having been thrown from a horse when I was younger than 18 and wearing the necessary headgear. I was wearing the standard design which is favoured by many riders—a peaked hard hat. A bull bellowed over a gate like a trumpet at the last judgment, and my horse reared up and threw me on to a hard road. I was not hurt by the fall beyond a few scrapes and bruises, but the force of the fall drove the hat down across my nose. Although it did not break it, it did a substantial amount of damage and was the only real injury that I sustained from the fall. Another form of headgear that is gradually becoming more favoured by riding schools, but not so much by individual riders, resembles a motorcycle helmet. it does not have a peak which can be forced down by a fall, so it protects the head without the possibility of damage being caused by the hat itself.

Any young person who rides his or her own horse or pony, a hired horse or a borrowed horse, in any place and in whatever conditions, should be made by law to wear protective headgear. It is very tempting to think, "I am only taking the horse down to the field. I am not out riding, so I do not need to put anything on my head and I do not want to have to go back to the house and fetch a hat." Young people are particularly prone to such lazy thoughts. Even on a 10-yard journey, if the horse reacts unexpectedly, even an expert rider can be thrown and sustain severe head injuries. If we make headgear a legal requirement for motor cyclists, we should certainly make it obligatory for young people riding horses. I do not wish to develop that theme, but I shall press new clause 2 because the scope of the Bill is not wide enough and will leave many people vulnerable to injuries that can be sustained when riding.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I shall be brief. If my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) looks at clause 2(1)(b) she will see that the description of the protective headgear to be worn by children is carefully and firmly covered. It is important that that should be so and I take my hon. Friend's point.

I was sorry to hear about my hon. Friend's nasty accident, but I hope that it will not colour her attitude to this important Bill.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. At 11 am, I raised a point of order, since when it has appeared on the tapes that the transcript of the conversations between the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Sir H. Miller), the Ministry of Defence, the Department of Trade and Industry and a third agency have, according to Downing street, come to light. Will the Government consider making a statement at 2.30 pm?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): That is not a matter for me, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's comments have been heard.

Mr. Greenway: I have two reasons for asking my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone not to press new clause 2. First, owners of horses cannot possibly provide headgear for all the sizes of heads of children who will be required to wear it to ride horses. The safe, secure and firm fitting of headgear for riders is important. If headgear is not firm, safe and secure, it is valueless. One problem with the 80 per cent. of children under 14 who already wear protective headgear is that they may wear any protective headgear, but the Bill overcomes that and ensures that it is carefully and suitably fitted.

My second reason is on health grounds. I run a riding scheme for deprived and disabled children in London. In the early days of the scheme, 26 years ago, we provided the riding establishments that children attended for instruction with a range of 30 protective hats. The parents of the children did not like them wearing them for health reasons, and we must accept that important point.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone will understand that I am not happy about new clause 2, but I accept the warm spirit in which she moved it.

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): I support my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) in resisting new clause 2, but I must say at the outset that I oppose the provisions of the Bill as a whole.

One reason why the new clause is not appropriate is that many riding schools simply do not cater for or require children to ride on a road. Those schools may be located in fields some distance from a road. The new clause will make it necessary for all riding establishments to provide protective headgear whether or not they intend or envisage young people riding on roads.

Miss Widdecombe: I do not follow the force of my hon. Friend's argument. It does not matter whether someone is riding on a field or road. If someone is going full gallop

[Miss Widdecombe]

across a field, he could damage himself quite horribly by falling off. Surely the Bill's purpose is to protect people wherever they are.

Mr. Waller: My hon. Friend is right, but the fact remains that my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North has brought before the House a Bill relating to riding horses on public roads. As it stands, the Bill includes bridleways, although I have an amendment seeking to exclude bridleways from the Bill.

2.15 pm

The Bill is essentially related to road traffic, and my hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic is present. It is not within the Bill's ambit to cater for the riding of horses in fields, although I fully accept that many accidents take place in fields. A study carried out in the midlands demonstrated that many more than half all accidents leading to medical treatment happen in fields or stables. However, the Bill is not about fields or anything other than roads. Therefore, it would be inconsistent with the Bill's objectives to include a requirement that would be unreasonable for many riding establishments in this country.

I shall continue to relate my comments to the new clause, but I hope that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will allow me a little latitude because the Bill had no debate on Second Reading, but went through on the nod. Therefore, hon. Members have not had any opportunity to discuss the Bill's objectives, whether or not they include the provisions of the new clause put forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe).

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): Does my hon. Friend agree that because the Bill received Second Reading on the nod, there has been no discussion in the House about whether such legislation, imposing a particular form of safety protection, is necessary? I speak not as a rider, but as a former rock climber. The belief 10 years ago that helmets, or some form of protective headgear, were essential at all levels of climbing, is very much out of fashion now. More and more of the country's leading rock climbers eschew headgear because they regard it as dangerous.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Bill has received Second Reading, albeit on the nod, so it would be inappropriate to jog back to that stage now. We must stick to the new clause.

Mr Waller: I take note of that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and of the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern).

The Department of Transport has said that resources have to be directed at major road safety problems. I heartily endorse that. Fortunately, there are few accidents involving horse riders compared with the number of accidents involving pedal cyclists. Bearing in mind the little discussion there has been in the House—even in Committee only two hon. Members apart from the Bill's promoter and the Minister, spoke—and that only two of the Bill's sponsors are here to support my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North, it is important that the many amendments down for discussion should at least be considered.

The fact that a defence, included in the Bill that my hon. Friend originally brought before the House, has been removed from the Bill without debate is a good reason for debating those matters now. I do not doubt my hon. Friend's sincerity, and I recognise that he feels strongly about the matter. However, I hope that he will recognise that others feel that while the law has a part to play in many areas of life, we should be cautious and require good reasons before extending it into an area where many people still believe that personal responsibility, including that of parents and guardians, is important.

Mr. Stern: I intend to speak briefly on the new clause. I find a number of aspects of the new clause troubling and I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) will have time to deal with my doubts. I have two main doubts, First, the new clause refers to "young people under the age of 18".

I am sure that my hon. Friend would agree that we are dealing with young people who are at different stages of physical development. As the hobby, habit and skill of riding become more popular and as riding becomes more frequently available in schools, I have no doubt that more and more young people of many different ages will take it up. Will my hon. Friend comment on the practicality of the universal obligation she proposes, which would have the effect that any provider of horses that are available to be ridden by young people must carry a range of protective headgear wide enough to protect children from the age of about four?

Miss Widdecombe: There is nothing in the new clause to prevent the young people in question from coming along with their own headgear. The new clause would insist that headgear should be made available. It would be in order for there to be an agreement between the owner of the horse and the person riding the horse that the latter would bring his own headgear. The new clause seeks only to stop young people borrowing a horse and riding it without headgear.

Mr. Stern: My hon. Friend misses the point. A young person and his parent or guardian may come to try out riding for the first time without such headgear—and given the cost of equipment for most sports, it is highly likely that a child trying riding for the first time will come along without such headgear. The hon. Lady would place an onerous duty on the provider of the horse. Under the new clause, it would be necessary to provide a range of headgear for young people from the ages of four to 18.

My hon. Friend has a detailed knowledge of health and social security matters. I am sure that she is aware of the increasing science involved in the study of head injuries and the necessity to provide different types of headgear for different bone structures. I am worried that the duty she seeks to impose is unduly onerous, especially for small riding establishments.

Secondly, who is to enforce that duty? Are we saying that under the law, it will be necessary for an enforcement body to check periodically whether a riding establishment provides a range of headgear to cover every potential customer? Where are the resources to come from to provide what would effectively be an inspectorate for riding establishments? Where is the register of riding establishments necessary for that inspection to work?

Mr. Harry Greenway: I must explain that all riding establishments have to be licensed and that they are inspected before being licensed. Part of that inspection could easily include examining the headgear that should be available. However, I have two objections to the new clause, including an objection on the ground of hygiene.

Mr. Stern: My hon. Friend is quite right, but under any sensible inspection regime, a once-and-for-all inspection is wholly inadequate. An additonal duty will therefore be placed on the inspectorate to ensure that an adequate range of headgear is made available for the purposes of the Bill. I am happy for such a duty to be laid on the inspectorate if the Bill is passed, but I question what resources would be necessary and whether we should place such a duty on every single riding establishment.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (Norfolk, North-West): I welcome this opportunity to discuss the Bill. My view on the new clause is that I do not think that we should complicate the Bill too much. I declare an interest because I was brought up on a pony and during an undistinguished career as an amateur steeplechase jockey I had the chance to ride in about 50 races. I owe my life to the fact that I was wearing a crash hat when I had a number of bad falls. We should do all what we can to get the details of the Bill right. I tabled several amendments to the Bill, but unfortunately they were not selected. I had the idea of adding after the word "horses" the words "cows and other large quadrupeds".

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must not refer to amendments that may or may not be discussed later. He must stick to the new clause.

Mr. Bellingham: In an ideal world, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Bill would also refer to cows and other large quadrupeds. We say that we are concerned about children riding horses and ponies but I have seen children riding bulls, elephants and camels. They could well ride such large quadrupeds without the proper headgear. However slim or remote the evenutality may seem, we should be aware that that could happen and I trust that the Minister will refer to it in his remarks.

We should be careful about complicating the Bill by adding the new clause. The Bill is excellent and I have always supported it. I particularly welcome the growing trend in riding circles for children and riders of all ages to wear proper approved crash hats rather than hunting caps, bowler hats or other forms of headgear. More and more responsible riding establishments, parents and horse owners will not let a horse out of the yard unless the rider is wearing a proper crash hat. We all know that, as a result of the move towards better safety standards, many lives have been saved. In the past, a large number of jockeys and stable lads at racing stables were seriously injured because they were not wearing proper headgear when they fell off a horse on the flat. Ten years ago, before the Jockey Club introduced rules whereby all riding stables had to insist on everyone wearing a proper crash hat, many accidents occurred that could have been avoided. That was probably the start of riding circles' increased efforts to insist that children in particular wore crash hats.

The Bill is a move in the right direction. I should have preferred it to be wider but, bearing in mind the objections expressed by hon. Members on both sides of the House, I am prepared to accept it as drafted. It would be a mistake to complicate the Bill by an unnecessary new clause and it might prevent this excellent Bill from proceeding.

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Robert Atkins): I have only a few moments and I do not intend to be on my feet at the close of play. Let me record first of all the Govenment's support for the Bill in general terms but our worries about the new clause, which would require persons who own, control or possess horses available to be ridden by young people under the age of 18 to have a supply of headgear that satisfies the regulations. A similar clause was moved in the Standing Committee, of which I was not a member. The clause is tangential to the purpose of the Bill, which seeks to ensure that children riding horses on the road should have to wear helmets. Irrespective of the place from which they set out and in what circumstances, an offence will prima facie have been committed if a child is discovered riding on the road without a helmet.

The problem about new clause 2, which was moved by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), is that a riding establishment may allow horses to be ridden only in the field, which is not within the scope of the Bill. It would be inconsistent to impose an obligation to hold helmets at a riding school whose horses are ridden only in fields, so we cannot support the clause.

Miss Widdecombe: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion, and clause, by leave withdrawn.

Mr. Waller: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Would it be in order for me to speak on amendment No. 16——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

It being half-past Two o'clock the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Friday 27 April.

Private Members' Bills

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You were in the Chair at 2.10 pm when I raised, on a point of order, the statement by No. 10 Downing street to the effect that the transcript of conversations between the hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Sir H. Miller), the Ministry of Defence, the Department of Trade and Industry and a third agency had now come to light. I ask that a Minister should come to the House to explain exactly what had happened and why it was that when the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry offered a statement on that subject on Wednesday, the transcript at that time——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. The hon. Gentleman is addressing his remarks more to the Government than to me. What is the point of order?

Mr. Dalyell: My point of order is on whether you have had any approach from any Minister. I warned Mr. Derek Kerr, one of the Private Secretaries in Downing street, that I would raise the matter. Have you had any requests from any Minister at the Department of Trade and Industry, the Ministry of Defence or a representative of the third agency —which is the responsibility of the Prime Minister—to come to the House to explain precisely what has happened, when those transcripts came to light, when they were brought to the knowledge of Ministers and when the Secretary of State for Defence and the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Clark), first knew that there was a problem about the export orders to Iraq, which is the question that I and other hon. Members have been asking since last Wednesday?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I can deal with the hon. Member's point. I have had no such request, but I am sure that the issues he has raised have been noted.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it not generally accepted that even on a Friday, when a lot of hon. Members leave the building, Ministers should always be available? That even applies during the long recess. It appears that my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) gave due notice at 11 am today about the purpose of his remarks and the fact that there is a cover-up involving No. 10 Downing street, and various other Departments, including the Department of Trade and Industry, over the Iraqi gun fiasco. We are reaching a sorry state when we have a Government who supposedly believe in defence but do not know the difference between a gun barrel and a pipeline. My hon. Friend is trying to get to the root of the matter. Parliament should deal with it. The Chair is being placed in an invidious position because Ministers are not available to answer such important questions. Every day that passes, Ministers are failing in their duty.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has openly declared his desire to see his Ministry abolished. Is there any wonder that the Iraqis are able to buy guns and God knows what else when a Minister says, "I want to get rid of my Department." That really is a scandal.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I can merely reiterate that I have had no request in respect of a statement.

SECURITY SERVICE ACT 1989 (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 27 April.

Mr. Dalyell: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I must pursue the remaining Orders of the Day.

HARBOURS, DOCKS AND PIERS CLAUSES ACT 1847 (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Second Reading deferred till Friday 11 May.

POLITICAL PARTIES (INCOME AND EXPENDITURE) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

Mr. Skinner: Friday next.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. Member have the authority of the hon. Member in charge of the Bill?

Mr. Skinner: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: In that case, Friday next.

NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE HOSPITALS (OPTING OUT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day?

Mr. Skinner: With the permission of the hon. Member in charge of the Bill, Friday next.

MEDICAL SERVICES FOR WOMEN BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day? No day named.

LOCAL AUTHORITY PLAYING FIELDS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

RAOUL WALLENBERG (MEMORIAL) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 4 May.

ADOPTION (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 4 May.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACT 1984 (AMENDMENT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day?

Mr. Skinner: On behalf of the hon. Member in charge of the Bill, Friday next.

MOTOR TRADE (CONSUMER PROTECTION) (NO. 2) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day?

Mr. Skinner: On behalf of the hon. Member in charge of the Bill Friday next.

TAX RELIEF FOR HOUSEHOLD EMPLOYERS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

EDUCATION (SCHOOL GOVERNING BODIES) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.
Second Reading deferred till Friday 27 April.

GREYHOUND BETTING LEVY BILL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Second Reading [16 February].

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Debate to be resumed. What day?

Mr. Skinner: With the authority of the hon. Member in charge of the Bill, Friday next.

FOOTBALL SPECTATORS BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day?

Mr. Skinner: With the agreement of the hon. Member in charge of the Bill, Friday next.

BRITISH RACING COMMISSION BILL

Order for Second Reading read

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day?

Mr. Skinner: On behalf of the hon. Member in charge of the Bill, Friday next.

TERM AND QUARTER DAYS (SCOTLAND) BILL

Read a Second time and committed to a Standing Committee, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

RADIOACTIVE MATERIAL (ROAD TRANSPORT) BILL

Order for Second Reading read

Hon. Members: Object.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Second Reading what day?

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): With the agreement of the hon. Member in charge of the Bill, Friday next.

MARRIAGE (REGISTRATION OF BUILDINGS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Not moved.

RIGHTS OF WAY (AGRICULTURAL LAND) BILL

[MONEY]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Rights of Way (Agricultural Land) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to that Act in the sums payable out of such money under any other Act.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

Hospital Facilities (Isle of Sheppey)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

2.38 pm

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): I welcome this opportunity to raise in the House the closure of acute hospital services on the Isle of Sheppey and the urgent need for new hospitals on Sheppey and in Sittingbourne. I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Minister for Health is here to reply to this important debate.

To many, an Adjournment debate in the House may seem to be a modest affair. However, I assure the House that it is of the utmost importance to my constituents that Parliament and the Government understand that there is a sense of crisis prevailing on the Isle of Sheppey.

Three months from now we face the closure of acute medical and geriatric services on Sheppey. Three years ago we saw the closure of surgery, obstetrics and gynaecology on Sheppey—a modern maternity unit. Before that, some years ago, the full casualty service, children's wards and the paediatric service were also closed.

The Isle of Sheppey is in the prosperous south of England, and has a population of 35,000 that more than doubles in the summer months. It is an important industrial area, containing one of Britain's successful ports, one of its most successful steel mills and much more. Its only link with the mainland is a lifting bridge and an inadequate road system. Now it has no acute hospital facilities. Is it any wonder that its residents are angry, and that many consider the problem to be literally a matter of life and death?

All this follows years of progressive rundown. It is almost exactly 20 years since, in a maiden speech, I spoke of the need to defend our local hospitals, and I have done so again many times since while presenting petitions and in Adjournment debates. Often dedicated local action groups such as the Sheppey watch committee have sent deputations to Ministers—Conservative and Labour—and have received kind and helpful assurances; nevertheless, the rundown has continued. We now feel that we have come to the end of the road.

My constituents and I want real, tangible help, and I intend to continue to press for that help from the Minister and the Secretary of State. We want new hospital facilities —not in the 21st century, but soon. We are not crying for the moon; we are merely asking for the implementation of sensible, practical proposals that already form part of a proper district and regional strategy. Our plea is for the minimum level of hospital services that the people of Swale are entitled to expect in the 21st century. It is also a plea for extra resources, and Ministers can exert their influence directly in that regard.

We want a fairer share of those resources for the Medway health district, to enable it to build new hospitals and to finance it from year to year. For years local Members of Parliament, among others, have argued that Medway is a deprived district in an otherwise prosperous region. In 1985, under the old resource allocation working party formula, Medway had reached only 77 per cent. of its target. To correct the shortfall, we were entirely dependent on the rate at which other districts in the theoretically over-provided south-east could reduce their expenditure—and that was a pretty forlorn prospect.

Surely it is self-evident nonsense that the largest, most concentrated population centre in Kent—which is certainly not the wealthiest part of the region—should receive the poorest hospital provision. When it was decided to end the RAWP system, many of us thought that Medway would at last receive proper funding from the region or from central Government; sadly, we now learn that that is not to be. Under the new resident capitation rules—I am not sure whether they have been finalised—Medway will remain much poorer than most other parts of the region. It will be £13 worse off per resident than the next worst-funded district in South East Thames. Medway will receive £173 a head, and Brighton some £212. The teaching district of Lambeth will receive about £400 a head and Greenwich about £268 a head, although I accept that different considerations apply there.

It has always been suggested that a safety net figure of about £200 a head should be built into capitation. Such a fair system would give Medway about £9 million a year, and Brighton about £13 million. That would enable us to fund our much-needed hospital programme, which has already been largely agreed in principle by all concerned.

As I understand it, the reason for the under-provision proposed in the new arrangements lies in the fact that the region has a number of districts with a higher proportion of elderly people. But in those districts there are almost twice the number of private hospitals and private nursing homes per 1,000 population over 65 than we have in Medway. Does it make sense to give more money to relatively prosperous retirement areas and less money to poorer or relatively poorer, more concentrated industrial areas? The logic of that does not bear too much analysis. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to look at that matter closely, urgently and sympathetically. If we can get this matter right, other things will follow.

The first thing that we need is a fair allocation of extra revenue—for example, the missing £9 million plus for Medway. The rules are not being changed, and this is the moment for the Minister to help us. The next thing that we need is approval for the Medway hospital phase 3C project which was taken out of the programme this year—that was a tremendous shock in Medway, which has a history of a sense of deprivation—just when the project had reached tender stage. It was another major setback for us. At the same time we need my hon. Friend's help to secure immediate funding for our primary care hospitals on Sheppey and in Sittingbourne.

I shall not rehearse the arguments for and against the concept of primary care hospitals. However, for many years many of us have campaigned for what was the declared policy objective—a second district general hospital in Swale or the so-called bi-polar strategy. That district general hospital, which would have been at Sittingbourne and would have replaced Sheppey general hospital and other facilities, obviously would not have satisfied the aspirations of the people of the Isle of Sheppey to have their own district hospital. The concept of a second district general hospital has been so reduced and undermined as to have lost credibility and support. Of course, there are those who urge that Sheppey general hospital should be restored to its full general hospital status—120 beds, a full range of services, casualty, surgery, medicine, maternity and so on. I should like nothing better than that.

In practice, we are faced with the overpowering logic not of politics or resources—not in any meaningful sense, anyway—but of the changing medical technology and more stringent standards that are imposed on us by the royal colleges. We understand also that a new district general hospital with a full range of consultant cover is designed to serve a much greater population than the population of the Isle of Sheppey. That is the argument for or against a new hospital. As much as we should like it, we recognise that there is little prospect of it ever happening. Our view and that of most people on the island and of Medway health authority has always been that we should retain the widest range of acute services until we can get new provision for hospitals in Swale. That consensus has been underminded by the royal colleges.

I must now record my resentment and anger at the behaviour of the royal colleges. I have said elsewhere that their attitude makes them appear not as protectors of the public, which is how I presume they would see themselves, but as predators. That is a harsh thing to say, and they will understand why. They always seem concerned that their senior house officers might suffer from remoteness and not get the necessary training and experience from hospitals such as Sheppey general hospital, but apparently they do not care that that very remoteness endangers the lives and well-being of the patients whom they are supposed to serve. It was only two years ago that the Royal College of Physicians accepted the present arrangements at Sheppey, but now it gives us just a few months' notice that, in effect, acute medicine and acute geriatric services must be withdrawn from Sheppey.

We now come to primary care hospitals. Let me make it clear that this is no cheap-jack solution. It is estimated that the four primary care hospitals planned for Medway would cost as much as a district general hospital. I believe it to be a good concept, but it is certainly not cheap. The concept has been approved by Medway district health authority and by most local bodies, including the community health council. The region has accepted that a case of need exists, and it goes along with the concept.

Each primary care hospital is expected to be based on between 30 and 72 in-patient beds, sites between three and six acres, entrance and reception areas, day hospital areas, out-patient clinics, treatment rooms for minor casualties, minor elective surgery, X-ray facilities and some pathology facilities. The primary care philosophy would depend for its success on a major contribution from general practitioners. That must be funded if only because it will mean extra GPs. It would depend on greater reliance on senior nursing skills, which would be welcome, extensive out-patient clinics, which would involve all consultants, and limited casual facilities. Such hospitals could obtain the confidence and involvement of the local communities and be seen as a logical complement to the high-tech district general hospitals.

Primary care hospitals must be purpose-built, modern and well-funded. There is talk of using existing buildings as an interim measure, given the present emergency. That is not a good solution, but it might be the only one available. None the less, we should not lose sight of the urgency and importance of obtaining funding for the new primary care hospitals.

How can we obtain approval and the resources for the new hospitals at the earliest opportunity? I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will say that if we come forward with proposals for what I might call unconventional funding we shall have her support in securing approval from her Department and the Treasury. If we simply ask for conventional funding I hope that she will do her utmost to persuade the regional health authority of the necessity of giving Medway district health authority its fair share of support as a matter of extreme urgency. My hon. Friend could do a tremendous amount to help us on the Isle of Sheppey in those important matters.

I shall make two more brief points. Although I could spend much more time on the subject, that time is not available. Last year the Secretary of State insisted that a transportation study should be undertaken to examine the problems that arise from the remoteness of many people on the Isle of Sheppey, in Sittingbourne and elsewhere, and their difficulty in gaining access to centralised hospital facilities following the closure of local facilities. What has happened to that report? Has it yet been received and when can we expect results from it?

My last point is important, but I do not have time to deal with it at any length. It is what I call the "life and death" question for people living in remote areas. They have seen acute emergency local hospital services progressively run down. That might be an inevitable consequence of changing technology and centralisation but none the less people are entitled to the assurance that they will receive the same, or better, immediate life-saving and emergency treatment as in the past. Presumably, that depends on increased paramedic ambulance services, and on the provision of a range of life-saving equipment at local and community hospitals and at doctors' surgeries.

People on the Isle of Sheppey will want to know how tne hospital service in its broadest sense will give them and their families the assurances to which they are entitled. On that matter and the general question of our inadequate hospital services in Swale, I hope that my hon. Friend can help us.

2.53 pm

The Minister for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) on so persistently, carefully and thoughtfully setting out the understandable anxieties of his constituents about the development of health services in his area. He forcefully made it clear that in the prosperous south-east the Isle of Sheppey has special circumstances and needs. I know the area moderately well because in a previous role I visited the Isle of Sheppey to look, not at health services but at birds. I am therefore well aware of some of the geographical features, and especially of the fact that the Isle of Sheppey is bound to the mainland by one bridge. I am also aware of the understandable effect of those geographical conditions on the provision of health services.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham said, he has raised the concerns of his constituents on several occasions in the House and I congratulate him on securing this Adjournment debate to rehearse these precise points once again. Before responding to his case, I wish to point out—as I am sure my hon. Friend is aware—that it is the Government's policy to delegate responsibility for the provision and organisation of local health services to local management. The Government provide a framework for those services by setting priorities and guidelines and by providing resources to the regional health authorities to allocate in turn to the district health authorities.

I shall be taking up a number of points that my hon. Friend has raised in more detail with the chairman of the

[Mrs. Virginia Bottomley]

regional health authority to see what further room there may be for manoeuvre and clarification and to ensure that my hon. Friend's constituents receive the improving quality of patient care that we wish to see throughout the country.

I understand my hon. Friend's concern about Medway health authority's recent announcement that further acute in-patient facilities will be removed from the island to hospitals in the Medway towns on the mainland. As he said, the circumstances are similar to those which led to the transfer of obstetric and gynaecological services from Sheppey general hospital to the mainland initially on a temporary basis in 1987. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State approved proposals to make the changes permanent in May 1989 and, in making his decision took account of the higher standard of care—in the form of the comprehensive back-up facilities and expensive medical technology—that would be offered by centralising acute in-patient services.

My hon. Friend thoughtfully spelt out some of the considerations that arise from the changing technology of medical care. Whereas in the past it was possible to have several district general hospitals, offering roughly equivalent standards of care, increasingly with the techniques that are becoming available and the methods of resuscitation, intensive care and the number of facilities that are normally expected, health authorities have to think again about the way in which their resources are deployed.

My hon. Friend expressed something stronger than disappointment about the announcement by the Royal College of Physicians that from 31 July 1990 it is planning to withdraw accreditation for junior doctor training at Sheppey general hospital. The facilities offered for training there are, indeed, limited. There is no coronary care unit, no on-site surgery; a limited range of radiology and pathology facilities; library facilities are poor and there is no accommodation for any postgraduate activity. The withdrawal of its accreditation for training means that it would be difficult to staff the hospital in its current role. I well understand my hon. Friend's reaction to that announcement. I am sure that he will understand that as I also have responsibility for junior hospital doctors, I have perhaps more understandings of their position on this matter. Nevertheless, I am well aware of my hon. Friend's reaction to the implications for his constituents.

As my hon. Friend pointed out, the health authority's long-term strategy was to offer acute services from a centralised site at Medway district general hospital in Gillingham and to suport them by local primary care hospitals, one of which would be Sheppey general. Again, my hon. Friend spelt out in some detail the important contribution that primary care hospitals can make. However, the royal college's decision means that the health authority finds it necessary to proceed with long-term plans for Sheppey earlier than intended. I should emphasise, however, that the health authority will be considering carefully the consultation required, given that it believes that it is necessary that the changed pattern in service should be in place by August, but certainly the community health council's views will be taken into account.

Similarly, I understand my hon. Friend's concerns about transport. We have already described the geographical location of Sheppey. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health recognised those problems in May 1989 when he approved Medway health authority's plans involving the permanent closure of obstetric and surgical in-patient services at Sheppey general hospital and requested that a report on transport services for Sheppey residents should be made. As my hon. Friend is aware, Medway health authority officials will shortly be meeting Kent county council officials to review transport services. Following that, I hope that it will be possible to give further information to my hon. Friend.

My hon. Friend will also be aware, no doubt, that since the transport survey was undertaken, the excellent south-east air ambulance is now operational. The primary role of that service is to provide speedy transport to the hospital services required, especially for patients who are ill or injured in isolated rural areas such as Sheppey, where access may be difficult.

I am aware that in particular the lifting bridge, giving the only road access, has been a source of serious concern. The helicopter service carries a team of specially trained paramedics who can provide on-the-spot emergency treatment and stabilise patients before transporting them to hospital services. It is based at Rochester airport and became operational in December. Since then, it has proved its worth in speeding accident victims to hospital and transferring patients to units that provide the specialist care that they require for their recovery. From the date that it was put into service until April of this year, it has already responded to seven calls from the Isle of Sheppey, four of which resulted in the patient being speedily removed to hospital on the mainland.

To take up my hon. Friend's point about the importance of recognised paramedic qualifications, after the disappointment that surrounded the dispute this winter there has been widespread recognition of the importance of paramedic training for real accident and emergency cases. That issue is being considered by the Department of Health, throughout the Health Service and in the regions. I shall certainly incorporate my hon. Friend's comments in our thinking on the matter.

My hon. Friend also raised questions about the finances of Medway health authority. He will be aware that the allocation of resources to the health authority is a matter for South East Thames regional health authority. Last year, the health authority received an allocation of just over £66 million. That has risen to just over £73 million for this year.

The region as a whole will benefit from the new weighted capitation system of funding, to which my hon. Friend referred. The region's interim proposals for the pace of change for districts from the resource allocation working party system of funding to a weighted capitation system of funding mean that Medway will receive the same growth money as that previously planned under RAWP —a sum of £870,000 for the current financial year.

My hon. Friend referred in detail to the nature of his constituency and to social deprivation. The formula used by the Department to allocate funds to the regions takes account of the size, age and health of a region's population, with an additional allowance for the higher cost of providing services within London. To some extent, deprivation is recognised in that formula, as in taking account of the pattern of ill health the Department uses information related to premature death rates, which are known to be closely correlated with measures of deprivation.

Regions will allocate money to districts using a weighted capitation formula, but they also have discretion to include weightings in addition to those used in the national formula in order that funding may be sensitive to local circumstances. The Department has encouraged regions to consider factors such as social deprivation, if that is appropriate and significant locally.

The question of social deprivation is one which South East Thames regional health authority is currently considering. Discussions are in progress as to whether that factor might be taken into account and, if so, on what basis. I cannot say, as yet, what the outcome might be for Medway health authority. However, I urge my hon. Friend to take up his views on social deprivation in Medway with the chairman of South East Thames regional health authority. I am sure that he would welcome the opportunity to consider that aspect, in view of the regional health authority's continuing discussions on that matter.

We should not lose sight of the fact that when the weighted capitation system of funding comes fully into play, the role of the districts will have changed. They will be not the providers but the purchasers of health services for their resident population. That important but subtle distinction, which is part of our proposals for reforming and improving the Health Service, means that the district health authorities, along with the family practitioner committees—to be known as the family health service authorities—will have a special role of examining the health needs of their local population and deciding how best to meet those needs within the available resources.

My hon. Friend also expressed his concern about the delay in starting the next phase of Medway district general hospital. He will know that a £35 million capital programme is being undertaken. He will appreciate that, along with a number of other capital programmes in the region, the time scale for it has had to be reviewed because of falling land prices. It is a matter that will require further consideration and I shall certainly take into account the important points that my hon. Friend made, particularly in the light of the new circumstances surrounding the royal college's decision. However, I should not wish that setback to detract from the recent achievements in the health authority's capital programme. I understand that there has been a £1·8 million development at Keycol hospital, which will provide day care and in-patient facilities for the elderly mentally ill. That facility has recently become operational. It serves a group who, frankly, in the past, were not given the priority that they deserve. It will serve the Isle of Sheppey and Sittingbourne.

Earlier this year, another major stage of Medway district general hospital started taking its first patients. It was a £13·8 million development taking patients for psychiatric, psycho-geriatric and geriatric treatment. I am delighted to have accepted an invitation formally to open that development and very much look forward to seeing at first hand some of the new, modern facilities at Medway district general hospital that can provide improved care.

My hon. Friend spoke about the role of primary care hospitals and the way in which they can be funded and further progress made. When specific proposals are brought forward, I and my ministerial colleagues will consider them carefully and have urgent discussions with the regional health authority about the best way in which progress can be made.

In referring to the enhanced role of the family practitioner service, my hon. Friend hit upon one of the fundamental directions in which we wish our Health Service to move. There has been a substantial increase in spending, in numbers and in the care that general practitioners provide to their patients. Our recent proposals, including the contract and the opportunities provided in the National Health Service and Community Care Bill, are a vote of confidence in general practitioners and will ensure that the family practitioner service works closely with the community services. The acute services will be fundamental to providing the quality and standard of health care that I know my hon. Friend seeks. He represents a constituency——

The Question having been proposed after half-past Two o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at eight minutes past Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 26 March 1990

PRIME MINISTER

Question Time

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if she will make it her policy *(a)* to make her answers at Prime Minister's Question Time more brief and *(b)* to seek to make greater use of statements at 3.30 pm

The Prime Minister: It is not always appropriate to provide brief answers to some of the questions which are asked.

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister how many representations she has received, and from whom, calling for the separation of a Ministry of Food from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have received representations calling for the separation of a Ministry of Food from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, as well as representations in favour of maintaining a single Department.

I do not believe that the interests of the consumer and industry would be best served by such a separation. The present arrangements ensure that ministerial responsibility for the food chain is covered from the point of production to the point of sale to the consumer. I said at the Royal show last year that I do not propose to dismember the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. This remains my view.

Nuclear Accident (Emergency Procedures)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Prime Minister whether she will conduct a review of emergency procedures in the event of an accident at a nuclear power station in northern France, and the subsequent radioactive contamination of the United Kingdom population, food supplies and the environment; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The United Kingdom's emergency procedures for dealing with a nuclear accident overseas were thoroughly reviewed after the Chernobyl incident in April 1986. I reported the first results of that review to the House on 18 December 1986, *Official Report*, columns *612-13*. I reported again on 30 June 1987, *Official Report*, columns *65-67*. The contingency arrangements now in place would be implemented in the event of an accident at a nuclear power station in northern France or elsewhere which could have consequences for the United Kingdom. In the unlikely event of any such accident there would be, in accordance with normal practice following any emergency, a further review of our contingency arrangements in the light of experience gained.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Non-custodial sentences

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number and proportion of offences triable only on indictment which attracted non-custodial sentences in each of the last three years.

Mr. John Patten: Information for 1986 to 1988 is given in the table.

Data for 1989 will not be available until autumn 1990.

Persons given non-custodial sentences for offences triable only on indictment 1986 to 1988
England and Wales

Year	*Total sentenced*	*Number given non-custodial sentences*	*Per cent.*
1986	9,679	2,520	26
1987	10,163	2,498	25
1988	10,464	2,752	26

Animal Experiments

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether animal experiments conducted under LD50 tests are still being licensed.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Yes. The latest available information is published in table 14 of the "Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals, Great Britain, 1988" (Cm. 743).

Personal Security Systems

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will consider providing pensioners, the disabled and those without incomes with grants to enable the installation at their homes of personal security systems.

Mr. John Patten: No. There are many examples of lock fitting schemes being conducted without a need for an individual householder's grant. These have often been carried out with valuable private sector support, and our safer cities programme already includes projects of this kind. Local authorities may also have access to urban programme and estate action resources for such purposes.

ENVIRONMENT

Chemicals (North Sea)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many tonnes per annum of *(a)* nitrates, *(b)* phosphates, *(c)* cadmium, *(d)* zinc, *(e)* lead, *(f)* copper, *(g)* mercury and *(h)* liquid low level radioactive wastes in each case from United Kingdom sources are discharged or dumped into the North sea.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Recent information on United Kingdom inputs of contaminants to the North sea via rivers, coastal discharges and dumping from ships is included in the 1990 interim report on the quality status of the North sea prepared for the third North sea conference in the Hague on 7 and 8 March. I am placing a copy in the Library together with the ministerial declaration and the implementation report on the action taken by North sea states since the London conference to reduce these discharges still further.

Some of the figures quoted in the interim quality status report have been compiled using differing methodologies, particularly in the case of river inputs and are, therefore, not directly comparable.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to take steps to ensure that volunteer carers who are employed by individual disabled people and who have not been introduced to that person by an independent charitable organisation will be exempt from the community charge, provided that they meet the other exemption criteria.

Mr. Chope: The criteria for the exemption of care workers require, inter alia, that the individual is employed to provide care or support to another person and that the employer is either a public authority, a body established for charitable purposes only, or the person receiving care. In this last circumstance I regard it as helpful that the regulations enable a community charges registration officer to have confirmation of the position of the claimant from an independent charitable organisation.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the total net spending and relevant applicable community charge, to levels of spending at standard spending assessment, 10 per cent. and 20 per cent. above standard spending assessment, and the increase or decrease in each case against the currently approved community charge for each charging local authority.

Mr. Chope: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) on 19 March 1990, *Official Report*, column *478*.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment for how many local authorities the poll tax is higher than the notional figure used in setting the level which income support beneficiaries are required to pay; what is the median amount by which they are higher; and what is the number and names of those which are lower.

Mr. Chope: The Government do not set a level of community charge which income support beneficiaries are required to pay.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy when he publishes the poll tax figures for each English district council to publish for each district the amount per capital also due to *(a)* that district, *(b)* the county, *(c)* the amount of each of these offseet by Government grants, *(d)* the safety net figure per capita plus or minus, *(e)* the amount per capita that poll tax would have been had central Government financed 50 per cent. of local Government spending and *(f)* the per capita gain or loss for the uniform business rate.

Mr. Chope: No.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the estimated total amounts of spending in 1989-90 and in 1990-91, and the percentage increase for *(a)* each English shire county and *(b)* each shire district within Somerset, Devon, Dorset and Wiltshire.

Mr. Chope: I intend to place a summary of the information returned from local authorities in the Library of the House after information has been received from all authorities.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to introduce regulations which ensure that a carer who resides part-time in his or her home and the remainder of the time in the home of the person being cared for pays only one poll tax liability; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The Community Charges (Miscellaneous Provisions) (No. 2) Regulations 1989 came into force on 28 December 1989. Regulations 62 of the regulations provides that no standard community charge will be payable on a property where the owner has moved to live in another place for the purpose of giving personal care and the property has been unoccupied for less than 12 months. Charging authorities have the discretion to extend the period of relief.

Mr. Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will review the conditions for the imposition of the standard community charge on a former home which the owner has not be able to sell within the present three-month limit.

Mr. Chope: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities to my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) on 21 March 1990, *Official Report*, columns *658-59*.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list, in order of percentage loss or gain, the grant-related expenditure for 1989-90 against the standard spending assessment for 1990-91 for all English counties; what is the cost change between the two; and if he will list for each the proportion of the population living in urban areas.

Mr. Chope: The information requested is shown in the table. The proportion of the population living in urban areas is calculated from data in the 1981 Census publication "Key Statistics for Urban Areas" which contains a definition of urban areas. Similar data are not readily available for district councils or London boroughs.

	Percentage change adjusted GRE to SSA Per cent.	*Cash change adjusted GRE to SSA £ million*	*Proportion of population in urban areas Per cent.*
Berkshire	12·8	42·696	92·5
Bedfordshire	12·3	30·271	87·1
Oxfordshire	11·7	26·322	77·7

	Percentage change adjusted GRE to SSA Per cent.	*Cash change adjusted GRE to SSA £ million*	*Proportion of population in urban areas Per cent.*
Hertfordshire	11·5	49·255	93·5
Hampshire	11·3	76·408	90·6
Isle of Wight	11·0	6·249	84·2
Buckinghamshire	10·9	31·902	86·1
Essex	10·9	74·691	89·2
East Sussex	10·3	30·401	87·7
Surrey	10·3	41·580	91·4
Kent	10·2	71·279	86·7
West Sussex	9·1	26·854	87·4
Cleveland	9·0	27·833	97·0
Cambridgeshire	8·5	25·007	79·2
Avon	8·4	35·031	92·8
Northamptonshire	7·8	21·531	82·1
Somerset	7·7	16·111	65·1
Cornwall	7·5	16·330	64·6
Wiltshire	7·4	18·623	75·8
Cumbria	7·3	16·721	72·3
Dorset	7·1	19·283	85·5
Nottinghamshire	7·1	33·952	92·7
Shropshire	7·0	13·738	71·3
Humberside	7·0	30·487	88·5
Durham	6·9	19·580	87·3
Gloucestershire	6·9	16·216	79·5
Lincolnshire	6·7	18·584	70·5
Lancashire	6·6	45·771	91·3
Leicestershire	6·0	26·115	88·8
Suffolk	6·0	16·691	70·6
Devon	6·0	27·428	79·3
Norfolk	5·8	19·258	69·3
Cheshire	5·4	24·483	88·6
North Yorkshire	5·1	16·245	72·1
Northumberland	4·6	6·263	79·7
Hereford and Worcester	4·5	13·654	72·6
Derbyshire	3·9	16·710	88·9
Warwickshire	3·5	7·661	81·1
Staffordshire	3·5	16·712	89·0

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby of 19 March, how he calculates the figures of *(a)* £28 and *(b)* £2.

Mr. Chope: The figures are calculated by applying the appropriate monetary weights given in paragraph 3.32 of the Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England) to the values of the specified indicators for Humberside, multiplying the result by the appropriate national scaling factor for highway maintenance and expressing the result as an amount per relevant adult (rounded to the nearest £1).

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of *(a)* the number of second homes, *(b)* the relationship of the standard charge to the poll tax and *(c)* the extra revenue accruing from this for each local authority in England; what are his proposals for taking this into account in faxing next year's expenditure targets; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: Detailed information on the number of people registered as subject to the standard community charge, or on the multipliers being set by charging authorities is not yet available to the Department. Income from the standard charge is not taken into account in determining English local authorities' revenue-raising capacity for the purposes of grant distribution.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment with reference to his Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England), annex A, V, highway maintenance, what was the basis on which the multipliers for road type weighting factors were arrived at.

Mr. Chope: Road lengths of different types are weighted in the following proportions:

	Weighted
Principal roads in built-up areas	6
Principal roads in non-built-up areas	3
Other roads in built-up areas	2
Other roads in non-built-up areas	1

These weightings assume that the average cost of maintaining principal roads is three times that of maintaining non-principal roads and that the cost of maintaining built-up roads is double that of maintaining non-built-up roads. The 3:1 relative cost weighting between principal and non-principal roads is based on analysis of expenditure data for the two types of road from maintenance outturn forms returned to the Department of Transport. The 2:1 ratio between built-up and non-built-up roads is based on evidence from sparsely populated counties provided by the Association of County Councils in the early 1980s.

Mr. Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will seek powers to require councils to reduce their community charge level next year by the amount contained in this year's charge for their contribution to the safety net.

Mr. Chope: No, although I hope that councils will do so voluntarily. Community charge bills in 1990-91 show safety net contributions as a separate item. In following years bills for authorities that formerly contributed to the safety net will show a straightforward comparison between the amount needed to provide a standard level of service and authorities' actual spending plans. It will be for authorities to justify to their chargepayers any excess of the latter over the former. For authorities receiving area protection grant, which replaces the safety net after 1990-91, this will appear as a separate item on community charge bills.

Lancashire (Derelict Land Reclamation)

Mr. Miscampbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much funding has been provided by the Government for derelict land reclamation in Lancashire in each of the last three years.

Mr. Moynihan: The information requested is as follows:

£ million

Grant programme	*Actual 1987-88*	*Actual 1988-89*	*Forecast 1989-90*
Derelict land grant	4·102	3·278	4·047
Urban programme[1]	0·372	0·166	0·264
Urban development grant Urban regeneration grant City grant [1][2]	3·941	2·665	3·535

[1] Includes expenditure on unused or waste land as well as derelict land.

[2] Information does not relate solely to the costs of reclamation since grant is based on the total project costs including those of reclamation.

New Town Tenants

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many new towns tenants have bought their homes since the right to buy was introduced; and if he will show the percentages for each new town in England and Wales.

Mr. Chope: Some 28,300 tenants have bought their homes from English new town corporations since October 1980, of which 9,400 were bought under the terms of the right-to-buy legislation. This does not include the number of tenants who have bought their homes after the transfer of new town stock to various local authorities and housing associations during the period; these sales cannot be distinguished from other sales by local authorities and housing associations.

The table gives the estimated percentage of stock sold by individual new towns to tenants between October 1980 and the date of transfer to local authorities and-or housing associations.

	Date of transfer	*Percentage of stock sold to sitting tenants*
Basildon	—	32
Central Lancashire	July 1985	4
Milton Keynes	—	26
Northampton	April 1985	12
Peterborough	November 1989-January 1990	42
Redditch	April 1985	12
Runcorn	December 1989	23
Skelmersdale	April 1985	15
Telford	—	47
Warrington	—	21
Washington	January 1986	10

For information about Welsh new towns I refer my hon. Friend to the Secretary of State for Wales.

Beach Pollution (Cleethorpes)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what action is being taken to remedy the design fault in Cleethorpes long sea outfall pipe;

(2) what action is being taken to stop designated bathing beaches at Bridlington, Cleethorpes, Hornsea and Withernsea being polluted by raw sewage from storm overflow pipes;

(3) what action is being taken to stop sewage discharges from Grimsby, Paull and Hull being deposited on beaches in the Cleethorpes area.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: These are matters for the National Rivers Authority.

Radon

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the estimated percentage of properties in each Cornwall district with radon concentration above the new action level.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The estimated proportion of houses exceeding the new action level in each Cornwall district is as follows:

	per cent.
Caradon	20
Carrick	15
Kerrier	30
North Cornwall	25
Penwith	30
Restormel	20

Housing Associations

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what account is taken in providing grants for new housing associations of the assets or funding available to them in the allocation of resources for 1990-91.

Mr. Chope: Housing Corporation circulars HC31/88 and HC74/89 set out the financial viability criteria that the corporation applies where registered housing associations seek housing association grant. They cover associations' property assets and reserves, and also their management competence. The corporation has discretion to vary the criteria for small or new associations.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average rent payable by a disabled person living in special needs accommodation provided by housing associations operating on Merseyside.

Mr. Chope: The Department does not have this information.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about the levels of grants payable to housing associations on Merseyside providing accommodation for people with special needs.

Mr. Chope: None, other than the hon. Member's letter of 16 March to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about a proposed housing association development at Fazakerley, to which I shall be replying shortly.

Rents

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his Department keeps an index of housing costs for those living in rented accommodation.

Mr. Chope: The Department does not maintain such an index. There are separate indices for rent and other items of housing expenditure within the general index of retail prices (RPI), which is published monthly by the Central Statistical Office. The RPI, of course, reflects the expenditure patterns of the majority of households and not just those in rented accommodation.

Pollution (Fines)

Mr. Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the average fine imposed by magistrates courts in 1988 for river and harbour pollution.

Mr. Heatcoat-Amory: Information collected by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department shows that for cases brought under sections 31 or 32 of the Control of Pollution Act 1974 the average fine imposed by magistrates courts in 1988 for water pollution offences was £560. The maximum fine available is £2,000 and up to three months' imprisonment. On indictment in the Crown Court there is no limit on the fine that may be imposed and terms of imprisonment can be up to two years.

Local Government Boundaries

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the progress of the Local Government Boundary Commission's proposals for the Suffolk-Cambridgeshire border.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Commission's programme is a matter for it to determine within the statutory requirement that it should complete the review of English county boundaries by 31 March 1992. I understand that the commission is actively considering the Suffolk-Cambridgeshire boundary in the light of responses to its draft proposals.

Mortgaged Property

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will make it his policy to introduce a duty of disclosure to oblige landlords to disclose *(a)* details of outstanding charges against the property at the start of a lease and *(b)* whether the lender has granted permission for the property to be let;

(2) if he will make it his policy to oblige mortgage lenders to obtain from borrowers an annual confirmation of occupiers of mortgaged property; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will make it his policy to seek to amend part III of the Housing Act 1985 to make it a statutory duty on housing authorities to accommodate people who are outside the existing categories of the involuntarily homeless, who are made homeless because the landlord to whom they were paying rent has unbeknown to them failed to pay his mortgage on that property;

(4) what legislation would need to be amended to bring into effect protection for people who pay rent to a landlord for property which they do not know is mortgaged;

(5) if he will review the arrangements for repossessions of property by court orders where a borrower has failed to meet mortgage repayments but has collected rent from a tenant in the property, to enable the tenant to be offered a first refusal on an option to buy or an assured tenancy for a limited period.

Mr. Chope: I will write to my hon. Friend.

Local Government and Housing Act 1989

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has had any consultations with local authority associations on the main provision of part VIII of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 since January 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: Following the announcement on 22 February to defer implementation of part VIII of the 1989 Act until 1 July, the local authority associations have been consulted on the draft regulations for the test of "resources" for owner occupiers and tenants. They have subsequently been consulted on a draft direction and associated guidance on the test of resources for landlords. Once their comments have been received and considered we will finalise the regulations and circulars relating to part VIII for issue as soon as possible thereafter.

Council House Sales

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on how many dwellings each local authority has sold under the right-to-buy legislation or voluntarily since April 1979; and what percentage of the total local authority stock they represent.

Mr. Chope: I have placed in the Library a table giving available information on local authority sales up to December 1989. It shows year by year information for each authority since 1984-85 together with cumulative figures since April 1979 and the proportion of their stock sold since April 1979.

French Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the volume of irradiated material and the scale of pollution from radioactive discharges which entered British coastal waters from the nuclear power stations on or near the northern coast of France during 1989.

Mr. Trippier: A programme of regular and extensive monitoring of the marine environment around the United Kingdom coastline is carried out by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. It is not possible to estimate the amount of irradiated material from overseas nuclear installations within the low levels of radioactivity measured in United Kingdom coastal waters.

Nuclear Waste

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much is being spent by Nirex in the current financial year on research into the safe disposal of nuclear waste; and how much money is being spent *(a)* in the United States and *(b)* Sweden on similar work in this financial year.

Mr. Trippier: I understand that Nirex's estimated expenditure for this financial year on research and development work towards a deep disposal facility for low and intermediate-level radioactive waste is £13·9 million. The Department does not have any information about expenditure on such research in the United States or Sweden.

Encapsulation Plants, Sellafield

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the projected timetable for intermediate-level waste encapsulation at Sellafield for each of the encapsulation plants.

Mr. Trippier: There are three intermediate-level waste encapsulation plants currently under construction at Sellafield. One will be operational later this year; the others are expected to be commissioned in 1992.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what was the level of expenditure by his Department on research into the safety of *(a)* intermediate and *(b)* low-level nuclear waste disposal for each year from 1970 to 1990, inclusive; and what are the projected figures to 1999;

(2) what was the level of expenditure by his Department on research into the safety of high-level nuclear waste disposal for each year from 1970 to 1990, inclusive; and what are the projected figures to 1999.

Mr. Trippier: My Department announced in 1977 that it would be assuming overall responsibility for radioactive waste management policy and in 1978-79 a full programme of research commenced under DOE control. Our wide-ranging research programme produces long-term benefits for the safe disposal of all levels of radioactive waste. It is not therefore practicable to divide the costs in the way requested. The level of expenditure by my Department on radioactive waste management research at actual prices for each financial year has been as follows:

	£ million
1978-79	3·3
1979-80	5·1
1980-81	9·7
1981-82	8·5
1982-83	9·8
1983-84	8·5
1984-85	9·6
1985-86	10·6
1986-87	11·4
1987-88	10·2
1988-89	8·8
1989-90	10·8

It is envisaged that current levels of expenditure are likely to be maintained broadly until the end of the century.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether there are any plans to build a nuclear waste repository under the seabed.

Mr. Trippier: The United Kingdom has no such plans.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment why the table 3.2b on pages 3 to 11 of the United Kingdom radioactive waste inventory (DOE/RW 188.061) entitled "Conditioned Waste Volumes Classed According to Waste Category: Waste from Committed Sources" includes waste arising from British Nuclear Fuels plc. from uncommitted reactors which are not currently in existence, under construction or required in future for currently approved programmes.

Mr. Trippier: The uncommitted arisings are from the operations of the THORP plant at Sellafield following major maintenance after its first 10 years or so of operation. At the time the inventory was compiled, these were included with the committed arisings on the basis that THORP itself was committed.

Mortgages

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to meet building society representatives and other mortgage lending institutions to discuss their approaches to rescheduling loans and repossession.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Ministers and officials at the Department of the Environment frequently meet representatives from mortgage lending institutions and discuss a range of issues, including mortgage arrears and possessions. I have met recently with representatives of the Council of Mortgage Lenders, whose members include all building societies of any size and many other mortgage lending institutions.

Rented Property

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his Department keeps an index of housing costs for those living in rented accommodation.

Mr. Michael Spicer: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope) to the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith).

Chatham and Medway Docks

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment who are the consultants who have been employed to assist with the Chatham and Medway docks redevelopment project.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have been asked to reply.

This is a matter for the boards of English Estates and the Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Household Incomes

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the average weekly household income in £ sterling as a percentage of total household income for the Yorkshire and Humberside region for 1979, 1983, 1987 and the most recent year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Estimates of gross average weekly household income for the United Kingdom and the Yorkshire and Humberside region are published in table 58 of the 1979 family expenditure survey report and in table 31 of the 1983, 1987 and 1988 reports, copies of which are in the Library.

European Community (Contribution)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the United Kingdom gross and net contribution to the European Community for each of the years for which figures are available at standard prices *(a)* for all contributions and *(b)* for contributions towards agricultural spending.

Mr. Ryder: The United Kingdom's total gross and net contributions, in constant 1989 prices, are set out in the table. The United Kingdom's contribution to the EC budget is towards the cost of total EC expenditure and not towards any particular element such as agriculture.

Gross and net payments to the EC budget

£ million[1]

Year	*Gross (before receipts and refunds or abatements)*	*Net (after receipts and refunds or abatements)*
1973	909	512
1974	784	127
1975	1,177	−193
1976	1,385	499
1977	1,932	968
1978	3,177	1,937
1979	3,306	1,949
1980	3,044	1,216
1981	3,365	614
1982	4,116	871
1983	4,061	883
1984	4,178	856
1985	4,866	2,233
1986	5,361	683
1987	5,916	1,957
1988	5,484	1,454
1989	5,533	1,966

[1] Constant prices have been constructed using the GDP deflator at market prices.

EC Agriculture Spending

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of European Community spending was on agriculture in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Ryder: For the years 1980 to 1988 the information requested is given in table 16 of successive reports by the Court of Auditors. In 1989 and 1990, provision for agricultural guarantee expenditure accounted for 59·6 and 56·6 per cent. respectively of the total budget.

Natural Beauty Products

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has anything to add to his answer of 16 February, *Official Report*, column 423, concerning companies forced into receivership by Customs and Excise action, in respect of the Natural Beauty Products Company of Bridgend.

Mr. Ryder: The company was not put into receivership by Customs and Excise action. The administrative receiver appointed by the debenture holder for Natural Beauty Products of Bridgend is trying to sell the company as a going concern.

Internal Audit

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the subject of the internal audit report that was drawn to the attention of a Minister in his Department in 1989.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 20 March 1990]:* The subject of the audit report concerned trade statistics in respect of diamond imports and exports.

Balance of Payments

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the nature of the expenditure and income covered by the £4,727 million deficit dealt with in the page of statistics entitled transfers on the balance of payments figures issued by the Central Statistical Office on 13 March.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 20 March 1990]:* The coverages of the various categories of expenditure and income are explained on page 39 of the 1989 edition of "United Kingdom Balance of Payments", a copy of which is in the Library.

Hong Kong (Investment)

Mr. Janman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the size of British investment in Hong Kong expressed as a percentage of national gross domestic product at factor cost.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 21 March 1990]:* Information is available only on the book value of United Kingdom direct investment in Hong Kong which, at £1,924 million at end-1987, represented 0·5 per cent. of United Kingdom gross domestic product at factor cost (in current prices) in 1987. Direct investment is only one aspect of the United Kingdom's extensive commercial involvement in Hong Kong. The total value of the United Kingdom stake in Hong Kong is likely to be substantially greater than the figure for direct investment alone.

TRANSPORT

Driving Licences

Sir Dudley Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many new full driving licences have been issued by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Centre in each of the last three years, exclusive of heavy goods vehicle licences and public service vehicle licences.

Mr. Atkins: The number of new full driving licences issued by the driver and vehicle licensing centre in the last three years, are as follows:

	New licences
1987	991,769
1988	1,000,611
1989	1,004,358

These figures do not include replacement, duplicate and exchange licences issued to people who have already held a full British driving licence.

M40 (Gerrards Cross)

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the current traffic flows, by volume, density and mix, on the M40 at Gerrards Cross.

Mr. Atkins: The latest annual average daily traffic flows recorded, for 1988, were:

	Vehicles	*Per cent*
Cars	63,000	84
Buses	600	1
Light Goods Vehicles	5,400	7
Heavy Goods Vehicles	6,000	8
Total	75,000	100

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the total amount of gross compensation paid under the Land Compensation Act 1973 in connection with the construction of the Gerrards Cross bypass (M40).

Mr. Atkins: Payments under part I of the Land Compensation Act 1973 for this length of M40 total £1·259 million.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what further representations he has received regarding the Channel tunnel and midland main line railway; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: I have received a number of representations about the Channel tunnel and the midland mainline. The extent to which this line is used for Channel tunnel rail services is a matter for BR's commercial judgment. It is also for British Rail in the first instance to decide whether it is in its commercial interest to propose electrification of this or any other line. The board's proposals for an international station at King's Cross would provide excellent interchange facilities with inter-city services on the midland mainline.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Public Expenditure Commentary

Mr. Knapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he intends to publish the Northern Ireland public expenditure commentary; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: The "Northern Ireland Commentary on Public Expenditure Plans 1990-91 to 1992-93" was published today and copies are available in the Vote Office. This is the third Northern Ireland commentary and it aims to improve the information available to Parliament, and the public, by amplifying the material in the Northern Ireland chapter of the 1990 public expenditure White Paper.

Higher Education

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many students from the Irish Republic are at *(a)* universities and *(b)* other higher education establishments in Northern Ireland; and what have been the numbers for each of the last four years.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 20 March 1990]*: Provisional information for the 1989-90 academic year is

(a). at universities—1,478

(b). at other higher education establishments—24

Comparable information for each of the last four years is:

	1985-86	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*
(a) at universities	436	613	931	1,219
(b) at other higher education establishments	14	16	14	20

New Building Units

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will estimate the number of new building units which will be built in 1990-91 in *(a)* the private sector and *(b)* the public sector.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 20 March 1990]*: It is estimated that during 1990-91 building will commence on the following units:

	Units
(a) The private sector (including housing associations)	7,000
(b) The public sector (Northern Ireland Housing Executive)	1,000

Salmon

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how long the dealer licensing scheme for the purchase of Atlantic salmon has been in operation in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 20 March 1990]*: The system, which was first provided for in the Fisheries Act (NI) 1928, has operated in its present form since the introduction of the Fisheries Act (NI) 1966.

Marine Research

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether a cost benefit analysis was carried out by the Department of Agriculture *(a)* before an undertaking to operate the research vessel Lough Foyle was entered into, *(b)* before or *(c)* after a decision was taken to seek funding for the vessel; and what are the benefits which justified the commitment.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 20 March 1990]*: Yes to *(a)* and *(b)*.

The benefits will derive from improved long-term management of exploitable marine stocks with the objective of providing enhanced yields in order to sustain a viable Northern Ireland sea fishing industry. Additional R and D will enhance scientific knowledge of complex interactions in the marine ecosystem and environment.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* part-time and *(b)* short term contract scientific staff have been appointed to new scientific posts created to work on the research vessel Lough Foyle.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 20 March 1990]*: No part-time or short-term contract scientific staff have yet been appointed. A total of 13 non-scientific staff for crewing the vessel are being employed through an agency agreement with the private sector.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many permanent staff have been appointed to the new scientific posts created to work on the research vessel Lough Foyle.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 20 March 1990]:* In 1989-90 one scientist, at grade 6, was appointed. A further 11 permanent and one temporary scientific staff are currently being recruited.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what analysis of the costs of berthing the research vessel Lough Foyle was carried out; whether *(a)* Coleraine port and *(b)* Londonderry port were considered and costed; what are the financial benefits per year in favour of Belfast since the vessel came into service; and what are the projections for the next three years.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 20 March 1990]:* Berthing costs are insignificant in terms of the overall costs of the vessel. The overriding factor is the cost of fuel to reach the target sea areas requiring R and D and monitoring. Londonderry and Coleraine are, therefore, not appropriate ports.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether any estimate has been made of the replacement cost of the research vessel Lough Foyle; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 20 March 1990]:* Replacement of the vessel has not yet been considered. A review will take place when appropriate taking into consideration policy and scientific needs.

Freddie Andrews

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps have been taken to assess whether Freddie Andrews enjoys the standard of living intended by his father and benefits appropriately from his properties disposed of by the Official Solicitor to John Laing Developments Ltd.

The Attorney-General: I have been asked to reply.

As I said in my most recent reply to the hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs), *Official Report*, 12 December 1989, columns *548-49*, it is not appropriate to publish details of the affairs of any patient without the leave of the court.

An application may be made to the court by any person concerned about a particular case for disclosure of any information in respect of which the applicant can demonstrate a legitimate interest.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Ethiopia

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the latest position regarding getting relief supplies to those who need them in Ethiopia.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether, in the light of serious famine forecast for April, he has proposals to grant further food aid to Ethiopia; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: Following my visit to Ethiopia on 9 and 10 March, I announced a further £8·5 million contribution of food and other emergency aid. Following the effective closure of the port of Massawa to relief operations, it is now unlikely that famine can be wholly averted.

The agreement on the movement of relief supplies into northern Welo and Tigray along the so-called southern line from the port of Assab was a most welcome development. President Mengistu assured me that the Government would not hinder this operation and the rebel side has also agreed to it.

The first convoys moved across the lines on 20 and 21 March and reached the distribution centre of Kobo in northern Welo the following day.

Rain Forests

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the financial aspects of the agreement with Brazil on rain forest issues, arranged during the visit of the right hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Patten).

Mrs. Chalker: Our programme of rain forest and other environmental assistance to Brazil will represent additional aid for that country, financed from the new £100 million for ODA's tropical forestry activities announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at the United Nations last November.

The level of assistance for Brazil is not fixed and will depend on the number of projects which can be agreed. The first project agreed under the memorandum of understanding, for climate-related research, is expected to cost some £2·5 million.

Namibia

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about how British aid to Namibia is to be spent.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Corby on 21 March, *Official Report*, column *612*.

Namibia

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) how much bilateral and multilateral aid he has given in the last two years to assist Namibians in English language teaching and training inside and outside Namibia;

(2) what steps he has taken to assist in the establishment of English as the lingua franca of Namibia;

(3) whether he is planning to aid the Namibian Academy in its English language teaching projects.

Mrs. Chalker: Over the last two years we have provided over £1 million in bilateral aid to assist Namibians in English language teaching and training. Most of this has been for training awards in Britain for Namibian teachers of English and for assistance to exile education institutions including the United Nations Institute for Namibia in Lusaka. It has included the preparation of teaching materials in English for use in Namibia's schools. Figures are not readily available for our share of multilateral aid for this purpose.

Under article three of Namibia's constitution, English is declared the official language of Namibia. We are already financing an English language adviser to the Minister of Education in Windhoek and will provide the course director for the first English language teaching course at the proposed National Institute of Languages. VSO will provide three teachers for this course. A British consultant arrived in Namibia today to advise on Namibia's education system. It is too early to say whether we will provide assistance to English language teaching projects run by the academy; much will depend on the Government's decisions on the academy's future role.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Advertising Expenditure

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Attorney-General what was the total publicity and advertising expenditure of his Department and the Lord Chancellor's Department and public bodies for which his Department has responsibility in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1989.

The Attorney-General: No publicity or advertising expenditure was incurred by my Department in 1979. At that time the Crown prosecution service and the Serious Fraud Office did not exist. In 1989-90, expenditure of £36,443 on publicity and £1,217 on advertising was incurred by the Treasury Solicitor's department. In that period, the Crown prosecution service incurred expenditure of £144,466 on publicity and £268,857 on advertising, and the Serious Fraud Office incurred an expenditure of £9,782 on advertising.

The estimated figures for the Lord Chancellor's Department and for the public bodies for which it has responsibility for 1989-90, excluding staff costs are as follows:

	Publicity *£*	*Advertising* *£*
LCD (and Associated Offices)	39,021	16,541
Legal Aid Board	105,000	25,000

The amounts spent for 1979 can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Bophuthatswana

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Attorney-General what discussions he has had on the public relations representation in the United Kingdom for Bophuthatswana; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: An allegation made in April 1986 on behalf of the Government of Bophuthatswana that funds had been misappropriated from a bank account belonging to the Bophuthatswana National Commercial Corporation Limited was referred to the metropolitan and city fraud squad. Following a police investigation, the Director of the Serious Fraud Office concluded in April 1988 that insufficient evidence was available to justify the institution of proceedings against any person. I had no discussion on the matter but was notified of that decision.

Land Registry

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make it his policy to investigate the feasibility of enabling private tenants of mortgaged property the right to register an interest on the Land Registry.

The Attorney-General: In its third report on land registration (Law Commission No. 158) the Law Commission, having extensively reviewed the matter, recommended no change to the existing requirement that only leases for a term exceeding 21 years should be capable of being noted on registered titles. The Government are considering this recommendation together with others listed in the report.

WALES

Local Government Finance

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the community charge for 1990-91 of *(a)* each district council and *(b)* each county council in Wales; and if he will show the relationship to the standard spending assessment for each of those councils.

Mr. Grist: Local authorities in Wales are in the process of submitting information to the Welsh Office relating to community charges. I shall write to my hon. Friend with the information he has requested when all the returns have been received and checked.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide the rate that would have had to have been levied as the equivalent of the community charge for 1990-91 of *(a)* each district council and *(b)* each county council in Wales; and if he will show the increase each of those rates are over the rates for those same councils for 1989-90.

Mr. Grist: I shall write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total amount collected in business rates *(a)* in Wales and *(b)* in each local authority in Wales in 1988-89; what is the amount projected to be collected in 1989-90; and what are the estimates for 1990-91 to 1994-95.

Mr. Grist: Estimates of business rate yield by local authority are available centrally only for 1990-91 as shown in the table. Information is not available for 1991-92 to 1994-95.

Non-domestic rate yield[1]

Local authority	*1988-89* *£ million*	*1989-90* *£ million*	*1990-91* *£ million*
Alyn and Deeside	—	—	12
Colwyn	—	—	5
Delyn	—	—	6
Glyndwr	—	—	4
Rhuddlan	—	—	7
Wrexham Maelor	—	—	17
Carmarthen	—	—	5
Ceredigion	—	—	5
Dinefwr	—	—	2
Llanelli	—	—	8
Preseli Pembrokeshire	—	—	8
South Pembrokeshire	—	—	8

Local authority	*1988-89 £ million*	*1989-90 £ million*	*1990-91 £ million*
Blaenau Gwent	—	—	7
Islwyn	—	—	5
Monmouth	—	—	8
Newport	—	—	27
Torfaen	—	—	13
Aberconwy	—	—	6
Arfon	—	—	6
Dwyfor	—	—	3
Meirionnydd	—	—	3
Ynys Mon	—	—	6
Cynon Valley	—	—	6
Merthyr Tydfil	—	—	6
Ogwr	—	—	15
Rhondda	—	—	5
Rhymney Valley	—	—	9
Taff Ely	—	—	15
Brecknock	—	—	3
Montgomeryshire	—	—	5
Radnor	—	—	2
Cardiff	—	—	48
Vale of Glamorgan	—	—	11
Port Talbot	—	—	17
Lliw Valley	—	—	6
Neath	—	—	9
Swansea	—	—	26
Central list[2]	—	—	80
Government contribution in lieu of rates	—	—	27
Total Wales	368	414	461

[1] Amount estimated to be collected.

[2] Amount payable by Welsh central list ratepayers.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what minimum residence period in a financial year has been established by the community charge registration officer for the payment of poll tax in each local authority for people with a residence but who normally work abroad for most of the year.

Mr. Peter Walker: A person is subject to a charging authority's personal community charge on a given day if he or she has their sole or main residence in the charging authority's area on that day. The decision as to whether, on any day, a residence constitutes a sole or main residence is a matter for each community charges registration officer (CCRO) to decide on the facts of the individual case. Information about community charges registration officers's decisions is not held centrally.

Council House Rents

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to limit council house rents; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: None.

Improvement Grants

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many home improvement grants have been given *(a)* in general and *(b)* specifically to households in order to replace lead plumbing in each district, borough and city council area for each year since 1985.

Mr. Grist: The total number of completed home improvement grants is given in the table. Data on the number of grants specifically given in order to replace lead plumbing is not collected centrally.

Number of home improvement grants completed by district, 1985-89

	1985	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
Aberconwy	204	155	134	212	179
Alyn and Deeside	131	134	184	200	158
Arfon	413	480	434	437	390
Blaenau Gwent	529	414	844	659	398
Brecknock	136	143	213	332	397
Cardiff	2,456	2,572	2,847	2,720	3,221
Carmarthen	358	518	450	428	402
Ceredigion	348	336	202	160	265
Colwyn	58	310	166	257	310
Cynon Valley	271	549	1,258	1,488	1,098
Delyn	150	179	233	193	165
Dinefwr	146	197	159	127	133
Dwyfor	125	186	131	113	173
Glyndwr	170	130	151	174	187
Islwyn	1,109	1,162	1,214	1,464	1,559
Llanelli	398	324	545	471	1,024
Lliw Valley	257	416	453	508	499
Meirionnydd	547	241	154	90	120
Merthyr Tydfil	374	456	590	733	773
Monmouth	223	362	207	454	158
Montgomeryshire	142	158	187	153	204
Neath	284	506	683	661	419
Newport	486	822	501	543	544
Ogwr	859	855	808	924	965
Port Talbot (Afan)	186	317	437	548	443
Preseli Pembrokeshire	232	335	372	377	524
Radnorshire	142	102	129	105	110
Rhondda	1,973	2,066	1,405	1,742	1,535
Rhuddlan	34	63	70	52	47
Rhymney Valley	433	518	876	801	965
South Pembrokeshire	388	405	438	355	382
Swansea	1,974	1,474	1,151	1,130	1,013
Taff-Ely	536	555	396	408	520
Torfaen	327	373	381	437	274
Vale of Glamorgan	328	460	369	400	372
Wrexham Maelor	112	90	72	83	65
Ynys Mon	313	208	253	248	218
Wales Total	17,152	18,571	19,097	20,187	20,209

Tap Water

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many households in each district, borough and city council area in Wales have tap water which is above *(a)* 100 micrograms of lead per litre concentration and *(b)* 50 micrograms per litre; and what were the figures for each year from 1985 to 1989.

Mr. Grist: This information is not available. However, Dwr Cymru has confirmed that the water that it supplies complies with the lead standard in the EC directive relating to the quality of water for human consumption (80/778/EEC).

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many tests were carried out on tap water standards in district, borough and city council area in Wales to locate the *(a)* lead, *(b)* aluminium, *(c)* pesticides, *(d)* nitrates and *(e)* trihalomenthanes in each year from 1985 to 1989.

Mr. Grist: This information is not held centrally and I refer the hon. Gentleman to the chairman of the respective water undertakers and to the environmental health officers of local authorities.

The Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989 (SI 1989 No. 1147) contain requirements about the frequency of sampling by water undertakers. So far as local authorities are concerned, sampling frequencies relating to public supplies are a matter for the authorities' discretion. Advice on the frequency of sampling by authorities of private supplies is contained in WO circular 51/84.

Water undertakers are required by regulation 29(1)*(f)* and 30(1) to maintain a public register of the results of all analyses. Regulation 31 requires that all undertakers prepare and publish an annual report of water quality.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the latest figures for levels of lead in tap water in drinking water at hospitals in Wales.

Mr. Grist: Information about levels of lead in tap water in drinking water at hospitals is not collected by the Welsh Office or by district health authorities.

Almost without exception, hospitals in Wales use water supplied by water undertakers. It is, in the first instance, for the companies themselves to ensure that the water they supply for domestic purposes—including supplies to hospitals—is wholesome. The sampling regime to be followed by the companies is prescribed by the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989 (SI 1989, No. 1147).

Local authorities also are under a duty to monitor public supplies and are required to ensure that private water supplies in their areas are wholesome.

Oil Spill (Severn)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what steps have been taken to clean up the oil spilled into the river Severn on 1 March 1990; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what impact the oil spilled into the river Severn on 1 March 1990 will have on the surrounding environment and wildlife, especially migratory birds returning to Wales for the summer; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: We are advised by the National Rivers Authority that the majority of the oil spilled was contained on site and removed by the company concerned. Inspections of the river Severn have shown only very minor contamination and there were no adverse effects on water quality. There has been some contamination of vegetation on the river banks. The spillage occurred before the return of migratory birds, but the authority has taken steps to minimise any effect on endemic and migratory wildlife.

Myodil Dye

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will undertake a full investigation into the side-effects on patients in Wales resulting from the use of myodil; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

DEFENCE

Air-Sea Rescue

Mr. Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if it is planned to continue the Royal Air Force long-distance air-sea rescue capability when the Nimrod fleet is phased out.

Mr. Neubert: Yes.

Atomic Weapons Establishments

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on visits by hon. Members to atomic weapons establishments; if the normal facilities are provided for such visits to establishments in hon. Members' constituencies or where constituents are employed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neubert: All visits to defence establishments, including the atomic weapons establishment, by Members of Parliament are subject to prior approval by Ministers.

European Fighter Aircraft

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether there has been any assessment of the economic and industrial implications of a reduction in the declared production of 250 European fighter aircraft.

Mr. Alan Clark: No. As I said in my reply to the hon. Gentleman on 15 January 1990 at column *125*, there has been no change in the United Kingdom's declared production offtake of 250 aircraft. It is too early to forecast with certainty the eventual size of the United Kingdom purchase of EFA.

DUCHY OF LANCASTER

Departmental Budget

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster what is the budget of his Department for 1989-90; what are the principal items on which it is spent; and how many staff are employed.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The estimated cost of my private office in the year 1989-90 is £56,342. The principal items of expenditure are salaries for the one and a half staff employed in my office, and provision of a secure Government car service.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

New Parliamentary Building

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Lord President of the Council if the plans for the new parliamentary building in Bridge street include a creche.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will take urgent steps to establish a workplace nursery in the House of Commons for use by staff working for Members of the House.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Positive resolutions in relation to the principle of providing child care facilities for the children of Members and all staff in the House have already been taken by the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee. Hitherto, it had been envisaged that those facilities could be provided only in phase 2 of the new parliamentary buildings or by participating in appropriate schemes set up by Government Departments. Recent developments in analysing the use of accommodation in the House may well, however, provide a fresh opportunity for reconsideration. The House of Commons Commission has therefore invited the Services Committee to look again at this matter.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Audit Policy

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, further to his reply of 18 January, *Official Report*, column *355*, if he will provide a list of the general issues relating to audit which his Department has referred to the accountancy bodies.

Mr. Redwood: The topics raised with the leading accountancy bodies and subsequently publicised in the professional press were:

(i) accounts not in statutory format
(ii) unwarranted filing of modified accounts
(iii) accounts not filed by due date
(iv) auditors acting as company secretary
(v) depreciation of fixed assets.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many auditing partners have been barred from practising as a result of critical reports by his inspectors.

Mr. Redwood: It is the responsibility of the professional accountancy bodies and the joint disciplinary scheme (JDS) to investigate complaints and take such action as is appropriate. As far as I am aware, there has been no occasion where criticism of a company's auditors by my Department's inspectors in reports published since June 1979 has led to an audit partner being excluded from membership of a professional accountancy body. However, there have been two instances where accountants who were directors of the companies criticised by inspectors were investigated by JDS and subsequently excluded from membership of their professional body.

Ferranti (Alleged Fraud)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the nature of the response of his Department to the alleged fraud at Ferranti; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The Serious Fraud Office and the company fraud department of the Metropolitan police are actively investigating allegations of fraud prior to, surrounding and subsequent to the merger of Ferranti plc and International Signal and Control Group plc. They will take action if that is necessary following investigation.

North East Shipbuilders Ltd.

Mr. Clay: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will indicate to Sir Leon Brittan that Her Majesty's Government have no objection to his discussing the details of the notification by Her Majesty's Government concerning the closure of North East Shipbuilders Ltd with the Member of the European Parliament for Tyne and Wear;

(2) if he will place in the Library a copy of the formal notification made by Her Majesty's Government to the European Commission regarding the closure of North East Shipbuilders Ltd.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: No.

Mr. Clay: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on which days Her Majesty's Government formally notified the European Commission of their proposals regarding the closure of North East Shipbuilders Ltd. and related matters; and on which day the European Commission formally notified their acceptance of these proposals.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Government formally notified to the Commission of the European Community on 9 December 1988 a number of aspects relating to British Shipbuilders, including the proposed terms of sale of a number of subsidiary companies and the payment of closure aid at North East Shipbuilders Ltd. The Commission decided on 21 December not to raise objections to the matters covered by this notification.

Contracts (Moral Rights)

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to bring forward legislation to amend the Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988 so as to render unlawful contracts in which a writer has to waive his or her moral rights.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have no such plans, since I believe that it is important to preserve freedom of contract in dealings involving copyright.

Domestic Fixed Capital Expenditure

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the total domestic fixed capital expenditure in the Yorkshire and Humberside region for 1979, 1983, 1987 and the most recent year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: I have been asked to reply.

Figures representing the total investment in Yorkshire and Humberside are not available. Estimates are made, however, of gross domestic fixed capital formation by general government and by selected industries. These estimates represent the expenditure on fixed assets, that is, on replacement or addition to the stock of fixed assets and so exclude expenditure on maintenance and repairs. Figures for Government expenditure are £346 million in 1979, £465 million in 1983 and £606 million in 1987. Figures for industry expenditure in these three years are respectively £1,981 million, £2,385 million and £3,288 million (1987 is the latest year for which estimates have been made). The industries covered are agriculture, forestry, fishing, energy, water supply, manufacturing, transport and communications excluding air and sea transport and dwellings. Estimates are not available for the service industries. There is some overlap between the general government and industry figures since they both cover dwellings.

Cot Mattresses (Chemical Hazard)

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when his Department first knew of biochemist Barry Richardson's work on the possible dangers of young babies from chemicals used in fire resistant mattresses and any link with cot death syndrome.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 12 March 1990]:* I have been asked to reply.

Mr. Richardson's work was first drawn to our attention by Mr. Mitchell in January 1989. In April 1989 we received further details of the hypothesis that fungal action on mattresses emitted toxic gases which were a possible explanation for sudden infant deaths. The laboratory of the Government Chemist was then asked to conduct a scientific assessment of the hypothesis. I understand that it has not, as yet, been able to confirm Mr. Richardson's findings. Its results are being referred to the group of experts which, as the hon. Member will know, the chief medical officer has invited to assess Mr. Richardson's work.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Angola

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken to support President Mobutu's work as mediator in the continuing Angolan civil war between UNITA and the MPLA.

Mr. Waldegrave: The breakdown of the ceasefire arranged by President Mobutu in June 1989 has frustrated his mediation efforts. We have urged both sides to renew the ceasefire and enter into negotiations on a political settlement.

Cyprus

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has as to the demographic mix of the population of Northern Cyprus as between Turkish settlers and indigenous Turkish Cypriots.

Mr. Maude: Turkish Cypriot statistics show a total population in 1989 of 169,272. This figure is not broken down. Estimates for Turkish settlers tend to be in the range of 40,000 to 45,000, although higher figures have been quoted.

Libya

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek information from the German Democratic Republic Government on their future intentions relating to technical support for the Libyan military.

Mr. Waldegrave: Our policy remains clear. We have no military links with Libya.

We look forward to discussions with representatives of the new GDR Government when it is formed.

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the current situation in Libya; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: Our information on Libya has been limited since diplomatic relations were broken in 1984. I shall be glad to write to my hon. Friend if he has a particular matter in mind.

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking through the United Nations and the European Economic Community to encourage the German Democratic Republic Government to cease all technical support for the Libyan military.

Mr. Waldegrave: Our policy remains clear. We have no military links with Libya. In 1986 the European Community agreed measures against Libya which included an arms embargo. This is still in force.

We look forward to discussions with representatives of the new GDR Government when it is formed.

Know-How Fund

Mr. Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries are now receiving help from the know-how fund; and if it is to be extended further in the near future.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced during President Havel's visit last week that the know-how fund is being extended to Czecholosvakia. Poland and Hungary are already beneficiaries and we have said other countries will qualify once they are fully committed to political and economic reform.

Namibia

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, during his recent visit to Namibia, he discussed with Ministers or officers of the new Government (i) the possibility of Namibia joining the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, (ii) the provision of unsafeguarded uranium for the United Kingdom stockpile and (iii) the continued provision of mineral resources to the United Kingdom from Namibian sources.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs discussed the possibility of Namibia joining the nuclear non-proliferation treaty with President Nujoma; he did not discuss the other two subjects mentioned in the question.

South Africa

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, during his recent visit to South Africa, he raised with Ministers or officials of the Government of the Republic of the prospects of South Africa joining the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Mr. Waldegrave: This subject was touched on briefly in the discussions that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs had with the South African Administration.

EC-ACP Meeting

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the agenda of the EC-ACP meeting in Fiji on 28 and 29 March.

Mr. Maude: The ACP-EC Council of Ministers meeting in Fiji on 28 and 29 March will discuss:

The state of implementation of the third Lomé convention.
Transitional measures between the third and fourth Lomé conventions.
Trade and customs co-operation.
Commodities.
Stabex (assistance for loss of export earnings from certain agricultural products).
Sysmin (assistance for loss of export earnings from certain minerals).
Sugar.

Development finance co-operation.
Industrial Co-operation.
Agricultural co-operation.
Treatment of ACP nationals in EEC member states.
The ACP-EC joint assembly.
Southern Africa.
The single European Market.
Developments in Eastern Europe and their implications for ACP-EC co-operation.
ACP states' indebtedness.

Council of Europe

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what decisions were taken at the enlarged meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Council of Europe in Lisbon on 23 and 24 March; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: A special session of the committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in Lisbon on 23 and 24 March discussed the Council's relations with central and eastern Europe. The United Kingdom was represented by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The conclusions of the meeting were wide ranging: a copy of a summary from the committee's chairman, the Foreign Minister of Portugal, has been placed in the Library. We will of course participate fully in the follow-up envisaged by the chairman's summary.

Cambodia

Mr. Lester: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on British Government policy towards Cambodia.

Mr. Hurd: Since my written reply to the question from my hon. Friend on 8 November 1989, we have continued to work for a sovereign and independent Cambodia whose people are able to live in safety and prosperity and free to decide their own future. Our abhorrence of the Khmer Rouge remains absolute, and we are doing what we can to prevent Pol Pot and his friends from returning to power.

We are making good progress in building up our humanitarian aid programme, which is designed to help both Cambodians in Cambodia and those who have taken refuge in camps along the Thai border. In December 1989, two British officials visited Cambodia to examine at first hand the scope for British aid. Following this, we pledged an additional £1 million to multilateral agencies for their programmes inside Cambodia. We are also supporting eight projects inside Cambodia sponsored by non-governmental organisations, with a total commitment of £224,000, and are considering six new applications with a total value of £500,000.

In addition to this important humanitarian effort, we are actively working for a peaceful, comprehensive political settlement in Cambodia. We welcomed the proposal by the Australian Foreign Minister for a special role for the United Nations. A series of meetings of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council has agreed the principles which should underlie a settlement. These include an enhanced role for the United Nations, the modalities of a peace-keeping effort in Cambodia, and the administrative structure during the interim period of United Nations involvement. The informal meeting on Cambodia in Jakarta on 26 to 28 February achieved some further progress on United Nations involvement, although it also demonstrated the important remaining differences between the parties.

I have discussed Cambodia with other Foreign Ministers, including those of the United States, France and Italy. I also had a meeting with the United Nations Secretary General in New York in February. Foreign Ministers of the 12 member states of the European Community issued a statement on Cambodia on 20 February, and Cambodia figured prominently in the discussions and joint declaration of the EC-ASEAN ministerial meeting in Malaysia in February.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Teachers' Negotiating Rights

Mr. Flannery: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when the International Labour Organisation indicated that it was satisfied with what he was currently doing about the restoration of teachers' negotiating rights, as he stated before the Select Committee on Education, Science and the Arts, on 28 November 1989 (HC 32-i, page 3).

Mrs. Rumbold: The position is that the ILO is aware of the steps the Government are taking to put in place new and lasting pay determination machinery and has not asked us to proceed on any other timetable.

Education Expenditure

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will list those years in the period 1974 to 1989 when financial cuts in real terms were made in public expenditure on education in England and Wales;

(2) if he will list those years in the period 1974 to 1989 when financial cuts in real terms were made in public expenditure on education in England and Wales.

Mrs. Rumbold: Public expenditure on education in England and Wales fell in real terms (as measured by the GDP deflator) in the following financial years in the period referred to:

1974-75; 1978-79; 1979-80; 1981-82; 1984-85; 1985-86.

Universities Funding Council

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many of his Department's staff and at what grades have been seconded to work for the Universities Funding Council.

Mr. MacGregor: There are 58 staff on secondment to the Universities Funding Council in the following grades:

	Staff
Grade 3	1
Grade 5	1
Grade 6	1
Grade 7	6
HEO	13
EO	10
AO	10
AA	2
Secretaries	5
Typing manager	1
Typists	4
Support staff	4
TOTAL	58

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many staff, at what grades, and what proportion of the total, have resigned or are intending to resign from the employment of the Universities Funding Council in consequence of *(a)* its move to Bristol and *(b)* for other reasons.

Mr. MacGregor: None. All staff directly employed by the council are prepared to move to Bristol. Those on secondment at EO level and above who will be under age 57 at the time of relocation will be asked whether they wish to become employees of the council and move to Bristol. All staff aged 57 and over and those at AO level and below will return to their employers.

Teacher Training (Bursaries)

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if, in respect of initial teacher training in subjects for which bursaries have been made available, he will list for each subject and each year for which a bursary scheme has operated, the number of applicants, the number of acceptances, the target for the subject, the amount of bursary and its total cost, and the proportion of students accepted for each course who completed their qualification, and the proportion who obtained employment in a maintained school, with aggregate totals for each year.

Mr. MacGregor: An evaluation commissioned from Bath university showed that in 1988, 83 per cent. of bursary holders went on to teach in maintained secondary schools, a higher proportion than the generality of ITT students. This finding is corroborated by evidence from a DES survey of bursary holders. It is not possible to disaggregate bursary holders from the total of students completing initial teacher training qualifications.

Table 1 shows the number of applications, recruitment targets, recruitment figures and total expenditure by subject and year.

Table 2 shows the amount of bursary by subject and year.

Table 1

Initial teacher training in the shortage subjects 1986 to 1990

For entry in year	*Applications*	*Recruitment*	*Targets*	*Total cost (£)*
Mathematics				
1986-87	1,299	901	1,275	541,000
1987-88	1,801	1,194	1,383	1,287,000
1988-89	1,594	1,143	1,572	1,489,000
1989-90	1,809	1,139	1,549	1,483,000
CDT				
1986-87	643	551	756	441,000
1987-88	1,044	743	867	944,000
1988-89	976	764	978	1,114,000
1989-90	1,554	775	1,020	1,155,000
Physics				
1986-87	594	365	522	219,000
1987-88	962	545	552	560,000
1988-89	823	456	595	637,000
1989-90	748	322	611	506,000
Chemistry				
1989-90	675	400	584	380,000

Since its institution, the bursary and the subjects covered have developed as follows:

Table 2

Subjects eligible	*Year*	*Level £*
Maths, Physics, CDT	1986	1,200
Maths, Physics, CDT, Technology	1987	1,250
Maths, Physics, CDT, Technology	1988	[1]1,300
Maths, Physics, CDT, Technology Chemistry	1989	[1]1,300

[1] + £200 CDT Equipment.

"Technology" was added on legal advice so as to include courses entitled "Technology" which prepare students to teach other bursary subjects up to GCSE standard.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what measures he has taken to monitor the effectiveness of the bursary schemes to attract student teachers to train in shortage subjects and to enter employment in the maintained sector; and what are the conclusions of such measures.

Mr. MacGregor: Research commissioned by my Department from the University of Bath school of education concluded that the bursary scheme had made an important contribution to attracting good quality students into shortage subject courses. At the time of the survey 83 per cent. of bursary holders had gone on to teach in maintained secondary schools, a higher proportion than the generality of newly trained teachers, Others were teaching in the independent sector or working in other posts connected with education. An increasing proportion of students had said that they could not have taken the course without a bursary, which helps to demonstrate the value of the scheme in attracting mature entrants to teaching.

Assisted Places

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the average tuition fee charged by schools within the assisted places scheme.

Mr. MacGregor: The average tuition fee charged by schools in England within the assisted places scheme in academic year 1988-89, the latest year for which final figures are available, was £2,591.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the estimated total expenditure on assisted places in 1990-91, and in respect of how many pupils.

Mr. MacGregor: It is estimated that total expenditure on assisted places in England in the financial year 1990-91 will be £61,926,000. Thirty three thousand, two hundred and eighty eight assisted places will be available in England in the academic year 1990-91.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science which school within the assisted places scheme charges the highest tuition fees; and what is the amount of that fee.

Mr. MacGregor: Charterhouse school, Godalming, where the academic year 1989-90 annual tuition fee is £6,975.

Pre-primary Education

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the estimate of the number of children currently receiving nursery and other forms of pre-primary education.

Mrs. Rumbold: A total of 548,000 under-fives were attending maintained nursery and primary schools in England in January 1989. This was an increase of 15,000 over the previous year and an increase of 119,000 since 1980. During the decade the age participation rate increased from 39 to 45 per cent. A further 42,000 (3 per cent. of the age group) were attending nursery units in independent schools. The Department does not collect information on other forms of pre-primary education.

School Closures

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will update the table in the answer to the hon. Member for Blackburn, of 29 June 1989, *Official Report*, columns *535-36*, on school closures, to give information for the calendar year 1989, and the latest information available for 1990.

Mr. MacGregor: The information is in the following updated table:

Calendar year *(1)*	*Number of proposals decided* *(2)*	*Number of places to be taken out of use by proposals in column 2* *(3)*	*Number of proposals in column 2 approved* *(4)*	*Number of surplus places to be taken out of use as a result of approved proposals* *(5)*
1983	366	104,174	330	85,606
1984	292	85,862	270	77,590
1985	205	101,097	185	88,218
1986	172	81,663	147	62,828
1987	159	55,116	134	45,326
1988	145	64,256	116	27,170
1989	140	59,527	114	41,831
[1]1990	12	2,467	7	2,380

[1] 1 January to 28 February 1990.

Further Education (Liverpool)

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met the assistant director for further education in Liverpool; what subjects were discussed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Officials of the Department met the senior assistant director (further education) of Liverpool local authority, together with the assistant city solicitor, on 21 March. His purpose in requesting the meeting was, in accordance with a resolution of Liverpool city council, to advise the Department of the council's decision to recommend to its education committee that the management of its further education provision be restructured by 1 April 1991 to a single college model on various sites throughout the city.

Student Loans

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the repayment terms of top-up for students on longer courses.

Mr. MacGregor: I am now able to announce that the Government intend that the repayment period for students on courses that are longer than four years should be initially seven years. The standard repayment period for other students will be initially five years. This will ensure that repayments are manageable for students on courses longer than four years, who will build up larger liabilities during their courses. As the scheme develops and loans increase in real terms the standard repayment period will be extended: the repayment period for those on longer courses will similarly be extended.

Access Funds

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will review the provision for access funds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I am now able to announce that following parliamentary discussion during the various stages of the Education (Student Loans) Bill in both Houses, the Government have decided to increase to £20 million the access funds available for higher education. This will give the higher education institutions greater scope for extending discretionary assistance on a flexible basis to their students, notably those facing relatively high accommodation.

The necessary supplementary estimates approval for the additional expenditure of £10 million in 1990-91 will be sought in due course.

Pensions

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what is the average pension paid to head teachers who retired in 1989; and what was the average pension received by head teachers who retired in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1969;

(2) what is the value at current prices of the average pension received by lecturers in higher education on their retirement in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1969;

(3) what is the value at current prices of the average pension received by lecturers in further education on their retirement in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1969;

(4) what is the value at current prices of the average pension received by teachers on their retirement in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1969;

(5) what is the value at current prices of the average pension received by head teachers on their retirement in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1969;

(6) what was the average pension paid for lecturers in higher education who retired in 1989; and what is the average pension currently received by lecturers in higher education in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1969;

(7) what was the average pension paid to lecturers in further education who retired in 1989; and what is the average pension received by lecturers in further education who retired in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1969;

(8) what was the average pension paid to teachers who retired in 1989; and what is the average pension currently received by teachers who retired in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1969.

Mr. Alan Howarth *[holding answer 20 March 1990]:* Information in respect of 1989 is being assembled and will be made available shortly; information relating to lecturers in higher education and further education is only held as a combined total. Figures for 1969 and 1979 are as follows:

Average pension at time of payment

	1969 *£*	*1979* *£*
Teachers	695	2,270
Head teachers	1,080	3,560
Lecturers	985	2,770

Average pension at current values

	1969[1] *£*	*1979*[1] *£*
Teachers	4,450	4,380
Head teachers	6,910	6,860
Lecturers	6,300	5,340

[1] Retirement.

In 1969, teachers generally required 30 years service before being eligible for a pension; the average length of service on which pensions were based in 1969 was 33 years. The present qualifying period for a pension is two years and the average length of service on which pensions are currently based is 26 years.

SCOTLAND

Footpaths and Bridleways

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list, for each of the years 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988 and 1989, the number of temporary traffic regulation orders made by local authorities under section 14 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to restrict or prohibit the use of footpaths or bridleways for which he gave consent under section 15(2) of that Act for an extension of the period for which the order was in force.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Temporary traffic orders affecting footpaths and bridleways are not separately identified from those affecting road traffic and the information could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Cash Limits

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he proposes to make further changes to the cash limits for 1989-90 within his responsibility.

Mr. Rifkind: Yes. I intend to make changes to four of the cash limits within my responsibility.

As a result of savings on various grant schemes the cash limit for class XVI, vote 2, agriculture services and fisheries, Scotland, will be decreased by £1,000,000 from £80,024,000 to £79,024,000.

The cash limit on class XVI, vote 3, regional and general industrial support, Scotland will be reduced by £750,000 from £144,249,000 to £143,499,000. This reflects a reduction to the Scottish Development Agency's grant in aid associated with additional receipts arising from property sales by the agency.

The cash limit on class XVI, vote 6, roads, transport and environmental services, Scotland, will be decreased by £1,500,000 from £212,942,000 to £211,442,000 as a result of savings on trunk road maintenance expenditure.

The non-voted cash limit SO/LA2, which covers housing capital expenditure by local authorities and new towns, will be reduced by £3,037,000 from £344,286,000 to £341,249,000 reflecting savings on expenditure by the new towns.

Training Schemes

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list private companies involved with provision of youth training schemes and employment training in Scotland by regional area; and how expenditure of public money by them is monitored.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 7 March 1990]:* Financial checks on all training providers in YTS and employment training are carried out by the Training Agency's professional accountant in Scotland.

All organisations operating YTS must have approved training organisation status, and all organisations operating employment training must achieve approved training organisation status by 5 September 1990 or two years after the start of their contract. One of the criteria for this is financial viability. Organisations must demonstrate that they have the financial resources to fulfil their contracted obligations, operate effective financial systems and controls and maintain up-to-date and accurate administrative records.

It is not possible to provide a comprehensive list of private companies involved with the provision of the youth training scheme and employment training in Scotland.

Birds of Prey

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number, species and cause of death of birds of prey discovered in each of the last three years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 12 March 1990]:* The information obtained through the wildlife incident investigation scheme of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland on numbers of birds of prey discovered dead is set out in the table. I understand that the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds also keeps records, but these cannot be compared directly because they are compiled on a different basis. The RSPB totals for the relevant years were 37, 25 and 38.

Species	*Poisoned*	*Shot*	*Trauma*	*Disease*	*Starvation*	*Unknown*	*Total*
1987							
Barn Owl	—	—	1	—	—	2	3
Buzzard	9	—	5	2	—	2	18
Golden Eagle	1	—	—	—	—	3	4
Kestrel	—	—	—	—	—	1	1
Osprey	—	—	—	—	—	1	1
Sparrowhawk	—	—	5	—	—	2	7
Tawny Owl	—	—	—	—	—	3	3
Total	10	—	11	2	—	14	37
1988							
Barn Owl	—	—	1	—	—	2	3
Buzzard	7	1	6	1	—	1	16
Golden Eagle	4	1	1	—	—	2	8
Hen Harrier	1	—	1	—	—	—	2
Kestrel	—	—	2	2	—	—	4
Merlin	—	—	—	1	—	—	1
Short Eared Owl	—	—	1	—	—	—	1
Sparrowhawk	—	—	4	—	—	1	5
Tawny Owl	2	—	2	—	—	—	4
Total	14	2	18	4	—	6	44
1989							
Barn Owl	—	—	4	—	—	2	6
Buzzard	11	1	2	1	1	9	25
Golden Eagle	1	1	2	—	—	2	6
Hen Harrier	—	1	—	—	—	—	1
Kestrel	—	—	3	1	—	2	6
Merlin	—	1	1	—	—	—	2
Osprey	—	—	—	—	—	2	2
Peregrine	3	2	1	—	—	3	9
Red Kite	1	—	—	—	—	—	1
Sparrowhawk	[1]2	—	3	3	—	2	10
Tawny Owl	—	—	2	—	—	1	3
Total	18	6	18	5	1	23	71

[1] Pesticide poisonings, not deliberate abuse.

Speech Therapists

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his policy on cover for maternity leave taken by speech therapists; and what is the average waiting time for children with speech difficulties in the Greater Glasgow health board area.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 19 March 1990]:* The information requested is not available.

Hospitals (Self-governing Status)

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* those hospitals which have declared an interest in applying for self-governing status.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 20 March 1990]:* Expressions of interest have been made public by the hospitals at Forfar, the Royal Scottish National hospital at Larbert and the unit at the Foresterhill site in Aberdeen comprising the royal infirmary, maternity hospital and children's hospital.

Prime Minister's Visit (Security)

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total cost to public funds of providing security during the visit to Scotland of the Prime Minister on 8, 9 and 10 March.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 20 March 1990]:* The level of security required to protect the Prime Minister, or any other public figure, is an operational matter for the chief constable concerned and it is not the practice to give information of the kind requested.

HEALTH

Residential Homes, Easington

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by name and address the nursing and residential homes in the Easington constituency and the cost per patient per home borne by the Department of Social Security.

Mr. Freeman: Information about nursing homes and residential care homes is not collected centrally in this form. Details of nursing homes and residential care homes registered under the Registered Homes Act 1984 are kept by district health authorities and local social services authorities respectively. Benefit levels and the payments made to individual residents are matters for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security.

Care in the Community

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what extra resources are to be made available to statutory authorities to provide care in the community within the Easington constituency.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: New burdens on local authorities as a result of the community care policy will be taken into account when determining their grant entitlement for 1991-92. The extra resources will be distributed to individual authorities through the standard spending assessment for personal social services. The formula is being reconsidered in the light of the new policies and discussions with local authorities. Final decisions on resource issues will be taken in the course of the current public expenditure discussions.

Additional resources for health care from April 1991, including care in the community, will also be considered as part of the current public expenditure survey. It is for the health authorities to decide on levels of expenditure in each part of their programme having regard to local plans and circumstances.

Dental Service

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimated proportion of the costs of the general dental service will come from patients' charges assuming that continuing care payments are in place under the proposed new dental contract.

Mr. Freeman: The 1990-91 estimates laid before Parliament show income from patient charges for general dental services in England as £388 million—38 per cent. of the estimated cost.

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total cost of the general dental service in the United Kingdom in terms of both current and constant prices over the last five financial years; and what are the best estimates for the costs of the service at current prices in 1989-90 and 1990-91.

Mr. Freeman: The gross cost of the general dental services in England in cash and at 1989-90 prices over the last five complete financial years is given in the table. The estimated outturn for 1989-90 is £970 million. The estimated gross cost of the general dental service in England in 1990-91, as shown in the main estimates, is £1,019·4 million. Information on the general dental services in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales and for Northern Ireland and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

	1984-85 £ million	*1985-86 £ million*	*1986-87 £ million*	*1987-88 £ million*	*1988-89 £ million*
Cash	640·4	660·0	741·7	819·6	949·7
At 1989-90 prices[1]	838·6	820·3	891·6	935·1	1,011·4

[1] Revalued to 1989-90 prices using the gross domestic product deflator.

Mr. Sean Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the costs of the general dental care service came from patients' charges in the period of the last five years.

Mr. Freeman: The proportion of the gross costs of the general dental services in England recovered from patients' charges in the last five complete financial years is given in the table.

	Per cent.
1984-85	27
1985-86	30
1986-87	30
1987-88	29
1988-89	31

Self-governing Hospitals

Mr. Tom Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the hospitals applying for self-governing status within the north-west region.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Formal applications for NHS trust status will not be made until Parliament has given approval to the necessary legislation. Only at this stage will units decide whether or not to submit a firm application. However, the following units in the North Western regional health authority have expressed an interest in trust status:

Christie hospital
Central Manchester hospital and community services
Royal Preston hospital
South Manchester health authority community unit
Stepping Hill hospital and Stockport infirmary
Wrightington hospital

Hampshire Constituencies

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list in the *Official Report* the size of the electorate of each parliamentary constituency in Hampshire and the extent to which each such constituency differs from the electoral quota for England, expressed both in numbers and in percentage.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is given in the table.

Parliamentary constituency	*Electors on 1990 register*	*1989 register*		
		Electors	*Above electoral quota by*	
			Number	*Per cent.*
Aldershot	83,356	82,750	13,217	19·0
Basingstoke	83,111	81,557	12,024	17·3
East Hampshire	91,512	91,737	22,204	31·9
Eastleigh	91,259	90,119	20,586	29·6
Fareham	81,399	80,864	11,331	16·3
Gosport	70,903	70,478	945	1·4
Havant	77,158	77,426	7,893	11·4
New Forest	76,278	76,647	7,114	10·2
North West Hampshire	72,637	72,156	2,623	3·8
Portsmouth North	81,523	81,453	11,920	17·1
Portsmouth South	77,127	76,521	6,988	10·0
Romsey and Waterside	83,302	82,910	13,377	19.2
Southampton, Itchen	73,223	72,658	3,125	4·5
Southampton, Test	74,703	74,334	4,801	6·9
Winchester	79,226	79,373	9,840	14·2

Note: The 1989 electoral quota for England was 69,533. The 1990 quota cannot be calculated until the electorates for all constituencies in England are available centrally in about two months time.

Infant Mortality (Greenwich)

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what targets Greenwich health authority has set to reduce its infant mortality rate; and what level of resources have been allocated to this task.

Mr. Freeman: This information is not held centrally but the hon. Member may wish to write to the chairman of Greenwich health authority for the details she seeks.

Health Authority Chairmen

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the chairmen of regional and district health authorities in England and Wales by authority, indicating (i) their age if over 60 years, (ii) their political affiliation if known and (iii) whether or not they are resident in the area covered by the health authority.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Health authority chairmen's appointments in England as at 1 April 1990 are listed in the tables which have been placed in the Library. Eight regional chairmen and 88 district chairmen are aged over 60 years. Dates of birth of individual chairmen are held in confidence. We do not seek details of their political affiliations. Chairmen who are resident within the district they serve are marked with an "R" in the tables. Those who do not live within their region or district usually have some other connection with it, for example they work or have a second home there.

Speech Therapists

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by how much the average salary of a speech therapist has increased since 1979 in real and percentage terms and what has been the percentage increases in *(a)* average doctor's pay, *(b)* average nurse's pay, *(c)* the salary of skilled workers and *(d)* the cost of living.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Between 1979-80 and 1988-89 (1 August—31 July) settlements for doctors and dentists were worth 149·5 per cent., nurses 184·8 per cent., speech therapists 138·7 per cent. and the retail prices index rose by 98·9 per cent. The real-terms increase over this period for speech therapists was 20 per cent. Information is not readily available about overall pay on a comparable basis and there is no precise category of skilled workers.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have started training in speech therapy in each of the last 10 years.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information is not collected centrally on the numbers entering speech therapy training. I understand from information supplied by the College of Speech Therapists that the total number of people starting training in speech therapy at the 16 training establishments in the United Kingdom for the years 1982 to 1988 was as follows:

	Number
1982	380
1983	374
1984	395
1985	376
1986	389
1987	394
1988	409

Figures for earlier years are not available. The provisional figure for 1989 is 450.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many schools for the deaf have a speech therapist provided by the health authority; and how many schools requiring one have not had their needs met by the health authority.

Mr. Freeman: The information is not available centrally. It is for individual health authorities to determine the speech therapy services that can be made available to hearing impaired children, in the light of local circumstances, their assessment of priorities, and the available resources.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many speech therapists are estimated to have permanently left the profession in each of the last 10 years.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not available in the form requested.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many speech therapists have been employed in the National Health Service in each of the last 10 years.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information is as follows:

NHS qualified speech therapists at 30 September each year—England

Years	*Whole-time equivalent*
1979	1,510
1980	1,650
1981	1,750
1982	1,900
1983	1,970
1984	2,150
1985	2,340
1986	2,510
1987	2,630
1988	2,730

Source: Department of Health (SMI3) annual census of NHS non-medical manpower.

Note: All figures are independently rounded to the nearest ten (10) whole-time equivalents.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many speech therapists he estimates are required per 100,000 population; and what is the current national average.

Mr. Freeman: A research study by Dr. Philip Davies of Oxford university, funded by the Department and published in December 1989, estimated that 26·0 (whole-time equivalent) qualified speech therapists per 100,000 population would be required if current methods of intervention were maintained. The research also indicated that the number of qualified therapists required could be reduced to 20·5 (whole-time equivalent) per 100,000 population if assistants were used to assist with group work. Dr. Davies's study concluded that a major review of the current concepts of speech therapy provision appeared to be warranted. In accordance with this the Department is supporting the College of Speech Therapists work to produce national guidelines for speech therapy services and will discuss with the college the introduction of another grade to provide appropriate assistance for the degree qualified members of the profession. The current national average of qualified speech therapists is 5·7 (whole-time equivalent) per 100,000 population.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many speech therapists per head of population are employed by each of the regional health authorities.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information is as follows:

NHS qualified speech therapists per hundred thousand of population at 30 September 1988

Region	*Whole Time Equivalent*
Northern	5·3
Yorkshire	4·6
Trent	5·3
East Anglian	5·5
North West Thames	7·7
North East Thames	6·5
South East Thames	6·8
South West Thames	6·3
Wessex	4·4
Oxford	5·6
South Western	6·2
West Midlands	5·0
Mersey	4·7
North Western	5·7
England (a)	5·7

Source: Department of Health (SM13) Annual Census of NHS Non Medical Manpower; OPCS Mid-1988 Population Estimates.

Note: (a) Includes staff in London Post Graduate Special Health Authorities.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many speech therapy posts in special schools are currently vacant; and what proportion this is of the total number.

Mr. Freeman: The information is not available centrally and could not be provided in the form required. It is for individual authorities to decide on the deployment of speech therapists.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many unfilled speech therapy posts there are in the National Health Service as a whole; and how many in each of the regions.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information, which has not yet been fully validated is as follows:

Region	*Funded posts vacant over 3 months at 31 March 1989*
England	178
Northern	4
Yorkshire	7
Trent	30
East Anglia	6
North West Thames	11
North East Thames	17
South East Thames	17
South West Thames	12
Wessex	10
Oxford	12
South Western	12
West Midlands	21
Mersey	13
North Western	4
SHAs	2

Source: National Professional Manpower Initiative Survey.

Note: All figures are rounded to the nearest whole-time equivalent.

Speech Problems

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will encourage health authorities to ensure that training programmes for those who have contact with the public include a showing of the National Speak Week video, "Show You Care".

Mr. Freeman: Health authorities are responsible for determining their own staff training programmes and are already be well aware of the need to include information about communication difficulties in those programmes. We are taking steps to commend to all health authorities the use of the National Speak Week video "Show You Care".

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those physical and psychological problems that can lead to speech defects according to information known to his Department.

Mr. Freeman: We are aware that speech and language defects can arise from mental handicap, cerebral palsy, cranio-facial abnormalities, hearing impairment, cerebrovascular accident-stroke, head injury, head and neck surgery, progressive neurological diseases, autism, developmental aphasia, senile dementia, other phsychiatric disorders and a variety of rarer conditions.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish in the *Official Report* the salary scales for speech therapists

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is in "Advance Letter (SP) 4/90" a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will seek evidence on the number and proportion of advertisements for speech therapy posts for which there are no applications.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will seek information on the number of children in special schools who need speech therapy but are not receiving it because a speech therapist cannot be obtained.

Mr. Freeman: Local education authorities and district health authorities are responsible for arranging speech therapy services for children in special schools. We are aware that, despite the increase in the numbers of speech therapists employed in the National Health Service and the initiatives we are taking with the professions, there are shortages in some areas. These are local problems which should be resolved by management locally.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what educational literature or publicity on the difficulties faced by those with speech problems has been provided by the Health Education Council; and if he will encourage the council to do more.

Mr. Freeman: There are no current publications dealing with this subject produced by the Health Education Authority. Whilst many preventable conditions—such as low birthweight and stroke—can lead to speech problems, it is the primary causes of these conditions which the Health Education Authority generally addresses. Many publications dealing with the remedial aspects of such conditions are produced, more appropriately, by voluntary and other bodies who have developed a special understanding of the difficulties faced by particular groups. These publications are made use of by health authorities and professionals.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what evidence he has on the trend in the overall number of people with speech defects; and what is the trend in each of the major categories of people with speech defects;

(2) what is the estimated number of people who suffer speech defects; and if he will classify them according to the major causes of the defect.

Mr. Freeman: An article, "Communication Disorders, Planning a Service to meet the Needs" published in the December 1989 issue of the "British Journal of Disorders of Communication" by Dr. Enderby and Dr. Davies, and based on research funded by the Department, confirmed an earlier estimate of approximately 2·3 million people in the United Kingdom with speech and language disorders, produced by Dr. Enderby and Dr. Philipp. The article, a copy of which is in the Library, also contained estimates for most of the major categories of speech and language disorder. There is no firm evidence available about trends in overall numbers and individual categories.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average cost of restoring some mobility by a hip operation to an arthritic patient; and what is the average cost of restoring some speech through speech therapy to a patient who has suffered a stroke.

Mr. Freeman: Information is not available in the form requested. The average cost of a National Health Service hip replacement operation was approximately £2,600 in 1988-89.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of speech therapists currently have specialist qualifications.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not available centrally.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health with whom he has discussed the problem of matching the supply and demand for speech therapy; what information he has collected; and when he intends to publish his conclusions.

Mr. Freeman: Officials have held discussions about speech therapy supply and demand issues with representatives of the College of Speech Therapists, the Association of Speech Therapy Managers, National Health Service officials, individual speech therapists and other organisations and individuals. A variety of information has been collected and conclusions will be published as and when appropriate.

Indicative Drugs Budgets

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will announce the procedure for the consultation with general practitioners and others by FHSAs prior to the setting of indicative drugs budgets.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Practices will be able to discuss their indicative prescribing budgets with their family practitioner committees before they are set. Family practitioner committees will consider the practices' historic spending patterns, comparable average costs for that family practitioner committee, special circumstances of the practices including high-cost patients, anticipated changes in demand and an allowance for the forecast increase in the cost of drugs. In this way, the needs of the practices and their patients will be fully taken into account in setting the budgets.

Residential Homes

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take steps to make arrangements for those employed by regional or district health authorities, or National Health Service hospital trusts, directly or indirectly, who have direct or indirect financial interests in residential homes or nursing homes, to be required to register such interests.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We expect health authorities to ensure that their employees declare any interests which may influence the way in which the authority discharges its responsibilities. It is for individual authorities to decide how this is best achieved. The same principle will apply to NHS trusts.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what reports he has received from health authorities about staff who advise patients on the availability of private residential care receiving commissions from private residential homes for referring clients; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have no record of any such reports.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take steps to arrange for those private residential premises, who care for individuals in receipt of Department of Health and Department of Social Security support, to register for easy public inspection the names of those holding direct or indirect pecuniary interest in the home.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Part 1 of the Registered Homes Act 1984 provides for local authorities to make available for inspection at all reasonable times, registers of those persons responsible for carrying on a residential care home registered under the 1984 Act.

Meningitis and Hepatitis A (School Outbreaks)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the outbreak *(a)* of meningitis in a school in Runcorn, Merseyside and *(b)* of hepatitis A in a school at Croxteth, Merseyside.

Mr. Freeman: Two children from the Brookvale primary school were admitted to Warrington general hospital for treatment for meningitis and one child for observation. All have now been discharged. The health authorities concerned have done everything necessary to keep the outbreak under control.

Five children from St. Swithin's school in Croxteth have contracted hepatitis A. We are satisfied that the Liverpool public health department is taking the necessary measures to control the outbreak.

Labour Statistics

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the mid-year estimate of the population of working age between the ages of 16 and 59 or 64 years in Great Britain and for each of the standard regions in *(a)* June 1979 and *(b)* June 1989.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is as follows:

Population of working age (16 to 64 for males: 16 to 59 for females)

Region	*Mid-year 1979*	[1]*Mid-year 1988*
North	1,877·9	1,890·9
Yorkshire and Humberside	2,911·5	3,016·7
East Midlands	2,279·4	2,463·6
East Anglia	1,097·0	1,231·6
South East	10,222·6	10,783·7
South West	2,504·6	2,781·0
West Midlands	3,117·5	3,230·5
North West	3,828·4	3,897·0
Wales	1,653·0	1,724·7
Scotland	3,084·9	3,169·8
Great Britain	32,576·8	34,189·5

[1] Populations estimates for mid-1989 have not yet been made and are not expected to be available until July 1990.

THE ARTS

East Midlands

68. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Minister for the Arts when he last met representatives of the arts in the east midlands; what was discussed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: I met the chairman and director of East Midlands Arts on 19 December to discuss the Wilding report.

Royal Shakespeare Company

69. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what information he has on contributions made by the City of London Corporation to the Royal Shakespeare Company since the Barbican centre was built.

Mr. Luce: The City of London Corporation provided the Barbican theatre as a purpose-built London home for the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1982. Since then the RSC has enjoyed a rent which is low by commercial standards. In 1988 the corporation also agreed to contribute £500,000 towards the RSC's accumulated deficit.

Arts Council

70. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Minister for the Arts when he last met the chairman of the Arts Council; and what was discussed.

Mr. Luce: I meet Mr. Palumbo from time to time to discuss matters of mutual interest.

Wilding Report

71. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what representations he has received concerning the Crafts Council following his statement on the Wilding report.

Mr. Luce: I have received general support for my announcement to the House on 13 March 1990 that the Crafts Council will remain an independent body.

Queen Street Mill, Burnley

72. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will make a visit to Queen Street mill, Marle Syke, Burnley.

Mr. Luce: I have no plans at present to visit the Queen Street mill museum, Burnley.

Admission Charges

73. **Mr. John Evans:** To ask the Minister for the Arts if he has any plans to enforce charges for art galleries.

Mr. Luce: The Government's repeatedly stated policy is that the decision whether to operate a system of admission charges or voluntary donations should be for the board of trustees responsible for each institution.

The Government neither impose nor prohibit the imposition of admission charges.

I confirm this in the Government's response to the recent report of the Education, Science and Arts Committee, copies of which I placed in the Library of the House on 12 March.

Donations

74. **Mr. Summerson:** To ask the Minister for the Arts whether he will list the five highest individual corporate or private donors to the arts in the last 12 months.

Mr. Luce: Such information is not held centrally. However, with business sponsorship of the arts now estimated at well over £30 million a year, donors, both great and small, are making a very useful contribution to supporting the arts.

Royal National Theatre (Exhibition)

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he has considered an application for an exhibition relating to the Royal National theatre to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Luce: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Services Committee, arrangements have been made with the authorities of the House for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from 14 to 18 May.

CIVIL SERVICE

Civil Service Unions

80. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service when he last met representatives of the Civil Service unions; and what subjects were discussed.

81. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service when he last met Civil Service unions; and what matters were discussed.

84. **Mr. Fisher:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service when he last met representatives of the Civil Service unions; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Luce: I meet the Civil Service unions from time to time, to discuss a range of matters.

Next Steps Agencies

82. **Mr. Summerson:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what progress has been made in developing the next steps agencies; and what was discussed.

85. **Mr. Watts:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what progress has been made in the setting up of Civil Service agencies since his last statement to the House.

Mr. Luce: Excellent progress is being made. Only last week, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry launched the insolvency service as an executive agency, bringing the total number of agencies to 12, with many more to follow. I hope to make a further statement shortly.

Equal Opportunities

83. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what further progress has been made to implement the Civil Service's equal opportunities employment programme.

Mr. Luce: Good progress is being made. We will shortly be publishing a revised code of practice on the employment of people with disabilities. The programme of action on women continues to be implemented, and in May, I shall introduce a new programme for action to achieve equality of opportunity in the Civil Service for people of ethnic minority origin.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Lindane

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has on when the Advisory Committee on Pesticides will be discussing the matter of lindane.

Mr. Gummer: Scientists within the Health and Safety Executive and MAFF are currently evaluating the data on lindane. It is not yet possible to predict when their report will be put to the Advisory Committee on Pesticides but it is being treated as a priority.

Pesticides

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will seek to obtain the handbook of basic information on the 100 most commonly used pesticides in the United States of America, published by the United States Department of Agriculture; and if he will arrange for a similar publication in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean: This Department and the Department of Agriculture for Scotland monitor usage of pesticides and the results are published. We are currently preparing a review of the surveys carried out between 1984 and 1989, which cover all main crops, to be published later this year. The USDA publication is being sought.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the pesticides for which his Ministry carries out surveillance for residues in food that are *(a)* banned in the United Kingdom and *(b)* in use in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Monitoring for pesticide residues is carried out by the working party on pesticide residues. Results are published and show, for all samples analysed, both those pesticides which have been sought and the levels of any residues which have been found.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he intends to take to phase out pesticides listed in part (c) of annex B of the final declaration of the third international conference on the protection of the North sea; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Under the terms of the North sea declaration, special attention is to be paid to phasing out pesticides which are the most persistent, toxic and liable to bioaccumulate. Annex 1B, part (c), lists 18 substances the use of which must be strictly limited or banned. Eleven of these substances are not approved for use in the United Kingdom, and approval for another, chlordane, will be withdrawn on 31 December 1992.

The remaining six substances are all tightly controlled under the Control of Pesticide Regulations 1986. Atrazine is being reviewed by the Advisory Committee on Pesticides, mercury compounds and PCP are being considered by the European Community, and chloropicrin, fluroacetamide and quintozene will be considered by the Advisory Committee on Pesticides when priorities for review are set later this year.

Baby Milk Products

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any plans to introduce legislation limiting the aluminium content of baby milk products produced by manufacturers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: We have no plans to introduce legislation. Results of the Government's surveillance work show that likely intakes of aluminium from baby milk products are well below the provisionally tolerable weekly intake set by the joint FAO/WHO expert committee on food additives.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he is taking to ensure that the aluminium content in baby milk products does not exceed the European Commission's recommended safety limits.

Mr. Maclean: There are no recommended EC limits for aluminium in baby foods.

Radioactivity

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the research projects he is currently *(a)* conducting or *(b)* funding on the effects of radioactivity contamination on agriculture and food products, giving the research establishment in each case.

Mr. Gummer: The following projects are being funded by my Department in 1989-90.

Project title	*Contractor*
Wind tunnel and rain tower studies	IC
Implementation of models for upland environments	ANS
Maintenance and support of the Soil-Plant-Animal Dynamic-Evaluation (SPADE) suite of codes	ANS
Field investigations on the dynamics of Caesium in agricultural foodchains following the Chernobyl accident: Sample collection and analysis	ANS
Further experimental studies on radionuclide transfer to upland plant species	ANS
Enhancement of atmospheric dispersion models in the SPADE suite of codes	ANS
Development of a method to rapidly predict the availability of radio-caesium to animal products after an accidental discharge	ITE/MLURI
Vegetation/soil survey in Cumbrian restricted area-validation of aerial survey	ITE
Studies on Caesium in soil, plants and sheep in Ireland	QUB
Particle properties and root uptake	UKAEA
Continuation of studies into the use of Prussian Blue to reduce body burdens of caesium in sheep	QUB
Comparative deposition and uptake by crops of radionuclides around English and French nuclear sites	UKAEA
Influence of upland soil type on caesium uptake	UKAEA
Assessment of novel analytical techniques	UKAEA
Strontium-90 in crops and effect of Chernobyl deposition	UKAEA
Development of automation of Strontium-90 analytical method	UKAEA
Gut uptake of fission products from fuel particles	UKAEA
Implementation of risk assessment and emergency codes for personal computers	CERC
Effects of land management on caesium recycling	ANS
Radionuclide transfer: a critical view	ANS
Methods to reduce agricultural impact	ANS
Radionuclide uptake by sheep	ITE
Transfer of radionuclides in an area reclaimed from the sea	NRPB
Specification of models for upland environments	ANS
Further evaluation of data obtained from field investigations on caesium dynamics following Chernobyl. Analysis of 1988-89 samples	ANS
Effects of organic matter on caesium uptake in pasture	UKAEA
Studies into the migration and binding of radio-caesium in peat	UKAEA
The migration of caesium 134 and 137 in peat	UKAEA
Recycling of radio-caesium	UKAEA
Preparation of detailed maps on selected farms in north Wales known to have received Chernobyl fall-out	SSLRC

Note:

ANS—Associated Nuclear Services.
ITE—Institute of Terrestrial Ecology.
UKAEA—AEA Technology (Harwell Laboratories).
IC—Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine.
MLURI—Macauley Land Use Research Institute.
QUB—Queens University, Belfast.
CERC—Cambridge Environmental Research Contractors.
NRPB—National Radiological Protection Board.
SSLRC—Soil Survey and Land Research Centre.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number and types of equipment he has for measuring radioactivity in plants, animals and liquids.

Mr. Gummer: My Department maintains fully equipped laboratory facilities, provided with a comprehensive range of radiometric equipment for measuring all types of radioactivity in any kind of agricultural, fisheries or food materials. In addition, we have 50 sodium iodide detectors which may be used, among other things, for monitoring gamma-emitting radionuclides in live animals in field conditions.

Food Stockpiles

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the quantities and types of food which are stockpiled as part of his emergency planning procedures.

Mr. Gummer: The strategic food stockpile contains flour, sugar, refined fat, yeast, special formulation biscuits, sweets and vitaminised skimmed milk powder, chosen for their value as sources of energy and nutrition for use in time of war or severe national crisis. It has been the policy of successive Governments not to reveal detailed information on the level and locations of the stockpile.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the aims of the Institute of Grocery Distribution study on identifying major food stocks for defence planning.

Mr. Gummer: The aim of this study is to provide my Department with up-to-date information on food stocks and patterns of food distribution for contingency planning purposes.

Intervention Board

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made towards establishing the Intervention Board as an executive agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: I am pleased to announce that the Intervention Board will become an executive agency with effect from 1 April 1990.

The Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce was set up by the European Communities Act 1972. It is appointed by Agricultural Ministers to carry out this country's obligations under the common agricultural policy of the European Community. The board delegates its functions to the Government Department created by section 6 of the 1972 Act, and this is the new agency.

The agency's task is to administer the market regulation and production support measures of the guarantee section of the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund. Its aim will be to operate them as economically, efficiently and effectively as possible. The board will oversee the way in which the agency exercises its responsibilities.

As a Government Department the Intervention Board has achieved a great deal since it was created in 1972. Establishing it as an agency will give it the impetus and additional financial and management tools to build on the good work achieved; to strengthen its performance; and to promote a more effective and efficient quality of service to its customers. The agency's efficiency will mainly be judged through indexes of unit cost and productivity. Additional performance measures relating to its objectives will be developed through its corporate and business plans. The financial targets for 1990-91 will be:

(i.) to achieve annual cumulative efficiency gains on its running costs of 2 per cent.

(ii.) to keep disallowance resulting from the agency's actions and falling on the Exchequer following the clearance of the 1988 EAGGF accounts to 0·5 per cent. of the vote 1 turnover; and

(iii.) to keep non-financing losses on intervention stocks to 6·5 per cent of total intervention activity.

Mr. Guy Stapleton who has been the chief executive of the Intervention board as a Government Department since 1986, has been appointed chief executive of the agency. We wish him and his staff every success in their new role.

Copies of the framework document are being placed in the Library of the House.

Lead-contaminated Food

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about the action taken by his Department to protect consumers following the recent importation of lead-contaminated animal feedingstuffs.

Mr. Gummer: As soon as there was clear evidence of a possible threat to the safety of food supplies, the Government imposed strict statutory controls to protect consumers under part I of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985.

Two thousand and eight-five tonnes of lead contaminated maize gluten replacer pellets were imported of which 730 tonnes were distributed and incorporated into 7,400 tonnes of commercial animal feed rations. My Department had the task of tracing all this imported material through the complex chain of importers, compounders, merchants and agents, of informing all recipients, implementing the necessary controls and supervising the withdrawal and disposal of contaminated feed. In all, some 2,100 farms in England and Wales were found to have received varying amounts of lead-contaminated feedingstuffs, including 1,062 dairy farms.

All milk produced on these farms was collected separately and used to manufacture powdered milk and butter which were stored pending full scientific analysis. In addition, an intensive sampling programme for ex-farm liquid milk was organised, in conjunction with the Milk Marketing Board, to enable restrictions to be lifted from individual farms as soon as lead levels were confirmed to have fallen below the limit set by Department of Health. A total of nearly 14,000 individual milk samples were taken and, by 13 December, milk restrictions were lifted from all farms.

Three livestock release schemes were introduced, two of which required the taking and analysing of blood samples from the animals concerned. During the 11 weeks for which these schemes were in operation, 20 complete farms were released from all restrictions under scheme I, 116,000 animals were released under scheme II and 7,000 animals under scheme III. We analysed 22,000 blood samples.

A number of scientific research and monitoring programmes were set up at short notice to elucidate the behaviour of lead in livestock and foods of various types and to monitor the decline in lead levels once all the contaminated feed had been removed. In the light of the information obtained, all the remaining livestock movement and slaughter restrictions were lifted on 12 February.

As a result of the firm action taken by the Government, together with the painstaking work undertaken by officials in the various Government Departments and outside organisations involved, and with the constructive co-operation of the vast majority of farmers and traders, I believe that the Government have been able to ensure the full protection of consumers, and to preserve justifiable confidence in British agricultural produce, both at home and overseas.

Salmonella

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on progress on control of salmonella in the European Community.

Mr. Gummer: The European Commissioner for Agriculture has assured me that he will present proposals on the control of zoonoses by May with a view to adoption by the Council in the summer. I welcome this undertaking as I believe that controls on salmonella should be adopted on a Community basis.

We have a strong basis upon which to pursue discussions in the Community because of the stringent and comprehensive set of measures in the United Kingdom to combat the salmonella problem. Our measures extend throughout the production chain, covering feedingstuffs, controls on breeding flocks, hatcheries and laying flocks and hygienic practices during slaughter and processing. These have been directed in particular at egg production, but have also helped to control salmonella in the poultry meat sector. The action that we have taken in the United Kingdom has clearly had an impact in reducing potential causes of human food poisoning, particularly from eggs.

As for the Community policy, we believe that the key priority areas will be to ensure clean hatchery and breeding stock for both layers and broiler flocks and to minimise any risk of infection entering through feed. Good hygiene is essential through all stages of production as this reduces overall infection. We believe that the Community measures will also need to require regular testing of laying flocks and to specify appropriate action when salmonellae, of types particularly associated with human food poisoning, are found.

The Community measures will need to take account of all relevant research and to ensure that the action taken in respect of particular poultry flocks is commensurate with the health risks which may be present. Consideration should be given, for example, to including in Community policy the option of treating certain types of flock to remove or prevent infection in young birds before they come into lay. The Government are already reviewing this possibility. In addition, there is a need to consider whether inhibitory treatment of chicks is an option that should be encouraged in commercial laying flocks to prevent them becoming infected.

The risk of infection in eggs arises from certain invasive forms of salmonellae which can infect the egg before it is laid. When these are present in laying or breeding flock our policy has been to prevent any eggs from the flock entering the food chain and we will be looking for similar steps to be taken throughout the Community.

It is important to remove any risk to public health when infected flocks are compulsorily slaughtered. We have hitherto ensured this by requiring the carcases to be destroyed. However, in discussions in the Community it has become clear that regulations are likely to follow the approach of applying safeguards to the end products permitting them to be consumed without danger to health rather than requiring carcases from infected flocks to be destroyed. We recognise that an alternative to our present policy would be to ensure that any salmonellae present in the bird are destroyed by thorough cooking. This is the normal treatment process for birds at the end of their laying cycle. In the light of these considerations, the Government have decided to permit carcases from infected flocks to be processed under carefully controlled conditions and subject to stringent safeguards to remove any risk from the product to public health and we will be seeking to ensure similar requirements in the Community discussions.

The flock owner will retain the proceeds from the sale of the birds and our compensation arrangements will be adjusted accordingly.

We will be issuing on 2 April further advice to local authorities, which enforce the poultry meat hygiene legislation, on measures to minimise the spread of salmonellae in poultry slaughterhouses. This, like the action taken over breeding flocks and hatcheries, will minimise the level of infection in birds reared for the table. It will, of course, continue to be necessary for caterers and retailers to ensure that raw and partly cooked poultry products are carefully handled and for any raw meat to be handled properly in the home and fully cooked, as emphasised in the Government's food safety leaflet.

I believe that measures adopted on a Community basis will give the best protection to consumers and I will be working to achieve a speedy and effective agreement so that consumers can have confidence in food supplies whether they are home-produced or imported from other member states.

Sheep Scab

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the number of outbreaks of sheep scab in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Scotland for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Gummer: The information is as follows:

Sheep scab outbreaks

Year	*England*	*Wales*	*Scotland*	*Total*
1980	33	—	—	33
1981	45	11	10	66
1982	87	5	2	94
1983	144	10	3	157
1984	116	9	6	131
1985	23	41	10	74
1986	19	36	—	55
1987	23	14	1	38
1988	26	9	1	36
1989	60	5	1	66
1990[1]	15	5	—	20

[1] January and February.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has plans to suspend the compulsory dipping of sheep not affected with sheep scab; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: As announced by the then Parliamentary Secretary on 14 April 1989, there will be national compulsory dips for sheep scab in the autumn of both 1989 and 1990.

Nuclear Accidents

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to conduct an aerial survey of the whole or part of the United Kingdom in the event of an accident occurring in a nuclear power station in northern France; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The safety of foodstuffs, for which my Department is responsible, requires direct measurement of dietary items. The potential value of an aerial survey in relation to food production would need to be assessed in the light of specific circumstances.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has conducted a review of his emergency planning procedures as a result of a nuclear accident in the last five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 18 December 1986.

My Department played a full part in the Government's post-Chernobyl review of contingency planning, including preparation of the national response plan for dealing with the effects of a future nuclear accident overseas. We shall continue to review and update our emergency arrangements in the light of technical and scientific developments both at home and overseas. Details of our arrangements for each of the major United Kingdom nuclear sites are being prepared for publication and copies will be placed in the Library of the House.

Drainage Rates

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he intends to introduce new regulations to amend the provisions of the Land Drainage Act 1976 in order to permit the National Rivers Authority and internal drainage boards to precept drainage rates from (i) domestic householders, (ii) business premises and (iii) agricultural holdings.

Mr. Curry: We have already made the Internal Drainage Boards (Finance) Regulations 1990 (SI 1990 No. 72) which came into force on 24 January 1990. They provide that, from 1 April 1990, internal drainage boards (and the NRA when acting as an internal drainage board), may continue to collect drainage rates direct from the agricultural sector and, in respect of the non-agricultural sector may impose a special levy on the district councils in whose area the internal drainage district lies.

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will state what consultations he has held with interested parties over the method by which drainage rates will be levied after 1 April.

Mr. Curry: We consulted the Association of County Councils, Association of District Councils, Association of Drainage Authorities, Association of London Authorities, Confederation of British Industry, Country Landowners

Association, Internal Drainage Boards, London Boroughs Association, National Association of Local Councils, National Farmers Union, National Rivers Authority and the Tenant Farmers Association.

Veterinary Laboratories, Bangor

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to close the veterinary laboratories in Bangor; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The review of the veterinary investigation service commissioned by the Minister, has now been finalised and is being submitted to Ministers for consideration.

As yet, no decisions have been made on any recommendations that might arise from this review.

Water Pollution

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to publish his next report on water pollution from farm waste.

Mr. Gummer: It is intended to publish the joint MAFF/NRA report " Water Pollution From Farm Waste 1989" on 4 April.

Genetically Engineered Organisms

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the labelling requirements in respect of foods containing genetically engineered organisms.

Mr. Gummer *[holding answer 23 March 1990]:* Although there are no specific labelling requirements for foods containing such organisms; the Food Labelling Regulations 1984 apply to most foods, including foods containing genetically engineered organisms. The Food Advisory Committee has been asked to consider, within the context of the Food Labelling Regulations, the need for special labelling of those products containing genetically engineered organisms following their approval by the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes. In the recent case of genetically engineered bakers' yeast the Food Advisory Committee recommended that additional labelling information was not required.

EMPLOYMENT

Enterprise Allowance Scheme

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what plans he has to review enterprise allowance scheme allocations to Cumbria for the coming financial year;

(2) whether his proposed allocations for the TEC in Cumbria provides support resources for enterprise allowance scheme awards in the financial year 1990-91.

Mr. Eggar: The size and scale of the enterprise allowance scheme is regularly reviewed to take account of levels of unemployment and the demand for places. Allocations to TECs in respect of the scheme will be determined by the Training Agency's regional directors. I am confident that the allocation to the Cumbria TEC will provide adequate support resources for that area.

YTS

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the numbers of accidents on YTS, fatal, major and minor, for the period September to December 1989; and how many YTS placements were closed or not accepted in the period.

Mr. Nicholls: YTS accident statistics and closure and non-acceptance figures on health and safety grounds are collected on a quarterly basis. Table A provides YTS accident figures for the period 1 October 1989 to 31 December 1989.

Table A

	Accidents[1]	
Fatalities	*Major injuries*[2]	*Minor injuries*
1[3]	170	721

Table B provides the closure and non-acceptance figures for the period 1 October 1989 to 31 December 1989. These figures are provisional.

Table B

	Number
Placements closed	6
Placements not accepted	1

[1] Training Agency figures have been compiled on a similar basis to those prepared by the Health and Safety Executive on employed persons. However, the Training Agency's figures will include a number of accidents to trainees in educational establishments and road traffic accidents which may not have been reportable to the Health and Safety Executive had the individuals been employed.

[2] Major injuries are classified according to the severity criteria laid down in the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985.

[3] This fatality was a road traffic accident in scheme time.

Wages Inspectors

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on plans for restructuring the wages inspectorate in Wales.

Mr. Nicholls: There are no plans to restructure the wages inspectorate in Wales.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will state the number of establishments visited in Wales by wages inspectors in each year since 1979.

Mr. Nicholls: The information requested is given in the following table.

	Number visited
1979	2,097
1980	2,131
1981	1,753
1982	1,720
1983	1,508
1984	1,249
1985	1,577
1986	1,318
1987	1,039
1988	1,014
1989	970

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will state the number of wages inspectorate officers with responsibility for Wales at *(a)* senior executive officer grade, *(b)* higher executive officer grade and *(c)* clerical grades.

Mr. Nicholls: Wages inspection in Wales is the responsibility of the wages inspectorate divisional offices in Manchester and Bristol and is not administered separately from the other areas covered by those offices.

The total number of staff in those offices at the grades specified is given in the table.

	Staff
Senior executive officer grade	2·0
Higher executive officer grade	5·0
Clerical grades	8·5

Health and Safety Commission

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment on what date the annual report of the Health and Safety Commission was launched; how many copies of the report have been published; and on what date he expects copies of the report to be made available to the general public.

Mr. Nicholls: The Health and Safety Commission's annual report for 1988-89 was launched on Monday 26 February 1990. A total of 2,500 copies of the published report have been sent to HMSO for sale to the public. These will be available in London from 23 March and elsewhere by 29 March.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment for how long Training Agency staff will be contracted to the training and enterprise councils.

Mr. Eggar: Training Agency staff who have volunteered to second to training and enterprise councils will normally go on secondment for an initial period of three years. This period may subsequently be extended by mutual agreement between the Training Agency, the secondee and the training and enterprise council.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how long training and enterprise council contracts will run.

Mr. Eggar: Training and enterprise council contracts will not have a fixed duration but will be subject to the production each year of an agreed business plan.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if any additional expenditure is being given to training and enterprise councils to undertake new training programmes other than employment training and youth training; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Training and enterprise councils (TECs) will be responsible for running the training programmes and business support activities currently managed by my Department. They will be given appropriate budgets to enable them to do this. Additionally, TECs will have a local initiative fund which can be used to finance new initiatives or to strengthen and expand existing programmes and services.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if any contracts have been concluded with any of the training and enterprise councils; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: I expect to conclude contracts with the first training and enterprise councils in early April.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if discussions have taken place with the training and enterprise councils regarding the reduction in expenditure on youth training per trainee week between 1989-90 and 1992-93; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The budget available for youth training has been discussed with training and enterprise councils (TECs) as part of the discussions over their business plans. A number of TECs have now submitted their plans setting out how they intend to improve the skills and qualifications of young people in their area.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has received representations from the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses regarding the composition of training and enterprise councils; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses Ltd has raised a number of issues with me including the composition of the boards of training and enterprise councils. The federation was advised that TEC boards and their members must meet the criteria set out in "Training and Enterprise Councils: a Prospectus for the 1990s", published in March 1989.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the estimated training and enterprise councils' expenditure in England and Wales in 1990-91 for the provision of ET and YTS.

Mr. Eggar: The 1990-91 supply estimate (class VI vote 1, Department of Employment: training and enterprise programmes) shows the planned expenditure for ET and YT. Table 2 on page 13 shows the estimated expenditure for these and the Training Agency's other main programmes by TECs and area offices.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the applications received for setting up training and enterprise councils; if he will list those given development funding including the expenditure involved; if he will list those under consideration; and if he will list the areas of England and Wales where applications are still awaited.

Mr. Eggar: The information requested is as follows:

Applications approved	*Development funding awarded (£)*
Essex	110,000
Hampshire	149,000
Hertfordshire	110,000
Isle of Wight	85,000
Milton Keynes	110,000
Devon and Cornwall	190,000
Dorset	95,000
Birmingham	139,00
Staffordshire	113,000
Walsall	104,000

Applications approved	*Development funding awarded (£)*
Calderdale/Kirklees	106,000
Sheffield	138,000
South and East Cheshire	106,000
Cumbria	115,000
East Lancashire	118,000
Oldham	81,000
Rochdale	75,000
Teesside	127,000
Tyneside	136,000
Wigan	94,000
North Yorkshire	125,000
North Nottinghamshire	120,000
Wearside	90,000
Mid-Glamorgan	104,000
Kingston/Merton	111,000
Thames Valley	125,000
Somerset	110,000
Norfolk/Waveney	149,000
Suffolk	106,000
Rotherham	90,000
County Durham	94,000
North East Wales	98,000
Northumberland	92,000
West Wales	110,000
Stockport/High Peak	110,000
South Glamorgan	100,000
North West Wales	110,000
Wolverhampton	88,000
Heart of England	110,000
Dudley	98,000
Greater Peterborough	[1]—
Manchester	150,000
South Cambridgeshire	116,000
Avon	115,000
Kent	158,000
Gwent	100,000
St. Helens	75,000
Barnley/Doncaster	[1]—
Bolton/Bury	110,000
Leeds	120,000
Coventry/Warwickshire	114,000
Gloucestershire	112,000
Northamptonshire	[1]
Sandwell	115,000
Wakefield	109,000
London East	195,000
Bedfordshire	[1]
South London	[1]
Bradford	[1]
Central England	[1]
North Derbyshire	[1]
Southern Derbyshire	[1]
Merseyside	[1]
Powys	[1]
Lancashire Area West	[1]
Chester/Ellesmere Port/Wirral	[1]
Applications under consideration	
Surrey	
Lincolnshire	
Greater Nottinghamshire	
Hereford and Worcester	
Applications awaited	
Humberside	
Central London	
Shropshire	
Enfield/Barnet	
South Thames	
Wiltshire	
North Cheshire	
Leicestershire	
Inner London North City	
Brent/Harrow	
Sussex	
West London	

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[1] Not finalised.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the training and enterprise councils in receipt of development funding by *(a)* those which have submitted operational budgets, including the amount of expenditure involved, *(b)* those which have contracts approved including the amount of expenditure and *(c)* those which have yet to submit operational budgets.

Mr. Eggar: Thirteen training and enterprise councils (TECs) have submitted their corporate and business plans. These are:

Calderdale and Kirklees
Cumbria
Devon and Cornwall
Dorset
East Lancashire
Hertfordshire
Oldham
Rochdale
South and East Cheshire
Teesside
Thames Valley
Tyneside
Wearside

The budgets for these TECs are still under discussion. Contracts will be signed when the plans are approved.

The following TECs are currently in the development phase and have yet to submit their corporate and business plans:

Avon
AZTEC
Barnsley-Doncaster
Bedfordshire
Birmingham
Bolton-Bury
Bradford and District
Central and South Cambridgeshire
CENTEC
CEWTEC
County Durham
Coventry-Warwickshire
North Derbyshire
Southern Derbyshire
Dudley
Essex
Mid-Glamorgan
South Glamorgan
Gloucestershire
Gwent
Hampshire
Heart of England
St. Helens
Isle of Wight
Kent
LAWTEC
Leeds
London East
South London
Manchester
Merseyside
Milton Keynes
Norfolk-Waveney
Northamptonshire
North Nottinghamshire
Northumberland
North Yorkshire
Greater Peterborough
Powys
Rotherham
Sandwell
Sheffield
Somerset
Staffordshire
Stockport and High Peak
Suffolk
North East Wales
North West Wales
West Wales
Wakefield
Walsall
Wigan
Wolverhampton

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will outline the guidance given to each training and enterprise council regarding the preparation of a profile of the needs of the unemployed, an assessment of employer-based skill shortages and an analysis of training and education provision in their area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The "Guide to Planning" requires training and enterprise councils (TECs) to undertake a thorough market assessment of their area. The outcome of this assessment will form the basis of the proposals contained in a TEC's corporation plan an business plan.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will outline the guideline given to training and enterprise councils covering the consultations required with *(a)* local government and *(b)* education authorities, *(c)* chambers of commerce, *(d)* the Engineering Employers Federation and *(e)* trade councils.

Mr. Eggar: The "Guide to Planning" emphasises the need for training and enterprise councils (TECs) to actively consult and involve all organisations in their area with an interest in education and training and small business support.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will place a copy of the TEC operations guideline in the Library.

Mr. Eggar: I will place a copy of the TEC operating manual in the Library when it is available.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if the operational budgets included in the TEC contracts contain premiums for an increased employer contribution to youth training; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: It is in employers' interests that they should increasingly contribute towards the costs of youth training to ensure its relevance to the needs of industry and commerce. The funding levels which TECs will receive for youth training in 1990-91 therefore assume a rise in the level of employer contributions.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the date for the launch of the first training and enterprise council.

Mr. Eggar: I expect contracts to be signed with the first training and enterprise councils (TECs) in early April.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of the employment training and youth training expenditure is to be used for performance and incentive bonus payments paid to TECs.

Mr. Eggar: A system of performance-related funding is being established to give an incentive for good and progressively better performance by TECs in achieving objectives. A bonus fund equal to 2 per cent. of overall programme funds will be allocated to TECs achieving specified levels of performance in particular areas of activity.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what provision for employers' contributions to ET are in the operational budgets, included in the TEC contracts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: It is in employers' interests that they should increasingly contribute towards the cost of employment training, as many employers already do. Employment training funding levels for TECs assume continuing employer contributions.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations have been received from training and enterprise council board members about the level of expenditure being approved for programmes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: I have received a number of representations from training and enterprise council board members on funding issues. TECs will receive agreed resources to implement their plans and my officials are currently negotiating with individual TECs about the resources that will be made available.

Labour Statistics

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will give the total number of employees in *(a)* manufacturing, *(b)* services and *(c)* all industries and services in Great Britain and each of the standard regions in (i) June 1979 and (ii) June 1989; and what was the figure between the two years in (1) numbers and (2) percentage;

(2) what was the number of employees in employment in Great Britain in each of the standard regions in *(a)* June 1979 and *(b)* June 1989; and what is the difference between the two years in (i) numbers and (ii) percentage;

(3) what was the number of people in employment excluding Her Majesty's forces in Great Britain and each of the standard regions in *(a)* June 1989 and *(b)* June 1979; and what was the change in (i) numbers and (ii) as a percentage;

(4) what was the total number of *(a)* male and *(b)* female employees in employment, self-employment, Her Majesty's forces and work-related Government training in Great Britain and each of the standard regions in (i) June 1979 and (ii) June 1989; (or work related training June 1983); and what are the differences between the two years in (1) numbers and (2) percentage;

(5) what was the total number of part-time and full-time employees in employment and self-employment in Great Britain and each of the standard regions in *(a)* June 1979 and *(b)* June 1989; and what was the difference between the two years in (i) numbers and (ii) percentage;

(6) what was the total number of people in work-related Government training in Great Britain and each of the standard regions in *(a)* June 1983 and *(b)* June 1989; and what were the differences between the two years in (i) numbers and (ii) percentage;

(7) what was the total number of self-employed in Great Britain and each of the standard regions in *(a)* June 1979 and *(b)* June 1989; and what was the difference between the two years in (i) numbers and (ii) percentage;

(8) what was the total work force in employment in *(a)* June 1979 and *(b)* June 1989; and what is the change between the two years in (i) numbers and (ii) percentage;

(9) what is his estimate of the numbers of self-employed in *(a)* manufacturing industries, *(b)* services and *(c)* all industries and services for Great Britain and each standard region in (i) June 1979 and (ii) June 1989.

Mr. Nicholls: The hon. Member has asked a number of related questions. As the answers involve a considerable number of statistical tables, I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the total number of YTS trainees or youth equivalent included in the employees in employment in Great Britain and for each standard region in *(a)* June 1979 and *(b)* June 1989; and what is the change between the years in (i) numbers and (ii) percentage.

Mr. Nicholls: The employees in employment figures include only those trainees who have contracts of employment. The table gives the number of such trainees on YTS in each region in June 1989. None of the trainees on the youth opportunities programme in 1979 had contracts of employment, and therefore comparisons between 1979 and 1989 either in real terms or percentage terms is not possible.

Number of trainees with contracts of employment

Region	*Number*
Scotland	8,000
Northern	5,000
North West	15,000
Yorkshire and Humberside	12,000
Midlands	10,000
Wales	4,000
South West	7,000
South East	15,000
London	7,000
East Midlands and Eastern	13,000
Great Britain Total	96,000

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total number of those with a second job as an employee in Great Britain and each of the standard regions in *(a)* June 1979 and *(b)* June 1989; and what is the difference between the two years in (i) numbers and (ii) percentage.

Mr. Nicholls: Estimates of persons with a second job are available only from labour force surveys, conducted in the spring of each year.

Estimates from the 1979 and 1989 labour force surveys, as requested, are shown in the table:

All persons in employment[1] with a second job as employee, by region spring estimates, thousands and per cent.

Region	*1979 Thousands*	*[2]1989 Thousands*	*Estimated Change 1979 Thousands*	*Estimated Change [2]1989 [3]Per cent.*
Great Britain	289	708	419	144·8
Northern	12	38	26	205·8
Yorkshire and Humberside	25	57	32	128·8
East Midlands	28	53	26	92·6
East Anglia	12	30	18	147·0
South East	90	222	132	146·7
of which				
-Greater London	37	68	32	86·5
South West	25	70	44	174·6
West Midlands	23	75	52	224·7
North West	36	76	39	109·1
Wales	11	31	20	171·1
Scotland	26	56	30	115·9

[1] Includes employees, the self-employed and persons in government employment and training programmes. In 1979 it was not possible to separately identify persons on government programmes and only those who stated they were in employment in the week before interview are included in the above totals.

[2] Preliminary estimates (1989 only)

[3] Calculated using unrounded estimates.

Source: labour force surveys.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total numbers of jobs which would be discounted if all full-time equivalence factors used by the European Community were applied to part-time jobs in *(a)* June 1979 and *(b)* June 1989.

Mr. Nicholls: We do not believe in discounting part-time jobs. Furthermore, the apparent method of calculating full-time equivalents set out in the European Commission report "Employment in Europe" is an inappropriate measure of labour input.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the unemployment rate by highest qualification and sex for Great Britain and each standard region for *(a)* spring 1979 and *(b)* spring 1989.

Mr. Nicholls: Final estimates from the 1979 labour force survey and preliminary estimates from the 1989 labour force survey are shown in the following table.

Unemployment rates by highest qualifications held[2] for people of working age, by sex and region: spring 1979 and 1989

Persons aged 16-59/64[3]

Per cent.

Region of residence Level of highest qualification held[5]	*Spring 1979 All Persons*	*Spring 1979 Males*	*Spring 1979 Females*	*Spring 1989[4] All Persons*	*Spring 1989[4] Males*	*Spring 1989[4] Females*
Great Britain						
All[6]	5·6	4·9	6·7	7·4	7·5	7·2
GCE A level or equivalent or higher	2·9	2·4	4·3	4·6	4·3	5·1
Other qualification	5·1	4·4	5·6	7·2	7·1	7·3
No formal qualification	7·0	6·9	7·2	11·6	13·7	9·1
Northern						
All[6]	8·7	9·0	8·3	11·5	13·1	9·4

Region of residence Level of highest qualification held[5]	*Spring 1979*			*Spring 1989*[4]		
	All Persons	*Males*	*Females*	*All Persons*	*Males*	*Females*
GCE A level or equivalent or higher	4·7	4·8	[1]	6·9	7·9	[1]
Other qualification	7·1	[1]	7·5	12·2	13·7	10·9
No formal qualification	11·3	13·6	8·6	16·7	22·0	11·5
Yorkshire and Humberside						
All[6]	6·0	5·1	7·6	8·7	9·4	7·7
GCE A level or equivalent or higher	2·8	2·6	[1]	4·6	4·5	4·9
Other qualification	5·1	[1]	6·0	8·8	9·1	8·5
No formal qualifications	7·4	6·9	8·0	14·1	18·7	9·0
East Anglia						
All[6]	4·8	3·8	6·4	6·8	6·8	6·9
GCE A level or equivalent or higher	2·5	[1]	[1]	4·1	3·3	6·2
Other qualification	5·4	[1]	6·3	6·6	6·5	6·6
No formal qualification	5·3	4·8	6·0	10·4	13·0	7·6
South East						
All[6]	4·5	3·5	6·1	4·2	3·5	5·2
GCE A level or equivalent or higher	[1]	[1]	[1]	2·6	[1]	[1]
Other qualification	5·9	[1]	[1]	3·7	[1]	[1]
No formal qualification	4·7	[1]	[1]	7·0	7·3	[1]
—Greater London						
All[6]	4·1	3·0	5·8	4·0	3·5	4·8
GCE A level or equivalent or higher	2·3	1·5	4·8	2·5	1·9	3·7
Other qualification	3·8	2·9	4·6	4·5	3·7	5·2
No formal qualification	4·6	3·6	5·8	6·1	6·8	5·4
—South East (exc. Greater London)						
All[6]	4·1	3·3	5·3	5·3	5·0	5·7
GCE A level or equivalent or higher	2·3	1·8	3·7	3·4	3·0	4·3
Other qualification	3·8	3·1	4·5	5·3	4·6	5·8
No formal qualification	4·9	4·2	5·8	8·6	9·6	7·3
South West						
All[6]	4·1	3·7	4·7	7·3	7·4	7·1
GCE A level or equivalent or higher	2·3	2·3	[1]	4·9	4·8	5·1
Other qualification	3·9	3·4	4·3	6·6	6·3	6·8
No formal qualification	5·3	4·9	5·7	12·5	13·7	10·8
West Midlands						
All[6]	5·3	4·7	6·2	5·3	5·3	5·4
GCE A level or equivalent or higher	2·7	2·1	[1]	3·7	3·3	4·7
Other qualification	5·0	5·7	4·4	5·4	4·5	6·1
No formal qualification	6·1	5·7	6·7	7·7	10·0	5·0
North West						
All[6]	5·2	4·7	5·9	7·7	7·1	8·5
GCE A level or equivalent or higher	2·2	[1]	[1]	4·5	3·6	6·6
Other qualification	4·6	[1]	5·0	8·1	7·9	8·3
No formal qualification	6·1	6·0	6·2	10·7	11·2	10·1
Wales						
All[6]	6·9	6·3	7·7	9·9	10·5	9·1
GCE A level or equivalent or higher	3·1	2·8	[1]	6·0	6·1	5·9
Other qualification	5·4	4·7	6·0	9·7	10·7	8·9
No formal qualification	8·9	9·8	8·0	15·6	18·5	12·3
Scotland						
All[6]	7·1	6·1	8·8	9·8	10·1	9·3
GCE A level or equivalent or higher	3·6	[1]	[1]	6·9	7·2	6·2
Other qualification	6·2	[1]	7·6	8·0	7·5	8·4
No formal qualification	9·4	8·9	10·0	14·8	16·2	12·9

Source: LFS estimates.

[1] Less than 10,000 in cell: estimates not shown.

[2] Based on the Great Britain labour force definition of unemployment (which broadly uses a one-week job search period). The unemployment rate for each qualification level/sex/region category is calculated as the numbers unemployed in the category as a proportion of all economically active persons in the category.

[3] The upper age limit is 64 for males and 59 for females.

[4] Preliminary estimates (1989 only).

[5] A finer breakdown of qualification levels is not given, as many more of the table entries would then be based on small samples and would not be shown.

[6] Includes persons not stating their highest qualification held, and for 1979 only, all persons in full time education and all males aged 60 to 64 (who were not asked about their highest qualification levels).

Training

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the estimated amount of expenditure on ET and YTS in each of the years 1988-89 and 1989-90.

Mr. Nicholls: The expenditure on YTS and employment training by the employment department group Training Agency (and its predecessor the Training Commission) is as follows:

	YTS (£m)	*ET (£m)*
1988-89 (actual)	993·8	425·0
1989-90 (forecast)	983·0	1,112·0

The YTS figures exclude community industry (included under the heading "Youth Training" in the public expenditure White Paper, evaluation, research and development, and marketing).

Employment training figures exclude the employment rehabilitation service (included under the heading "Training for Unemployed Adults" in the public expenditure White Paper).

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the "Community Action Programme for the Development of Continuing Vocational Training", Com (89) 567 final, of 8 December 1989.

Mr. Nicholls: This European Commission proposal aims to support and complement activities developed by and in member states in the area of continuing vocational training. An explanatory memorandum was submitted to the Commons Select Committee on European Legislation on 31 January 1990. The text is currently being negotiated at official level and the proposal is expected to be considered by the European Community Labour and Social Affairs Council on 29 May 1990.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, further to his answer to the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) of 15 March, *Official Report*, column *340*, if he will give the regional breakdown of the number of young people over 18 years on YTS with special training needs endorsements; and if he will make a further statement.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) of 15 March, *Official Report*, column *340*, on young people undertaking the youth training scheme with special training needs endorsement, if he will break down the figures given by region.

Mr. Nicholls: The following table gives the number of young people in training on YTS at 31 December 1989 who were aged 18 and over and had special training needs endorsements.

Region	*Number*
Scotland	1,600
Northern	1,800
North West	2,900
Yorkshire and Humberside	2,000
West Midlands	1,400
East Midlands and East	1,400
Wales	1,200
South West	800
South East	1,300
London	1,500
Total	15,900

(All figures rounded to the nearest hundred).

Action for Jobs Campaign

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much of the total expenditure on the Action for Jobs campaign in 1987-88 was spent on regional campaigns.

Mr. Eggar: Expenditure on Action for Jobs regional campaigns in 1987-88 was £1·4 million.

YTS Allowance

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to introduce an increase in the YTS allowance, age-related for 18-year-olds and over, in line with the principles set in April 1988 for income support claimants when rate liability was introduced.

Mr. Nicholls: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) on 15 March 1990, *Official Report*, column *340*.

Population Statistics

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total number of people by highest qualification held, and by sex, for Great Britain and each of the standard regions in *(a)* spring 1979 and *(b)* spring 1989.

Mr. Nicholls: Final estimates from the 1979 labour force survey and preliminary estimates from the 1989 labour force survey are shown in the table.

Highest qualification held by people of working age, by sex and region: spring 1979 and 1989

Persons aged 16—59/64[2] *Thousands*

Region of residence *Level of highest qualification held*	*Spring 1979* *All persons*	*Males*	*Females*	*Spring 1989*[3] *All persons*	*Males*	*Females*
Great Britain						
All[4]	31,966	16,619	15,347	33,851	17,657	16,194
Degree or equivalent	1,687	1,245	443	2,659	1,728	931
Higher education below degree	1,540	530	1,010	1,897	763	1,134
GCE A level or equivalent	5,601	4,385	1,215	8,137	5,785	2,352
GCE O level or equivalent	3,566	1,309	2,258	5,983	2,299	3,684
CSE below grade 1	1,187	471	715	1,616	712	904
Other qualification	1,236	423	812	2,433	1,175	1,257
No formal qualification	14,019	6,059	7,960	10,827	5,017	5,810
Northern						
All[4]	1,840	956	884	1,872	979	893
Degree or equivalent	69	53	16	91	61	30
Higher education below degree	87	34	53	95	37	58
GCE A level or equivalent	349	296	54	458	360	98
GCE O level or equivalent	155	55	100	305	107	199
CSE below grade 1	73	29	45	117	51	66
Other qualification	63	16	47	126	68	58
No formal qualification	877	356	522	662	286	376
Yorkshire and Humberside						
All[4]	2,863	1,493	1,370	2,992	1,564	1,429
Degree or equivalent	109	80	30	187	122	64
Higher education below degree	120	41	79	171	75	96
GCE A level or equivalent	463	393	70	695	516	180
GCE O level or equivalent	265	99	166	502	193	310
CSE below grade 1	100	36	64	135	58	78
Other qualification	109	41	68	227	116	111
No formal qualification	1,429	617	811	1,044	465	579
East Midlands						
All[4]	2,225	1,159	1,067	2,457	1,289	1,168
Degree or equivalent	88	69	19	146	99	48
Higher education below degree	109	35	74	136	63	73
GCE A level or equivalent	379	303	76	563	414	150
GCE O level or equivalent	246	88	158	418	156	262
CSE below grade 1	86	36	50	152	66	87
Other qualification	93	36	57	190	102	88
No formal qualification	1,021	452	569	831	377	453
East Anglia						
All[4]	1,091	580	511	1,227	637	590
Degree or equivalent	47	36	10	109	67	42
Higher education below degree	50	19	31	61	23	38
GCE A level or equivalent	181	145	35	275	201	74
GCE O level or equivalent	131	51	80	224	83	141
CSE below grade 1	45	19	26	67	28	39
Other qualification	56	23	33	99	50	50
No formal qualification	485	216	270	376	178	198
South East						
All[4]	9,965	5,170	4,795	10,629	5,528	5,101
Degree or equivalent	713	514	199	1,205	769	436
Higher education below degree	506	166	340	601	234	367
GCE A level or equivalent	1,717	1,256	462	2,442	1,667	775
GCE O level or equivalent	1,249	474	775	2,061	817	1,244
CSE below grade 1	411	168	244	496	219	277
Other qualification	415	147	268	825	377	447
No formal qualification	3,912	1,728	2,184	2,922	1,396	1,526
—Greater London						
All[4]	4,096	2,096	2,000	4,158	2,150	2,008
Degree or equivalent	337	230	107	616	378	238
Higher education below degree	193	49	144	206	70	136
GCE A level or equivalent	618	429	189	890	589	301
GCE O level or equivalent	499	193	306	739	297	443
CSE below grade 1	148	63	85	151	62	89
Other qualification	150	57	93	352	157	195
No formal qualification	1,696	767	929	1,176	580	595
—South East (excluding Greater London)						
All[4]	5,869	3,074	2,795	6,471	3,378	3,093
Degree or equivalent	375	284	91	589	391	198
Higher education below degree	313	117	196	395	164	231

Region of residence *Level of highest qualification held*	*Spring 1979* *All persons*	*Spring 1979* *Males*	*Spring 1979* *Females*	*Spring 1989*[3] *All persons*	*Spring 1989*[3] *Males*	*Spring 1989*[3] *Females*
GCE A level or equivalent	1,099	827	273	1,552	1,078	474
GCE O level or equivalent	749	280	469	1,321	520	801
CSE below grade 1	263	105	159	345	156	188
Other qualification	265	90	175	473	220	253
No formal qualification	2,216	961	1,255	1,746	816	930
South West						
All[4]	2,461	1,287	1,175	2,758	1,428	1,329
Degree or equivalent	123	92	31	173	118	55
Higher education below degree	118	40	78	179	75	104
GCE A level or equivalent	447	350	97	679	485	193
GCE O level or equivalent	305	110	195	537	203	333
CSE below grade 1	106	46	61	161	70	90
Other qualification	104	38	66	190	91	99
No formal qualification	1,003	429	574	821	376	445
West Midlands						
All[4]	3,081	1,613	1,468	3,206	1,692	1,515
Degree or equivalent	109	83	26	175	119	56
Higher education below degree	118	44	74	148	66	83
GCE A level or equivalent	429	348	80	697	501	196
GCE O level or equivalent	304	111	193	514	205	309
CSE below grade 1	125	53	72	190	83	107
Other qualification	102	34	68	229	114	115
No formal qualification	1,615	739	877	1,215	585	630
North West						
All[4]	3,797	1,967	1,830	3,858	2,018	1,840
Degree or equivalent	193	148	45	253	170	82
Higher education below degree	204	81	123	209	91	118
GCE A level or equivalent	661	538	123	950	694	256
GCE O level or equivalent	420	152	268	664	246	418
CSE below grade 1	142	52	90	194	88	107
Other qualification	138	43	95	268	124	144
No formal qualification	1,671	693	978	1,282	584	698
Wales						
All[4]	1,621	842	779	1,721	899	822
Degree or equivalent	75	56	19	96	63	33
Higher education below degree	85	26	59	97	32	65
GCE A level or equivalent	251	209	42	355	256	99
GCE O level or equivalent	191	71	119	302	109	193
CSE below grade 1	61	24	37	87	43	44
Other qualification	61	19	43	130	68	62
No formal qualification	732	322	410	640	318	323
Scotland						
All[4]	3,021	1,552	1,469	3,132	1,624	1,508
Degree or equivalent	161	113	48	225	140	85
Higher education below degree	143	44	100	199	68	131
GCE A level or equivalent	724	547	177	1,024	692	331
GCE O level or equivalent	301	98	203	457	182	275
CSE below grade 1	36	[1]	27	18	[1]	10
Other qualification	95	27	68	148	66	82
No formal qualification	1,274	507	766	1,034	452	582

Sources: 1979 final and 1989 preliminary LFS estimates.

[1] Less than 10,000 in cell: estimate not shown.

[2] The upper age limit is 64 for males and 59 for females.

[3] Preliminary estimates (1989 only).

[4] Includes persons not stating highest qualification held, and for 1979 only, all persons in full time education and all males aged 60 to 64 (who were not asked about their highest qualification levels).

SOCIAL SECURITY

Mobility Allowance

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what representations he has received from the mobility allowance campaign concerning the criteria for extending the mobility allowance to deaf-blind people;

(2) what representations he has received from the mobility allowance campaign concerning the eligibility criteria for deaf-blind people for mobility allowance;

(3) when his Department last met the mobility allowance campaign; and when it next intends to do so.

Mr. Scott: The campaign has made representations on several occasions, and letters have been sent in recent weeks to the Department and to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Officials will be meeting representatives of the campaign and other organisations on 26 March, and I shall be writing to the campaign following those discussions.

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) whether in drawing up the eligibility criteria for extension of mobility allowance to deaf-blind people, he has consulted the mobility allowance campaign;

(2) which organisations his Department has consulted when formulating the eligibility criteria for deaf-blind people to mobility allowance.

Mr. Scott: We were aware of the views of the campaign about the eligibility criteria for the extension of mobility allowance to deaf-blind people.

Community Charge

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will introduce measures to raise the level of support available to people on income support in respect of community charge liabilities;

(2) if he will make special one off payments to those people on income support living in areas where the community charge will be over £315.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will increase income support payments to claimants to cover 20 per cent. of the actual national average of the community charge of £350 as against the notional national average of 20 per cent. of £278.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Income support levels were adjusted on a once-for-all basis in April 1989 to include help towards the average 20 per cent. contribution to the community charge. The amounts included now form part of the overall benefit levels, which are of course being uprated next month.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimates his Department has regarding the number of people on income support who will be worse off under the community charge because the local charge is higher than the figure allowed for in the 20 per cent. uprating.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information requested is not available.

Income Support

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the number of people receiving income support at the present time.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: A total of 4·3 million claimants were receiving income support in August 1989, the latest date for which information is available.

Maintenance Payments

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action he has taken to improve the payment of maintenance by absent parents; and what further action he proposes.

Mr. Newton: From October 1989, we extended the absent parent's liability to maintain to cover dependent children aged 16, 17 and 18. I have also already announced that from next month we are strengthening the basis on which DSS local offices assess absent parents' ability to pay maintenance.

I now propose some further changes in the law, to improve the way in which the present system works and in particular to tackle some of the problems which lone parents themselves face in regard to the making and enforcement of maintenance orders.

I intend to bring forward an amendment to the present Social Security Bill to give courts the power to make an order for recovery of benefit which can have regard to the income support personal allowance of the mother even where she is divorced or was never married. This will recognise her costs as child carer, and bring social security law more into line with family law.

I also intend to bring forward two further amendments to improve the working of maintenance orders themselves. The first will propose that DSS be given power to transfer to the lone parent an order which it has obtained, if she leaves benefit. This eliminates the need for her to make a fresh application for a maintenance order and means that she can take the maintenance for the child with her, if she wishes to go to work, thus reducing what has often been held to be a discouragement. The second will propose that DSS be given a power to seek enforcement of a claimant's own maintenance order if the absent parent fails to pay. These changes will reduce the need for the lone parent to take court action herself.

"Show You Care"

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will ensure that all training courses for social security officials include a showing of the National Speak Week video, "Show You Care."

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We are grateful to the right hon. Member for raising this matter. To ensure the National Speak Week video is seen by the widest possible audience of social security officials, we are arranging for copies of the video, and the accompanying notes, to be distributed to every local office. Managers will be encouraged to use the material during the many and varied training sessions which are held in those offices.

War Widows

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many war widows died in December 1989 and in January and February 1990; and if he has any information on the number of war widows who have died in March 1990.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The numbers notified as at 21 March are:

	Number
1989	
December	416
1990	
January	250
February	160
March	5

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, further to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State's reply to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe, on 25 October 1989 what is the number of war widows who died in the year 1989.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The number of war widows who died in the year ended 31 December 1989 was 3,169.

Student Loans

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consultations his Department has had with organisations representing deaf people and organisations representing disabled students concerning the draft proposals for Social Security Benefits (Student Loans) Amendment Regulations and the definition used for disabled student.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Social Security Benefits (Student Loans) Amendment Regulations have been referred to the Social Security Advisory Committee which is currently consulting a variety of organisations including, we understand, organisations representing the interests of deaf and disabled people.

Residential Homes

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will make it his policy, when reviewing the arrangements for determining his Department's rates applying to those living in private residential care, to ensure that those rates are not negotiated by his Department's staff, or local authority staff, who hold direct or indirect financial interests in such private residential homes;

(2) what rules apply to his Department's staff holding direct or indirect financial interests in private residential or nursing homes; and whether his Department's staff are required to register such financial interests for public inspection.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Central rules provide that civil servants must not put private interests before their duty to the state or put themselves in a position where duty and private interests conflict or make use of their official position to further those interests. Officers who have occasion to deal in an official capacity with any matter in which they have a private interest, are required to disclose that interest to a senior officer and ask that some other officer deals with the matter.

Additionally, in DSS, staff having significant face-to-face contact with the public are not normally permitted to undertake any private activity within the area covered by their office.

However, provided management is satisfied that it would be proper to do so, permission may exceptionally be given for staff to hold a financial interest in private residential or nursing homes if there are no more than six long-stay residents and the officer undertakes to produce and keep up to date a list of residents' names so that management may ensure that the officer has no official dealings with the home or its residents.

Taper System

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list in the *Official Report* any revisions he is making in the taper system for income support, family credit, housing benefit and community charge rebate, following the Chancellor's announcement of the increased savings threshold.

Mr. Scott: We believe that the present rules for taking account of capital holdings strikes the right balance between ensuring that state benefits are available to those with the greatest need and that personal thrift is not discouraged. We shall monitor carefully the effects of the changes to the upper capital limit to ensure this balance is maintained. The community charge benefit taper, whereby benefit entitlement is reduced by 15p for every £1 of income in excess of the applicable amount, is more generous than with the former rate rebate scheme.

Social Fund

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give the numbers of applications *(a)* received and *(b)* approved for budgeting loans and crisis loans in each of the social security offices in Dunfermline, Kirkcaldy, Leven and Cowdenbeath for each month in 1989.

Mr. Scott: The information is in the Library.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is *(a)* the estimated expenditure on social fund budgeting and crisis loans and *(b)* the actual expenditure for each month between January 1989 and December 1989 inclusive for the Leven, Dunfermline, Cowdenbeath and Kirkcaldy Social Security offices.

Mr. Scott: The information given in the table represents the spending profile set at the start of each financial year for each office requested. The profile is adjusted at the end of each month to take account of actual expenditure and can be adjusted at any time to take account of local circumstances. Information for actual spending is in the Library.

	Community Care Grants per cent.	*Loans per cent.*
Leven		
1989		
January	7·87	7·87
February	9·19	9·19
March	9·40	9·40
April	7·93	7·93
May	8·33	8·33
June	8·33	8·33
July	8·33	8·33
August	8·33	8·33
September	8·02	8·02
October	8·88	8·88
November	8·89	8·89
December	7·75	7·75
Dunfermline		
1989		
January	7·87	7·87
February	9·19	9·19
March	9·40	9·40
April	7·93	7·93
May	8·33	8·33
June	8·33	8·33
July	8·33	8·33
August	8·33	8·33
September	8·02	8·02
October	8·88	8·88
November	8·89	8·89
December	7·75	7·75
Cowdenbeath		
1989		
January	7·78	7·78
February	9·19	9·19
March	9·40	9·40
April	7·93	7·93
May	8·33	8·33
June	8·33	8·33

	Community Care Grants per cent.	*Loans per cent.*
July	8·33	8·33
August	8·33	8·33
September	8·02	8·02
October	8·88	8·88
November	8·89	8·89
December	9·09	9·09
Kirkcaldy		
1989		
January	7·89	7·89
February	9·19	9·19
March	9·40	9·40
April	7·93	7·93
May	8·33	8·33
June	8·33	8·33
July	8·33	8·33
August	8·33	8·33
September	8·02	8·02
October	8·88	8·88
November	8·89	8·89
December	7·75	7·75

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of income support recipients are now having deductions made from benefit as a result of paying back social fund loans *(a)* nationally, *(b)* regionally and *(c)* in each local Department of Social Security office area.

Mr. Scott *[pursuant to his reply, 23 February 1990, c. 938-45]:* The information for those offices in the London North region was found to be incorrect. The corrected information is given in the table.

London North Region	*Per cent.*
Acton	5·63
Aylesbury	3·67
Banbury	5·69
Barking	4·43
Barnet	4·32
Basildon	5·97
Bedford	4·68
Braintree	3·88
Bury St. Edmunds	3·42
Cambridge	11·33
Canning Town	8·59
Chelmsford	7·14
Clacton	3·05
Colchester	5·78
Cricklewood	19·68
Diss	1·81
Dunstable	1·11
Ealing	3·18
Edgware	7·03
Edmonton	3·09
Euston	4·69
Finsbury Park	6·42
Grays	8·92
Great Yarmouth	6·72
Hackney	9·36
Harlesden	10·53
Harlow	3·03
Harrow	3·13
Hemel Hempstead	2·66
Hendon	6·53
Hertford	3·97
Highgate	6·43
High Wycombe	4·17
Hoxton	9·89
Ilford	4·22
Ipswich	5·05
Kings Lynn	4·47
Leytonstone	6·50
Lowestoft	6·85
Luton	8·36
Milton Keynes	7·86
Neasden	6·23
Norwich (C)	6·10
Norwich (M)	7·71
Notting Hill	8·79
Oxford	7·94
Paddington	3·32
Peterborough	10·17
Plaistow	6·82
Poplar	7·68
Romford	3·88
St. Albans	4·80
Shoreditch	8·73
Southall	8·97
Southend	4·94
Stepney	5·81
Stevenage	6·24
Thames North	3·21
Tottenham	10·40
Uxbridge	5·58
Walthamstow	6·68
Watford	5·38
Woodgrange Park	9·75
Wood Green	7·33

Housing Benefit (Students)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give calculations used to determine the student deduction as applied to student housing benefit claims; whether the student deduction as applied to student housing benefit claims is related to any index of housing costs; and what is the amount he intends to uprate the student deduction by for the 1990-91 academic year.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The amount of the rent deduction applied to student housing benefit claims is determined on the basis of figures provided by the Department of Education and Science. The level of the rent deduction for the 1990-91 academic year will be determined on the same basis and will be known shortly.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will state his reasons *(a)* for removing student entitlement to housing benefit and *(b)* for removing student entitlement to income support during periods of unemployment.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Government believe that full-time students should be supported by the educational maintenance system and not by social security benefits. Access to benefits by students has been an unplanned product of social security changes over the last two decades, creating a disproportionate administrative burden on local offices and local authorities. The proposed new student loans and access funds will provide additional forms of support making it unnecessary for the majority of full-time students to have access to housing benefit and income support.

Additionally, we believe that it is inappropriate to treat students as unemployed when they are following a full-time course of study. Benefits for the unemployed are intended to provide financial support for people who are normally reliant on earnings when they face the unforeseen contingency of unemployment. Periods of study, and vacations between periods of study, cannot be classed as days of unemployment in the same way.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is *(a)* the total value and average weekly payment of housing benefit currently being claimed by claimants aged 18 to 24 years, *(b)* the total value of housing benefit paid to students in the academic year 1988-89 in each region of the country and *(c)* the projected number of claims for housing benefits, their total value and the average size of weekly claim in 1990 in each region of the country.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Information is not available in the detail requested. The average weekly amount of housing benefit for claimants aged 18 to 24, who were not also in receipt of income support, was £11·70 in May 1988. Similar information for claimants receiving both income support and housing benefit is not held. Housing benefit spending on claimants who are aged 18 to 24 is not identifiable within total expenditure.

Information on housing benefit paid to students is not available in the form requested and I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 5 March at column *535*.

Spending plans and caseload estimates are on a Great Britain basis and for 1990-91 it is estimated that £4·6 billion in housing benefit will go to 4·2 million households. Average weekly amounts are not projected and deriving such amounts from the expenditure and caseload estimates does not produce a representative result.

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the number who would benefit each year if people receiving invalid care allowance were eligible for unemployment benefit when those they care for die, go into residential care or to hospital; and what would be the yearly cost.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Only those former carers who have received invalid care allowance for a period in excess of two and a half to three years would fail to qualify for unemployment benefit by virtue of a lack of recently paid national insurance contributions. As the average duration of invalid care allowance is approximately two years, most former carers who claim unemployment benefit qualify for it. Details of the numbers who fail to qualify for unemployment benefit are not available.

Disabled Students

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether all disabled students will retain entitlement to social security benefits following introduction of the loans scheme.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Disabled students will retain entitlement to most social security benefits on the same basis as now, including attendance allowance and mobility allowance. We propose that those students who meet the criteria for the disability premium will continue to be eligible for income support and housing benefit. Students who have received income support as a disabled student prior to the introduction of the new arrangements in the next academic year, will also retain eligibility to these benefits. We further propose that all full-time students will be excluded from unemployment benefit.

Local Government Finance (Rebates)

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will bring forward proposals to backdate the increase in capital exemptions for poll tax rebates announced in the Budget to cover Scotland in 1989-90; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: My right hon. and learned Friend, the Secretary of State for Scotland, has announced a scheme of ex-gratia payments which will benefit an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 individual chargepayers. The scheme will be administered and paid for by my right hon. and learned Friend's Department.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in Scotland had savings between £8,000 and £16,000 which had the effect of restricting their entitlement to income support and to poll tax rebate in 1989-90; and what the cost of such income support and rebates would be for those figures.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: It is estimated that some 15,000 to 20,000 individual chargepayers in Scotland in 1989-90, may have had, or shared, capital of between £8,000 and £16,000 which would have disentitled them from community charge rebates. The cost may have been up to £4 million. No estimates for income support are available.

Rates (Ex Gratia Payment)

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make ex gratia payments to pensioners with limited savings in Northampton who did not receive a rate rebate in 1989-90.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Rate rebates were available to pensioners and others with savings of up to £8,000 in 1989-90. This limit will be doubled to £16,000 for rent rebates and allowances, and for the new community charge benefit, from April 1990. The new limit will not be retrospective.

Nuclear Test Veterans

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what arrangements exist for compensating through the war pensions scheme ex-service men who took part in the British nuclear weapons test programme who subsequently developed cancerous diseases; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: It is open to any ex-service man who suffers disablement which he considers to be due to service to make a claim for war pension.

As regards the British nuclear test programme, the rigorous safety precautions adopted were such that only a small proportion of the participants could have been exposed specifically to ionising radiation and that those who were exposed received only small radiation doses. Consequently the Government are confident that no one should have suffered harm as a result of exposure to ionising radiation.

However, in view of the concern which some participants had expressed in this matter, the Government commissioned in 1983 the independent National Radiological Protection Board to undertake a study of the health of the participants, investigating whether it showed any correlation with radiation exposure. Its report, published in 1988, concluded:

"small hazards of leukaemia and multiple myeloma may well have been associated with participation in the tests, but that such participation has not otherwise had a detectable effect on the participants' expectation of life or on their total risk of developing cancer."

Although the report showed a slight increase in the rate of occurrences of multiple myeloma and leukaemia, other than chronic lymphatic leukaemia, it did not establish any firm evidence of a causal relationship between increased incidence of any cancers and participation in the test programme.

Proof, however, is not essential for a claim to succeed under the war pensions scheme. There only needs to be reliable evidence which raises a reasonable doubt whether a condition is caused or aggravated by service. The Department's doctors are satisfied that the report's evidence does raise sufficient doubt in the case of participants suffering from multiple myeloma or leukaemia (other than chronic lymphatic leukaemia). Any claim to a war pension by such service men or the widows of such service men is therefore likely to succeed, and seven awards have been made.

The Report by the NRPB included data up to 1 January 1984. The NRPB has advised that, in order to provide a reliable assessment of the further accumulated data for the period 1 January 1984 to 1 January 1989, it would be necessary to conduct a full-scale validation and analysis exercise. In the light of this advice, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has set in hand a further study by the NRPB. I understand that it hopes to be in a position to report its findings by the end of 1991.

We shall await the NRPB's further report with interest and we shall take full account of the findings to the extent that they provide any additional information which might affect participants' entitlement to war pensions.

ENERGY

Coal Imports

6. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what forecast he has made for the likely level of coal imports in the year 2000.

Mr. Baldry: We do not make such forecasts.

29. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what are the latest figures for imported coal into Britain *(a)* by countries of origin and *(b)* amounts in each case.

Mr. Baldry: The latest information is as follows:

Quantity[1] *(thousand tonnes)*

Country of origin	*Calendar year 1989*	*January 1990*
United States of America	4,874	376
Australia	2,676	324
Poland	1,055	63
Colombia	874	45
Canada	729	184
China	450	1
South Africa	346	12
Federal Republic of Germany	259	32
Netherlands	200	112
USSR	181	9
Panama	106	—
Venezuela	86	—
Belgium	78	13
Norway	58	3
France	50	—
Other countries	116	21
Total	12,137	1,194
of which:		
coking coal	7,998	825
steam coal	3,374	291
anthracite	765	78

[1] Figures are rounded independently and totals may therefore differ from the sum of their constituent parts.

Source: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

37. **Mr. Buckley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his most up-to-date estimate of the level of imports of coal in 1990, 1991 and 1992.

Mr. Baldry: We do not make such estimates.

Renewable Energy

16. **Mr. Livsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what percentage of power generation originates from renewable sources.

Mr. Peter Morrison: In 1989, about 2 per cent. of electricity was generated from renewable sources in Great Britain.

39. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what specific measures Her Majesty's Government are carrying out to encourage research, and operation of, wind, solar and other alternative sources of energy.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Government are supporting a major research and development programme aimed at developing commercially viable and environmentally acceptable renewable energy technologies to contribute to future energy supply.

49. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his latest assessment of the potential of wind-generated electricity in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The most recent estimate of the potential of wind-generated electricity in the United Kingdom was published in energy paper No. 55, copies of which are in the Libraries of the House. The extent to which this renewable source of energy might be developed commercially within environmental constraints is not yet known, but energy paper No. 55 has estimated that by the year 2025 wind energy might provide up to 30 TWh per year of electricity which represents about 10 per cent. of current electricity requirements.

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what initiatives his Department is taking to develop commercially viable and environmentally acceptable forms of renewable technology.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Government are supporting a major research and development programme aimed at developing commercially viable and environmentally acceptable renewable energy technologies to contribute to future energy supply.

Bankside Power Station

14. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his most up-to-date estimate of the capital value of Bankside power station.

Mr. Wakeham: The estimated value of this site is commercially confidential.

34. **Miss Hoey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has received regarding the future use of Bankside power station.

Mr. Wakeham: My Department has received representations on behalf of one project.

35. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has received regarding the ownership of Bankside power station and Sudbury house.

Mr. Wakeham: I am consulting the CEGB and those other parties which have a locus under the provisions of the Electricity Act 1989 about my proposed modifications to the board's transfer scheme, including the reallocation to Nuclear Electric of the Bankside power station site and Sudbury house.

Electricity Privatisation

15. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his most up-to-date estimate of the gross Exchequer costs of electricity supply industry privatisation.

Mr. Wakeham: It is too early to make any estimate of the likely gross costs of privatising the electricity supply industry, but the costs will be small in comparison with the proceeds.

25. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what consultations he has had with the European Commissioner for competition in relation to the privatisation of the electricity supply industry.

Mr. Wakeham: I and my Department have had a number of discussions with the Commission on electricity privatisation.

58. **Mr. Charles Wardle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has received from large consumers of electricity about his plans for privatisation of the electricity industry.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend continues to receive representations on electricity privatisation from a wide range of interested parties.

Low-sulphur Coal

17. **Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his most-up-to-date estimate of the level of imports of low-sulphur coal in 1990, 1991 and 1992.

Mr. Wakeham: We do not make such estimates.

Home Insulation

18. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what plans he has to review the amount of grant now paid towards home insulation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My right hon. Friend is taking powers in the Social Security Bill which, if approved, will lead to the introduction of a new scheme of grants for energy efficiency measures in low-income households. The amount of grant payable to an individual applicant under the scheme will depend upon the work undertaken; the allowable maximum still has to be settled.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

19. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what steps he is taking to reduce United Kingdom emissions of carbon dioxide from power stations.

Mr. Wakeham: My Department's programmes to promote energy efficiency and renewable energy and our support of nuclear power will all help to reduce future emissions of CO_2. The non-fossil fuel obligation on the privatised electricity supply industry will further promote the development of technologies which do not emit CO_2.

59. **Mr. Ray Powell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects to *(a)* publish and *(b)* achieve CO_2 emission reduction targets for the energy sector.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The United Kingdom, along with other industrialised nations, was a party to the Noordwijk declaration on atmospheric pollution and climatic change in November 1989, which stated that emissions of greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide, should be stabilised at a level and on a time scale to be considered by the intergovernmental panel on climate change and by the second world climate conference in November 1990. That remains the position.

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the level of carbon dioxide emission reductions in the United Kingdom estimated to be possible by 2005 and 2020 due to energy efficiency, renewable energy sources, nuclear power, or the increased use of natural gas.

Mr. Peter Morrison: An indication of the extent to which some technical options in isolation can contribute to reducing carbon dioxide emissions together with their associated costs is provided in the study (chapter 5), "An Evaluation of Energy—related Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Measures to Ameliorate Them". Further consideration of the economic costs of the various options will need to be made in due course.

Lead-free Petrol

20. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what proportion of petrol sold in Britain is lead-free; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Currently about 30 per cent. of petrol sold is unleaded. This is an increase from 4 per cent. in January 1989.

41. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what has been the increase in the consumption of unleaded petrol in the east midlands in the last six months; and how many petrol pumps have been converted for unleaded petrol.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Regional information on the consumption of unleaded petrol is not available centrally. However, United Kingdom deliveries of unleaded petrol increased by 23 per cent. between July 1989 and January 1990, from 23 per cent. of total petrol deliveries in July 1989 to 30 per cent. in January 1990.

No information is available on how many petrol pumps have been converted for unleaded petrol, but the Institute of Petroleum estimates that over 90 per cent. of retail petrol outlets now sell unleaded petrol.

Nottinghamshire Coalfield

21. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what has been the rate of productivity growth in the Nottinghamshire coalfield.

Mr. Baldry: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) earlier today.

Flue Gas Desulphurisation

22. **Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has received regarding the completion of the flue gas desulphurisation programme of the Central Electricity Generating Board.

Mr. Wakeham: I have received a number of representations on this, mainly as a result of misunderstandings about the requirements of the EC large combustion plants directive.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the date by which flue gas desulphurisation will be in operation at each of the power stations in England and Wales which are of 1,500 MW capacity or more.

Mr. Baldry: The EC large combustion plants directive —to which the Government are fully committed—does not require every station to be so fitted. The FGD plant at Drax is expected to come fully on stream by the end of 1996.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what reasons have been given to the member states of the Community with regard to the delay in the provision of desulphurisation equipment at the larger power stations.

Mr. Baldry: The Government are committed to achieving the reductions in emissions specified in the EC large combustion plants directive. There has been no delay in planning to meet this commitment. The fitting of flue gas desulphurisation equipment to power stations will play an important part in achieving the emissions reductions required by the directive. Contracts have already been placed for FGD at the 4GW Drax power station and further retrofits are in prospect. Other measures will also contribute.

Gas Transmission (North Sea)

24. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has had any recent applications for delivery transmission systems, for gas, in the North sea; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Morrison: No formal applications of this kind have been received recently.

Energy Conservation

26. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what new measures are being put forward by the Government to encourage energy conservation in the home and place of work.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Energy Efficiency Office is continuing to promote energy efficiency in the domestic, commercial and industrial sectors through a number of programmes aimed at energy consumers, professional advisers and decision makers. Recent initiatives include the best practice programme, which aims to provide authoritative and targeted information on a wide range of energy efficiency measures and applications, and the proposed new scheme of grants for insulation measures in the homes of those on low incomes.

Nuclear Electric

27. **Mr. Frank Cook:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has received regarding the allocation of Central Electricity Generating Board property to Nuclear Electric plc.

45. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has received about the allocation of Central Electricity Generating Board land at Druridge bay and Pembroke to Nuclear Electric plc.

Mr. Baldry: I have received representations from interested parties, including hon. Members.

33. **Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has received regarding the assets and liabilities of Nuclear Electric.

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend laid a minute before the House on 6 March relating to Nuclear Electric's financial position. Some Members have signed an early-day motion objecting to the minute. I have received various representations on other matters.

51. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his most up-to-date valuation of the assets and liabilities of proposed Nuclear Electric plc.

Mr. Baldry: Nuclear Electric will inherit assets and liabilities from the CEGB on vesting day. The latest valuation is reflected in the CEGB's report and accounts for 1988-89, a copy of which is in the Library. The company will review the valuations before the publication of its own accounts later in the year.

Energy Efficiency

28. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what energy savings targets have been set in connection with the various initiatives being undertaken by the Energy Efficiency Office.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Targets for the Energy Efficiency Office's programmes are set out in chapter 5, paragraphs 44 to 46 of the 1990 Public Expenditure White Paper (Cm. 1005).

40. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has made an assessment of the environmental implications resulting from the reduction in real terms of the budget of the Energy Efficiency Office.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Energy Efficiency Office's activities have always been targeted to maximise their effectiveness in stimulating improvements in energy efficiency. Such improvements are not only economically attractive but environmentally beneficial.

56. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has any plans to increase the budget of the Energy Efficiency Office.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The budget of the Energy Efficiency Office is being substantially increased in 1990-91 to accommodate expenditure under the proposed home energy efficiency scheme. Powers for the new scheme, which will offer grants towards the cost of insulation measures in low income households, are included in the Social Security Bill currently before Parliament.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will abolish the Energy Efficiency Office.

Mr. Peter Morrison: No.

Electricity Prices

30. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has received regarding the rise in electricity prices from 1 April 1990.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations about electricity prices.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he has made an estimate of the contribution of the rises in domestic electricity prices in April 1990 to the retail prices index.

Mr. Baldry: It is estimated that the increases in electricity prices effective from April 1990 should add between 0·20 per cent. and 0·25 per cent. to the retail prices index once the tariffs have been fully implemented.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he has discussed the implications of articles 85 and 86 of the treaty of Rome for the new pricing structure of the electricity supply industry of England and Wales with the European Commissioner responsible for competition, in respect of *(a)* domestic and *(b)* industrial consumers.

Mr. Baldry: The European Commission has been kept fully informed of all aspects of the Government's proposals for electricity privatisation.

National Power

31. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what consultations he is carrying out regarding the appointment of the chairman of National Power.

Mr. Wakeham: I am carrying out such consultations as I consider appropriate.

53. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what discussions he has had with the chairman of National Power regarding possible generation of electricity using gas.

Mr. Wakeham: I meet the chief executive of National Power regularly to discuss many aspects of his business.

Oil and Gas Exploration

32. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the likely level of drilling on the United Kingdom continental shelf in 1990.

47. **Mr. Arbuthnot:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his estimate of the likely level of drilling on the United Kingdom continental shelf in 1990.

Mr. Peter Morrison: A recent survey of company intentions by my Department showed that a record number of more than 200 exploration and appraisal wells could be drilled in the United Kingdom continental shelf this year.

38. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what plans he has for the reduction of the number of fallow blocks on the United Kingdom continental shelf in 1990.

54. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what plans he has for the reduction of the number of fallow blocks on the United Kingdom continental shelf in 1990.

Mr. Peter Morrison: As I indicated in my reply on 26 February to my hon. Friends the Members for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) and for Broxtowe, (Mr. Lester), I am pressing forward with the fallow block initiative. I will be keeping in close touch through 1990 with the licensees concerned, and I will be encouraging them to continue the good progress made in 1989 in reducing the number of fallow blocks.

43. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many significant discoveries of oil and gas were made on the United Kingdom continental shelf during 1989.

52. **Mr. Wood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many significant discoveries of oil and gas were made on the United Kingdom continental shelf during 1989.

55. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many significant discoveries of oil and gas were made on the United Kingdom continental shelf during 1989.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Twenty-nine significant discoveries, comprising nine of oil, 13 of gas, four of oil and gas, two of gas and condensate and one of condensate were made on the United Kingdom continental shelf in 1989, the highest total in any one year since offshore activity began in 1964.

57. **Mr. Page:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many of the wells drilled on the United Kingdom continental shelf have been drilled *(a)* since 1964 and *(b)* since 1979.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden) earlier today.

Electricity Supply

36. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he next proposes to discuss reciprocal electricity supplies sharing and purchase arrangements between EEC member states with his counterparts in the Council of Energy Ministers.

Mr. Wakeham: Sharing and purchase arrangements for electricity supplies within the Community are for the electricity industries. However, the Energy Council on 21 May is likely to consider the Commission proposal for a directive on electricity transit. The directive seeks to reduce barriers to transit and thus promote interstate trade in electricity.

British Coal

42. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the chairman of British Coal; and what were the principal matters which were discussed.

Mr. Wakeham: I meet the chairman of British Coal regularly to discuss all aspects of the coal industry.

44. **Mr. Patchett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his most up-to-date estimate of the numbers employed by British Coal in 1990, 1991 and 1992.

60. **Mr. Allen McKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his most up-to-date estimate of the manpower figures for British Coal in 1990-91.

Mr. Baldry: The Government do not make estimates of future manpower levels in British Coal. Such levels depend on a number of factors, including the corporation's continued ability to raise its competitiveness.

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how much the Government have invested in British Coal since 1979.

Mr. Baldry: Since 1979 the Government have invested over £6·5 billion in the coal industry and continue to invest at a rate of over £2 million every working day.

Offshore Energy Industry

46. **Mr. Wilshire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what has been the level of employment in the offshore oil and gas industry in each of the years from 1983 to 1989.

Mr. Sumberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what has been the level of employment in the offshore oil and gas industry in each of the years from 1983 to 1989.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Mr. Thompson) earlier today.

61. **Mr. Hayward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the level of capital investment in the North sea in 1989; and what are the prospects for 1990.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) on 16 March, *Official Report*, column *397*.

62. **Dr. Michael Clark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the chairman of the United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association; and what was discussed.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I meet the representatives of the United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association (UKOOA) regularly to discuss matters of mutual interest.

Electricity Undertakings (Property)

48. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the proposed proportion of property assets to total assets of *(a)* Nuclear Electric, *(b)* National Power, *(c)* PowerGen and *(d)* the National Grid Company.

Mr. Baldry: The Central Electricity Generating Board submitted on 12 March a scheme for transferring all the board's property, rights and liabilities to successor companies. Subject to my approval and any modifications this scheme will come into force on 31 March. My Department is now considering the board's scheme, which is commercially confidential, and is undertaking the consultations called for by statute.

Landfill Gas Schemes

50. **Mr. William Powell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many landfill gas schemes are in operation.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Currently, 35 landfill gas schemes are operational and a further 30 are being planned. The estimate of current energy savings is 150,000 tonnes coal equivalent per annum (tcepa). Of the existing schemes, 13 are generating electricity with a capacity of 16 MW.

National Union of Mineworkers

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has any plans to meet the president of the National Union of Mineworkers.

Mr. Wakeham: I am always happy to meet officers of the coal mining unions at their request.

National Society for Clean Air

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met representatives from the National Society for Clean Air; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I have had no meetings with the National Society for Clean Air.

Nuclear Reactors (Accidents)

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what consultations his Department has recently had to improve emergency planning procedures to deal with a civil nuclear reactor accident.

Mr. Baldry: The Department regularly consults organisations concerned with all aspects of civil nuclear emergency planning. This is done under the auspices of the nuclear emergency planning liaison group, which brings together representatives of Government Departments, the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate (NII) the National Radiological Protection Board, nuclear operators, the police, local authorities and the fire service. My Department is also a member of the nuclear emergency arrangements forum where matters of common interest are discussed between the nuclear operators, the NII and Government Departments. In addition, the Department participates in ad-hoc meetings with various organisations from time to time to consider particular aspects of planning.

Electricity Bill Estimates

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many complaints he has received from consumer organisations over the practice of electricity boards estimating fuel use when access to meters is readily available.

Mr. Baldry: The Department of Energy receives representations from consumer organisations from time to time on a wide range of issues including estimated billing. However, this is a matter for the industry.

Coal Contracts

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects to receive the notification of approval or otherwise from the European Commission regarding the coal contracts agreed between British Coal and National Power and PowerGen.

Mr. Wakeham: I hope that the Commission will be able to respond favourably in due course to the arrangements notified to it.

Lord Marshall of Goring

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met Lord Marshall of Goring in his capacity as chairman of the CEGB; and what was discussed.

Mr. Wakeham: I met Lord Marshall regularly as chairman of the CEGB. The discussions at such meetings are confidential.

Cornwall Energy Project

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what support has been given to the Cornwall energy project.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My Department has contributed 25 per cent. of the cost—some £80,000—to the Cornwall energy project conducted by Cornwall county council.

National Grid Company

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he can yet estimate the extent to which industrial energy producers will increase their rates to the National Grid Company after privatisation.

Mr. Baldry: Prices will depend on market conditions and the specific details of any relevant contracts.

Gas and Electricity Prices

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on *(a)* the percentage increase and *(b)* the real increase in the price of gas and electricity over the past five years.

Mr. Wakeham: The increases for domestic and industrial consumers are shown in the following tables:

Domestic Sector

Percentage changes between the 4th quarter of 1984 and the 4th quarter of 1989

	Current prices	*Deflated prices*[1]
Gas	+11	−15
Electricity	+21	− 8

[1] Deflated using the GDP (market prices) deflator. The GDP deflator for the 4th quarter of 1989 has been estimated using the change in the retail prices index (all items).

Source: Fuel price indices published in Tables 19 and 20 of Energy Trends.

Industrial sector

Percentage changes between the 3rd quarter of 1984 and the 3rd quarter of 1989

	Current prices	*Deflated prices*[1]
Gas	−20	−39
Electricity	+18	− 9

[1] Deflated using the GDP (market prices) deflator. The GDP deflator for the 4th quarter of 1989 has been estimated using the change in the retail prices index (all items).

Source: Fuel price indices published in tables 19 and 20 of Energy Trends.

Chemical Spillages (North Sea)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many complaints there have been regarding spillages or discharges of chemicals from North sea oil and gas installations over the last five years.

Mr. Peter Morrison: There have been no complaints concerning spillages or discharges of chemicals from North Sea oil and gas installations over the last five years.

However, following the Piper Alpha incident, several queries were received concerning the PCBs present in equipment on the installation.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many prosecutions there have been for the spillage or discharge of chemicals from North sea oil and gas installations over the last five years.

Mr. Peter Morrison: There have been no prosecutions for spillage or discharge of chemicals from North sea oil and gas installations over the last five years.

Nuclear Industry (Work-related Diseases)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has received, and from whom, concerning employees in the nuclear industry and work-related diseases; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: I have received a number of representations from the public and from Members of this House concerning this matter.

Natural Gas

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the current production of natural gas from the United Kingdom sector of the North sea in million tonnes of oil equivalnt; and what is the projected use of natural gas by 2005 and 2020 outlined in the range of scenarios produced in the study "An Evaluation of Energy-related Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Measures to Ameliorate Them".

Mr. Peter Morrison: Gas production from United Kingdom fields in 1988—the last year for which full data is available—was approximately 39 million tonnes oil equivalent (MTOE). Primary gas demand in the study referred to was estimated to range between 59 and 100 MTOE in 2005 and between 72 and 169 MTOE in 2020. This range of estimates was based on price assumptions provided by the International Energy Agency.

Greenhouse Effect

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy to whom the departmental study for the IPCC "An Evaluation of Energy-related Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Measures to Ameliorate Them", has been circulated for peer review external to the Department.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The study has not been subject to formal peer review. It was undertaken at the specific request of the energy and industry subgroup of the response strategies working group of the IPCC, and given to it at the end of November 1989. In the preparation of the study, a number of groups within and outside Government were consulted, and some provided input. Much of the data used was from published sources.

The Department's advisory council on R and D for fuel and power (ACORD) will discuss the study shortly.

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he has any plans to update the departmental study for the IPCC "An Evaluation of Energy-related Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Measures to Ameliorate Them", to include new information and data, and to take account of critical reviews received since its publication.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I have no plans to update this study. It was carried out as a response to a specific request from the energy and industry subgroup of the response strategies working group of the IPCC for material to assist the work of that subgroup. The work of the subgroup is expected to be completed before the end of April.

Sizewell

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what were the original overall costs for the development programme at Sizewell; and what are his latest projected costs figures.

Mr. Baldry: The Sizewell B project was sanctioned by the CEGB on 1 April 1987 at a cost of £1,691 million. The board's most recent estimate, derived from evidence given to the Hinkley Point C inquiry in September 1989, is £1,870 million at 1987 prices.

French Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if either the French Government or Electricité de France have informed him of any risk or failure at nuclear power stations situated on or near the northern coast of France;

(2) if he will consult both the French Government and Electricité de France to ensure that arrangements exist for notificaion in case of serious risk or failure at northern nuclear power stations in France;

(3) what discussions he has had with the French Government or with Electricité de France in regard to the safety of nuclear power stations that are close to the northern coast of France.

Mr. Baldry: There are continuing contacts between my officials and those of the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate and their French counterparts.

The nuclear installations inspectorate has an exchange of information arrangement with the French nuclear safety regulatory body—Service Central de Sureté des Installations Nucléaires (SCSIN)—which includes the exchange of safety-related information.

There is no reason to suppose that the standards of safety adopted by the French are any less rigorous than those applied in the United Kingdom.

Arrangements already exist, under a bilateral treaty with the French Government, for Her Majesty's Government to be notified of any accidental release of radioactivity from a French nuclear installation. In addition, the French Government are a party to the early international notification arrangements established by the International Atomic Energy Agency and the European Community.

An independent means of detecting and monitoring any abnormal increases in environmental radioactivity of the kind which might stem from an overseas nuclear accident is provided by the radioactive incident monitoring network (RIMNET).

Magnox Fuel

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the volume of intermediate-level waste that is generated due to the reprocessing of spent fuel for each of the fuel types Magnox, advanced gas reactor and pressurised water reactor.

Mr. Baldry: I understand from British Nuclear Fuels plc that the volumes of intermediate level wastes, conditioned for disposal, generated from the reprocessing of spent fuel are approximately as follows:

2·00 cubic metres per tonne of uranium of Magnox fuel reprocessed.
2·25 cubic metres per tonne of uranium of advanced gas reactor fuel reprocessed.
1·25 cubic metres per tonne of uranium of pressurised water reactor fuel reprocessed.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what are the countries of origin for foreign Magnox fuel that has been reprocessed in the United Kingdom;

(2) what is the tonnage of foreign Magnox fuel which has been reprocessed in this country, for each country of origin, for each of the years from 1965 to 1990, inclusive; and what are the projected tonnages to 1999.

Mr. Baldry: For the tonnages of civil spent fuel which have been reprocessed in this country, I refer the hon. Member to the answers given by the hon. Member for Midlothian (Mr. Eadie) to the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) on 27 May 1977 at column *626*, by my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. Goodlad) to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) on 11 December 1985 at columns *638-39* and by my hon. Friend the Member for Worcestershire, South (Mr. Spicer) on 1 February 1988 at columns *473-74*. Some 10 per cent. of these quantities have been Magnox spent fuel from Italy or Japan. Quantities for future years are dependent upon reactor life times.

Estate Agents

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what factors he takes into account in deciding whether to appoint estate agents as advisers in major privatisations.

Mr. Wakeham: In any privatisation it is important to ensure that the property portfolios are properly documented and valued. This is the role of the valuers which the hon. Member chooses to describe as estate agents. It is a fundamental step in the process of establishing a realistic valuation of the undertaking as a whole and obtaining value for the assets in proceeds. This is consistent with the advice of the National Audit office to the Public Accounts Committee.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 27 March 1990

DEFENCE

Admirals

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish a table showing the number of admirals in the Royal Navy expressed as a proportion of the number of vessels in the Royal Navy fleet in 1960, 1970, 1980 and 1990.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The numbers of admirals receiving full active pay and of vessels in the Royal Navy on 1 April in the following years were:

Year	[1]*Admirals*	*Vessels*	*Ratio*
1960	84	447	1:5·3
1970	68	239	1:3·5
1980	59	182	1:3·1
1990	[2]53	173	1:3·3

[1] Rear admiral and above.

[2] At 1 January.

In the modern Royal Navy, there is no direct relationship between the number of admirals and ships. The former is primarily governed by the needs of the shore organisation, including headquarters, and international commitments.

Mr. Colin Wallace

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many former members of the Army information service at headquarters, Northern Ireland have been interviewed by Government agencies about Mr. Colin Wallace's allegations.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A number of officials were interviewed by the police in the course of investigations into Kincora.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will direct his officials to interview Mr. Mike Taylor and Miss Wendy Austin about the full scope of their activities in Army information services in Northern Ireland in the 1970s.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No. If Mr. Taylor or Miss Austin have information about activities in Northern Ireland which they feel to be of significance, they should submit it to the RUC or to the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his written answer to the hon. Member for Brent, East, *Official Report*, 6 May 1988, column *621*, if he will place in the Library copies of all printed material designed and printed at Army headquarters, Northern Ireland, and disseminated to the public from 1972 to 1975.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what security exercises were carried out by the Army information department in Northern Ireland in the 1970s.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have nothing to add to my letter of 30 January to the hon. Member for Brent, East.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which section of his Department was responsible for psychological warfare operations and psychological warfare training for civil servants in Northern Ireland from 1971 to the current date.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have nothing to add to the answers given by my hon. Friend the former Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces to the hon. Member on 6 May 1988 at column *622*.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish in the *Official Report* the text of the letters from the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Mr. Hamilton), to the hon. Member for Brent, East on 30 January and 2 February.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No. A copy of my letter of 30 January is already in the Library of the House. I did not write to the hon. Member on 2 February. A copy of the letter which the Secretary of State for Defence wrote to him on that date is already in the Library of the House.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish in the *Official Report* the text of the letters from the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman), to the hon. Member for Brent East on 18 April 1988, 21 June 1988 and 15 August 1988 concerning Mr. Colin Wallace and related matters.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No. Copies of the letters of 21 June and 15 August 1988 are already in the Library of the House. A copy of the letter of 18 April 1988 will also be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the written answer to the hon. Member for Arundel (Mr. Marshall) of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *112*, whether Army intelligence material was used in the Clockwork Orange project.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have nothing to add to my reply of 30 January to my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel (Mr. Marshall) at columns *110-13*.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the written answer to the hon. Member for Arundel (Mr. Marshall) of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *112*, if he will place in the Library copies of all documents relating to the project Clockwork Orange.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the written answer to the hon. Member for Arundel (Mr. Marshall) of 30 January, *Official Report*, column *111*, what investigations were carried out to discover whether Mr. Wallace was given a supplementary directive or job description; what was the security classification given to Mr. Wallace's responsibilities; and where Mr. Colin Wallace was interviewed in January 1975 about the use of forged documents for disinformation purposes.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have nothing to add to earlier statements about Mr. Wallace's job description. I am unable to identify the interview to which the hon. Member has referred.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether *(a)* Mr. Peter Broderick or *(b)* Mr. Michael Taylor were ever interviewed by any official or Government agency in connection with allegations made by Mr. Colin Wallace.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I understand that, during the inquiries into Kincora, both Mr. Broderick and Mr. Taylor were interviewed by the RUC, Mr. Broderick on 7 June 1982 and 8 November 1985, Mr. Taylor on 9 June 1982.

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether Mr. Colin Wallace carried out any psychological operations warfare whilst working in Army information services Northern Ireland.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have nothing to add to my previous statements made in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel (Mr. Marshall) on 30 January at columns *110-13* and during the Adjournment debates on 6 and 12 February at columns *866-68* and columns *115-22*.

Sea Harrier

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the Sea Harrier FRS 1 aircraft presently being operated by the Royal Navy are to be modified so as to reach FRS 2 standard.

Mr. Alan Clark: It is currently planned that 29 of the Royal Navy's present Sea Harrier FRS 1 aircraft will be modified to FRS 2 standard. There will also be two development aircraft, making a total of 31.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the first new build Sea Harrier FRS 2 aircraft will be delivered to the Royal Navy.

Mr. Alan Clark: Deliveries will begin in early 1994.

European Fighter Aircraft

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has commissioned any studies into the effect on the European fighter aircraft project if the Federal Republic of Germany or its successor withdraws its support.

Mr. Alan Clark: No. My right hon. Friend and his German counterpart agreed on 22 January that there was a need for a modern fighter aircraft and the EFA was the best solution to meet the requirements of our air forces in the second half of the 1990s and beyond.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what indemnities he has signed or proposes to sign in favour of companies located in Federal Germany in relation to the European fighter aircraft; if he will place copies in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: The arrangements for companies involved in the EFA programme are contained in the development MOU signed by all the four participating nations in November 1988.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what studies he has commissioned into the requirements of the Royal Air Force in the event of the European fighter aircraft being cancelled.

Mr. Alan Clark: We do not expect the European fighter aircraft programme to be cancelled.

Type 23 Frigate

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy towards the development by Yarrow Shipbuilders of a stretched version of the type 23 frigate.

Mr. Neubert: Following our withdrawal from the NFR90 project, my Department is considering alternative means of replacing the type 42 destroyers with a ship capable of deploying the support defence missile system. This consideration will include the suitability of existing warship platforms, such as the type 23.

SSN20 Submarine

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy towards the introduction of competition into the project definition phase for the SSN20 submarine.

Mr. Neubert: No decision has been made on the project definition phase for the next class of fleet nuclear-powered submarines. In line with current defence procurement policy, we intend making the maximum possible use of competition in this programme.

SRAAM

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends to announce a decision for full-scale development of the advanced short range air-to-air missile.

Mr. Alan Clark: We are currently considering the way forward with our international partners and with industry. I do not expect to announce a decision for some time.

Married Quarters (Woolwich)

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Army married quarters in the Woolwich area are currently empty; and how many of these have been empty for *(a)* up to six months, *(b)* up to 12 months and *(c)* longer than 12 months.

Mr. Neubert: There are currently 91 empty Army married quarters in the Woolwich area out of a total stock of 690; 67 have been empty for up to six months, 19 for up to 12 months and five for longer than 12 months. Of these, the majority are either already allocated to service families, who will be moving in shortly, or are awaiting major maintenance work. In addition, there are 54 flats in the process of sale, of which 51 have been vacant for longer than 12 months and three for up to 12 months.

Mr. John Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Army married quarters in the Woolwich area have been offered for sale during the past 12 months; how many have been sold; and to what type of buyer they have been sold.

Mr. Neubert: A total of 81 ex-Army married quarters in the Woolwich area have been offered for sale during the past 12 months. Of these 27 have been sold to the London borough of Greenwich, and we are currently negotiating the sale of the remaining 54 properties.

Sandown Class Minehunters

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when tenders are to be sought for the next batch of Sandown class role minehunters for the Royal Navy.

Mr. Neubert: Tenders have been invited today for up to seven vessels of this class.

Procurement Executive (Location)

Mr. Aspinwall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future location of his Department's Procurement Executive.

Mr. Neubert: As a result of the studies we have carried out over the past 18 months, we have now decided to proceed as follows. The Procurement Executive's land and air systems controllerates, the ordnance board, and associated work of the Director General of Defence Contracts will be moved from London to Keynsham, east Bristol in 1993. Collocation in the same travel-to-work area of the sea systems controllerate, the majority of whose staff currently work in Bath, will be tackled progressively and completed as soon as practicable thereafter. In this way, we shall achieve the collocation in the same travel-to-work area of the bulk of the Procurement Executive's project management activities.

The controllerates currently comprise some 3,800 posts in London, of which up to 1,100 are non-mobile grades. In addition, there are a further 1,100 sea systems posts currently located in Portsmouth and Weymouth, of which some 200 are non-mobile grades. We would expect to recruit locally such replacements as are necessary to fill the non-mobile posts.

A large number of options was considered for these moves. The Bristol-Bath solution proved to be the most economically attractive, both in terms of initial outlay, and of savings in running costs, which are expected to amount to over £50 million a year once the programme is complete. It is well placed in relation to the operational needs of the staff concerned for frequent direct contacts with Ministry of Defence headquarters, with the defence research establishments, and with contractors.

Collocation in the same travel-to-work area will enable us to offer our staff better career prospects without further domestic disruption, will lead to reduced costs, and improved efficiency and professionalism in the short term while providing us with the flexibility we require to adapt the Procurement Executive to future needs.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Rule 43

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of prisoners currently on rule 43, own protection, by individual prison establishment.

Mr. Mellor: The information is given in the table:

Prisoners in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales on 31 January 1990 removed from association in their own interests under Prison Rule 43 and Young Offender Institution Rule 46: by establishment

Establishment and type	*Number*
Remand centres	
Brockhill	7
Cardiff	23
Dorchester	3
Exeter	7
Hull	12
Low Newton	16
Norwich	4
Pucklechurch	2
Winchester	8
Local prisons	
Bedford	52
Birmingham	24
Bristol	55
Brixton	35
Canterbury	33
Cardiff	23
Chelmsford	41
Dorchester	4
Durham	166
Exeter	28
Gloucester	35
Holloway	3
Hull	64
Leeds	170
Leicester	24
Lewis	18
Lincoln	79
Liverpool	197
Manchester	127
New Hall	10
Norwich	20
Oxford	18
Pentonville	52
Preston	3
Reading	18
Risley	23
Shrewsbury	12
Swansea	43
Wandsworth	438
Winchester	50
Wormwood Scrubs	34
Training prisons	
Acklington	1
Albany	4
Blundeston	1
Camp Hill	19
Channings Wood	4
Coldingley	1
Dartmoor	30
Featherstone	3
Frankland	41
Full Sutton	110
Garth	2
Gartree	2
Haverigg	1
Lindholme	15
Long Lartin	7
Littlehey	2
Maidstone	2
Nottingham	3
Northeye	5
Parkhurst	11
Preston	4
Ranby	2
Shepton Mallet	2
Stocken	1
Styal	7
Swaleside	3
Wakefield	19
Wayland	4
Wymott	4

Establishment and type	*Number*
Young offender institutions	
Everthorpe	5
Hollesley Bay	15
The Mount	26
Northallerton	31
Portland	3
Stoke Heath	6
Swinfen Hall	3
Whatton	2
All establishments	2,366

Drugs

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria are used to measure the cost-effectiveness of programmes dealing with drug misuse and, in particular (i) drug enforcement programmes, (ii) education programmes to reduce demand, (iii) treatment programmes and (iv) court disposals for drug abusers including those convicted of both possession and supply.

Mr. Mellor: It is difficult to measure the cost-effectiveness of different programmes designed to tackle drug misuse; the most that can often be achieved is to estimate the costs of the programme and measure certain of its intermediate outputs. Wagstaff and Maynard, in their 1985 study of economic aspects of the illicit drug market and drug enforcement policies in the United Kingdom (published as Home Office research study 95), undertook some preliminary economic analysis of the drug enforcement activities of the police and customs, and constructed a number of different cost-effectiveness indices. A Home Office research study, planned to start later this year, will seek to estimate the cost of each of the different aspects of the Government's strategy against drugs.

Private Security Firms

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to legislate to enforce stricter controls on the setting up of private security firms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: We have no such plans at present. We are currently considering, in the light of the report of a Home Office working group on self-regulation of the private security industry, what further action needs to be taken.

Elvet Prison (Suicides)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners on remand and how many who have been sentenced have committed suicide in Her Majesty's prison, Elvet, Durham, during the last five years.

Mr. Mellor: The table shows the number of inmates who have died at Her Majesty's prison, Durham since 1985. All these deaths were confirmed as suicide at a coroner's inquest. There have been two deaths at the prison so far in 1990, both of convicted inmates, but an inquest has been held in neither case. One of these deaths is thought to have been suicide.

Suicides at HM Prison Durham: 1985-89

	Convicted	*Unconvicted*	*Total*
1985	—	2	2
1986	—	—	—
1987	—	3	3
1988	—	1	1
1989	1	1	2

Replica Firearms

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will seek to introduce legislation to prohibit the sale and ownership of replica firearms.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Under the Firearms Act 1982, the sale and possession of replica firearms which can be readily converted to fire live ammunition are subject to the same level of stringent control as that imposed on real firearms by the Firearms Acts 1968 and 1988. We have no plans to control the sale and possession of imitation firearms which cannot be so converted.

Mr. Colin Wallace

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish in the *Official Report* the text of the letter from the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten) to the hon. Member for Brent, East on 2 February about Mr. Colin Wallace.

Mr. John Patten: The text of my reply of 12 February 1990 to the hon. Member for Brent, East is as follows:

> "I am writing in response to points you raised about the case of Mr. Colin Wallace, and the allegation that Mr. Wallace was wrongfully convicted.
>
> You will be aware that the Home Secretary carefully considered the material advanced to support that allegation and announced his decision in a written Answer to Mr. Michael Marshall MP on 30 January. In amplification of that Answer the Home Secretary placed a memorandum in the Library. I enclose for ease of reference a copy of the reply and memorandum.
>
> I would draw attention particularly to paragraph 2 of the memorandum. The points which you and Mr. Wallace raised are matters which were either considered at the trial or which could have been raised at the trial had Mr. Wallace and his advisers so wished.
>
> You asked in your Question in the House on 15 January whether the Home Secretary would institute an inquiry into the conduct of the Sussex police force when investigating the murder charge against Mr. Colin Wallace. We can see no grounds for such an investigation."

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who interviewed Mr. Peter Broderick and Mr. Michael Taylor in 1980 about Mr. Wallace's manslaughter case.

Mr. John Patten: I understand from the chief constable of Sussex that Mr. Peter Broderick and Mr. Michael Taylor were seen by detectives of that police force involved in the inquiry in 1980 into the death of Jonathan Lewis, in respect of whom Mr. Wallace was convicted of manslaughter.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many personal licences were in force for *(a)* 1987, *(b)* 1988, and *(c)* 1989 under the terms of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986; under what circumstances personal licences are revoked; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The latest available information, for 1987 and 1988, was published in the annual report of the Animal Procedures Committee for 1988 (HC 458; p3). The figures for 1989 will be published in the committee's report for 1989. The most usual reason for revoking a licence is that the holder no longer requires it. The conditions attaching to personal licences and the circumstances in which they may be revoked are set out in "Guidance on the Operation of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986" (HC 182), published this year.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what criteria he employs to determine whether animal experiments merit the granting of a project licence under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986;

(2) what steps he takes to establish whether alternative methods of testing exist before granting a project licence under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to refuse entirely applications for licences in any category of work. "Guidance on the Operation of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986" (HC 182 of 1990), published on 15 February, sets out the criteria he follows, in accordance with section 5 of the Act, in determining whether and on what terms to grant a project licence, including the consideration which has been given by the applicant to alternatives. The reports of the Animals Procedures Committee for 1988 (HC 498 of 1989) and 1987 (HC 36 of 1988) set out the advice of the committee, which my right hon. and learned Friend has gratefully accepted, on the consideration of applications for project licences for the testing of cosmetics. We look forward to receiving further advice from the committee on this subject.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what reasons he ascribes to the increase in the number of experiments performed on animals in respect of safety tests for *(a)* environmental pollution, *(b)* substances used in agriculture, *(c)* substances used in industry, *(d)* substances used in the household, *(e)* food additives, *(f)* cosmetics and toiletries and *(g)* alcohol research between 1987 and 1988; what steps he plans to take to reduce the number of such animal experiments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: "Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals Great Britain 1988" (Cm 743) sets out the available information on the increases or decreases in the numbers of safety tests under different headings. "Guidance on the Operation of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986" (HC 182 of 1990) sets out the criteria which my right hon. and learned Friend follows in determining whether and under what conditions to grant a project licence.

Shops Act 1950

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for each of the last five years, how many fines have been imposed upon stores which have traded in breach of the Shops Act 1950; and what is the total for each year of the fines imposed.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 19 March]:* Information for 1984 to 1988 is given in the table. Data for 1989 will not be available until autumn 1990.

Defendents fined for offences against the Shops Act 1950
England and Wales

Year	*Total fined*	*Total amount fined (£)*
1984	785	114,410
1985	632	150,346
1986	598	185,851
1987	568	147,095
1988	441	99,730

NATIONAL FINANCE

Income Tax

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the extra revenues from a further (i) 5p, (ii) 7½p and (iii) 10p on the standard and higher rate of income tax, at current yields; and what would be the annual extra amounts a married man with two children aged under 11 years would pay on annual earnings of (1) £8,000, (2) £10,000, (3) £12,000 and (4) £14,000 if the tax rate were raised by *(a)* 5p, *(b)* 7½p or *(c)* 10p.

Mr. Lilley: Information is in the tables. The figures reflect independent taxation and the levels of allowances and thresholds announced in the 1990 Budget. Estimates in table 1 are based on a projection of the 1987-88 survey of personal incomes and are provisional. They do not take account of the consequential effects on capital gains tax.

Table 1: Revenue yield in a full year of increases in the basic and higher rates of income tax, at 1990-91 levels of income

Increase in basic and higher rates	*Yield (£ billion)*
(a) 5 pence on both	10·2
(b) 7½ pence on both	15·4
(c) 10 pence on both	20·5

Table 2: Increase in tax liability for 1990-91 of married man[1]—£1 per year

Earnings	*Increase in both basic and higher rates[2] of income tax:*		
	5 pence	*7½ pence*	*10 pence*
8,000	163·75	245·63	327·50
10,000	263·75	395·63	527·50
12,000	363·75	545·63	727·50
14,000	463·75	695·63	927·50

[1] Calculations assume that the married man has no other forms of income and that he does not receive any tax allowances or reliefs other than the personal allowance plus the married couple's allowance. Child benefit is not affected by the proposed tax changes.

[2] At the levels of earnings given, higher rate tax would not apply.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of all those state benefits and payments which are taxable, giving the number of tax units paying tax and the amount of revenue gained for each benefit or payment for the latest available year together with the date at which the benefit or payment first became taxable.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 5 March 1990]:* I regret the delay in replying. The table lists the benefits liable to tax with the date from which they became taxable together with provisional estimates, where available, of the number of single people and married couples liable to income tax in receipt of each benefit for the whole or part of 1989-90. Table 9·6 of the 1989 edition of "United Kingdom National Accounts" (the CSO Blue Book) provides an estimate of income tax attributable in total to these benefits, applying the recipients' average rate of income tax on the whole of their income to the amount of benefit received.

Taxable Benefit	*Date from which taxable*	*Taxpayers receiving benefit in 1989-90 (thousands)*
Industrial death benefit	pre 1950	n.a.[6]
Retirement pension	pre 1950	2,750
Widow's benefit	pre 1950	250
Old person's pension	[2]1970	n.a.[6]
Invalid care allowance	[3]1976	n.a.[6]
Job Release allowance	[4]1977	n.a.[6]
Income support[1]	[3]1982	750
Unemployment benefit	[3]1982	1,250
Statutory sick pay	[5]1983	2,500
Statutory maternity pay	[5]1987	n.a.[6]

[1] Formerly supplementary benefit.

[2] 2 November.

[3] 5 July.

[4] 3 January.

[5] 6 April.

[6] Not available.

Corporation Tax

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the corporation tax figures for each Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development country and other major economic countries; and if he will express the figures as a percentage of gross domestic product.

Mr. Lilley: Corporation tax statistics for OECD countries, including taxes on corporate income expressed as a percentage of gross domestic product, are given in "Revenue Statistics of OECD Member Countries 1964-1988", which is available in the Library. Statistics for other countries could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mortgages

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, further to his written reply dated 20 February concerning the amount of mortgage interest payable each year since 1979 whether his figures were end-year or average, and after payment of mortgage interest relief; whether he will publish in the *Official Report* his estimate of the average mortgages outstanding in each year and the amount of interest paid before relief; and if he will add an estimate for 1989.

Mr. Lilley: The figures for mortgage interest as a percentage of person disposable income and of consumers' expenditure given in reply to the hon. Member on 20 February at columns *688-89* were averages for the years and were calculated on the basis of payments gross of mortgage interest relief. As regards the amounts of interest payable before relief in these years, I would refer the hon. Member to the mortgage interest figures which were included in the reply that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary gave on 19 February to another question by the hon. Member at columns *524-25*, which were on this basis. Estimates of average mortgages outstanding in the years 1979-1988 are as follows:

	£ billion
1979	42·1
1980	48·9
1981	57·5
1982	69·1
1983	84·2
1984	100·1
1985	117·7
1986	140·2
1987	168·4
1988	204·4

It is not yet possible to provide estimates of mortgage interest payable and average mortgages outstanding during 1989.

Nationalised Industries

Mr. Adley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the external financing limits for each of the nationalised industries for the last three, the current, and the next three years; and what percentage this represents, for each industry, of the public sector borrowing requirement.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 19 March 1990]:* The external finance limits for nationalised industries for 1986-87 to 1992-93 are set out in table 21.5.1 of the Government's Expenditure Plans 1990-91 to 1992-93 (Cm. 1021). The public sector borrowing requirement is set out in the Financial Statement and Budget Report (HC 286).

I regret that it is not meaningful to express public expenditure provision for a particular nationalised industry as a percentage of the public sector borrowing requirement.

Independent Taxation

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give figures for the total number of married couples in each income group consistent with the answer to the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury on 1 March, *Official Report*, column *268*; and if he will give figures for the proportion of each income group which will *(a)* gain as a result of the proposals for independent taxation and *(b)* receive transitional relief because of the proposals for independent taxation.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 22 March 1990]:* Information is given in the table. These estimates update the figures given in reply to the previous question to allow for the levels of income tax allowances and thresholds announced in the 1990 Budget and more up-to-date information on income. The new estimates are based on a projection of the 1987-88 survey of personal incomes and are provisional.

Independent Taxation 1990-91

Total income of married couple	*Married couples*[1]	*Married couples*[2]	*Total number of married couples liable to tax before independent taxation*	*Proportion of married couples liable to tax before independent taxation*	
				(a) gain under independent taxation	*(b) receive transitional relief*
£'000s	*'000s*	*'000s*	*'000s*	*Percentage*	*Percentage*
0-5	—	—	20	0·00	10·00
5-10	410	180	1,150	36·00	9·00
10-15	520	520	2,330	22·00	4·00
15-20	400	620	2,550	16·00	1·00
20-25	240	420	1,770	14·00	[3]—
25-30	210	300	1,040	20·00	[3]—
Over 30	1,570	1,080	1,850	85·00	[3]—
All ranges	3,350	3,120	10,710	31·00	2·00

[1] With a reduction in the combined income tax liability on their respective incomes. Makes no allowance for possible behavioural changes or the effect on Capital Gains Tax receipts.

[2] Who could reduce their income tax liability by transferring income bearing assets from husband to wife or vice versa.

[3] Less than 0·5 per cent.

Taxation

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish, using 1989-90 price and income levels, the effect on take-home pay of the changes in income tax and national insurance contributions since 1979 for *(a)* a single person, *(b)* a married man, and *(c)* a married man with two children in each case with a £30,000 mortgage at gross earnings levels of (i) £12,000, (ii) £18,000, (iii) £24,000, (iv) £30,000, (v) £36,000 and (vi) £42,000.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* The information is in the table which shows the additional liability to income tax and national insurance contributions in 1989-90 if the 1978-79 regimes had been indexed for inflation and applied to the individuals specified.

Increase in 1989-90 in income tax and national insurance contributions under 1978-79 indexed regimes

Earnings £ per annum	*Single person £ per annum*	*Married man £ per annum*
12,000	289·22	267·62
18,000	477·72	456·12
24,000	957·72	936·12
30,000	1,585·32	1,637·07
36,000	2,395·82	2,315·57
42,000	3,738·57	3,549·07

Note

Calculations assume no other source of income; no reliefs or allowances other than relief on interest at 13·9 per cent. on a £30,000 mortgage and the appropriate personal allowance; and the post-October 1989 NIC rates. Child tax allowances in 1978-79 excluded from the calculations as they were being phased out.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will construct an index with 1978-79 equalling 100 of the changes in the level of the income tax and national insurance contributions for each subsequent year for a taxpayer on *(a)* half, *(b)* two thirds, *(c)* average, *(d)* five times average and 10 times average earnings for households where the taxpayer is (i) single, (ii) married and (iii) married with two children, in each case assuming the wife does not work.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* Figures for income tax and national insurance contributions for 1978-79 to 1987-88 have been placed in the Library of the House, as noted in the *Official Report*, 13 April 1989, col. 620. Figures for 1988-89 and 1989-90 were given in reply to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) on 8 January 1990, *Official Report*, columns 559-64.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish, using 1989-90 price and income levels, the effect on take-home pay of the changes in income tax and national insurance contributions since 1979 for *(a)* a single person, *(b)* a married man and *(c)* a married man with two children earning £6,000 per annum with no mortgage.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* If the 1978-79 income tax and national insurance regimes had been indexed for inflation and applied in 1989-90 to people earning £6,000 per annum, a single person would pay £292·82 more and a married man would pay £271·22 more. As child tax allowances were being phased out in 1978-79, they have been excluded from the comparison. The calculations assume no other forms of income and no reliefs or allowances other than the personal allowance (single or married, as appropriate), and the post-October 1989 rates of national insurance.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated yield from all sources of taxation including excise duties for 1990-91; what the comparable yield in 1978-79 was revalued at 1990-91 levels; and if he will provide a breakdown of categories used.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* Total taxes on income, capital and expenditure and the community charge are forecast to yield £170·2 billion in 1990-91. The comparable figure for 1978-79 is £120·1 billion at 1990-91 prices.

Retail Prices Index

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what grounds it was decided *(a)* to exclude the cost of credit and *(b)* to include mortgage interest in the retail prices index.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* The cost of credit has never been included in the RPI, following successive recommendations of the retail prices index advisory committee which were reaffirmed in a report submitted by the committee in 1986 (published as Cmnd. 9848).

The inclusion of mortgage interest payments in the RPI follows recommendations in a report submitted by the advisory committee in 1974 (published as Cmnd. 5905). The committee examined this question again in 1986 and confirmed that mortgage interest payments should continue to be included as a proxy for owner-occupiers' housing costs.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what grounds it was decided *(a)* to exclude financial services and *(b)* to include property insurance in the retail prices index.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* Both financial services and property insurance are covered by the retail prices index. The treatment of the former raises certain conceptual and practical problems which are currently being considered by the retail prices index advisory committee and any recommendations which the committee makes will be laid before Parliament in due course.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what grounds it was decided *(a)* to include the community charge and *(b)* to exclude income tax from the retail prices index.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* The inclusion of the community charge follows recommendations made by the retail prices index advisory committee in a report submitted last year, which also accepted that income tax should continue to be excluded. I refer the hon. Member to that report (published as Cm. 644) which sets out the arguments very fully.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what grounds it was decided to exclude holiday expenditure from the retail prices index.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* Holiday expenditure has never been covered by the retail prices index because of difficulties in measuring price changes satisfactorily. The RPI advisory committee recommended in a report submitted in 1986 (published as Cmnd 9848) that it should be brought into the index but recognised that, before this could be done, further work would be needed to resolve some conceptual and technical problems. The Central Statistical Office is about to report back to the committee on the progress of this work and the committee's conclusions will be laid before Parliament in due course.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what grounds it was decided to exclude the price of houses from the retail prices index.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* House prices do figure in the retail prices index indirectly in that they affect the size of the morgage debt and thus the level of mortgage interest payments. In a report submitted in 1986 the RPI advisory committee considered the possibility of incorporating house prices into the index in their own right but this suggestion was rejected by the committee. I refer the hon. Member to paragraph 114 of the report (published as Cmnd 9848), which sets out the arguments very fully.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made, since the National Audit Office examination of the retail price index, with production of a technical manual incorporating detailed operational objectives for the index and with developing ways of establishing a suitable measure or measures of the statistical reliability of the index and of prioritising potential improvements to the retail prices index system.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* Progress made on these matters since the National Audit Office's examination will be reported by the departmental accounting officers concerned to the Public Accounts Committee on 28 March and I would not wish to anticipate that hearing.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Brent Magistrates Court

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement about the failure of the Crown prosecution service to be represented in a magistrates court in Brent on 15 March.

The Attorney-General: I take the question to refer to the events which occurred on Saturday 17 March. I very much regret the circumstances which arose at Brent magistrates court on that day when there was no representation for the Crown prosecution service. The Director of Public Prosecutions immediately instituted a thorough investigation. An arrangement was made by a member of the CPS staff for a barrister agent to attend Brent magistrates court on that occasion. The arrangement was made in the week commencing 26 February at the same time as arrangements were made for that barrister additionally to cover courts on 3, 10 and 31 March. The barrister in question maintains that he was booked for only one date in March, that being the 31. The issue is not capable of objective resolution, but it is established that he did duly attend court both on the 3rd and the 10th.

On learning of the situation, police officers at Brent magistrates court attempted to contact the Crown prosecution service but the court dismissed the case at approximately 10.40 am. The Director of Public Prosecution has taken steps to ensure that such a situation shall not recur. A revised system has been put in place at the branch in question whereby all such arrangements are confirmed in writing and checked on the preceding afternoon, and whereby there are effective contingency procedures to deal with the situation where a prosecutor, for whatever reason, unexpectedly fails to attend. The field director for operations in the CPS has circulated every CPS area in the country requiring that all such systems be reviewed and tested.

Ashley Gardiner

Mr. Alton: To ask the Attorney-General if he will detail the procedures used by the Crown prosecution service to determine the charges brought in the case of the death of Ashley Gardiner.

The Attorney-General: The charges brought against Mark Wenham were formulated by the branch Crown prosecutor after careful consideration of a full and detailed report submitted by the Merseyside police. He preferred the charges with the full knowledge and approval of his chief Crown prosecutor. I am satisfied that, in the circumstances of this sad case, no other charge was available.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Attorney-General if he will give the reasons why the Crown prosecution service did not bring a charge of causing death by reckless driving in the case of the death of Ashley Gardiner.

The Attorney-General: The facts of this sad case did not, as a matter of law, disclose the commission of an offence of causing death by reckless driving. The decision to proceed on charges of reckless driving and excess alcohol reflected the only course open to the Crown prosecution service.

ENVIRONMENT

Coastal Protection

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the sources of grant aid available from his Department for work on coastal protection and sea defences; including details of the sums of money to be paid during 1989-90 and 1990-91.

Mr. Chope: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to him on 7 March by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food at column 712.

Advertising Expenditure

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total publicity and advertising expenditure, including for privatisation, of his Department and public bodies for which his Department has responsibility in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1989.

Mr. Chris Patten: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which I gave to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on 13 March at column *191* in respect of publicity expenditure by my Department. Information on expenditure by non-departmental public bodies is published in their annual reports but is not held centrally in the form requested.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby of 19 March, how he calculates the figures of *(a)* £9 and *(b)* £5.

Mr. Chope: The figures are calculated by applying the appropriate monetary weights given in paragraph 3.29 of the revenue support grant distribution report (England) to the values of the specified indicators for Humberside, multiplying the result by the appropriate scaling factor for fire and expressing the result as an amount per relevant adult (rounded to the nearest £1).

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the amounts received by each district and borough in Cambridgeshire from *(a)* the commercial rate in 1989-90 and *(b)* the unified business rate in 1990-91.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* The amounts received from the commercial rate in 1989-90 and the unified business rate in 1990-91 are shown in the table.

Non-domestic rate yield

	1989-90 *£ million*
Cambridge	34·8
East Cambridgeshire	5·6
Fenland	9·8
Huntingdonshire	18·4
Peterborough	35·4
South Cambridgeshire	15·9

Business rate income (£292·51 per adult)

	1990-91 *£ million*
Cambridge	21·7
East Cambridgeshire	13·2
Fenland	16·5
Huntingdonshire	16·5
Peterborough	32·5
South Cambridgeshire	26·0

Note: The figures shown are not comparable due to changes in the system of local government finance, in particular changes in the way Revenue Support Grant is distributed and in the pattern of precepting by the county council.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what minimum residence period in a financial year has been established by the community charge registration officer for the payment of poll tax in each local authority for people with a residence but who normally work abroad for most of the year.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* No minimum residence period has been prescribed for the purposes of establishing whether a person is solely or mainly resident in a charging authority's area. It is for the community charge registration officer to consider each case on its merits.

South Yorkshire Fire Authority

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his reply of 12 March, to the hon. Member for Don Valley, *Official Report*, column *92*, what was the result of the representations made to him by the South Yorkshire fire and civil defence authority in respect of its financial situation for the year 1990-91; and what conclusion was reached over the local authority grant settlement.

Mr. Chope: The representations from the South Yorkshire fire and civil defence authority, together with all other representations, were considered carefully by my right hon. Friend before he finalised the details of the settlement for 1990-91. The conclusions reached are set out in the revenue support grant distribution report (England) approved by this House on 18 January.

Rateable Values (Revaluation)

Sir George Young: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out the average rateable value for *(a)* commercial and *(b)* industrial premises in each London borough following revaluation, together with the average figure for each category prior to revaluation; and what is the percentage increase as a result of the 1989 revaluation.

Mr. David Hunt: The available information has been placed in the Library. As a result of the revaluation, non-domestic rateable values in England will increase by an average 8·1 times. This was taken into account when fixing the 1990-91 rate poundage at 34·8p.

Revenue Support Grant

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the result for Humberside of applying the formulae to indicators in paragraph 3.7 (primary education), before the result is then scaled to the control total, with reference to paragraphs 3.3 and 3.7 of the revenue support grant distribution report (England).

Mr. Chope: The standard spending assessment for primary education for Humberside, before scaling to the control total, is £96,104,927.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the sum across all relevant authorities of the results of applying the formula to their indicator data for paragraph 3.7 (primary education), with reference to paragraph 3.3 and 3.7 of the revenue support grant distribution report (England).

Mr. Chope: The sum of the standard spending assessments for primary education, for all relevant authorities, before scaling to the national total is £5,091,312,178.

Disabled People (Housing)

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many disabled people were accepted by local authorities in England and Wales as priority homeless because of physical disability in each year from 1979 to 1989, respectively.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Estimates of the numbers of households accepted by English local authorities as homeless and in priority need because of physical disability are as follows:

	Number
1979	1,100
1980	1,200
1981	1,600
1982	2,000
1983	1,700
1984	2,200
1985	2,700
1986	2,900
1987	2,900
1988	3,000
1989	3,200

However, because of changes in the reporting system in 1980 and 1982, figures for the earlier years are not strictly comparable with those since 1983.

For information about Welsh authorities I refer my hon. Friend to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Nuclear Safety (France)

Mr. Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will meet the chief inspector for nuclear safety at Electricité de France to discuss safety at French nuclear power stations and the implications for the United Kingdom as a whole and for Kent; and if he will describe the warning and emergency procedures that would be followed in the event of a serious incident occurring at one of these power stations.

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. Friend has no plans to meet the chief inspector for nuclear safety at Electricité de France. I understand that the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate has continuing contact with the French nuclear safety regulatory authority—Service Central de Sureté des Installations Nuclearies (SCSIN). Current contingency plans for overseas nuclear accidents are set out in the HMSO booklet "The National Response Plan and Radioactive Incident Monitoring Network (RIMNET). Phase 1", a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Common Land

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 27 November, *Official Report*, column *89*, to the hon. Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) when he intends to announce the Government's intentions on common land legislation.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend expects to make an announcement within the next few weeks.

World Student Games

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has considered an application for an exhibition relating to the 1991 world student games in Sheffield to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Moynihan: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Services Committee, arrangements have been made with the authorities of the House for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from Monday 23 April to Friday 27 April.

Radiation Detectors

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by location *(a)* the chain of radiation detectors set up after the Chernobyl accident and *(b)* those that are still operative.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The location of the monitoring stations in the national radiation monitoring network, RIMNET, are listed in the HMSO booklet "The National Response Plan and Radioactive Incident Monitoring Network (RIMNET). Phase 1", a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House. They are all operating.

Housing Corporations

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment why the Housing Corporation is delaying cash allocations in 1990-91.

Mr. Chope: The Housing Corporation is currently discussing draft allocations with housing associations. I understand that the corporation expects to make a formal statement of allocations at about the end of April and subsequently to set cash planning targets for associations.

Bathing Water

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to introduce a system to alert members of the public to the failed status of a beach in respect of bathing water standards.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: It is for local authorities to issue advice in respect of bathing water quality. We are considering with the National Rivers Authority and the Department of Health whether it would be appropriate to give guidance to local authorities.

Environment

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Environment Council on 22 March.

Mr. Chris Patten: I represented the United Kingdom at this meeting.

Agreement was reached, subject to final confirmation by the Federal Republic of Germany, on a directive on the freedom of access to environmental information. This is a principle which has been consistently promoted by the United Kingdom, and which is strongly reflected in the Environmental Protection Bill currently before Parliament. I was therefore particularly pleased that agreement was reached on a measure which has great significance for public accountability and for the environment across Europe. The directive requires member states to provide the public with access to environmental information held by all public authorities with environmental responsibilities, while setting out certain categories of information whose confidentiality may be protected where necessary. It also provides for the dissemination to the public of general information on the environment.

The Council concluded agreement on two directives on the contained use and the deliberate release of genetically modified micro-organisms. These directives establish a Communitywide system for regulating operations involving genetic modification. They are broadly compatible with United Kingdom legislation relating to human health and safety, and with proposals in part VI of the Environmental Protection Bill. They are also in line with the recommendations of the Royal Commission on environmental pollution in its 13th report. The system established under these directives will secure a high level of environmental protection, while providing stable arrangements for the development of the biotechnology industry in the United Kingdom and in Europe as a whole.

Agreement was also concluded on a regulation establishing a European Environment Agency responsible for the collection, co-ordination and analysis of environmental information. The Council considered and agreed amendments submitted by the European Commission reflecting opinions expressed by the European Parliament. In particular, it was agreed that the work programme of the agency would be reviewed after two years of operation. The location of the headquarters of the agency will be decided separately.

A useful discussion took place on the development of a Community policy on global climate change. Ministers considered an informal Commission paper on this subject, but there was widespread recognition that further work was urgently needed. I was able to make a number of specific suggestions for positive action by the Community which would assist reductions in carbon dioxide emissions. The Commission was invited by the presidency to undertake further consideration of these issues.

The Council heard a progress report from the Commission on negotiations towards the revision of the Montreal protocol on substances which deplete the ozone layer. I urged the Commission to maintain the Community's case for the fastest possible phase-out of CFCs, and to consider further improvements to the Community's position on other ozone-depleting chemicals.

I warmly welcomed a draft Council resolution setting out a strategy and principles for the Community's policy on waste. The resolution, which was adopted, includes commitments to waste minimisation and recycling, together with the aim of self-sufficiency of member states in waste disposal. It will provide the framework within which a number of new directives on waste will be brought forward in the near future.

I also welcomed the Commission's recent proposals for a consolidated directive on car emissions, which received a generally favourable reaction in a first exchange of views.

Ministers again reviewed progress on a draft directive concerning water pollution by nitrate from diffuse sources, which was remitted for further discussion. A proposal to establish a committee to review and amend technical details of certain existing directives on water quality was also discussed and received United Kingdom support.

I took the opportunity to urge the Commission to bring forward new proposals containing tough controls of emissions from lorry and other diesel engines in line with the United States 1994 standard, the strictest in any current legislation. In addition, I asked the Commission to come forward quickly with proposals on the incineration of toxic and dangerous wastes which will ensure that the highest standards of design and operation, reflecting state of the art technology, are applied throughout the Community.

Sewage Sludge

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has made an assessment of the levels of *(a)* metals and *(b)* harmful micro-organisms present in unpasteurised sewage sludge used as fertiliser; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 23 March 1990]:* The levels of metals in sewage sludge vary depending upon local circumstances. When sludge is used in agriculture, producers must ensure that the metal concentrations in the soil resulting from use of sludge do not exceed the limits specified in the Sludge (Use in Agriculture) Regulations 1989 (SI No. 1263). Detailed records have to be maintained by the sludge producer and made available to Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution, which is responsible for enforcement of the regulations. The regulations also require that sludge is treated before use to reduce its fermentability and content of pathogenic organisms. Advice on acceptable sludge treatment methods is contained in the code of practice for agricultural use of sewage sludge published by the Department in 1989.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of sewage sludge is pasteurised before final disposal; what action he is taking to increase this percentage; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 23 March 1990]:* Apart from one small pilot installation in Yorkshire, there are no operational sludge pasteurisation plants in the United Kingdom. This process is not used to any great extent elsewhere in other countries and we have no plans to require more extensive use here.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to extract plastic waste from sewage sludge; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 23 March 1990]:* It is a condition of licences for the disposal of sewage sludge at sea that non-degradable materials such as plastics must be removed before disposal. Enforcement is a matter for the licensing authorities.

The code of practice for agricultural use of sewage sludge also recommends that non-degradable material should be removed from sludge before spreading on the land. Sludge producers find it essential in any event to screen out such materials to ensure efficient operation of sludge stabilisation processes.

Tyres

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what official guidance exists for those seeking to dispose of redundant tyres; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 23 March 1990]:* My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs is expecting to receive very shortly a report from KPMG Peat Marwick identifying ways of reducing the volume of scrapped vehicle tyres and increasing resource recovery. When he receives the report, a working party will be set up with industry, local authority and voluntary group representation, to draw up an action plan. The plan will cover what guidance is necessary for those seeking to dispose of redundant tyres.

Leeds Development Corporation

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, further to his reply of 12 March, if he will list the site of the 40 display signs purchased and erected by the Leeds development corporation, the cost of each sign and the details of competitive tendering in relation to the erection of each sign.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* A single contract for making and erecting all the signs was let by competition to the cheapest tenderer. The costs for individual signs are not therefore available.

I will write to the hon. Member with the details of the location of all the signs currently in place.

Local Government Finance (Rebates)

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much it would cost to give full exemption to all non-employed status YTS trainees with special training needs endorsements from paying the community charge.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will estimate the cost of exempting all non-employed status YTS trainees with special training needs endorsements from paying the rebated poll tax.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* I refer the hon. Members to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities to the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley), and the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) on 19 March 1990, at column *482*.

Riverside Works, Chartham

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he has received against application CA 897798/CHA for gravel extraction at the water meadow site next to Riverside at Chartham; and if he has any plans to call in the application.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* Seven representations have been received by my Department. Kent county council granted planning permission for this application on 13 March 1990. Call-in, therefore, is not now an option open to the Secretary of State.

Pesticides

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the amount of pesticides which enter rivers each year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* Surveys were undertaken in 1989 to identify the concentrations in rivers of their pesticides included on the red list of substances most dangerous to water. Results of the surveys are expected shortly. Further monitoring for these substances will be undertaken this year as part of a Paris Commission comprehensive survey of riverine inputs, in which all signatories of the Paris convention are participating.

ENERGY

Electricity Prices

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the average rise in the price of electricity between February 1974 and June 1979; what were the price increases since June 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: From the first quarter of 1974 to the second quarter of 1979, domestic electricity prices increased by 171 per cent., and industrial prices by 131 per cent. The average annual increase over this period was therefore 21 per cent. for domestic customers and 17 per cent., for industrial customers. The equivalent average annual increases since the second quarter of 1979 have been 8 per cent. for domestic customers (for the period up to the fourth quarter 1989) and 7 per cent. for industrial customers (for the period up to the third quarter of 1989).

European Commissioner (Meeting)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will place in the Library a copy of the minutes of his meeting of 12 March with the European Commissioner responsible for competition.

Mr. Wakeham: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) on Monday 26 March at column 5.

Coal Mines

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) how many licensed underground coal mines not owned and operated by British Coal are working by county *(a)* in England, *(b)* in Wales and *(c)* in Scotland; (2) what is the average size, in terms of coal output and manpower, of licensed underground coal mines working by county *(a)* in England, *(b)* in Wales and *(c)* in Scotland.

Mr. Baldry: These are matters for the British Coal Corporation as the licensing authority.

Coal Imports

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what are the annual tonnages by port of coal imported from non-United Kingdom sources in 1987, 1988, 1989 and 1990 *(a)* in England, *(b)* in Wales and *(c)* in Scotland.

Mr. Baldry: The latest available information on coal imports is as follows:

[1] Thousand tonnes

Port[2]	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*[3] January 1990*
(a) England				
Middlesbrough	2,501	2,570	2,812	329
Immingham	669	999	1,268	214
London (including Tilbury)	538	743	782	167
Medway	556	565	652	1
Trent	335	386	338	24
Sunderland	198	418	287	21
Liverpool	65	31	286	3
Goole	236	286	109	5
Avonmouth	60	86	103	—
Hartlepool	354	314	89	26
King's Lynn	117	117	88	5
Portsmouth	59	92	74	—
Colchester	91	71	63	—
Grimsby	—	88	11	—
Others	158	164	197	4
Total England	5,938	6,931	7,159	798
(b) Wales				
Port Talbot	1,958	1,997	2,610	174
Cardiff	222	294	229	48
Newport (Gwent)	5	116	135	22
Swansea	—	92	134	15
Others	—	—	3	—
Total Wales	2,184	2,499	3,111	260
(c) Scotland				
Greenock	1,216	1,164	1,162	90
Glasgow	46	204	140	—
Grangemouth	40	276	118	3
Inverness (including Wick)	31	85	17	9
Leith (including Granton)	4	84	23	1
Others	36	84	68	5
Total Scotland	1,373	1,896	1,529	107

Source:

Her Majesty's Customs & Excise (port of entry basis).

[1] Figures are rounded independently and totals may therefore differ from the sum of their constituent parts.

[2] Customs trade ports through which imports have been 50,000 tonnes or more in any year.

[3] Figures for the whole of 1990 are not available.

Low-sulphur Coal

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his latest estimate of accessible reserves of low-sulphur coal in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, and *(c)* Scotland; and if he will list by name the (i) deep mines and (ii) opencast mines which have access to these reserves.

Mr. Baldry: Estimates of coal reserves, and their recoverability, are the responsibility of the British Coal Corporation. The Department does not make such estimates.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is, by analysis, the current definition of low-sulphur coal of the sort to be burnt as an alternative to the retro-fitting of desulphurisation technology at United Kingdom power stations.

Mr. Baldry: The Government are determined to implement in full the EC large combustion plants directive. This directive commits the United Kingdom to reduce its emissions of sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxides from existing plants, such as fossil fuelled power stations, but does not specify the means by which this has to be done. Decisions by the electricity generators to retrofit flue gas desulphurisation equipment to some power stations will play an important part. However, the burning of coal with a lower sulphur content than the average for that mined in the United Kingdom is also likely to contribute towards meeting this directive. The origin and composition of the coal to be used would be a matter for the generators to determine. Greater use of natural gas will also have a role to play.

Coal Mines (Employment Numbers)

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy why the upper limit on numbers of men employed in non-British Coal deep mines is 150.

Mr. Baldry: The new 150 manpower limit on men who may be employed to work underground in licensed deep mines will enable greater investment to be made in modern mining equipment and techniques, and should lead to improved productivity and safety. The new limit is well below the manpower levels of British Coal's smallest pits and has been carefully chosen to fill a gap in the exploitation and development of reserves of coal, particularly coals in short supply, that can be economically and safely worked by private mines on this new scale.

Nuclear Electric plc

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to his written answer of 6 March, *Official Report*, column *566*, whether he now proposes to give to Nuclear Electric plc the letter of comfort in respect of its liabilities as described in the departmental minute laid before the House on that date.

Mr. Wakeham: A departmental minute was laid before the House on 6 March, describing the nature of the assurance I intend to provide to Nuclear Electric plc. That minute has now been before the House for more than the required period of 14 sitting days. I have considered all the representations made. I remain satisfied that I should give assurance to Nuclear Electric plc in respect of the types of liability outlined in the minute. I will be writing today to the company to provide this assurance. As the departmental minute makes clear, the extent of the commitment entered into by giving such an assurance is constrained by the statutory limit of £1 billion set out in schedule 12 to the Electricity Act 1889. Commitment beyond this limit will be possible only with the approval of the House.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Stationery

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make available House of Commons headed stationery, compliments slips, etc. for hon. Members' use, printed bilingually in Welsh and English.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: There has so far been no significant demand for this, but if hon. Members wish to have a service of this kind I will investigate what can be done.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Zimbabwe

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the level of assistance to Zimbabwe.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Member to the answers given to him on 24 July 1989 column *454* and 4 December 1989, column *9*, to which I have nothing further to add.

Cambodia

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make public the findings of the diplomatic mission which visited Cambodia in late 1989.

Mrs. Chalker: The main conclusions of the British mission to Cambodia last December have been passed on to interested non-governmental organisations in Britain. The report itself is an internal working document. I announced on 8 January column *702* the approach that we shall be taking to assistance for Cambodians as a result of the mission.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will propose to his European Community colleagues the establishment of an European Economic Community assessment mission to be sent to Cambodia.

Mrs. Chalker: EC Commissioner Matutes made a visit to the region in January. An EC Indo-China refugee co-ordinator will be appointed to monitor the situation and EC involvement throughout the region. The EC also plans to increase its humanitarian assistance programmes for Cambodians, channelling funds through non-governmental organisations.

European Investment Bank

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the total debt owed by developing countries to the European investment bank; whether any debt has so far been written-off; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: At the end of 1989, the total debt owed to the European investment bank by developing countries in the Mediterranean region was 998 million ecu, around £730 million; and that owed by African, Caribbean and Pacific countries was 630 million ecu, around £460 million. None of this debt, which arises from loans from the bank's own resources, has been written off.

European Development Fund

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the total debt owed by developing countries to the European development fund of the European Community; whether any debt has so far been written off; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: I understand that the European authorities do not keep readily available information on current levels of outstanding European development fund debt. The Council of Ministers has not taken any decisions to write off such debt.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

EC Synergy Agreement

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will list the data bases and other sources of information held by the Government which will be covered by the European Community synergy agreement; and what steps are being taken to harmonise and publicise the conditions for access;

(2) if he will make it his policy to comply with clause 19 of the synergy agreement to ensure that any pre-existing citizens' rights of access to the original information as determined by legislation are preserved; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what guidelines he has compiled defining the conditions for the release and exploitation of public sector data and information, under the European Community synergy agreement; and how he proposes to publicise these;

(4) which public departments and bodies in the United Kingdom are included in the 1989 European Community's agreement on guidelines for improving the synergy between public and private sectors in the information market; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: Tradeable information guidelines were issued in 1986 by my Department for use by all Government Departments and these apply to all Government-held information in electronic form. The guidelines are fully consistent with the European Commission's "Guidelines for improving the synergy between the private and public sectors in the information market", published in 1989, and do not affect Departments' statutory obligations.

The tradeable information guidelines are made available to the private sector by my Department and are also publicised by the Confederation of Information Communication Industries.

Company Accounts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what are the checks which Companies house staff perform upon receipt of the annual company accounts.

Mr. Redwood: I refer the hon. Member to the written reply I gave to his similar question on 14 March at column *304*.

Audit Policy

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the auditing standards and guidelines to which his representative on the Auditing Practices Committee has *(a)* objected and *(b)* assented.

Mr. Redwood: The Department's representative does not have a vote. He naturally discusses a wide range of matters, presenting the Department's viewpoint on the normal terms of committee confidence.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether auditors are under any statutory duty to search for and evaluate evidence relating to the applicability of the going concern concept.

Mr. Redwood: The duties of auditors under the Companies Act are set out in sections 236 and 237 of the Companies Act 1985. It is a basic accounting principle (set out in paragraph 10 of schedule 4 to the Act) that there is a presumption that a reporting company is carrying on business as a going concern. If the accounts are drawn up on that basis but the auditor finds that the audit evidence does not justify that presumption he should report appropriately.

Property Reforms, USSR

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his assessment of the impact of the recent reforms of property rights in the Soviet Union on joint ventures between firms in the United Kingdom and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Mr. Redwood: The new law on property ownership in the Soviet Union, which is due to come into force on 1 July, opens up the possibility of foreign ownership of Soviet enterprises, either independently or through joint ventures. This will, however, be subject to further legislation, currently in draft and not expected to be published before next year, which will consolidate and revise the law on the general status of foreign ownership in the Soviet Union.

In principle, this will help British companies to invest in the Soviet Union, by putting such investments into a proper legal framework. Business will also need to weigh other risk factors, including hard currency, which will still make it difficult to repatriate profits earned in the Soviet market.

GATT

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he last met the High Commissioners of Canada, New Zealand and Australia to discuss the progress of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade negotiations in Geneva, with particular reference to agricultural trade; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Ministers and officials in my Department have had a number of recent discussions about the GATT negotiations with representatives of Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and the high commissioners or members of their staff have been present at several of these. The discussions have included agricultural trade.

Consolidated Sterling Deposits

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what investigations are currently taking place on the activities of Consolidated Sterling Deposits; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Consolidated sterling deposits is based in the United States of America and appears to be outside the scope of my Department's investigatory powers. My Department understands that there have been investments in this fund through the medium of Hamilton House Associates Limited, a United Kingdom investment company which was suspended by Fimbra in January 1990.

European Space Agency

Mr. Michael Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what stance the Government are adopting towards the new telecommunications programme of the European Space Agency.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom informed the council of the ESA on 21 March that it would be participating in the agency's proposed satellite communications programme. This would involve a commitment of £32 million over the coming years. Some of the other member states of ESA have still to announce their level of participation. But the programme is expected to commence shortly.

Innovation Advisory Board

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will publish the first report of his Department's Innovation Advisory Board.

Mr. Ridley: In its first 15 months the Innovation Advisory Board has focused on particular issues concerning the United Kindom's performance on innovation. Its work on two of these topics, "Innovation and Growth", and "Innovation: City Attitudes and Practices", will be published for a conference on innovation and short-termism planned for 25 June this year.

Companies Act (Disclosure Provisions)

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will bring into force the provisions of the Companies Act 1989 on the disclosure of interests in shares.

Mr. Redwood: On Friday 23 March I signed an order to commence subsections (1), (2), (3), (5) and (6) of section 134 of the Companies Act 1989. These provisions will come into effect on 31 May 1990. From that date, the notifiable percentage for disclosure of interests in shares of public companies under part VI of the Companies Act 1985 will be lowered from 5 per cent. to 3 per cent. and the period allowed for disclosure will be reduced from five to two business days. The order also states that, where an existing interest of between 3 per cent. and 5 per cent. becomes notifiable by virtue of the coming into force of section 134(2), the person holding the interest comes under an obligation to disclose when he is or becomes aware that he has such an interest, and he must notify the company within the new period for disclosure, that is, two business days.

No regulations under subsection (5) and (6) are being made at the present time.

I have placed a copy of the order in the Library.

Used Postage Stamps

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will institute an inquiry into the fraudulent treatment and resale of used postage stamps; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* This is an operational matter for the Post Office which keeps such issues under constant review. I refer the honourable and learned Member to the written reply I gave in the House on 13 March to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley).

Rover Sale

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has received full payment from British Aerospace for the purchase of Rover.

Mr. Ridley *[holding answer 12 March 1990]:* The consideration for the Government shareholding in the Rover Group has not yet been received from British Aerospace. I expect it to be paid on 30 March 1990.

Coto Doñana National Park, Spain

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, of 5 March, *Official Report*, column *407*, what information he has on the level of United Kingdom investment in the Coto Doñana tourist development and associated projects.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 16 March 1990]:* I understand that there are some unconfirmed reports of United Kingdom investment in the Costa Doñana tourist development and associated projects. However, I have no official information, nor do I have any details to connect to the unconfirmed reports.

Export Representative Service

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the rate of usage by businesses of the export representative service in the case of *(a)* the United States of America, *(b)* Canada and *(c)* West Germany for each month from September 1988 to date.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 21 March 1990]:* Usage by businesses of the export representative service has been:

	United States of America	*Canada*	*West Germany*
September 1988	1	—	3
October 1988	1	—	3
November 1988	—	—	—
December 1988	—	—	—
January 1989	—	—	4
February 1989	1	—	3
March 1989	4	1	8
April 1989	1	1	3
May 1989	1	—	1
June 1989	2	2	1
July 1989	5	1	6
August 1989	6	—	7
September 1989	6	2	4
October 1989	4	1	8
November 1989	1	2	4
December 1989	9	—	—
January 1990	10	1	7
February 1990	8	—	7

In addition a further 16 reports were commissioned for West Germany and a further three for Canada in the period September 1988 to June 1989, but cannot be attributed to a particular month.

Business Inquiries

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many major inquiries were made by business under the overseas status report service for each month from September 1988 to date;

(2) how many substantive inquiries were made by business under the overseas status report service for each month from September 1988 to date.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 21 March 1990]:* The information that is readily available is as follows:

Reports paid for in the period September 1988 to March 1989

	Reports
September 1988	36
October 1988	63
November 1988	64
December 1988	70
January 1989	50
February 1989	53
March 1989	107

Following the introduction of the service card system of payment in 1989 it has not been possible to record the monthly use of this service. Use is estimated by quarters as follows:

	Reports
April to June 1989	80
July to September 1989	73
October to December 1989	66
January to March (to date) 1990	62

A breakdown of reports taking up to four hours and those taking more than four hours could be made available only at disproportionate cost.

PRIME MINISTER

Press Secretary

Q67. **Mr. Tam Dalyell:** To ask the Prime Minister if it was with her authority that her press secretary on 12 March initiated a call to the Press Association to comment on the alleged challenge on her position as Prime Minister from members of her own party; if she will put in the Library a transcript of the conversation between Mr. Ingham and the representative of the Press Association; and what consequences such an initiative has for relations between the civil service and the press as outlined in the Armstrong guidelines.

The Prime Minister: My chief press secretary, as a civil servant, acted wholly properly in correcting, on my behalf, an unfounded newspaper allegation relating to the Government.

Leith

Q144. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will pay an official visit to Leith.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Local Government Finance

Q168. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Prime Minister whether she will make a statement on the outcome of the fixing of community charge levels in England; and what information she has on how many county councils have been able to fix precepts in accordance with the Government's published target figures.

The Prime Minister: The average community charge for England is estimated to be £363, an increase of 33 per cent. over this year's average domestic rate income per adult, and £85 more than the community charge for standard spending.

An increase of this size means increases in demands and precepts of more than 16 per cent. This cannot be justified on any terms. It is almost twice the level of inflation and £3 billion above the amount the Government believed it would be reasonable to spend to achieve a standard level of service.

The level of the charges in shire county areas are very largely determined by the precepts set by the counties. It is extremely disappointing that on average they have seen fit to increase these by more than 7 per cent. above their standard spending assessments (SSA) or by nearly £50 per adult. Labour-controlled county councils' precepts are on average £82 per adult above their SSAs.

Mr. Colin Wallace

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Prime Minister if she will publish in the *Official Report* the text of her letters to the hon. Member for Brent, East on 23 June 1988, 31 August 1988, 29 September 1988 and 13 February 1989, about Mr. Colin Wallace and related matters.

The Prime Minister: It is not my practice to do so.

Local Authorities

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister whether she will set out the evidence on which she based her statements concerning overspending by Labour-controlled local authorities, made on 20 March, *Official Report*, column 1007.

The Prime Minister: On the basis of the information then available to the Department of the Environment, Labour authorities' budgets were on average 14 per cent. above their standard spending assessments; the budgets of Conservative-controlled authorities were estimated to be on average 4 per cent. above their SSAs. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has said that he intends to place a summary of the returns for individual authorities in the Library of the House after returns from all authorities have been received.

Baltic States (Gold Reserves)

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: To ask the Prime Minister whether Her Majesty's Government will replace or deposit with the Bank of England to the order of the independent Governments of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania the national gold reserves of those countries which were deposited for safe-keeping in the Bank of England before Russia occupied the said countries and which, pursuant to the Foreign Compensation Act 1969, were subsequently converted to other uses without their depositors' assent.

The Prime Minister: If claims were presented to Her Majesty's Government by Governments of future independent Baltic states, such claims would be considered.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: To ask the Prime Minister whether Her Majesty's Government will request the Russian Government to return to the Bank of England, for redeposit to the order of the Governments of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, the national gold reserves of those countries which had been deposited with the Bank of England for safe-keeping prior to the Russian occupation of those independent countries.

The Prime Minister: The Soviet Government do not possess the gold reserves of the former Baltic states. The action taken by the British Government in 1968 in respect of these reserves is set out in the answer which my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) on 5 March.

Engagements

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 27 March.

Mr. Stern: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 27 March.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I hope to have an audience of Her Majesty the Queen.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Pesticides

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research is being undertaken or financed by his Department into the costs, crop yields and incomes of farmers who minimise use of fertilisers, pesticides and antibiotics.

Mr. Curry: Over £18·5 million will be spent by this Department in 1989-90 on research concerned with pesticides and alternative methods of pest control to which it attaches high priority and from which the farming industry will benefit. A list of the projects being funded was given to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) on 1 December 1989, column *471-80*.

In particular, the Department has funded research at Boxworth experimental husbandry farm into the impact of reduced pesticide usage on the farming environment and on crop yields and margins. Plans are advanced to extend this work to cover reduced fertiliser inputs as well. A copy of the final report of the Boxworth project will be lodged in the Library of the House when completed and published later this year. Antibiotic use is controlled by product licence under the Medicines Act 1968. The Department is actively funding research projects aimed at developing alternative methods of disease prevention.

The Department has also commissioned, in consultation with the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland and the Welsh Office and with the assistance of the various organic farming associations, a study of the economics of the production and marketing of organically grown farm produce in Great Britain. The study is being conducted by the university of Cambridge in co-operation with the University college of Wales, Aberystwyth, and the North of Scotland college of agriculture. A full report is expected to be published in the spring of 1991.

WALES

Infertility

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the infertility services provided by each health authority in Wales.

Mr. Grist: This information is not collected centrally.

Community Health Councils

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the total annual cost of community health councils.

Mr. Grist: The total health funding for community health councils in Wales in 1989-90 amounts to £666,086.

Southern Wales Coalfield

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if measures are to be taken to prevent the further despoilation of the remaining areas of hillside, woodlands and crags which lie between heavily urbanised valleys of the southern Welsh coalfield.

Mr. Grist: Sufficient powers are available to local planning authorities to control development in the open countryside.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what funds are to be made available to local authorities, Welsh Water plc and the Welsh division of the National Rivers Authority to clean up the material pollution and debris in and alongside the rivers of the southern Welsh coalfield.

Mr. Grist: It is for the National Rivers Authority (NRA) and the local authorities concerned to determine their own expenditure priorities. The NRA has stated as its central aim the achievement of a significant and sustainable improvement of the water quality of the rivers, estuaries and coastal waters of England and Wales and it has been allocated substantial funds for this work. Provision has also been made for local government's environmental protection responsibilities in the 1990-91 local authority revenue settlement and this has been reflected in standard spending assessments for revenue support grant purposes.

With regard to Welsh Water, sewage-related material is only part of the litter problem, but Welsh Water is committed to an investment programme on an unprecedented scale which includes improvements to a large number of its sewage treatment works. This will make a major contribution to improving the quality of our rivers including those in the south Wales coalfield.

The NRA has conducted a survey of litter in and on the banks of the River Taff. In its conclusions the report said that because of the diversity of the litter tackling the problem requires the collaboration of all the responsible bodies including the local authorities and voluntary organisations. Disscussions are proceeding with the intention of taking forward the initiative.

Disabled People (Employment)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of disabled people employed by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* the Welsh Development Agency, *(c)* the Development Board for Rural Wales, *(d)* Wales Tourist Board and *(e)* Tai Cymru and, for each, the number employed (i) in total and as a percentage of all employees, (ii) by grade and as a percentage of all employees in that grade and (iii) by the severity of their disability.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The Department employs 27 people who have notified me that they are registered disabled. They make up 1·2 per cent. of the total work force. In addition, four disabled people are employed under the sheltered placement scheme.

Grade	*No. of Registered Disabled People*	*Per cent of Grade*
6	2	3·0
SPTO	1	2·7
HEO	2	1·0
EO	5	1·4
AO	7	1·7
AA	3	1·0
Typist	1	0·8
Support Grades	5	4·5
Industrial	1	0·9

Staff who are registered disabled are not classified in terms of the severity of their disablement.

The information requested relating to the non-departmental public bodies listed is not held centrally and the hon. Gentleman should approach the organisation direct.

Health Authorities (Finance)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what provision is built into his allocation of finance to health authorities in Wales for 1990-91 to allow for inflation.

Mr. Grist: The allocations to health authorities in Wales for 1990-91 which my right hon. Friend announced on 11 January take account of the 5 per cent. forecast of general inflation which was given by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Autumn Statement. However, it is for each authority to make its own assessment of the prospective effect of pay and price rises on its own mix of staff and non-staff expenditure in the light of this forecast when planning its budget. This process will be assisted by the recent determination of pay increases for staff covered by the review bodies' arrangements as announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 1 February and by the additional £11 million provision which is being made available to authorities in Wales in recognition of the excess costs of these awards over the provision for forecast general inflation within authorities' original allocations for 1990-91.

Industrial Sites (Sale)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will direct the Welsh Development Agency to offer sitting tenants in their factories first refusal when industrial estates are being offered for sale;

(2) if he will issue guidelines to the Welsh Development Agency regarding consultation with its tenants of industrial units when those units are being offered for sale;

(3) if he will direct the Welsh Development Agency to offer first refusal to the relevant local authority when its industrial estates are being offered for sale.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidance he has given the Welsh Development Agency on the sale of industrial sites to sitting tenants.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The Welsh Development Agency's policy for the disposal of individual sites and units is established on the basis of guidelines issued by the Department. These state that the agency shall at all times seek to obtain the best possible consideration and whenever reasonably practicable to seek competitive bids for the asset, whether land or buildings. Whenever it is practical to do so, the agency considers the possibility of sales to industrial tenants.

National Parks

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures are being taken to limit the physical damage to vulnerable natural landscapes in the National Park areas of the Brecon Beacons, Snowdonia, Pembrokeshire and Gower.

Mr. Wyn Roberts: The relevant national parks authorities have the general responsibility for identifying and taking steps to limit physical damage to vulnerable landscapes in those areas for which they are responsible, in accordance with their statutory powers and wider management interest.

All three parks are preparing maps and related management strategies for these areas as required under section 3 of the Wildlife and Countryside (Amendment) Act 1985. Within these areas the national parks have additional powers to make management agreements with landowners where developments threaten landscape quality. In addition, all parks have consultation procedures to protect against inappropriate forestry development and management programmes to repair damage caused by recreational pressures. They also seek to influence farmers, landowners and the general public by education and persuasion. As planning authorities the national parks also control development. Where appropriate, national parks have acquired land which they manage directly to ensure the maintenance of quality.

The Countryside Commission has also recently established a review panel under the chairmanship of Professor Ron Edwards, which will address the issue of vulnerable landscapes, among other matters. It is expected to report early in the new year.

National Assistance Act 1948

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many inquiries have been undertaken under section 36 of the National Assistance Act 1948 in each of the past 10 years; what was the average length of time taken; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many requests to conduct an inquiry under section 36 of the National Assistance Act 1948 he has received in each of the last 10 years; what action was taken in each case; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: In the last 10 years a large number of requests has been received for inquiries into matters concerning local social services authorities. One inquiry under section 36 of the National Assistance Act 1948 was held. It took place over a two-month period in 1988. It was decided not to declare the authority in default as the authority took steps to deal with the cause of complaints.

X-ray Treatment (Myodil)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what advice his Department has given to health authorities in Wales on the use of myodil; when this most recent advice was given; and on what dates advice was previously given on the use of myodil prior to x-ray treatment.

Mr. Grist: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

UNESCO

76. **Mr. Boyes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in which activities of UNESCO British scientists still participate; and what funding he provides to support these activities.

Mr. Sainsbury: British scientists play an active role in a number of UNESCO projects. In particular they are involved with the intergovernmental oceanographic organisation, of which we remain a member; the international hydrological programme; man and the biosphere programme; and the international geological correlation programme.

Financial support from ODA available to these projects from the money saved by our withdrawal from UNESCO totalled £296,000 in 1988-89. United Kingdom scientific consultants have also been involved in a number of UNESCO programmes.

South Georgia

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has concerning the threat to wildlife on South Georgia, especially penguins and seals, resulting from the depletion of stocks of krill and ice fish following intensive fishing by Soviet and east European fishing fleets; and if he will extend the present 12-mile limit to 200 miles.

Mr. Sainsbury: We are concerned that the present level of fishing activity round South Georgia is threatening the conservation of fish stocks. We are also concerned about the possible consequences of this for wildlife in the area, particularly the wandering albatross.

We are tackling these problems through the multilateral convention for the conservation of antarctic marine living resources (CCAMLR), in which we play a leading role.

The commissioner for South Georgia commissioned a research cruise in January 1989 and another in January this year, and we are in touch with the Soviet authorities at both diplomatic and scientific levels.

We have no plans at present to impose a 200-mile exclusive economic zone unilaterally round South Georgia.

Embassy Staff

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the current totals of staff employed by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics embassy in London and the United Kingdom embassy in Moscow; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: Soviet staff currently employed at the embassy of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in London—77.

British staff currently employed at the British embassy in Moscow—78.

Cuba

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's current relations with Cuba.

Mr. Sainsbury: We have normal relations with Cuba.

Information Research Department

Mr. Livingstone: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* the text of the letter from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Enfield, North (Mr. Eggar), to the hon. Member for Brent, East on 3 May 1988 about the Information Research Department.

Mr. Sainsbury: No. A copy of the letter was placed in the Library of the House, as indicated in the answer given to the hon. Member on 23 May 1988 by my hon. Friend the then Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Vol. 134, c. *26*.

European Single Market

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government are proposing to the European Commission for the study of the effect of 1992 on developing countries and of measures to limit any damaging effects.

Mr. Maude: We believe that the single market process will bring significant gains not just to the European Community, but to the entire international trading system, including the developing world. To this end we have consistently pressed for greater openness in trade to ensure that full benefits are achieved. We recently commissioned a study by the Overseas Development Institute, which confirmed that the single market should have a limited positive impact on developing countries, with particular opportunities for trade.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received concerning the effects of 1992 on developing countries.

Mr. Maude: The single market will bring significant gains to the international trading system and in particular should be of overall net benefit to developing countries. We have stressed the widespread advantages in discussing 1992 with Members of this House, members of the public, and with representatives of other Governments.

Israel

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about relations between Britain and Israel.

Mr. Sainsbury: I have nothing to add to the reply given to my hon. Friend on 7 February by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Vol. 166, col. *688*.

Baltic States

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations the Government are making to the Government of the Soviet Union regarding the recent declaration of independence by the Republic of Lithuania.

Mr. Sainsbury: In our recent contacts with the Soviet authorities we have stressed the importance of continued dialogue between Moscow and the Lithuanian people. We have made clear our view that all involved should exercise the maximum restraint.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what requests have been made by the Governments of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia for assistance in exercising their self-determination in terms of political education and financial assistance.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer the hon. Member to the answer which my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office gave to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on 19 March, Vol. 169, col. *447-48*. We have not received requests of the sort described from Baltic groups.

HEALTH

Simplesse

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a further statement about *(a)* the product Simplesse and *(b)* its possible nutritional implications.

Mr. Freeman: Simplesse is a microparticulated egg and milk protein product which is intended to replace fat in the diet in uncooked food such as mayonnaise and frozen desserts. The Food and Drug Administration in the USA has recently affirmed as "generally recognised as safe" a microparticulated protein product (Simplesse) for use in frozen desserts (pp 6383-6391 of the "Federal Register" of Friday 23 February).

Since the main use of Simplesse is likely to be in high-value specialist products its effect on the fat intake of the population as a whole is unlikely to be very significant. However, for some population groups—for example, children consuming large quantities of ice cream—it may affect fat intake.

Although the possible nutritional implications of the use of this product will become clear only when data on intakes become available, the Department of Health is considering the available information on the likely nutritional effects of Simplesse.

In addition, the Food Advisory Committee will be considering fat replacers as a general issue in the near future.

AIDS

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if any current study commissioned by his Department into the survival of viruses in sea water includes the AIDS virus.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department has not commissioned any studies into the survival of HIV or other viruses in sea water.

Disability

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations his Department has received concerning full implementation of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986.

Mr. Freeman: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) on 20 March at columns *563-65*.

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations his Department has received concerning the need for a statutory duty for local authorities to consult disabled people and their carers on their community care plans.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have received representations from several groups about the need for local authorities to consult on their community care plans. The White Paper "Caring for People" makes it clear that we expect local authorities to consult and take account of the views of service users and carers in drawing up these plans.

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps his Department is taking to examine the adequacy of the law relating to guardianship, mental incapacity, and abuse of mentally handicapped adults;

(2) whether his Department has any evidence concerning the abuse of mentally handicapped adults in the community and in institutions;

(3) whether his Department has carried out consultations concerning the need to amend existing legislation to enable guardianship to be used to protect people with a mental handicap;

(4) whether his Department has received any representations concerning the need to amend existing legislation to enable guardianship to be used to protect people with a mental handicap.

Mr. Freeman: We have received representations from hon. Members, SENSE and members of the public and the report on the extent of abuse from Dr. Leila Cooke.

We will consider the need for future statutory provision in the light of the outcome of the review the Law Commission is currently undertaking of the law relating to mentally incapacitated adults and will consult widely on any proposals.

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to increase representation and advocacy opportunities for people with mental handicap; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Planning guidelines issued to health authorities in health circular (88)43, a copy of which is in the Library, state that every district should consult mentally handicapped people and their families, as well as the statutory and other agencies concerned, in preparing policy statements and action plans for meeting the health needs of mentally handicapped people. The Department has also grant-aided National Citizen Advocacy by £15,000 a year in 1987-88 and 1988-89 and by £20,000 in 1989-90 towards the cost of its national resource centre and advisory service for locally based advocacy projects.

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department has commissioned any independent research into the abuse of mentally handicapped adults in the community and in institutions.

Mr. Freeman: The Department is not currently carrying out any research into the abuse of mentally handicapped people.

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department has issued any guidance to professionals working with mentally handicapped people regarding training and effective procedures for dealing with suspected abuse.

Mr. Freeman: No specific guidance has been issued. We would expect the local statutory bodies as part of their general responsibility for the provision of mental handicap services to ensure that professionals are aware of the procedures for dealing with cases of suspected abuse in their area.

Community Care

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will detail the timetable proposed and the consultation procedure to be undertaken for each of his Department's project groups on aspects of implementation of the community care proposals.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department intends to issue drafts of guidance by the end of May with the aim of producing guidance in final form by the end of September. We shall seek views from representative bodies and other organisations involved in implementing the proposals of the White Paper "Caring for People".

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which voluntary organisations he will consult on the draft guidance drawn up by his Department on the Government's community care proposals.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department will consult formally the main "umbrella" associations representing voluntary organisations. Within this process all voluntary organisations are welcome to make their comments.

Wythenshawe Hospital, Manchester

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from Dr. P. V. Barber of Wythenshawe hospital, Manchester, and fellow consultants at the hospital in regard to rationalisation and the deferment of decisions; what reply he is sending to their letter of 15 March; if there is any action he will be taking; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I have replied to the letter of 15 March from Dr. P. V. Barber and other doctors at Wythenshawe hospital, south Manchester, in which they express concern about the delay in reaching a decision on proposals for rationalising district hospital services currently provided at the Wythenshawe and Withington hospitals. Responsibility for establishing how south Manchester's health needs are to be met in the future is a matter to be decided by that district health authority in conjunction with the North Western regional health authority and taking account of the record level of resources for 1990-91 made available to them by the Government and recently announced. We have no reason to interfere in the local decision-making process, which must clearly take account of the views expressed by all interested parties, including medical opinion at Wythenshawe and Withington hospitals.

Communication Disorders

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children and adults have *(a)* cerebral palsy and *(b)* other speech/language/communication disorders; and how many of these people have received speech therapy in the past or are currently receiving it.

Mr. Freeman: Information about the number of children and adults with cerebral palsy is not available centrally. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) on 26 March for estimates of the numbers of people with speech and language disorders. Not all those with speech and language disorders necessarily need or would benefit from speech therapy, and it is not known how many of them have received speech therapy in the past. Estimates of the number of people receiving speech therapy in England in 1988-89 are not yet available.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money his Department has spent on research during the most recent five years for which figures are available; how much money his Department has spent on research into disorders of human communication and appropriate service provision to deal with such disorders during these five years; and if he will provide details on each research project undertaken into this subject during the most recent year for which this information is available.

Mr. Freeman: Expenditure on research and development work in the field of health and personal social services commissioned over the last five years is as follows:

	£ million
1985	11·2
1986	11·5
1987	12·6
1988	12·9
1989	[1]15·3

[1] Approx.

In 1989 approximately £434,000 was spent on research into speech therapy, visual and hearing impairments. Figures for the preceding four years are not readily available. Details of the research programme are published in the Department of Health yearbook of research and development and for earlier years in the annual DHSS handbooks of research and development, copies of which are available in the Library.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide information relating to the demand for and take-up of devices for assisting communication, such as speech synthesisers and portable communication aids, and if he will provide specific figures, where possible, for particular devices.

Mr. Freeman: Information is not available in the form requested. A 1984 research report "Communication Aids Provision", commissioned by the Department from the rheumatology and research unit of the university of Leeds indicated that 1,214 communication aids had been prescribed to adults by 82 per cent. of speech therapy departments in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has any plans to investigate the need for alternative communication systems for the communication-handicapped population.

Mr. Freeman: Officials at the Department of Health, together with officials from the Department of Education and Science, have been examining whether the current arrangements for the assessment of children who require aids to communication meet the needs of those children in the most efficient and cost-effective way. We will consider in the light of their work whether any specific steps by the two Departments will be appropriate.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department is considering making it possible for communication-impaired people of all ages to have access to appropriate communication aids.

Mr. Freeman: It is for individual authorities and their professional staff to determine whether a communication aid is appropriate for a communication impaired person. Health authorities can seek advice from the specialist communication aids centres to enable them to make a judgment.

Health Service Staff

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many physiotherapists, occupational therapists, clinical psychologists and pharmacists are employed in each district in England.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total staff pay bills were for speech therapy, physiopherapy, occupational therapy, clinical psychology and pharmacy for 1986-87, 1987-88, 1988-89 and 1989-90; and if he will provide the latest figures on staff pay bills for speech therapy in each district in England.

Mr. Freeman: The information derivable from annual accounts submitted to the Department for the financial years 1986-87 to 1988-89, the latest available, has been placed in the Library. Equivalent information for 1989-90 will become available in the autumn.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much speech therapists' pay increased in real terms in the years 1986-87, 1987-88 and 1989-90; and how much the pay of physiotherapists, pharmacists, general practitioners, hospital doctors and nurses increased in real terms over the same periods.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The real-terms increases are as follows:

Financial year	*Speech therapists*	*Physiotherapists*	*Pharmacists*	*General Practitioners*	*Hospital doctors*	*Nurses*
1986-87	2·91	5·05	[1]10·10	4·47	4·47	4·66
1987-88	[2]4·61	4·70	0·77	2·69	3·89	5·09
1988-89	1·54	4·72	[4]4·67	3·27	4·04	13·47
1989-90	[3]0·93	−0·28	n/a	0·19	0·19	−1·11
1986-87 to 1989-90[5]	13·57	18·22	n/a	16·44	14·25	27·03

[1] Six per cent. average increases w.e.f. 1 April 1986; from 1 October 1986 Emergency Duty Services remuneration scheme introduced, plus a further increase of £800 on all pay points for basic grade staff.

[2] Settlement introduced revised grading definition £450 lump sum.

[3] Eighteen month settlement w.e.f. 1 April 1989.

[4] Settlement consisted of 3·1 per cent. increase w.e.f. 1 December 1987 plus assimilation to new salary scales w.e.f. 1 April 1988.

[5] Percentage real terms increase reflects cummulative percentage settlements deflated by the percentage change in the retail prices index from April of the base year to April of the latest year.

n/a = Not available.

National Assistance Act 1948

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the reply to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe, on 13 March, *Official Report*, column *182*, how many requests to conduct an inquiry under section 36 of the National Assistance Act 1948 he has received in each of the last 10 years; what action was taken in each case; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not available. Where representations are made to the Department which state or imply that a local authority has failed to comply with its statutory duties under welfare legislation, whether or not section 36 of the National Assistance Act 1948 is specifically referred to, appropriate inquiries are made. Since 1 January 1990, seven such representations have been received, each in respect of services for disabled people. Inquiries are continuing in these and some earlier cases; many have been resolved, either by a decision that there was no breach of statutory duty or by compliance on the part of the authority.

TRANSPORT

Trains (Passenger Limits)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has for putting statutory passenger load limits on trains; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend has no such proposals. He has agreed with BR load factor standards for Network SouthEast and provincial services. The Government are supporting a large rail investment programme which is giving priority to new higher capacity rolling stock to help in achieving those standards.

Footpaths and Bridleways

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for each of the years 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988 and 1989, the number of temporary traffic regulation orders made by local authorities under section 14 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to restrict or prohibit the use of footpaths or bridleways for which he gave consent under section 15(2) of that Act for an extension of the period for which the order was in force.

Mr. Atkins: Temporary traffic orders affecting footpaths and bridleways are not separately identified from those affecting road traffic. Records are not kept centrally, and the information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Roll On/Roll Off Ferries

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what action he proposes to take to assess whether existing roll on/roll off ferry ships and new designs remain unacceptably vulnerable;

(2) when he expects to report on the findings of the Government's research programme on roll on/roll off ferry design and vulnerability.

Mr. McLoughlin: Following the official report of the formal investigation into the loss of the Herald of Free Enterprise, the Department of Transport initiated a wide-ranging programme of research into ways of increasing the safety of ro-ro passenger ferries. The steering committee which supervised the programme has now completed its work, and I am studying its report and recommendations. I hope to make the report and the results of the research widely available shortly.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many accidents there have been and how many casualties have been sustained in incidents involving roll on/roll off ferries at sea in each of the past 10 years for which records are available.

Mr. McLoughlin: The numbers of accidents involving United Kingdom passenger roll on/roll off ferries for which records are readily available, together with the numbers of lives lost, are:

Year	*Accidents*	*Lives Lost*
1982	3	6
1983	2	—
1984	—	—

Year	*Accidents*	*Lives Lost*
1985	1	—
1986	—	—
1987	4	189
1988	1	—

Coal Importing Facilities

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the current rated capacity in tonnes per hour of imported coal handling facilities on a port-by port basis *(a)* in England, *(b)* in Wales and *(c)* in Scotland.

Mr. McLoughlin: My Department does not have this information.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many applications have been received, by county, to expand or significantly alter existing coal importing facilities at ports *(a)* in England, *(b)* in Wales and *(c)* in Scotland;

(2) how many new applications have been received, by county, to develop and operate coal importing facilities at ports *(a)* in England, *(b)* in Wales and *(c)* in Scotland.

Mr. McLoughlin: Since 1985 no port developments have needed the Secretary of State's approval. Port undertakings are generally free to develop whatever facilities they wish on existing port land. Port developments elsewhere need either planning permission or statutory powers by means of an order under the Harbours Act or a private Bill. I am not aware of any recent applications for statutory powers for port developments for the express purpose of importing coal.

A1, Barnet

Mr. Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish statistics for personal injury connected with use of the gap in the central reservation of the A1 Barnet way, opposite Hyver hill, for the years 1987, 1988 and 1989; what evidence he is considering in reaching his decision on whether to close the gap; what recommendations he has received from the London borough of Barnet in connection with proposals to close the gap; and whether they have conveyed to him the views of local residents about the effects of any closure.

Mr. Atkins: No personal injury accidents were recorded at this gap for the years in question. The closure of the gap, in association with other works planned for the Barnet way, was proposed in consultation with the London borough of Barnet, as the Department's agent for this part of the A1 trunk road, and was not opposed by the council's public works committee. The evidence being considered includes representations from or on behalf of seven residents of Hyver hill opposing closure, and the Department's own knowledge of and maintenance plans for the road. The leader of the council wrote to me about the effect of the proposed closure on local residents.

Underground Train Drivers

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will instruct the railway inspectorate to examine the period of experience required before a driver may take sole charge of an underground train; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Drivers of London underground trains are presently recruited from guards who are trained to drive as part of their duty, and who can apply to become drivers after six months' service. Candidates for driver posts receive a further 14 days of basic training, followed by a period of rolling stock and route training specific to the line on which they are to drive.

As the number of guards is declining, London Underground has developed proposals to recruit drivers directly. This is at present being discussed with the unions concerned and I have asked the railway inspectorate to review the conclusions of those discussions with London Underground in due course.

St. John's Wood Underground Station

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will ask for a report from the chairman of London Underground on the safety aspects of the renewed removal from service of an escalator at St. John's Wood underground station.

Mr. Portillo: Although closure of an escalator is inconvenient to passengers, the alternative facilities are not unsafe.

Rail Accidents

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* passengers and *(b)* British Rail staff died as a result of accidents involving passenger trains in each of the years from 1980 to 1989, inclusive.

Mr. Portillo: The table shows fatalities in accidents involving all trains. I am unable to specify those attributable solely to passenger trains. Similarly, the staff figures include all railway employees; no separate figures are available for BR staff fatalities.

	Passengers	[1]*Staff*	*Total*
1980	25	24	49
1981	35	22	57
1982	18	25	43
1983	27	25	52
1984	39	20	59
1985	31	16	47
1986	31	13	44
1987	39	12	51
1988	68	13	81
[2]1989	31	14	45

[1] Includes contractors' staff from 1984 onwards.

[2] Provisional figures.

Road Accidents

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people died as a result of road accidents in each of the years from 1980-89 inclusive.

Mr. Atkins: The information is as follows:

Persons killed in road accidents: Great Britain, 1980-89

	Deaths
1980	6,010
1981	5,846
1982	5,934
1983	5,445
1984	5,599
1985	5,165
1986	5,382

	Deaths
1987	5,125
1988	5,052
1989	[1]5,230

[1] Provisional.

The 7 per cent. decline in road deaths between the 1981-85 average and 1989 has achieved a level which represents one of the lowest in Europe. Nevertheless, we have set ourselves the target of reducing the toll by one third by the year 2000.

Iron Foundries (Rail Equipment)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his actions in relation to the Office of Fair Trading, Rail Equipment Investment, the Atlas steel foundry in Armadale and William Cook plc in the light of the debate on 23 March.

Mr. Portillo: I understand that the Director General of Fair Trading is considering, in the normal way, what advice he should give in this case. The action to be taken in the light of that advice will be a matter for the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. The procurement of equipment for British Rail is a matter for the board, which requires that it be obtained from an approved foundry, whether in this country or elsewhere.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Ardglass Harbour

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when capital funds will be released for the construction of the new harbour at Ardglass in South Down; and if he will give a commencement date for the scheme.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I have nothing to add to my reply to the hon. Gentleman's question on this issue on 1 February 1990, *Official Report*, column *341*.

Stevens Inquiry

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when it is anticipated Mr. John Stevens will report the results of his investigation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: I understand that Deputy Chief Constable Stevens is expected to report the findings of his inquiry to the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary some time during the month of April.

Education Reform Brochures

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the level of resources expended on the brochure, "Education Reform —What it Means to You".

Dr. Mawhinney: It is important that the Northern Ireland public should be properly informed about the most radical changes to education in the Province for almost 50 years. I am satisfied that the level of expenditure involved was the minimum consistent with achieving this objective.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total cost incurred in the preparation and design of the brochure entitled, "Education Reforms —What it Means to You"; and which office was responsible for having this work carried out.

Dr. Mawhinney: This work—at a total cost of £32,386 —was carried out on behalf of the Department of Education by McCann-Erickson (Belfast) Ltd.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total cost of the *(a)* manufacture/printing, *(b)* distribution and *(c)* advertisement of the brochure entitled, "Education Reform—What it Means to You".

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is as follows:

	£
(a) Manufacture/printing	158,535
(b) Distribution	89,600
(c) Advertisement	252,523

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which firm printed the brochure entitled, "Education Reform—What it Means to You".

Dr. Mawhinney: The brochure was printed by Reproprint Limited, Burnley.

Pin-ups

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will issue instructions for the removal of all offensive pin-ups in all departmental premises.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 5 March 1990]:* The Northern Ireland civil service issued instructions to staff on 12 October 1988. It is the duty of line managers in the Northern Ireland civil service to ensure that any material of a sexual or divisive nature (including posters, flags, insignia and other articles) which is potentially offensive or may cause apprehension is not displayed or circulated in the workplace. A similar line is taken in the home civil service group of the Northern Ireland Office.

Marine Research

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table to show how much of *(a)* the staff and *(b)* the finances made available to the newly formed merger of fisheries research laboratory staff will be dedicated to (i) the research vessel Lough Foyle, (ii) marine fish stock assessment, (iii) other marine research, (iv) research on the river Bush and (v) other fresh water research.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 20 March 1990]:* Information in the form requested is not available. The areas identified are continuing to receive attention as previously, with intensification of effort planned for marine science and fish stock assessment being met with additional resources.

The balance of future effort in each area will reflect perceived priorities of the policy/scientific needs of the Department of Agriculture.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the daily running costs of the research vessel Lough Foyle when it is in berth at Belfast.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 20 March 1990]:* The marginal cost of the vessel in port is estimated at £600 per day.

Fisheries Research Laboratory

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what have been the annual running costs of the fisheries research laboratory in Coleraine in each of the last two years broken down into *(a)* salaries, *(b)* equipment, *(c)* overheads and *(d)* total.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 20 March 1990]:* The information is as follows:

Costs[1] of DANI Fisheries Research Laboratory, Coleraine, (£000):

	1988-89	*1989-90*
Salaries:	179	218
Equipment:	19	63
Consumables:	30	32
Travel:	15	12
Overheads:	36	49
Total	279	374

[1] Excluding expenditure on marine research vessel.

Freshwater Biological Unit

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what have been the annual running costs of the freshwater biological unit at Antrim for each of the last two years broken down into *(a)* salaries, *(b)* equipment, *(c)* overheads and *(d)* total costs.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 20 March 1990]:* The information is as follows:

Costs of DANI Freshwater Biological Investigation Unit (£000):

	1988-89	*1989-90*
Salaries:	189	211
Equipment:	28	36
Consumables:	43	45
Travel:	4	6
Overheads:	40	45
Total	304	343

Salmon

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has, or is collected by the Fisheries Conservancy Board, in respect of catches of salmon and grilse by anglers.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 20 March 1990]:* None.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has any plans to introduce the community charge in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 20 March 1990]:* The Green Paper of January 1986 "Paying for Local Government", which formed the basis for the Great Britain reforms, made it clear that the proposals did not apply to Northern Ireland. This reflected the fact that local government arrangements in Northern Ireland are significantly different from those in the rest of the United Kingdom and we have no present plans to replace the existing system.

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he has taken to ensure that the local government finance system in Northern Ireland is fair and accountable; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 20 March 1990]:* Since 1973 the provision of local authority-type services in Northern Ireland has been on a very different basis from the rest of the United Kingdom. Ninety per cent. of the expenditure on these services is administered by Northern Ireland departments as a fully integral part of the public expenditure survey systems and as such is subject to the full scrutiny of Parliament. The remaining 10 per cent. is administered by the district councils. In those circumstances, Northern Ireland has not experienced the problem of accountability which has been a key issue in the Government's approach to the reform of local authority finance in Great Britain.

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he has any plans for a revaluation of property for domestic rating purposes in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 20 March 1990]:* The case for both commercial and domestic revaluation of property in Northern Ireland is kept under review. Any plans would, as in the past, be announced well in advance.

Terrorism

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many terrorist killings of United Kingdom citizens have occurred in the Irish Republic between 1972 and 15 November 1985; and if anyone has been made amenable to the courts for these murders.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 23 March 1990]:* The information is not currently available in the form requested. I will write to the hon. Gentleman shortly.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many terrorist killings of United Kingdom citizens have occurred in the Irish Republic since 15 November 1985; and if anyone has been made amenable to the courts for these murders.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 23 March 1990]:* The information is not currently available in the form requested. I will write to the hon. Gentleman shortly.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will continue to press the authorities in the Irish Republic concerning terrorist murders within its jurisdiction of citizens of the United Kingdom; when he last made representations on this issue; and what response he has had.

Mr. Cope: This subject has been raised on a number of occasions and latterly at the intergovernmental conference in February 1989 following the death of Mr. Keys. In all our discussions on security co-operation the desirability of bringing the perpetrators of all terrorist murders to justice is foremost in our minds.

Electoral Register

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many police officers in the Royal Ulster Constabulary are unable to register to vote because of the likelihood of the Provisional IRA using the information contained in the electoral register as a source of information in order to target them.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 23 March 1990)*: I have no reason to believe that members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary are deliberately not registering as electors.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will consider introducing a special confidential register of electors for the Royal Ulster Constabulary through which secure postal voting arrangements could be implemented; and for inclusion in which the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary would vouch his officers to the chief electoral officer.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 23 March 1990]*: The introduction of a special confidential register of electors would present practical difficulties and there are no plans to introduce a separate register of this kind. But, as I explained in my reply to a recent question from the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen), *Official Report*, 26 February 1990, column *37*, we continue to keep the matter under careful review.

Security Forces (Home Security)

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) whether he will consider making available to all members of the security forces living in Northern Ireland the opportunity to have installed basic home security measures;

(2) whether, in the light of the circumstances surrounding the terrorist killing of Royal Ulster Constabulary Inspector Derek Monteith in Armagh, there has been a review of the level of threat at which home security measures become available to members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary; and if the criteria have changed.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 23 March 1990]*: The personal safety of members of the security forces living at home in Northern Ireland is kept under constant review by the appropriate service authorities. It would not be appropriate for me to indicate publicly what measures have been or may be taken.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether, in his consultations with the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, he is regularly briefed on the various sources of threat to members of the police force in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 23 March 1990]*: Yes.

SCOTLAND

Infertility

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list the infertility services provided by each health board;

(2) what is the prevalence of infertility in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have nothing to add to the replies I gave to the hon. Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on 28 July 1989, Vol. 157, column 969-70.

Education Spending

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those years in the period 1974 to 1989 when financial cuts in real terms were made in public expenditure on Scottish education.

Mr. Lang: The years in the period 1974-75 to 1988-89 where the rate of increase in education expenditure was less than the rate of increase in the GDP deflator are as follows:

1975-76
1976-77
1977-78
1979-80
1982-83
1983-84
1985-86

Airflow Beds

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many airflow beds are in use in Scottish hospitals; what was the position in 1980, 1985 and 1988; and what are the reasons for their purchase and use.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information about the number of airflow beds in use is not held centrally. Such beds are used where clinically indicated.

Pupil-Teacher Ratios

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the present pupil-teacher ratio in *(a)* primary and *(b)* post-primary schools in Scotland.

Mr. Lang: The pupil-teacher ratios in education authority schools in September 1988 were 20·3 in primary schools and 12·7 in secondary schools; the provisional September 1989 figures are 19·7 in primary and 12·4 in secondary.

Hospitals and Community Health Services

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the proposed distribution of the hospital and community health service capital for 1990-91.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. and learned Friend has allocated £130·593 million to health boards to meet their gross capital expenditure commitments on hospital and community health services in 1990-91. This will enable the substantial investment in hospital building projects in recent years to continue.

Substantial investment will be made in major hospital projects now under construction, including the Ayr acute hospital in Ayrshire and Arran, the St. John's hospital in Lothian, the Royal Cornhill hospital in Grampian, the Perth royal infirmary in Tayside and the Stornoway hospital in the Western Isles. It will also provide the resources for construction to start on new hospital developments, including the hospitals at Oban and Campbeltown, the West Fife district general hospital phase II and the spinal injuries unit at the Southern general hospital, Glasgow.

The allocations to individual health boards are as follows:

Health Boards	*Capital allocation (£,000)*
Argyll and Clyde	5,000
Ayrshire and Arran	22,000
Borders	1,400
Dumfries and Galloway	1,500
Fife	6,300
Forth Valley	5,730
Grampian	11,250
Greater Glasgow	23,850
Highland	3,800
Lanarkshire	11,195
Lothian	17,500
Orkney	358
Shetland	1,455
Tayside	10,905
Western Isles	8,350
Total	130,593

Pittenweem Harbour

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will meet representatives of Fife regional council to discuss the project for the redevelopment of Pittenweem harbour.

Mr. Lang: Not at the present. My officials and those of Fife regional council have still to reconcile their assessments of costs and benefits in establishing whether this project meets the necessary criterion of adequate return on investment. In addition there are still parliamentary procedures to clear before proceeding further.

Speech Therapy

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what qualifications a teacher is required to hold over and above the basic teaching certificate in order to specialise in work with children with specific language disorder.

Mr. Lang: There is no statutory requirement for teachers to hold a qualification over and above the basic teaching certificate to specialise in work with children with specific language disorder. However, teachers employed wholly or mainly in special classes for pupils suffering from speech defects are normally required to hold a teacher's certificate (primary education) with a special qualification to act as a teacher of physically handicapped children, or an appropriate teacher's certificate (secondary education).

Electricity

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what efficiency factors he intends to set in the licences to be issued to the Scottish electricity industry.

Mr. Rifkind: As indicated in my reply of 22 March 1990, *Official Report*, column 705, the maximum average distribution, supply and transmission prices to be charged by Scottish Power plc and Hydro-Electric plc will be capped and indexed by an RPI-X formula. I have now decided that the values of X will be as follows:

	Scottish Power	*Hydro-Electric*
Transmission	1·0	0·5
Distribution and Supply	0·5	0·3

These values allow for capital expenditure on the system significantly in excess of historic levels so that the present high security standards are maintained. They also assume the achievement of increased cost efficiency within these businesses as private sector disciplines are introduced.

Taken together with my decision that the generation element within the overall price charged to Scottish consumers should not be allowed to increase by more than RPI over the next four years, this means that average price increases after vesting to all consumers taking less than 10 MW will be held below the rate of inflation at least until April 1994. Larger customers will benefit from the downward competitive pressure on prices under the new industry structure.

Secondary Education

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to review courses and examinations in the fifth and sixth years of Scottish secondary education.

Mr. Rifkind: I have received advice from the Scottish Examination Board that the current structure of examination for pupils in the fifth and sixth years of secondary education may no longer be adequate, and that a detailed study of arrangements after standard grade should be undertaken. I have considered the board's advice and have decided to establish a committee to review the position and to report to me by the end of 1991.

The remit of the committee will be:

> to review the aims and purposes of courses and of assessment and certification in the fifth and sixth years of secondary school education in Scotland;
>
> to consider what structure of courses and what forms of assessment best satisfy these aims and purposes taking account of the needs of pupils of varying ability and background, the demands of employment and the requirements of and developments in higher and further education;
>
> to recommend necessary changes.

I am glad to say that Professor John Howie, Regius Professor of Mathematics at the university of St. Andrews, has accepted my invitation to chair the committee. A further announcement about its membership will be made shortly.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the number of occasions on which poll tax registration officers have had to alter their registers within the last year; and what was his initial estimate of the number of changes likely to be required.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 21 March 1990]:* It is the responsibility of community charges registration officers to compile and maintain the community charges register and the information requested is not held centrally.

City Technology Academy

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much private capital has been promised for a city technology academy; from whom it is to come; and under what conditions.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* Trusthouse Forte has already announced its decision to sponsor a technology academy in Scotland and has made a firm and generous offer of £1·5 million towards its cost. I fully expect that more will be raised when a decision has been taken on the location of the academy.

Regional Councils

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland by how much regional councils exceeded Government expenditure guidelines in each of the years since 1979-80.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 26 March 1990]*: The information requested is set out in the following table:

	£ million
1979-80	197·6
1980-81	388·5
1981-82	273·1
1982-83	102·6
1983-84	10·5
1984-85	101·1
1985-86	63·2
1986-87	151·8
1987-88	81·3
1988-89	98·7

Expenditure guidelines have not been issued by my right hon. and learned Friend for the years subsequent to 1988-89.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many persons engaged in Government-funded or partially funded training schemes are classified as *(a)* employed and *(b)* unemployed.

Mr. Nicholls: There were approximately 595,000 participants on Government schemes in Great Britain in January 1990, the latest date for which information is available. The schemes included are YTS, employment training and community industry.

All these participants are classified as part of the work force in employment except for a small number on YTS whose training does not include work experience with an employer.

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on how the official unemployment count is made.

Mr. Nicholls: The unemployment count is based upon the administrative system for paying unemployment related benefits, that is, unemployment benefit, income support and national insurance credits. It relates to people claiming these benefits who say that on the day of the count they were unemployed and capable of, available for and actively seeking employment. (Students claiming benefit during a vacation and who intend to return to full-time education are excluded.)

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of *(a)* all mothers with children 16 years or under, *(b)* mothers with children 16 years and under without working husbands, *(c)* single-parent men with children 16 years or under and *(d)* single-parent women with children 16 years or under who are (i) in full-time employment and (ii) in part-time employment.

Mr. Nicholls: Preliminary estimates from the 1989 labour force survey are shown in the table:

Great Britain, spring 1989

Parents with children under 16 years	*Percentage in employment*[1] *Full time*[2]	*Part time*[2]	*All*[3]
(a) All mothers	19	37	55
(b) Mothers without working husbands	[4]—	[4]—	24
(c) Single-parent men	57	5	64
(d) Single-parent women	17	21	38

Source: Preliminary 1989 Labour Force Survey estimates.

[1] Includes employees, the elf-employed and participants in work-related government training programmes.

[2] The full-time/part-time classification is based on respondents' self-assessment.

[3] Includes those in employment who did not specify whether in full-time or part-time work.

[4] Estimate not readily available.

Benefits

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the benefits which a person loses upon entering a Government-sponsored training programme.

Mr. Nicholls: A trainee on YTS or ET would normally stop receiving unemployment benefit, dependency benefit, sickness benefit, invalidity benefit or severe disablement allowance while in training. Other social security benefits will usually continue in payment depending upon the individual's circumstances.

Unemployment

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will provide an estimate of the total cost of unemployment to the Exchequer, including benefits, redundancy fund payments, administration costs, lost revenue, and so on.

Mr. Eggar: The estimated expenditure in 1988-89 on unemployment and supplementary benefit paid to the unemployed is £5,390 million; redundancy fund payments totalled £7 million and the administration costs of paying benefits to the unemployed were £332 million.

Workfare

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether an analysis of workfare has been made by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: My Department financed a study of workfare which was initiated and commissioned by the employment research centre of the university of Buckingham. A report of the study was published in 1987 under the title "Would Workfare Work?". Since the study was undertaken, the Government have introduced a number of measures; most recently in the Social Security Act 1989, to require unemployed people to seek work actively as a condition of receiving unemployment benefits.

Earnings

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table providing information about the increase in weekly and hourly earnings for full-time male and female manuals and non-manuals in (i) manufacturing, (ii) the public sector and (iii) the whole economy, less the production industries and the public sector; and what numbers are represented by each category in each class.

Mr. Nicholls: Estimates of the increases in average gross weekly and hourly earnings in the year to April 1989 (the latest available) are provided in the following table. The categories "manufacturing" and "public sector" are not mutually exclusive groupings and the data for them are thus not directly comparable. Similarly, because the categories "production industries" and "public sector" are not mutually exclusive, comparable figures for the whole economy excluding them are not readily available and would involve disproportionate cost to compile.

Estimates of the numbers in employment are not available for the categories requested except for manual/non-manual employees in employment in manufacturing; the latest available estimates, for September 1989, are published in table 1.10 of the December 1989 *Employment Gazette*.

Percentage increase in weekly and hourly earnings of full-time adult employees in the year to April 1989[1]

	Weekly earnings			*Hourly earnings*		
	Males	*Females*	*All*	*Males*	*Females*	*All*
Manuals and non-manuals						
(i) Manufacturing	9·2	10·3	9·2	8·8	10·4	9·0
(ii) Public sector	8·3	12·0	9·1	9·1	13·2	10·2
Non-manuals						
(i) Manufacturing	10·3	11·9	10·1	10·3	11·9	10·3
(ii) Public sector	8·3	12·2	9·9	8·7	13·5	10·7

[1] Average gross weekly and hourly earnings, not affected by absence, for those on adult rates.

Source: New Earnings Survey.

Labour Force Survey

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give from Labour force survey evidence by region, including Greater London, and for Great Britain, by male, female, full and part-time, and 1980 SIC division the number of self-employed people in June of 1979, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988 and 1989.

Mr. Nicholls: Estimates from labour force surveys as requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will give, from the 1989 labour force survey by region, including Greater London and by male and female, the number of people not counted as unemployed by the definition using ILO/OECD guidelines on the grounds that they had not looked for work in the four weeks prior to interview, but who stated that they would like a job if one was available, and were not free to start work within two weeks;

(2) if he will give, from the 1989 labour force survey by region, including Greater London and by male and female, the number of people not counted as unemployed by the definition using ILO/OECD guidelines on the grounds that they had not looked for a job in the four weeks prior to interview, but who stated that they would like a job if one was available, and were available to start work within two weeks.

Mr. Nicholls: Preliminary results from the 1989 labour force survey, as requested, are shown in the following table:

Persons not in employment and not unemployed on ILO definition who had not looked for work in four weeks prior to interview[1] *but would like a job, by availability to start work*

Spring 1989, Thousands

	Not available to start within two weeks[2]		*Available to start within two weeks*	
	Males	*Females*	*Males*	*Females*
Great Britain	340	663	360	727
Northern	26	41	26	52
Yorkshire and Humberside	35	50	32	68
East Midlands	21	43	21	45
East Anglia	[3]—	17	10	18
South East	83	201	95	188
of which				
Greater London	40	98	43	87
South West	22	47	24	51
West Midlands	35	74	36	81
North West	52	91	56	96
Wales	28	41	24	40
Scotland	30	59	37	88

[1] Includes those who did not state whether they had looked for work.

[2] Includes those who did not state whether they were available to start work.

[3] Sample size too small for a reliable estimate.

Source: 1989 Labour Force Survey Preliminary Results.

Students

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the average length of unemployment for each student who was registered unemployed during the summer of 1989 in each region of the country.

Mr. Nicholls: The information is not available.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the total value of unemployment benefit paid to students during the summer vacation of 1989 in each region of the country.

Mr. Eggar: This information is not available.

Pits (Safety Disputes)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many safety disputes have occurred at pits during the last 48 months.

Mr. Nicholls: Estimates for the past four years of the number of stoppages and working days lost in the coal industry over safety issues are detailed in the table below:

Year	*Stoppages*	*Working days lost*
1986	15	2,419
1987	12	5,855
1988	5	3,442
[1]1989	5	724

[1] Provisional.

National Speak Week

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, if he will ensure that *(a)* all jobcentres include in the staff training programmes and *(b)* all those involved in employment training programmes are given a showing of the National Speak Week video "Show You Care".

Mr. Eggar: I should like to thank the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) for drawing the video to my attention. My officials are arranging to see it. A decision on how far it should be disseminated to employment service personnel and to those involved in delivering the employment training programme, and if so through what means, will be taken when they have done so.

Skill Centres

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many civil servants were involved in the management buy-out team in the Skills Training Agency; whether time, during working hours, was provided to draw up their proposals; and over how many months preparation work had been undertaken to form the proposal from Astra Training Services Ltd.

Mr. Eggar: Three civil servants formed the management buy-out team in the skills training agency. No other staff were involved in the planning or preparation of the buy-out proposals.

Given their special position as a management buy-out team, in early April 1989 my Department removed the three officers concerned from direct responsibility for decisions affecting both personnel matters and the expenditure of public money. This was done to ensure that bias could not enter into decisions.

The majority of the time spent on the preparation of the management buy-out proposals was beyond normal hours of duty though departmental management agreed to provide time during working hours on the understanding that the buy-out team's official duties were always accorded priority. Detailed planning by the management buy-out team started after my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) announced on 13 March 1989 the intention to move STA into the private sector. I understand that a small amount of preliminary work, purely on a contingency basis, took place before that announcement and that the team were in contact with professional advisers as from the autumn of 1988. This was not done at the expense of the team members' official duties.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the powers under which civil servants were permitted to form and operate a private limited company; and which provide the authority for the sale of 47 skill centres to Astra Training Services Ltd.

Mr. Eggar: No powers are needed for civil servants to form and operate a private limited company. Such activity must not have an adverse effect on their official work or bring any conflict of loyalty to their position as civil servants.

The Secretary of State maintained skill centres under section 2 of the Employment and Training Act 1973 which empowers him to make such arrangements as he considers appropriate for the purpose of assisting persons to train for employment. No specific powers are required to discontinue arangements which he no longer considers appropriate. In the case of the skills training agency, the Government believe that a successful move to the private sector will provide a more effective contribution to the national training effort.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to the reply to the hon. Member for Bradford, South of Tuesday, 20 March, what is the price which has been negotiated for the sale of 10 skill centre sites; how many other sites are under consideration for sale; and who are the purchasers of the 10 so far arranged.

Mr. Eggar: As indicated in the earlier reply, *Official Report*, 20 March 1990, column 577, I propose to sell the Government's interests in the 10 skill centre sites where a training business purchaser is to be granted a lease, later this year. I propose to sell the Government's interest at nine further sites currently held by units of the Skills Training Agency which are not included in the terms of sale agreed with purchasers of training businesses. None of these 19 property interests has yet been offered for sale, so it is too early to say what price will be negotiated or who the purchasers will be.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what expenses have been charged by Deloitte Corporation Finance and Deloitte Haskins and Sells in connection with their work on the sale of the 47 skill centres; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Total expenses in connection with the sale of the skills training agency in 1989-90, including professional fees and expenses paid to Deloittes and other advisers, will be available in the Appropriation Accounts (class VI, vote 5) to be published in the summer.

Restart

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people *(a)* were referred to each menu option at the restart interview, *(b)* failed to attend for interview and *(c)* were referred to the unemployment benefit office from their interview and for what reasons, for the quarters ended September 1989 and December 1989.

Mr. Eggar: The information requested is provided in the table:

	Quarter ending September 1989	*Quarter ending December 1989*
Referred to:		
Job	68,900	64,100
Jobclub	46,200	45,200
EAS	18,200	15,500
Restart course	15,800	16,600
Employment training	88,900	77,800
Other referrals[1]	58,800	48,200
Referred to the unemployment benefit office		
For failure to attend an interview	81,600	62,500
Non-availability/refusal of employment/actively seeking[2]	14,700	12,000

[1] Referrals to claimant advisers, disablement resettlement officers.

[2] Actively seeking statistics have been collected since October 1989 only.

Accidents (Coal Mines)

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many employees were killed in 1987, 1988, 1989, and 1990 in accidents *(a)* in opencast coal mines operated directly on behalf of British Coal and *(b)* in licensed opencast coal mines; and how many men, in total, were employed in those divisions of mining during those years;

(2) what was the rate of reportable accidents per man shift worked *(a)* in opencast coal mines operated directly on behalf of British Coal and *(b)* in licensed opencast coal mines, for each year 1987 to 1990.

Mr. Nicholls: At opencast coal sites operated by the British Coal opencast executive one fatal accident occurred in 1987-88 and one in 1988-89. There were no fatal accidents at licensed opencast sites during this period. Figures for 1989-90 are not available.

The Health and Safety Executive keeps records of the number of accidents at opencast coal sites but not of the numbers of persons employed at such sites.

It is not possible to calculate accident rates as information regarding the number of man shifts worked is not available.

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the rate of reportable accidents per man shift worked *(a)* in British Coal deep mines and *(b)* in licensed underground coal mines in 1987, 1988, 1989 and 1990.

Mr. Nicholls: Accident statistics are recorded by fiscal year and those for 1989-90 are not available. Statistics for 1987-88 and 1988-89 are as follows:

(a) in British Coal deep mines the rate of reportable injuries per 100,000 manshifts worked was 38·62 in 1987-88 and 32·25 in 1988-89.

(b) it is not possible to calculate the rate of reportable injuries at licensed underground coal mines as manshift figures are not available.

Mines (Inspections)

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many licensed mines were visited by Her Majesty's mines inspectors in 1987, 1988, 1989 and 1990, by county *(a)* in England, *(b)* in Wales and *(c)* in Scotland.

Mr. Nicholls: The information can be supplied in the form requested only at disproportionate cost.

Training and Enterprise Council (Bradford)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what resources will be available to the training and enterprise council in Bradford; what level of support has been secured from the private sector; what level of grant he is making; how many training places will be available through the training and enterprise council in Bradford; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The amount of development funding which will be made available to the Bradford and district training and enterprise council (TEC) is currently being finalised.

I have been very encouraged by the high level of support and commitment from the private sector in establishing the Bradford and district TEC. Its corporate and business plan will set out their proposals to develop training and enterprise activities in the area.

Work Permits (Dependent Territories)

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether a decision has yet been made on a special annual quota for the current year of work permits for workers from the dependent territories whose level of skill is below that required by the general work permit scheme.

Mr. Eggar: The arrangements for a special annual quota are kept under review. I can confirm, however, that it has been decided that there should be a quota for 1990 of 200—the same as last year. Within that figure of 200 no more than 150 permits will be allowed for any one territory.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensioners

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if, on the basis of data in the 1987 family expenditure survey, he will list the cash and percentage changes in real equivalised incomes of each decile group of pensioner households for each year since 1979;

(2) if he will give the overall increase in pensioner incomes in real terms by quintile group for each year from 1979-80 to 1986-87;

(3) what proportion of all pensioners have no income from any source other than from state benefits.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The latest available information shows that in 1987, 15·9 per cent. of pensioner tax units received all their income from state benefits. This compares favourably with the figures for 1979 when 22·5 per cent. of pensioner tax units received all their income from the state benefits.

The information requested on

1. the overall increase in pensioner incomes by quintile group; and
2. the cash and percentage changes in real equivalised incomes of each decile group of pensioner households;

Table 1: Overall increases (percentage) in Pensioner net Incomes by Quintile Group for each year from 1979-80 to 1986-87.

Quintile	*1979-1980*	*1980-1981*	*1981-1982*	*1982-1983*	*1983-1984*	*1984-1985*	*1985-1986*	*1986-1987*	*Overall*
Lowest	4	5	2	6	2	−1	1	−1	19
2	2	6	3	6	1	0	2	1	24
3	1	6	2	7	−1	1	3	3	24
4	2	3	2	9	−2	1	5	5	27
Highest	2	5	−6	16	−2	4	7	14	44

Source: Family Expenditure Survey.

Table 2: Change since previous year in real equivalised incomes of each decile of pensioner households 1979-87 (£ per week 1987 prices)

Decile	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*
Lowest	1·40	3·30	0·60	4·00	0·80	−2·10	1·60	−0·80
2	0·40	4·80	0·70	4·30	1·30	−1·20	2·10	−0·10
3	0·90	4·70	1·00	4·80	1·50	−1·00	2·40	0·60
4	0·70	4·80	1·50	5·40	0·90	−0·40	3·10	0·50
5	0·90	4·60	1·80	6·00	0·30	0·40	2·90	1·80
6	0·90	4·70	1·90	6·60	0·60	−0·10	3·30	3·20
7	0·60	5·50	1·40	7·60	−0·70	0·40	3·90	4·00
8	−1·20	7·60	0·00	10·20	−0·20	2·10	5·70	4·80
9	0·00	8·10	−2·10	15·60	−3·30	7·20	5·40	7·70
Highest	8·80	14·40	−20·60	46·80	−1·70	−1·90	30·70	43·10
Average	1·40	6·20	−1·40	11·10	0·10	0·20	6·10	6·50
Increase since 1979	1·40	7·60	6·30	17·40	17·50	17·70	23·90	30·30

Table 3: Percentage change since previous year of real equivalised incomes of each decile of pensioner households 1979-1987

Decile	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*
Lowest	2	5	1	6	1	−3	2	−1
2	1	7	1	6	2	−1	3	0
3	1	6	1	6	2	−1	3	1
4	1	6	2	6	1	0	3	1
5	1	5	2	7	0	0	3	2
6	1	5	2	7	1	0	3	3
7	1	6	1	7	1	0	3	3
8	−1	7	0	9	0	2	4	4
9	0	6	−1	11	−2	5	3	5
Highest	4	6	9	21	−1	−1	12	15
Average	1	6	−1	10	0	0	5	5
Increase since 1979	1	7	6	17	17	17	23	31

Source: Family Expenditure Survey 1987.

Note: In common with all other surveys, the Family Expenditure Survey draws information from a random sample of the population. This means that the FES will occasionally include some individuals whose weekly incomes are considerably higher or lower than those of the remainder of their quantile. The unrepresentative income of such individuals may cause wide swings in the figures particularly in year-to-year comparisons and when dis-aggregated into quantiles. In general, when viewed over the long term, the data provides a reliable indication of the movement in average weekly income.

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the proportion of *(a)* all pensioners, *(b)* single male pensioners, *(c)* single female pensioners, *(d)* pensioner couples, *(e)* single women aged 75 years or over, *(f)* single men aged 75 years or over, *(g)* couples where at least one partner is aged 75 years or over, who are in receipt of an occupational pension on the basis of the 1987 family expenditure survey; and for each group what is the mean and median amount received.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information requested is set out in the table.

Table: Pensioners with occupational pensions

	Proportion with occupational pension Per cent.	*Mean amount received £*	*Median amount received £*
All pensioners	52	44·80	24·30
Single male pensioners	53	43·30	21·50
Single female pensioners	39	33·80	19·20
Pensioner couples	69	53·30	30·00
Single women 75 or over	29	34·30	19·00
Single men 75 and over	52	42·60	20·40
Couples where at least one partner is 75 or over	65	51·00	25·40

Notes:

1. *Source:* Family Expenditure Survey 1987.
2. All figures refer to pensioner tax units. A tax unit is a single person of pensionable age or a couple where the man is of pensionable age. .
3. £s per week at 1987 prices.
4. Average and median amounts are based on the number of pensioners actually in receipt of occupational pensions.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will consider taking steps to deal with the failure of local authorities to meet housing benefit claims within the statutory periods.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We have no power to intervene in the day-to-day administration of the housing benefit scheme, which is the statutory responsibility of the local authorities. Authorities were, however, recently reminded about their duty to process claims within 14 days, or as soon as reasonably practicable thereafter, in a circular HB/CCB(90)1, a copy of which is in the Library.

Independent Living Fund

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications for financial assistance were made to the independent living fu[illegible]uring 1988 and 1989 from people living in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Scott: The information requested is not available for Wales only. The independent living fund is currently helping 202 people in Wales and has helped 215 people in Wales since July 1989.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are *(a)* the estimated expenditure targets and *(b)* the projected Government grants awarded to the independent living fund for (i) 1990 and (ii) 1991.

Mr. Scott: The independent living fund's budget was doubled to more than £10 million in 1989-90 and has been doubled again to well over £20 million in 1990-91. Estimated expenditure targets are not available for 1990-91.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he has any plans to reduce the resources of the independent living fund during the next financial year.

Mr. Scott: We have no plans to reduce the resources of the independent living fund in 1990-91. Indeed we have more than doubled its resources to well over £20 million in 1990-91.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many disabled people have been helped by the independent living fund since its inception; and if he will categorise them according to the nature of their disability.

Mr. Scott: The independent living fund has helped 4,264 disabled people up to the end of February 1990. Sufficient information is not available in order for them to be categorised by the nature of their disability.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much money has been awarded in grants by the independent living fund since its inception; if he will categorise them according to the purpose for which they have been made; and what proportion is in the form of *(a)* single grants and *(b)* regular payments.

Mr. Scott: The independent living fund had awarded a total of £8·3 million in benefit up to the end of February 1990. Information detailing the specific purpose for which payments have been made is not available.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will ensure that the independent living fund has sufficient resources to continue to provide for those urgent needs of disabled people which are not met by social security provision, the local authorities or the Health Service;

(2) if he will ensure that the independent living fund has sufficient resources to ensure that the regular payments it makes to disabled people can continue as long as the need remains;

(3) if he will ensure that the independent living fund has sufficient resources to ensure consistency in its awards to disabled people throughout its financial year;

(4) if he will make a statement on the funding and future of the independent living fund.

Mr. Scott: Provision for the independent living fund was doubled to more than £10 million this year and doubled again to well over £20 million for 1990-91. However, the success of the fund means that much of this provision is committed to existing beneficiaries or to those to whom offers of help have already been made.

We intend to meet the trustees of the fund shortly to discuss how best to proceed in these changed circumstances.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list in the *Official Report* the main objectives of the independent living fund.

Mr. Scott: The aim of the independent living fund is to provide, subject to the provisions and powers laid down in the trust deed, financial assistance to very severely disabled people who are in need of such assistance to enable them to live independently.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will request the independent living fund to monitor the claims it receives so as to assess the variation in local authority response to requests for help with the needs of disabled people; and if he will provide them with the funds to do so.

Mr. Scott: We have no plans to make such a request to the independent living fund.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has received from the trustees of the independent living fund regarding the funds they require for 1990-91 to continue to respond to requests for help from disabled people in a way that is consistent with their established practice.

Mr. Scott: We have received no such estimate from the trustees of the independent living fund. We are hoping to meet the trustees shortly to discuss their requirements for 1990-91.

Severe Disability Premium

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many appeals tribunals regarding payment of severe disability premium have been adjourned to a later date within the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many appeals tribunals regarding payment of severe disability premium are waiting to be convened; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The administration of social security appeal tribunals is the responsibility of the president of the social security appeal tribunals, His Honour Judge Holden. The information requested cannot be obtained from the president's office as the administrative statistics for appeal tribunals are not broken down into data for specific income support premiums.

Income Support

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update the answer given to the hon. Member for Birkenhead on 30 January 1989, *Official Report*, column *70*, about claimants and dependants on supplementary benefits income support.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information is in the tables:

Number of claimants in receipt of supplementary benefit or income support

Year	*Great Britain*	*England*	*Wales*	*Scotland*
1979	2,855,000	2,396,000	172,000	286,000
1980	3,118,000	2,627,000	186,000	304,000
1981	3,723,000	3,131,000	221,000	371,000
1982	4,267,000	3,590,000	253,000	423,000
1983	4,349,000	3,649,000	260,000	440,000
1984	4,609,000	3,866,000	275,000	468,000
1986	4,938,000	4,141,000	291,000	506,000
1987	4,896,000	4,073,000	287,000	535,000
1988	4,352,000	3,594,000	259,000	499,000
1989	4,160,000	3,430,000	246,000	485,000

Number of partners and dependent children of claimants in receipt of supplementary benefit or income support

Year	*Great Britain*	*England*	*Wales*	*Scotland*
1979	1,516,000	1,256,000	95,000	164,000
1980	1,745,000	1,465,000	104,000	177,000
1981	2,399,000	2,013,000	149,000	237,000
1982	2,803,000	2,348,000	173,000	281,000
1983	2,888,000	2,438,000	178,000	273,000
1984	3,119,000	2,618,000	198,000	304,000
1986	3,353,000	2,821,000	207,000	326,000
1987	3,309,000	2,789,000	194,000	327,000
1988	3,036,000	2,527,000	182,000	328,000
1989	2,860,000	2,380,000	165,000	315,000

Sources for both tables:

1979-1987—Annual Statistical Inquiry.
1988—Updated figures using Annual Statistical Inquiry.
1989—Provisional estimates based on May Quarterly Statistical Inquiry.

Notes:

1. All figures are rounded to the nearest thousand and may not therefore sum.
2. There was no Annual Statistical Inquiry in 1985: the one due in December that year was deferred until February 1986.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the maximum net weekly incomes that would qualify for poll tax rebates for *(a)* an employee who is single and aged under 25 years, *(b)* an employee who is single and aged over 25 years, *(c)* a married couple with two children aged under 11 years, *(d)* a single pensioner aged 60 to 74 years and *(e)* a pensioner couple aged 60 to 74 years assuming poll tax levels of (i) £349, (ii) £381, (iii) £386, (iv) £391 and (v) £394, respectively.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information requested is set out in the following table:

Maximum net weekly income at which community charge benefit is awarded

Annual community charge £	*Single person under 25* £	*Single person over 25* £	*Married couple, 2 children under 11* £	*Single pensioner aged 60 to 74* £	*Pensioner couple aged 60 to 74* £
349·00	66·16	74·06	167·71	80·86	143·61
381·00	69·44	77·34	174·26	84·14	150·16
386·00	69·95	77·85	175·28	84·65	151·18
391·00	70·46	78·36	176·30	85·16	152·20
394·00	70·77	78·67	176·92	85·47	152·82

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Primary Schools

11. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much was spent per pupil in primary schools in Staffordshire in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what was the comparable figure in 1978-79, at constant prices.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The most recent data available relate to 1987-88. In that year Staffordshire spent £980 per primary pupil, compared with £370 per pupil in cash terms in 1978-79. At 1987-88 prices, those figures are £980 and £755 respectively—a real-terms increase of nearly 30 per cent.

68. **Mr. Geraint Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to guarantee improved non-contact time for primary school teachers.

Mrs. Rumbold: The organisation of the school day and the duties to be undertaken by individual teachers in their 1,265 hours of directed time are matters for head teachers. The Interim Advisory Committee on School Teachers' Pay and Conditions has drawn attention in its third report to the scope that exists for LEAs and governing bodies to develop policies to increase teachers' non-contact time.

40. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proposals he has to ensure that there are sufficient teachers available for primary schools in London in September 1990.

Mr. Alan Howarth: We are spending £159,000 in support of a London teacher recruitment campaign, which targets returners and mature new entrants, particularly women, who live locally. This campaign is also being supported by ILEA and the London boroughs.

My right hon. Friend recently gave consent to the Inner London education authority proposal to sell a number of properties and sites to the London teachers housing association. These will be used to provide some 250 housing units for teachers in inner London. I expect the scheme to help the inner London boroughs in their efforts to attract and retain teachers.

My right hon. Friend has also accepted in full the recommendations of the Interim Advisory Committee on Teachers' Pay and Conditions. These included an 8·8 per cent. increase in London weighting and a further discretionary supplement of £750 for inner London.

In addition, from April 1990 £4 million education support grant will be available over two years to support 45 LEAs, over half of them in London, to develop flexible and innovative recruitment packages aimed at returners.

GCSE Curriculum

13. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received concerning curriculum overload for GCSE pupils arising from excessively time-consuming project work.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend and I continue to receive letters on this subject, although significantly fewer than in 1988, the first year of GCSE.

Grant-maintained Schools

14. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the number of schools to date which have elected to become direct grant-maintained.

Mr. MacGregor: Ballots have been held at 84 schools. Parents at 64 schools have so far voted in favour of proceeding with an application for grant-maintained status. I have approved 34 of the 46 proposals for grant-maintained status which have so far reached me for a decision.

66. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement on the guidelines for approval of grant-maintained status for schools.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend's reply to the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) earlier today.

Nursery Education

15. **Ms. Gordon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to enable access to nursery education of children in every local education authority area.

24. **Mr. Clelland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to enable access to nursery education of children in every local education authority area.

62. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to enable access to nursery education of children in every local education authority area.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend has no such plans. It is for local education authorities, acting under their discretionary powers, to determine the extent and form of provision for the under-fives in their area.

School Repairs

16. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make an estimate of the current outstanding repairs in schools in England and Wales.

47. **Mr. David Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make an estimate of current outstanding repairs on schools in England and Wales.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The DES school building survey in 1987 estimated the cost of implementing the main structural requirements related to the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981 and other physical requirements in primary and secondary schools in England was about £1·1 billion. Substantial sums have since been devoted to improving school premises. The repair of schools in Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

60. **Mr. Barron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action he is taking to ensure that schools are in good repair, prior to the local management of schools being effected.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin).

55. **Sir Michael McNair-Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps are being taken to assist local education authorities to maintain the upkeep of school-buildings.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The 1990-91 grant settlement allows for local authorities in England to spend almost £15 billion on education; that is over 9 per cent. higher than the comparable total for last year. Annual capital guidelines for capital works by LEAs for education are some £485 (compared with capital allocations, under the old system, of £352 million in 1989-90); and £118 million for the voluntary aided, special agreement and grant-maintained sectors. LEAs will continue to use capital receipts to increase expenditure above that financed by borrowing. It is for local education authorities and governors to maintain the upkeep of school buildings from within the resources available to them.

Research

17. **Mr. Caborn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what estimate he has made of the cost of bringing scientific instruments for research in universities and polytechnics up to the current state of the art.

42. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what provision he has made for the re-equipment of research laboratories in universities and polytechnics following the survey by his Advisory Board for the Research Councils of their instrumentation needs.

Mr. Jackson: The Advisory Board for the Research Councils' recent survey found that over three quarters of respondents regarded their present research equipment as adequate or better. Universities and polytechnics estimated that £259 million worth of additional equipment was needed to support current research interests. Our latest expenditure plans allow for further increases in spending on equipment.

70. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science who is responsible for the allocation of funds for research into different aspects of the global environment.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. Friend allocates funds to the research councils to enable them to carry out programmes of research across a wide field, including global environmental research. It is for the research councils themselves to determine how to allocate the funds made available to them.

Local Management of Schools

18. **Mr. McWilliam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress has been made on local management of schools; and if he will make a statement.

28. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress has been made on local management of schools; and if he will make a statement.

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress has been made on local management of schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Eighty-seven local education authorities' schemes for local management of schools have received formal approval to come into force on 1 April this year, and 10 authorities have been informed that their schemes cannot be approved in their current form for introduction this year.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the operation of the local financial management of schools; and if he has given guidance to local authorities on the assessment of school budgets.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam). Decisions on total expenditure for school education are a matter for individual local education authorities. Under local management of schools those resources must be distributed by means of a formula which conforms to the guidelines set out in the Department's circular 7/88 and provides for the bulk of resources to be allocated according to pupil numbers and ages.

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has received from Norfolk local education authority in respect of preparations for local management of schools.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend has received no letters in 1990 from Norfolk local education authority about the local management of schools.

43. **Mr. Haselhurst:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any plans to introduce greater flexibility into schemes for local management of schools.

Mrs. Rumbold: There is ample flexibility for schemes for local management of schools to reflect local needs and priorities within the national criteria. In addition, there are simple arrangements which allow local education authorities to make changes to their approved schemes in the light of experience.

36. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement on his decision to withhold approval of the scheme for local management of schools originally submitted by Leicestershire education authority; and what discussions his Department has since held with the authority.

Mrs. Rumbold: The scheme for the local management of schools submitted by Leicestershire LEA failed to meet a number of policy requirements, in particular in relation to its proposed funding formula. Officials from the Department will be visiting Leicestershire on 4 April to continue discussions with the authority, with the aim that an acceptable scheme can be designed and approved for introduction in April 1991.

Standard Spending Assessments

19. **Mr. Flannery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science on what basis the 1990-91 standard spending assessments for education were calculated.

29. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science on what basis the 1990-91 standard spending assessments for education were calculated.

57. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the 1990-91 standard spending assessments for education.

58. **Mr. Patchett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the 1990-91 standard spending assessments for education.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer the hon. Members to the reply that I gave earlier today to the hon. Members for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) and for Sheffield, Heeley (Mr. Michie).

69. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to discuss the 1990-91 standard spending assessments for education with Leicestershire county council.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend has no plans to discuss the education component of the 1990-91 standard spending assessment for education with Leicestershire county council.

Higher Education

20. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what measures he intends to introduce to increase the participation rate of 16 to 19-year-olds in full-time education.

49. **Mr. O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proposals he has to increase the level of achievement of 16 to 19-year-olds in full-time education.

Mr. Jackson: I refer the hon. Members to the reply that I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner).

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what are the numbers of students in *(a)* full-time non-advanced further education, *(b)* full-time higher education at undergraduate or equivalent level and *(c)* full-time postgraduate study.

Mr. Jackson: In Great Britain universities, polytechnics and colleges during the academic year 1988-89 there were 494,000 students in full-time non-advanced further education, 554,000 students in full-time higher education at undergraduate level and 89,000 students on post-graduate courses.

54. **Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his target by 1992-93 for the participation of 16, 17 and 18-year-olds in full-time education; and if he will make a statement.

74. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his target by 1992-93 for the participation of 16, 17 and 18-year-olds in full-time education; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: On current statistical assumptions, participation rates for 16, 17 and 18-year-olds in full-time education in schools and further education colleges in England are projected to rise from 49·9 per cent., 34·4 per cent. and 9·3 per cent. respectively in 1988-89 to 53·4 per cent., 38·3 per cent. and 9·6 per cent. by 1992-93. These figures do not include YTS trainees who attend college full-time. The Government believe that many more young people should be participating in education and training, both full-time and part-time.

Languages

21. **Mr. Batiste:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress is being made in encouraging the teaching of languages in schools so as to better prepare pupils for the opportunities of the European Community.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Government have included a modern foreign language as a foundation subject in the national curriculum to be studied by all pupils between the ages of 11 and 16. Since last autumn, maintained schools in England have been required to offer all pupils aged 11 to 14 the opportunity of choosing to study at least one of the working languages of the European Community. Within this framework, we are encouraging schools to offer a greater diversity of languages and we are providing education support grants for pilot projects in some local education authorities in England to promote the preparation and implementation of plans for language diversification.

26. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assessment he has made of progress in developing new programmes for European language learning in secondary schools with particular emphasis on German, French and Spanish.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend announced on 15 March, *Official Report*, col. *322*, the publication of the initial advice submitted by the national curriculum working group for modern foreign languages, and welcomed the progress which the group had made in developing the attainment targets and programmes of study for modern foreign languages in the national curriculum. The attainment targets and programmes of study apply to all the languages—including the main European Community languages, such as French, German and Spanish—which may qualify as the national curriculum modern foreign language foundation subject. I am sending my hon. Friend a copy of the working group's initial advice.

Student Loans

22. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the administration of the proposed student loans scheme.

30. **Mr. Doran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the administration of the proposed student loans scheme.

39. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the administration of the proposed student loans scheme.

Mr. Jackson: It is the Government's intention that, subject to the passage of the Education (Student Loans) Bill, the student loans scheme will be administered by the Student Loans Company. Preparatory work on the scheme is well in hand. The company has appointed senior staff, acquired premises in Glasgow and is presently testing the main computer system.

38. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he plans to issue further details of his proposals for a student loan scheme.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. Friend will keep the House fully informed as to the development of the student loans scheme. Details of the certification and application process, the role of the academic institutions and arrangements for loans to minors were announced on 22 March, *Official Report*, column *709*.

Teacher Vacancies

23. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what figures his Department holds for the number of teacher vacancies in England as at 1 January 1990 and at the recent equivalent date at the beginning of each of the years of the previous decade.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Information on teacher vacancies in January 1990 is not yet available.

The number of vacancies for full-time permanent teachers in England in January of each year from 1980 to 1989 are shown in the table. Information on vacancies in nursery and primary schools was not collected before 1988.

	Nursery and primary schools		*Secondary schools*	
	Number of vacancies	*As a percentage of full-time teachers in post*	*Number of vacancies*	*As a percentage of full-time teachers in post*
1980	—	—	3,307	1·5
1981	—	—	2,058	0·9
1982	—	—	1,720	0·8
1983	—	—	1,843	0·8
1984	—	—	1,829	0·8
1985	—	—	1,897	0·9
1986	—	—	2,398	1·1
1987	—	—	2,508	1·2
1988	2,400	1·4	1,995	1·0
1989	3,116	1·8	2,424	1·3

Eastern Europe (Scientists)

25. **Mr. Chris Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what additional support he has made available to British scientists seeking to build up contacts with eastern European scientists since the process of liberalisation began in 1989.

Mr. Jackson: In the 1989 public expenditure survey the science budget was increased by £175 million. I am sure that the research councils, the Royal Society and the Fellowship of Engineering will be considering the new opportunities in eastern Europe as they decide how they allocate the resources made available to them.

History Teaching

27. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he intends to publish the final report of the national curriculum working party on history; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend is currently considering the final report of the history working group. He is hoping to publish the report shortly.

National Curriculum

31. **Mrs. Rosie Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received concerning the speed at which the Government are implementing the national curriculum; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend frequently receives correspondence about the national curriculum. Some of it concerns the pace of implementation. We intend to implement the national curriculum as soon as practicable in order to raise standards of education. But we are phasing its introduction to make it more manageable for schools in accordance with our stated policy.

75. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress there has been with the introduction of the parts of the national curriculum dealing with mathematics, science and technology.

Mrs. Rumbold: The national curriculum attainment targets and programmes of study for mathematics and for science came into force from the beginning of the last autumn term for children aged five and 11. Schools are preparing to apply the national curriculum requirements to seven-year-olds from this September.

The order for technology in the national curriculum was laid before Parliament on 6 March. Attainment targets and programmes of study will be introduced this autumn for children aged five, seven and 11 years of age.

63. **Mr. Duffy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representation he has recently received about the national curriculum; and whether he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend frequently receives correspondence from school governing bodies, teachers, parents and others about the national curriculum. It shows substantial support for the national curriculum in principle.

53. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proposals he has to ensure that there are sufficient teachers available to teach the national curriculum in September 1990.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Since 1986 the Government have been pursuing a range of measures designed to attract people into teaching. These include the initial teacher training bursary scheme for shortage subjects, recently increased in value to £1,500, with £2,000 for physics students, and extended to include modern foreign languages; the education support grant scheme for school teacher recruitment; and support for a Londonwide recruitment campaign to attract qualified teacher returners. In addition, implementation of the licensed teacher scheme will ensure an increasing number of mature entrants.

We also plan a work experience scheme to give undergraduates experience of teaching. In addition, through the work of the teaching as a career unit and other ways, we will continue to publicise teaching as a career and to stimulate recruitment.

46. **Mr. Amos:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about progress on the introduction of the national curriculum in Northumberland.

Mrs. Rumbold: It is for the Northumberland education authority in the first instance to monitor progress in introducing the national curriculum in the schools it maintains. However, evidence from Her Majesty's inspectors shows that schools across the country are in general making satisfactory progress in implementing the new requirements.

Cleveland County Council

32. **Ms. Mowlam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to discuss the 1990-91 standard spending assessments for education with Cleveland county council.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend has no plans to discuss the education component of the 1990-91 standard spending assessment for education with Cleveland county council.

Research Councils

33. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many fellows of the Royal Society he expects to be made redundant as a result of restructuring by research councils.

Mr. Jackson: This information is not held centrally.

Special Educational Needs

34. **Mr. Nicholas Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to increase the availability of integrated pre-school education for children with special educational needs.

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if his Department plans any new initiatives to increase the integration of special needs students in mainstream schools.

Mr. Alan Howarth: It is the duty of local education authorities to keep under review the arrangements they make for special educational provision.

73. **Mr. Morley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what safeguards he has imposed to ensure that delegated budgets take into account the extra cost of the education of children with special educational needs.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on 21 February, *Official Report*, column *795*.

Basildon

35. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the reorganisation of sixth forms in Basildon.

Mr. Alan Howarth: On 24 January 1990 my right hon. Friend approved proposals to reorganise secondary and further education in the Basildon and Wickford areas. Several local comprehensive schools will now lose their sixth forms, and educational provision for pupils aged 16 to 19 will be concentrated in a new tertiary college.

Pupil Assessment

37. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has for the assessment and testing of seven-year-olds; and if he will make a statement.

72. **Mr. Rogers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has for the assessment and testing of seven-year-olds; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer the hon. Members to the reply which my right hon. Friend gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) on 6 March, *Official Report*, column *578*.

Gateshead

41. **Ms. Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has any plans to discuss the 1990-91 standard spending assessments for education with Gateshead metropolitan district council.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend has no plans to discuss the education component of the 1990-91 standard spending assessment for education with Gateshead metropolitan district council.

Pollution (Eastern Europe)

44. **Mr. John P. Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what support he is giving to research by British scientists on priorities in the reduction of pollution in eastern Europe.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. Friend announced on 10 January that the science budget for 1990-91 will be £897 million. I am sure that the research councils, the Royal Society and the Fellowship of Engineering will be considering the new opportunities in eastern Europe as they decide how they allocate these funds. I understand that the Natural Environment Research Council is currently contributing to an international research programme on gaseous emission pollution in which several east European countries are participating. In addition, the Agricultural and Food Research Council's Institute of Arable Crops is currently engaged in a number of collaborative projects within eastern Europe. These include a joint initiative with Poland on nitrate and potassium movement in the soils, and a project with Bulgarian scientists on biological control of insects and nematode pests.

City Technology Colleges

45. **Mr. Livsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his Department's policy on encouragement of voluntary-aided city technology colleges.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend has been interested to hear of plans by the London borough of Wandsworth for the establishment of a voluntary aided city technology college and will be giving careful consideration to the issues involved. He cannot prejudge the outcome of any statutory proposals which may come to him for decision.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any plans to restore the negotiating rights of teachers' trades unions on pay and conditions of service.

48. **Dr. Twinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he will make a statement on the new machinery for determining teachers' pay to replace the interim advisory committee.

59. **Mr. Nicholas Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what arrangements are being made for negotiating teachers' pay and conditions for 1991-92.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer the hon. Members and my hon. Friend to the reply given earlier today by my right hon. Friend to my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway).

Examination Results

50. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what evidence he has as to whether there is any correlation between the spending on education of local education authorities and the results achieved as they are monitored by examinations.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) on 18 January, *Official Report*, column *334*. That shows that many authorities with relatively low spending per pupil achieve good examination results.

UNESCO

51. **Mr. Robert Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will seek an increase in the science budget to renew United Kingdom membership of UNESCO.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is currently undertaking a review of United Kingdom membership of UNESCO and hopes to be able to announce the outcome in a few weeks' time.

Teacher Shortages

52. **Mr. Gerald Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress has been made on measures being taken to tackle teacher shortages in inner London.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend accepted in full the recommendations of the Interim Advisory Committee on Teachers' Pay and Conditions. These included an 8·8 per cent. increase in London weighting and a further discretionary supplement of £750 for inner London. My right hon. Friend has also given consent to the Inner London education authority to sell a number of properties and sites to the London teachers housing association. These will provide some 250 homes for teachers in inner London.

Good progress is being made on other measures to tackle teacher shortages. The Government are contributing £159,000 to a London recruitment campaign which will target local returners to teaching. This will be supported by a substantial share of £2 million education support grant in each of the next two years.

The Department will continue to support the inner London LEAs in their efforts to recruit and retain sufficient teachers of the right quality.

Teacher Morale

61. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations his Department has received regarding the morale of teachers.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. Friend receives, as is normal, a substantial correspondence on general issues pertaining to the teaching profession, among them being morale.

Rural Schools

64. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has received concerning the future of small schools in rural areas.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. Friend regularly receives representations about rural primary schools which are the subject of reorganisation proposals.

Catholic Primary Schools

65. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what recent representations he has received about Catholic primary schools.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Representations have been received from various sources from time to time about Catholic primary schools, including one from my hon. Friend about St. Patrick's Roman Catholic primary school in Cleveland. I shall reply to my hon. Friend shortly.

Genetic Engineering

67. **Dr. Bray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has made to the European Community Council of Science Ministers on the adoption by the European Community of British practices on the regulation of genetic engineering research and the release of genetically engineered organisms.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. Friend has made no representations. The European Community Council of Environment Ministers has under consideration two directives on the contained use of genetically modified micro-organisms and the deliberate release of genetically modified organisms into the environment, both for research and development purposes and as products. Responsibility for these directives in the United Kingdom rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment.

Social Security

71. **Ms. Walley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assessment he has made of the effect on eligibility for access courses of the operation of the social security system.

Mr. Jackson: The so-called 21-hour rule administered by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security permits unemployed adults to receive income support while studying part-time, so long as they are actively seeking work and are prepared to leave their studies immediately a suitable job opportunity arises. Unemployed people undertaking access courses can expect to receive income support in accordance with these criteria.

Inner London Education Authority

Mr. Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a further statement on the arrangements being made for the London boroughs to take over the responsibilities of the Inner London education authority.

Mrs. Rumbold: The transfer process is going satisfactorily and schools and colleges in the 13 inner London LEAs will open for business as usual on Monday 2 April. I look forward to the development of an improved, more cost-effective and more responsive education service in inner London.

Speech Problems

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what consideration his Department is currently giving to supplying communication aids to speech impaired children who require such aids in educational facilities.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Such provision, where prescribed for pupils with statements under the Education Act 1981, is the responsibility of LEAs. My officials, together with officials of the Department of Health have, however, been assessing whether the current arrangements for the assessment of children with communication handicaps meet the needs of those children in the most efficient and cost-effective way. My right hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will be considering in the light of their work whether any specific steps by the two Departments would be appropriate.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what qualifications a teacher is required to hold over and above the basic teaching certificate in order to specialise in work with children with specific language disorder.

Mr. Alan Howarth: None. However, within the local education authority training grants scheme there is a national priority area to support in-service training for designated teachers in ordinary schools who offer a general advisory service to their colleagues on special educational needs. Support for this training is at the discretion of the local education authorities.

The Department is funding a research project to identify the in-service training needs of teachers of children with speech and language disorders and to develop materials for a distance taught course.

Disabled Students Allowance

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will amend regulations to ensure that the disabled students' allowance is based on assessment of need in place of means testing.

Mr. Jackson: Assessments for the disabled students' allowance within mandatory awards already take into account relevant expenditure actually incurred by the student. In practice, a student will receive maintenance grant, including at least the amount assessed for this allowance, unless the parental or other contribution is based on quite high levels of income. My right hon. Friend regards this as a reasonable balance between public and family support for such students. He has no present plans to treat the allowance differently from other elements of the mandatory award by excluding it from means testing.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science on what date he expects to announce his Department's new arrangements for the disabled students' allowance.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. Friend announced improvements in the disabled students' allowance for the academic year 1990-91 in answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) on 19 March, *Official Report,* col. *417-18.* Revised mandatory awards regulations will be laid before Parliament in the summer, and any necessary guidance will be issued to local education authorities and students then.

Speech Therapists

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make it his policy to collect details of the number of speech therapists either employed or funded by each education authority in England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Council of Local Education Authorities has discussed with officials of the Department and the Department of Health a number of issues relating to the responsibilities of district health authorities and local education authorities in respect of the provision of speech therapy services. I expect to meet members of the Council to discuss these issues quite soon.

Medical Specialties (Chairs)

Mr. Jack Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will list the medical specialties for which there is only one academic chair;

(2) if he will list the number of chairs in audiological medicine, giving the universities at which they are held and the date at which they were established;

(3) if he will list the number of chairs in ear, nose and throat pathology, giving the universities at which they are held and the date at which they were established;

(4) if he will list the number of chairs in otolaryngology, giving the universities at which they are held and the date at which they were established.

Mr. Jackson: This information is not collected centrally. In any case, professorial titles or occupancy of chairs do not provide a reliable guide to the teaching and research that institutions undertake.

Postgraduate Medical Institutes

Mr. Jack Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will establish an inquiry into the amount and security of the finance provided for the postgraduate medical institutes which joined large medical schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The funding of medical schools is a matter for the universities concerned, in consultation as necessary with the Universities Funding Council.

Students (Housing Benefit)

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his estimate of the average amount of housing benefit claimed by students *(a)* outside

London who claim more than £310 per academic year and *(b)* in London who claim more than £340 per academic year.

Mr. Jackson: Government records of students' housing benefit claims are not collected centrally in the detail requested. However, I understand that Department of Social Security management information returns for May 1988 show that the average benefit receipt among all those students who were claiming housing benefit at that time was £7·80 per week, or just under £300 for those students who claim over the whole academic year.

In addition, Research Services Limited collected information about students' social security claims when conducting its 1988-89 survey of student income and expenditure. A copy of the survey report is in the Library.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his estimate of the number of students outside London who claim more than £310 per academic year in housing benefit; and who in London claim more than £340 per academic year in housing benefit.

Mr. Jackson: Government records of students' housing benefit claims are not collected centrally in the detail requested. However, I understand that Department of Social Security management information returns for May 1988 show that there was a total of 78,000 students claiming housing benefit at that time.

In addition, Research Services Limited collected information about students' social security claims when conducting its 1988-89 survey of student income and expenditure. A copy of the survey report is in the Library.

Further and Higher Education

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the number of people aged 18 to 24 years currently undertaking non-advanced further education full-time and higher education full-time; and what percentage of the total population of 18 to 24-year-olds this represents.

Mr. Jackson: In Great Britain universities, polytechnics and colleges during the academic year 1988-89 there were 110,000 and 392,000 students aged 18 to 24 years on non-advanced further education courses and higher education courses respectively, representing together about 8 per cent. of the population of 18 to 24-year-olds in Great Britain.

Pupil-Teacher Ratios

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the present pupil-teacher ratio in *(a)* primary and *(b)* post-primary schools in England.

Mr. Alan Howarth: In January 1989 the pupil-teacher ratios in maintained primary and secondary schools in England were 22·0 and 15·3 respectively.

School Budgets (Exceptions)

Mr. Critchley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish the percentage of its general schools budget which every local education authority has removed as mandatory and discretionary exceptions.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) on 5 February 1990, *Official Report*, col. *451*.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 28 March 1990

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Science Students

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the cost of educating a science student to Ph.D. level in a university in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* Japan, *(c)* the United States of America, *(d)* Scandinavia and *(e)* the countries of the European Community.

Mr. Jackson: The data requested are not available by subject and level of course.

Universities (Capital Expenditure)

Mr. Ian Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether the figure for 1990-91 for planned capital expenditure for universities in the public expenditure White Paper, Cm. 1011, is on a basis consistent with that for polytechnics and colleges.

Mr. Jackson: I regret that the figures for planned capital expenditure by the Universities Funding Council in table 11.1 of the public expenditure White Paper (Cm. 1011) are not shown on a consistent basis for each year. Figures on a consistent basis are shown in the following table. The percentage increase in planned capital expenditure in 1990-91 is broadly the same for each sector of higher education.

£ million

	1988-89	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Universities Funding Council			
Capital	141	139	152 (175)
Current	1,585	1,713	1,685 (1,661)

Note: Figures as shown in Cm. 1011 in brackets.

Consultancies

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1989 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1989, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment; and what is the total amount that his Department has budgeted to spend in the current year.

Mrs. Rumbold: This Department spent £685,000 on computer and management consultancies in the 1989-90 financial year and has budgeted for £540,000 for 1990-91. Contracts awarded in 1989-90 were as follows:

Peat Marwick McLintock—Financial management survey of SERC
Peat Marwick McLintock—Student loans
Price Waterhouse—Student loans
PAS Limited—Parent awareness survey
Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte—Financial computer system consultancy
Peat Marwick McLintock—Financial computer system consultancy
SCOLL—IT Specialist productivity
FI Group—Grants payments system
BIS—CRAMM Reviews
Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte—Network security
LBMS—INGRES
Digitus—Desk Top Publishing
Fernhart—Service Desk
Butler Cox——Further Education Statistical Records
BIS—Telecommunications Darlington
Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte—Mainframe replacement
Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte—Financial system testing
ICL—CRIS-F Report writing
CMG—Data modelling
BIS—Data collection and electronic data interchange

History Working Party

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) when he first received the draft of the final report of the history working party;

(2) when he first received the final report of the history working party;

(3) on what dates in the last year he has met Commander Saunders Watson, chairman of the history working party;

(4) when he expects to publish the final report of the history working party.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend saw a draft of the history working group's report just before Christmas, and received the final report on 31 January. He will publish it soon. He met Commander Saunders Watson on 4 August last year and 10 January this year.

Pensions

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what is the average pension paid to head teachers who retired in 1989; and what was the average pension received by head teachers who retired in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1969;

(2) what is the value at current prices of the average pension received by lecturers in higher education on their retirement in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1969;

(3) what is the value at current prices of the average pension received by lecturers in further education on their retirement in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1969;

(4) what is the value, at current prices, of the average pension received by head teachers on their retirement in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1969;

(5) what is the value at current prices of the average pension received by teachers on their retirement in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1969;

(6) what was the average pension paid for lecturers in higher education who retired in 1989; and what is the average pension currently received by lecturers in higher education in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1969;

(7) what was the average pension received by lecturers in further education who retired in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1969;

(8) what was the average pension paid to teachers who retired in 1989; and what is the average pension currently received by teachers who retired in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1969.

Mr. Alan Howarth *[pursuant to his reply, 26 March 1990, c. 35-36.]:* The average rate of pension paid to teachers, head teachers and lecturers who retired in 1989 was as follows:

	£
Teachers	5,010
Head teachers	8,460
Lecturers	5,990

WALES

Footpaths and Bridleways

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list, for each of the years 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988 and 1989, the number of temporary traffic regulation orders made by local authorities under section 14 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 to restrict or prohibit the use of footpaths or bridleways for which he gave consent under section 15(2) of that Act for an extension of the period for which the order was in force.

Mr. Roberts: Temporary traffic orders affecting footpaths and bridleways are not separately identified from those affecting road traffic and no records are kept.

Infertility Services

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the infertility services provided by each health authority in Wales.

Mr. Grist: Information on infertility services provided by health authorities is not held centrally.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he proposes to charge-cap any Welsh local authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: I will decide whether to introduce community charge limitation in Wales in 1990-91 in the light of my consideration of Welsh authorities' expenditure plans.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the rules he intends to use for poll tax-capping in Wales.

Mr. Peter Walker: No.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give details of the number of additional staff employed to administer the community charge in Wales *(a)* in total, *(b)* by county council and *(c)* by district council.

Mr. Grist: This information is not held centrally.

Pupil-Teacher Ratios

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the present pupil-teacher ratio for *(a)* primary and *(b)* post primary schools in Wales.

Mr. Roberts: At January 1989, pupil-teacher ratio was 22·3 for primary schools and 15·4 for secondary schools.

Health Authorities

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the figures provided to him by each health authority in Wales in respect of *(a)* the authority's own estimate of the shortfall due to inflation in 1989-90 and *(b)* the figure by which each authority estimates it is underfunded for 1990-91.

Mr. Grist: My right hon. Friend and I have seen copies of reports from the treasurers of district health authorities in Wales to their chairmen's committee concerning the financial position of Welsh DHAs generally in the current financial year and their projections for 1990-91. These reports give estimates of shortfalls in funding in both years on the basis of estimates of inflation and other financial pressures. However, they fail to take account of the resources to be released to supplement allocations through the attainment of targets for cost improvements and income generation. They therefore understate the resources available to authorities to meet the financial pressures which they face. So long as minimum cost improvement and income generation targets are achieved —which should be possible in any well-managed authority —allocations in both years should be more than sufficient to meet these financial pressures.

Consultancies

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total amount spent by the Welsh Development Agency in 1989 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by the Welsh Development Agency in 1989, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment; and what is the total amount that the Welsh Development Agency has budgeted to spend in the current year.

Mr. Peter Walker: The Welsh Development Agency has spent £139,534 on the following consultancy contracts in 1989:

Company	*Assignment*
Ernst and Young	Documentation for users of new computer systems and advice on implementing new systems.
P J Sullivan	Development of integrated data bases from existing computer systems.
Beaufort Research	Monitoring effectiveness of Agency marketing campaign in Wales
Numbers Research	Monitoring effectiveness of Agency marketing campaign outside of Wales.
Taylor Nelson	Monitoring effectiveness of Agency food initiative marketing campaign.
BJM	Customer attitudes monitoring.

The agency estimates that £150,000 will be spent on such contracts in 1990.

Myodil

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of people in each health authority area in Wales who have been affected adversely by the use of myodil in connection with X-ray tests.

Mr. Grist: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

ENERGY

Consultancies

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1989 on management and computer contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1989, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment; and what is the total amount that his Department has budgeted to spend in the current year.

Mr. Wakeham: My Department spent £618,000 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases, in the financial year 1989-90.

Contracts placed with private sector firms and companies for management and computer consultancies during 1989-90 were:

Consultants	*Subject*
Price Waterhouse	Advice on, and implementation of, databases related to North Sea oil and gas activity.
KPG	Transfer of data from magnetic tape to optical disk.
J. P. Kenny	Advice on electronic storage of petroleum maps.
BIS	Advice on local area networks for computers.
Businessland	Advice on data communication links.
Specialist Services Scotland	Development of industrial capabilities database for the Offshore Supplies Office
Oracle (UK) Ltd.	Development of a database for recording offshore safety incidents.
Saxton Bampfylde	Recruitment consultants for chairman of North Western Electricity Board.
Russell Reynolds	Recruitment consultants for chairman of National Power.
TDA Consulting group Ltd.	Management training.
Jonathan Coates and Associates	Management training.
TFC Ltd.	Management training.
Brewster Computer Training Ltd.	IT training.
FI Word Processing Services Ltd.	IT training.
PST Ltd.	IT training.

My Department has budgeted to spend an estimated £750,000 on management and computer consultancy in the financial year 1990-91.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Disarmament

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all the current fora in which east-west disarmament talks are taking place.

Mr. Maude: NATO and the Warsaw pact are negotiating on conventional armed forces in Europe in Vienna, and at the open skies conference due to resume in Budapest next month; and (together with the neutral and non-aligned countries) on confidence and security-building measures in Vienna. Forty nations take part in the chemical weapons talks at the conference on disarmament in Geneva. The United States and the Soviet Union are negotiating on START and on nuclear testing, also in Geneva.

Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether there is likely to be a conference on security and co-operation in Europe this year.

Mr. Maude: A meeting of the Heads of State or Government of the CSCE participating states is likely to be held in the course of this year. The CSCE intersessional meetings for 1990 agreed at the Vienna follow-up meeting will also take place.

Purchasing Costs

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if his Department achieved the target of a 5 per cent. saving in purchasing costs in 1988-89 through use of the central unit on purchasing.

Mr. Maude: Yes. In 1988-89, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office achieved purchasing savings of 9·1 per cent.

Cuba

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the United States of America to restore normal relations with Cuba; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: None.

Nigeria

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will request the Nigerian authorities to expedite the issue of temporary employment visas for United Kingdom nationals carrying out duties in Nigeria with a stay of less than 90 days.

Mr. Maude: Under Nigerian rules, applications for temporary employment visas have to be referred to Nigeria for decision. We regularly press the Nigerian authorities to reduce delays to a minimum, and have been able to help with some individual cases.

German Democratic Republic

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the elections in the German Democratic Republic.

Mr. Maude: We welcome the recent elections in the GDR, which all observers consider to have been free and fair. We look forward to developing relations with the new Government once formed.

Baltic States

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his policy towards self-determination in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

Mr. Maude: We have never recognised de jure the incorporation of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania into the Soviet Union in 1940. We recognise the right of the Baltic peoples to say what their own future should be.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the policy of Her Majesty's Government towards political developments in *(a)* Lithuania, *(b)* Estonia and *(c)* Latvia.

Mr. Maude: We support the right of the Baltic peoples to decide their own future, and have welcomed the considerable progress made in the past two years.

Against the background of recent developments we now think it vital that the dialogue between the Soviet authorities and the Lithuanians should continue. We attach particular importance to the repeated statements by the Soviet leadership that there is no question of use of force.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will meet leaders of the Sajudis Popular Front of Lithuania.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has no plans for any such meeting.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether any representations have been made by Her Majesty's Government to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the political situation in *(a)* Lithuania, *(b)* Estonia and *(c)* Latvia.

Mr. Maude: The Soviet Union is well aware of our view that the Baltic peoples should be enabled to determine their own future. We have made clear to the Russians our concern about the situation in Lithuania and our firm view that continued dialogue between the Soviet authorities and the Lithuanians is essential.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made by the Baltic states to the British Government concerning the Baltic gold deposited for safekeeping with the Bank of England at the outbreak of the war.

Mr. Maude: The criteria which we apply to the recognition of a state are explained in the answer which the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Mr. Waldegrave) gave to a question by the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on 19 March. It would be open to the Government of any future independent state in Estonia, Latvia or Lithuania to make representations on the subject of gold deposits.

Buchenwald Exhibition

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if his Department has considered an application for an exhibition relating to Buchenwald concentration camp to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Maude: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Services Committee, arrangements have been made with the authorities of the House for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from 11 to 15 June.

Consultancies

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1989 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1989, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment; and what is the total amount that his Department has budgeted to spend in the current year.

Mr. Maude: We estimate that our expenditure in the financial year 1989-90 on management and computer consultancy will be:

	£
Management consultancy	232,100
Computer consultancy	1,691,710

Individual contracts awarded during the year were:

Management consultancies

W. S. Atkins Energy Limited—Energy survey
MWH Project Services Limited—Refurbishment project
The Anne Shaw organisation—Review of car pool
Pergamon Technical Services—Revision of regulations
Coopers and Lybrand—Study of Personnel Department
Coopers and Lybrand—Entry clearance study
Market and Opinion Research International—Staff communications Survey
Duhig Berry Limited—Scoping study of Project Support Office

Computer consultancies

BIS Applied Systems Limited—Systems Development
Casu Electronics Limited—Systems Development
Logica UK Limited—Requirements Analysis
The Instruction Set Limited—Requirement Analysis
Price Waterhouse—Project Management
BRS Europe—Systems Development
Software Sciences Limited—Systems Development/Training Consultancy
Infosound Limited—Training Aids
Secure Information Systems Limited—Systems Strategy
Towngate Software Limited—Systems Development
Technological Solutions Limited—Programming
Praxis Systems plc—Systems Analysis and Design/Project Management
Applied Learning International Limited—Training Aids
Management Systems Development Limited—Feasibility Study/Systems Development
Casu Europe Limited—Systems Development
SCICON—FOLIOS Development
Duhig Berry Limited—Project Control Systems
Computer Learning Centre Limited—Traning Aids
Ashford Associates Limited—Post-Implementation Review
Softlab Limited—Risk Analysis
Kinesis Computing Limited—Systems Development
Mega Consultancy—Building and Cabling Works
Absolute Solutions—Technical Documentation
Digitus—Systems Development
System Assurance Limited—Strategy Support
PA Limited—Organisational Issues
P+P Corporate Systems Limited—Systems Development
NCR Limited—Systems Development
BOS Software Limited—Systems Development

There is no specific budgetary provision of management consultancy for the financial year 1990-91, but our present estimated expenditure is £37,500. The budget for computer consultancy is £1,430,000.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the number of cases where the Crown prosecution service has failed to prosecute when a coroner's court has brought in a verdict of unlawful killing during the last five years.

The Attorney-General: The information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Consultancies

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Attorney-General what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1989 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1989, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment; and what is the total amount that his Department has budgeted to spend in the current year.

The Attorney-General: No expenditure on management and computer consultancy contracts was incurred by the legal secretariat to the Law Officers in 1989-90, and no such expenditure is expected by the Treasury Solicitor's Department. In 1989-90 the Crown prosecution service spent £550,000 on management and computer consultancy contracts, while the Serious Fraud Office estimates its expenditure to be nil in respect of management consultancy contracts, but £213,000 in respect of computer consultancy contracts in 1989-90. The contracts awarded by the Crown prosecution service in 1989-90 were as follows:

PA Management Consultants—staffing model development study,

The Human Science and Advanced Technology Research Centre, Loughborough University—evaluation of the use of information technology to present evidence in court,

Kinesis Computing Limited—assistance with legal information feasibility study,

Cumulus Software Limited—training and assistance with changes to case tracking software,

Aims Systems Limited—assistance with formal specification of SCOPE case management project,

Yale Data Management Limited—assistance with the production of the SCOPE operational requirement and procurement.

The computer consultancy contracts awarded by the Serious Fraud Office were as follows:

Digitus—systems analysis, design and implementation of computerised case tracking system,

ITL—preparation of computer manual for document control system,

Digitus—programming amendments to computer system for document control,

Digitus—systems acceptance of case tracking and investigation system,

Ultracomp—preparation of performance tests for case tracking and investigation system,

CCTA—IT strategy study,

S & S Enterprises Limited—recovery of data from disc.

The total amounts the legal secretariat to the Law Officers, the Treasury Solicitor's Department, the Crown prosecution service and Serious Fraud Office have budgeted to spend in 1990-91 are nil, £5,000, £395,000 and £200,000 respectively.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Attorney-General what was the total amount spent by the Land Registry in 1989 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by the Land Registry in 1989, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment; and what is the total amount that the Land Registry has budgeted to spend in the current year.

The Attorney-General: Management and computer consultancy contracts were awarded by the Land Registry in 1989 as follows:

Management Consultancy

Industrial Training Service Ltd.—Programme to develop management training.

Computer Consultancy

Business Information Management—Technical advice on a requirement document for procurement of a new digital mapping system.

PAFEC Ltd.—An investigation into techniques for the colour scanning of map records.

Intergraph (UK) Ltd.—Software development of the Registry's Intergraph System.

Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency—Departmental Support Agreement providing ongoing technical advice support and Information Technology procurement services.

The Land Registry estimates that its expenditure in the financial year 1989-90, including expenditure on CCTA will be £42,899·70, and for 1990-91 a budget of £50,000 has been set.

PRIME MINISTER

Consultancies

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Prime Minister what was the total amount spent by the Cabinet Office in 1989 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; if she will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by the Cabinet Office in 1989, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment; and what is the total amount that the Cabinet Office has budgeted to spend in the current year.

The Prime Minister: The expenditure by the Cabinet Office on management and computer consultancies, excluding purchases of hardware and software, is estimated to be £163,900 in 1989-90. The management and computer consultancy contracts let by the Cabinet Office during 1989-90 are as follows:

Firm	*Assignment*
Coopers and Lybrand	Pilot study on evaluation
Infomet Ltd	System building for local area network
National Children's Bureau	Advice on the London Childcare Project
Nettel Ltd	Adapting software to user requirement
Oracle Corporation UK Ltd	Redevelopment of management information system
Peter Williams Associates	Advice on the London Childcare Project
Praxis Systems	Assistance in the analysis, design and formulation of software
Price Waterhouse	Advice on performance indicators and management information systems

Firm	*Assignment*
Price Waterhouse	Design and write database system
Psytech Ltd	Development of computerised system to support use of psychometric testing in recruitment schemes
Shaista Faruqi	Design of recruitment monitoring system
Systematika Ltd	Software development for personnel record system

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

AIDS

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the reasons for the resignation of Dr. Jonathan Mann, the director and founder of the World Health Organisation's global programme on AIDS; and if he will make it his policy to freeze the British contribution to that programme until he is satisfied about the future effectiveness of that programme in the absence of Dr. Mann.

Mrs. Chalker: The reasons for Dr. Mann's resignation are a matter between him, the World Health Organisation and its director general. The Government's interest is to work for the continuation of an effective global programme on AIDS.

An acting director of the WHO global programme on AIDS, Dr. M. Merson, has taken office. We shall be working closely with him and will continue to monitor carefully, with other donors, the progress of the programme. We shall consider future United Kingdom support and its timing in the light of real practical progress and developments.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Drugs

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many intravenous drug users in Her Majesty's prisons were HIV sero-positive in each of the last five years.

Mr. Mellor: Because HIV antibody tests are carried out only with informed consent, the antibody status of intravenous drug users identified while in prison custody will not always be known. Since June 1987 prison medical officers have reported the risk category or categories of identified HIV-infected prisoners. In the last seven months of that year, 41 of the cases were reported to be in the intravenous drug user category. The corresponding figures for the full calendar years 1988 and 1989 were 60 and 44 respectively.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the breakdown of known drug users on the Home Office notification index by enumeration districts of the small area statistics of the 1981 census in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Mellor: The information requested is not readily available. The tables on addicts notified to the Home Office in 1989 published in "Statistics of the Misuse of Drugs: addicts notified to the Home Office, United Kingdom, 1989 Area tables", a copy of which is in the Library, break down some information by police force and local authority areas. Figures for district health authorities are also available on request, for England, from the Department of Health.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of *(a)* black or other ethnic minority and *(b)* white drug possession offenders were (i) cautioned and (ii) charged for each police force in 1989.

Mr. John Patten: Information on the ethnic background of drug possession offenders is not held centrally.

Deportation

Mr. Litherland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many defendants found guilty of crimes of violence have been recommended for deportation by the courts over the past five years;

(2) where the Home Office has served a notice to deport, in how many cases over the last five years this was following a drugs-related offence; and in how many cases it was following an offence of violence to the person.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I regret that this information is not readily available.

Farzad Bazoft

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department under what name Farzad Bazoft first entered the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: On entry the name was recorded as Farzad Robati-Bazoft.

Mr. Dicks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) on what grounds the recommendation of the judge for the deportation of Farzad Bazoft was overruled;

(2) what evidence was available at the time the decision was made not to deport Mr. Farzad Bazoft to indicate that his life would be at risk if he were to return to Iran; and what was the source of that evidence.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It was decided not to deport Mr. Bazoft to Iran because of documentary evidence that he would be arrested by the Iranian authorities because of his political opinions. It is not the practice to disclose sources of evidence in individual asylum cases.

South Yorkshire fire and civil defence authority

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the result of the discussions he had with members of the South Yorkshire fire and civil defence authority in respect of their 1990-91 financial situation.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State met at their request a delegation from South Yorkshire fire and civil defence authority on 15 January to listen to their concerns about the standard spending assessment for the authority for 1990-91, which is 11·8 per cent. greater than their grant-related expenditure assessment for 1989-90.

My right hon. and noble Friend took note of the concerns expressed and Her Majesty's inspectorate of fire services will monitor closely the operational capacity of the South Yorkshire fire service. Ministers have agreed to consider any new evidence on standard spending assessments with regard to the possibility of making changes for 1991-92 if this should prove necessary.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Value Added Tax

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many representations he has received concerning value added tax on food; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has received a number of representations.

Payroll Tax

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consideration he has given to the implementation of a payroll tax similar to that in the United States of America.

Mr. Lilley: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has no plans to introduce such a tax.

Married Couple's Allowance

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the cost to the Exchequer at the 1990-91 tax rates announced in the Budget of the married couple's allowance; and how much of this cost is attributable to taxpayers aged below 65 years.

Mr. Lilley: The direct revenue cost in a full year, at 1990-91 levels of income, of the married couple's allowance is estimated to be about £5·5 billion, of which £4·8 billion is attributable to married couples where both the husband and wife are aged under 65. The extra relief is worth £8·27 per week to a basic rate taxpayer not entitled to a higher, age-related, allowance.

Estimates are based on a projection of the 1987-88 survey of personal incomes and are provisional.

Budget (Gains)

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the gain per individual arising from each relevant component of the 1990 Budget, both at current prices and net of indexation for those at one half and three quarters of average earnings, average earnings and one and a half, two, five and 10 times average earnings; and if he will provide comparable figures for each Budget since 1979.

Mr. Lilley: Individuals will benefit directly or indirectly from many Budget measures. These gains will vary according to their specific circumstances, as well as their level of earnings, and it would be impracticable to attempt to estimate the effects of all the measures listed in table 4.1 of the 1990 FSBR, let alone for each Budget since 1979. Information on the effects of specific measures may be found in the press notices issued each Budget day by Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise.

Mortgage Interest

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) of 15 March, *Official Report*, column 654, if he will give for the years 1988 and 1989 the total amount of mortgage interest paid, distinguishing between changes due to changes in the level of interest rates and changes due to changes in the stock of mortgages; and what is the number of mortgages outstanding and their average size as at 31 December 1987, 31 December 1988 and 31 December 1989.

Mr. Lilley: The latest estimates are that total mortgage interest payments grew from £22·1 billion in 1988 to £32·3 billion in 1989; 53 per cent. of the increase was due to the effect of the increase in interest rates on the stock of mortgages in 1988 and 47 per cent. to the effect of the increase in stock in 1989, including the effect of the rise in the interest rate on the increase in stock. Estimates of the numbers of mortgages outstanding and their average size in the last three financial years are given in the table:

Mortgages qualifying for income tax relief

	Outstanding mortgages (thousands)	*Average size of mortgage (£)*
1987-88	8,750	17,000
[1]1988-89	9,100	21,000
[1]1989-90	9,300	24,500

[1] Provisional.

Consultancies

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total amount spent by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in 1989 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in 1989, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment; and what is the total amount that Her Majesty's Customs and Excise has budgeted to spend in the current year.

Mr. Ryder: The total amount spent by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in the financial year 1989-90 was £3,251,798.

The consultancy firms awarded contracts in management and computer consultancy, excluding hardware and software purchases, are as follows:

Consultancy firm	*Contracts*
A. Palmer	Development Training
Aims Systems	SSADM
Alkemi	Standby Disaster Plan
Ashvent Limited	Computer Training

Consultancy firm	*Contracts*
BIS Applied Systems	Cabling Requirement Partnership Agreement
Branton Kenton	General Training Consultancy
British Telecom	DAS Network Consultancy
Bull HN	Cedric Technical Support
CCTA	Service and Support Agreements
Change Matters	Development Training
Comshare	Operational Planning System
Consultancy Lecturing	Computer Training
Coopers Lybrand	Management Information System
D. Megginson Associates	Development Training
Datafit	VAT System Software Development
Deloitte Haskins Sells	Personnel System
EOSYS	Cabling Study
Ernst and Young	Information Management Study Expert System for VAT Control Staff
Expertech	Expert System Development
F. E. J. Peach	Computer Training
Hoskyns Group plc	Chief Consultancy
ICL	Local User Requirement Analysis Computer Training
Inforem	Business Analysis
Langdon Systems Ltd.	Computer Training
LBMS	VAT II Consultancy
Logica UK Ltd.	Seizure System for Heathrow Partnership Agreement
M. E. Parkinson	VAT Training
Max A. Eggart	General Training Consultancy
Meritkeen Ltd.	General Training Consultancy
Metron	Capacity Management Planning
MFT Computer Systems	Central Tariff Quota Unit Mini Computer Strategy Study
Oasis Ltd.	Knowledge Based System
Octagon	Telephone Management Initiative
Onsite Training Ltd.	Computer Training
P. A. Consulting Group	Chief Project Support Forward Plan Study Project Management Cadre VAT II Relocation Study
Performance Systems Incorporated	Capacity Management Consultancy Personnel Recruitment System
PPA	Computer Training
Praxis	Project Planning System Performance Related Pay

Consultancy firm	*Contracts*
Price Waterhouse	Single European Market Strategy
Rede Group	Quality Management Initiative
Regional Software	Consultancy Support
Samna	Word Processing Study
SJB Communications	Telecoms Consultancy
Soft Options	Software Evaluation
Style Conferences	Audio Visual Study General Training Consultancy
TDA Consultancy Group	Development Training
Thorn EMI	VAT Measures Consultancy
Touche Ross	Operational Planning System Chief Technical Assurance
University of Bath	Local Delegation Study
Welcom Software International	Chief Project Cost Management
Yale Data	Integrated Tariff

The total amount budgeted to be spent in the year 1990-91 by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise is £4,544,000.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total amount spent by Her Majesty's Stationery Office in 1989 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by Her Majesty's Stationery Office in 1989, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment; and what is the total amount that Her Majesty's Stationery Office has budgeted to spend in the current year.

Mr. Ryder: The total amount spent in 1989 was £290,000 and the budget for 1990 is £480,000.

The following contracts were awarded in 1989:

Firm	*Subject of Assignment*
NCC	Advice on electronic data interchange
Batalas	Quality assurance audit (BS 5750)
Mortiboys	Quality assurance audit (BS 5750)
David Hutchins Associates	Total quality management
CCTA	General IT consultancy
OASIS	Business supplies development
Touche Ross	Data administration standards
Touche Ross	Preliminary accountancy system design
D. Harris Associates	Post implementation reviews of IT projects
Technigraphic Bristol Ltd.	Design and manage building works

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total amount spent by the Inland Revenue in 1989 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by the Inland Revenue in 1989, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment; and what is the total amount that the Inland Revenue has budgeted to spend in the current year.

Mr. Lilley: The amount spent by the Inland Revenue in the financial year 1989-90 on management and computer consultancy contracts excluding hardware and software purchases is expected to be about £16·1 million.

The Inland Revenue has awarded the following consultancy contracts in 1989-90:

Touche Ross Management Consultants: Records Management
Printing Industry Research Association: Reprographics
HMSO Technical Services: Reprographics
Organisations and Systems Innovations Ltd.: BROCS Project Office
Oracle (UK) Ltd.: Systems development
Henley Business Systems Ltd.: Evaluation of MIDAS software
Expertech: Expert systems for BROCS
Gmb Support Ltd.: IR Suggestions Scheme
BIS Applied Systems Ltd.: Security risk assessment of systems
IMB UK Ltd.: Systems development
Trident Computer Services Ltd.: COVA project support
Inforem: Technical support

A budget of £17 million has been allocated by the Inland Revenue for the financial year 1990-91.

Default Surcharge

Mr. David Davis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the review of the operation and impact of the default surcharge has been completed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: The review we announced in July 1988 has been completed. A very thorough examination of the operation and effectiveness of the default surcharge was carried out and very careful consideration was given to the submissions made by many interested parties. We have, however, no plans for changes at the present time, although the matter will be kept under constant review.

Commemorative Coins

Mr. David Davis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if Her Majesty's Government have plans to issue any new commemorative coins.

Mr. Major: Her Majesty the Queen has been graciously pleased to approve my recommendation that a special £5 crown be issued to commemorate the 90th birthday of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother. There will be a normal version of the coin issued at face value, and collectors' versions in precious metal and base metal, issued at a premium.

Finance Bill

Mr. David Davis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Finance Bill will be published.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The Finance Bill will be published on Thursday 19 April.

ENVIRONMENT

Deputy Secretaries

Mr. Tom Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the responsibilities of each of the deputy secretaries in his Department and the numbers and ranks of staff reporting to each.

Mr. Chris Patten: There are six deputy secretaries in DOE (central). Their responsibilities are planning, inner cities and rural affairs; local government and finance; environmental protection; legal services; housing, construction and sport; and establishments and the built heritage. The planning inspectorate and regional directors also report to the deputy secretary responsible for establishments and the built heritage. There are a further three deputy secretaries in the Property Services Agency.

The numbers of staff by grade reporting to each of the deputy secretaries in DOE(C) on 1 February are set out in the table.

There are also certain groups within DOE(C) which do not report through a deputy secretary. These consist of private offices (with 63 staff) and information (with 44 staff).

The figures also exclude staff at the Historic Royal Palaces Agency which became an executive agency on 2 October 1989, and the Building Research Establishment, which it is proposed should become an executive agency on 2 April 1990.

I will write to my hon. Friend with further information regarding the Property Services Agency.

	Grade 3	*Grade 4*	*Grade 5*	*Grade 6*	*Grade 7*	*SEO*	*HEO*	*EO*	*AO*	*AA*	*Industrial*	*Total*
Planning, inner cities and rural affairs	3·0	1·0	13·0	10·0	49·0	43·0	57·0	67·0	80·0	20·0	—	343·0
Local government and central finance	3·0	0·5	14·0	7·0	44·0	28·0	63·0	83·0	94·0	36·5	—	371·5
Environmental protection	5·0	—	22·5	33·0	123·0	48·0	60·0	85·0	95·0	23·0	—	494·5
Legal	2·0	—	10·0	10·0	15·5	—	1·0	6·0	10·0	2·0	—	56·5
Housing, construction and sport	4·0	—	21·0	14·5	77·5	27·0	81·0	127·0	149·0	40·0	—	541·0
Establishments	3·0	1·0	10·0	13·0	40·0	74·5	149·5	214·5	207·5	348·5	—	1,067·5
Heritage and Royal Estate	1·0	—	2·0	1·0	7·0	7·0	37·0	156·0	38·0	7·0	371·5	627·5
Planning inspectorate	1·0	2·0	11·0	114·0	85·0	4·0	24·0	68·5	160·5	100·0	—	570·0
Regional offices	6·0	1·0	19·0	14·0	105·5	85·0	149·5	212·5	222·0	77·5	—	892·0

Hindu Temple, Hertsmere

Mr. Bidwell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will announce his decision concerning the planning application for a Hindu temple to be built in the borough of Hertsmere.

Mr. Moynihan: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, West (Mr. Jones) on 20 March at columns *600-17*.

Disabled People (Housing)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps his Department is taking to encourage local housing authorities to provide home improvement agency services to disabled home owners where voluntary sector agencies do not operate.

Mr. Chope: My Department is currently reviewing the best way of using the provisions in section 169 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 relating to the provision and long-term funding of home improvement agency services, including those for the disabled. I hope to be able to make an announcement later this year.

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his Department will take steps to place a duty on local housing authorities to replace properties sold to disabled people under the right to buy.

Mr. Chope: No. Such properties are not lost to the housing stock, and would in any case not be available for re-letting so long as the secure tenants remained in occupation.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will publish a table showing the Government's percentage contribution to local expenditure for each year since 1978-79 together with a forecast for *(a)* the current financial year and *(b)* 1990-91 based on the budgets which have been agreed by the local authorities to date.

Mr. Chope: The available information is as given in the table:

Aggregate Exchequer grant as percentage of relevant expenditure

	Per cent.
1978-79	59·8
1979-80	58·6
1980-81	57·2
1981-82	54·9
1982-83	51·7
1983-84	50·1
1984-85	50·0
1985-86	49·0
1986-87	45·4
1987-88	44·4
1988-89	42·5
[1]1989-90	40·5

[1] Based on local authority budgets.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by local authority area the total amount paid in lieu of non-domestic rates by formula-rated properties in 1989-90 and the equivalent contribution being made to the non-domestic pool in 1990-91.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 27 March 1990]*: The information that the hon. Member has requested is not held centrally for 1989-90. For 1990-91 the aggregate of the rates bills of those industries appearing on the central rating list for England whose rateable values are set by order is estimated to be £863 million.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish figures showing how the contribution paid in lieu of non-domestic rates by Oxfordshire formula-rated properties is to be redistributed in Oxfordshire in 1990-91.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 27 March 1990]*: From 1 April rates paid by the industries whose rateable values are fixed by order will be collected by the Secretary of State and paid into the non-domestic rate pool. Attribution of rateable values to properties occupied by these industries in particular local authority areas will no longer be necessary. The proceeds of the non-domestic rate pool will be distributed to charging authorities in proportion to their population of community charge payers.

Regional Planning Guidance

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he is next going to issue new regional planning guidance for the period up to the year 2006.

Mr. Moynihan: The current regional planning guidance for the south-east region is contained in planning policy guidance note PPG9. SERPLAN (the London and south-east regional planning conference) is conducting a regional review, and hopes to submit advice to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment after its July 1990 conference. After considering that advice, my right hon. Friend will issue a draft for consultation, before finalising his new regional planning guidance. This will probably occur during 1991.

West Midlands Residuary Body

Mr. Bevan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance he has given to the West Midlands residuary body in relation to the disposal of land at Church lane, West Bromwich, known as the former Johnsons Rolls site; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: In response to a request from the board of the West Midlands residuary body I issued a direction on 20 March 1990, under section 65 of the Local Government Act 1985 requiring the residuary body to dispose of all its interests in the land at Church lane, West Bromwich to the Black Country development corporation on or before 30 April 1990. I have today placed a copy of the direction in the Library of the House.

Building Research Establishment

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the future status of the Building Research Establishment.

Mr. Chris Patten: I am pleased to announce that on 2 April the Building Research Establishment (BRE) is to become an executive agency in the Department of the Environment under the next steps initiative. This will provide the establishment with new freedoms and will improve its ability to serve the needs of Government, the construction industry and building users. I am placing a copy of the policy and resources framework document for the new agency in the Libraries of both Houses.

The key performance indicators of the agency are set out in the framework document. The principal targets for 1990-91 are:

the average overhead rate
the average technical man day rate
the utilisation rate for chargeable staff
non-Exchequer income as a percentage of total income

In addition, the target net vote cost of the agency will be £1·764 million in 1990-91. The agency will be expected to make efficiency savings equivalent to at least 2 per cent. a year.

TRANSPORT

Ro-Ro Ferries

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will introduce regulations to change the layout of roll on/roll off ferries, in order to ease the evacuation procedure in case of emergency.

Mr. McLoughlin: Evacuation procedures are governed by regulations made under the Merchant Shipping Acts. The Department of Transport has sponsored research into evacuation from roll on/roll off passenger ferries in an emergency. The results and recommendations of this research have been put to the International Maritime Organisation for consideration by the Maritime Safety Committee later this year.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Local Government Finance

45. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has had on the poll tax rebate system; and if he will make a statement.

46. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has had concerning poll tax rebates; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Ministers receive correspondence on a range of issues, both from hon. Members and from their constituents. In the last six months, 1,053 items of correspondence have been received by the Department about the community charge benefit scheme, but it is not possible to identify the number relating particularly to rebates in Scotland.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has any plans to extend the period for poll tax rebate.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Hayward) on 23 March at column *788*.

Disabled People

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people will benefit from the new measures to help disabled people who do not qualify for attendance allowance or mobility allowance.

Mr. Scott: We estimate that some 140,000 people will benefit from the new lower rate of the care component of the new disability allowance and some 150,000 from the initial rate of the mobility component.

Ex-Miners (Reduced Earnings Allowance)

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many retired or redundant miners are eligible for an increase in their reduced earnings allowance following the successful appeal to the social security appeal tribunal on 8 March by Gerald Linsdell; and what steps he is taking to notify potential claimants.

Mr. Scott: The decision of the social security appeal tribunal dealt only with the circumstances of Mr. Linsdell's claim and is not considered to have wider implications.

Community Charge

Sir George Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security by how much the community charge of a pensioner couple, living in a district with a community charge of £380, will be reduced as a result of the Chancellor's statement, where their only income is the state retirement pension and they have savings of *(a)* £8,000, *(b)* £12,000 and *(c)* £16,000.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information requested is shown in the table.

Pensioner couple aged 60 to 74, receiving state retirement pension for a couple of £75·10 a week, with a community charge of £380 each.

Savings £	*Community charge benefit (per week)* £
8,000	8·72
12,000	6·32
16,000	3·92

Pensioner Premium

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will introduce regulations to pay the higher pensioner premium to all persons on income support who were in receipt of invalidity benefit when they reached retirement age; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We have no plans to do so.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is his estimate of the cost of paying higher pensioner premium to all those who fail to be entitled to it solely because they transferred from invalidity pensions to retirement pensions on the advice of his Department; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what is his estimate of the number of people who fail to be entitled to higher pensioner premium solely because they transferred from invalidity pensions to retirement pensions on the advice of his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The formal and informal advice given by the Department reflects the contemporaneous position in law and any known forthcoming changes in it. Information on which to base the requested estimates, of people who are not entitled to the higher pensioner premium because they retired before the introduction of income support, is not available.

Social Fund

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the budgetary totals for *(a)* DSS offices relating to Leyton residents, *(b)* Londonwide and *(c)* nationally for (i) grants and (ii) loans from the social fund in 1988-89 and 1989-90 and his estimate for 1990-91.

Mr. Scott: Information about the social fund grants and loans budget allocations nationally, for each social security region and each local office for 1988-89 and 1989-90 is in the Library. I refer the hon. Member to my statement on Monday 26 March concerning the budget allocations for 1990-91. I have placed that information in the Library.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest figure for the total repayments of social fund loans in the current financial year.

Mr. Scott: Loan repayments in 1989-90 as at 28 February 1990 were provisionally £99 million.

Independent Living Fund

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the total expenditure for the independent living fund for the year 1989-90 for *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* the London borough of Lewisham.

Mr. Scott: The total expenditure for the independent living fund from 1 April 1989 to 28 February 1990 for the United Kingdom is £8·3 million. Information for Lewisham is not available separately.

Regional Offices

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what functions his Department carries out at the regional level; where the regional offices are located in each of the regions; what staff are employed and at what grades; what proportion of his Department's budget is spent in each of the regions; and what geographical boundaries determine his Department's regions.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[pursuant to her reply, 21 March 1990, c. 639-41.]:* The information in table 3 was found to be incorrect. The corrected information is given in the following table.

Table 3
Staff-in-post in regional offices—1st March 1990

	Mids	*LN*	*LS*	*Scot*	*NW*	*NE*	*WSW*	*Totals*
Executive/Director	0·0	0·0	0·0	1·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	1·0
Assistant/Secretary	1·0	1·0	1·0	0·0	1·0	1·0	1·0	6·0
Senior/Principal	5·0	5·0	5·0	4·0	5·0	5·0	5·0	34·0
Principal	6·0	6·0	7·0	7·0	8·0	6·0	6·0	46·0
Senior Executive Officer	22·5	24·5	25·0	27·0	29·0	24·5	22·0	174·5
Higher Executive Officer	78·5	81·5	87·5	81·0	85·0	79·5	71·0	564
LOI	111·0	145·0	139·5	141·0	92·0	154·0	74·0	856·5
Executive Officer	116·5	83·5	118·0	117·5	141·5	85·5	111·0	773·5
LOII	123·0	139·5	77·0	137·0	26·0	145·5	5·0	653·0
AO	130·0	44·5	108·5	61·5	192·0	114·5	131·0	782·0
AA	9·0	60·0	58·0	38·0	49·5	33·5	27·5	275·5
Typ Manager	1·0	2·0	3·0	3·0	3·0	2·0	2·0	16·0
Typist	13·0	18·5	22·5	19·5	21·5	20·5	19·5	135·0
PES	8·0	4·0	6·0	7·0	8·0	10·0	4·0	47·0
MED/Board/Assistant	0·0	0·0	0·0	0·0	2·0	0·0	2·0	4·0
SM3	0·0	0·0	1·0	0·0	1·0	0·0	0·0	2·0
Supp Grade 1	1·0	2·0	2·0	0·0	3·0	6·0	4·0	18·0
Supp Grade 2	2·0	8·0	11·0	0·0	18·0	11·0	16·0	66·0
Professionals	2·0	2·5	2·5	0·0	2·0	3·0	0·0	12·0
TOTALS	629·5	627·5	674·5	644·5	687·5	701·5	501·0	4,466·0

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Inspectors' Reports

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the reply to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby of 26 February, *Official Report,* columns *16-17,* when he expects to publish the inspectors' reports hitherto not published.

Mr. Redwood: Of the inspectors' reports listed in my reply, the decision whether to publish remains under consideration in respect of 12 reports relating to the following companies:

Alexander Howden Group plc
British Anzani plc
Medway Secondary Metals Limited
Guinness plc (interim)
Aldermanbury Trust plc (interim)
Consolidated Gold Fields plc (two interims)
Graylaw Holdings Limited and
Link Service Stations Limited
Bank Street Securities Limited
Pennine Commercial Holdings plc
The Animal Defence Society Limited
Minet Holdings plc and
WMD Underwriting Agencies Limited (final)

House of Fraser Holdings plc was published on 7 March. The other reports will not be published.

Accountancy Bodies

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make it his policy as a condition of recognition, to require the accountancy bodies seeking supervisory recognition under the Companies Act 1989 to hold their meetings in the open, with access for members.

Mr. Redwood: No. It is for a supervisory body itself to decide what arrangements are appropriate for informing its members of matters of concern to them.

Inspectors

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry who advises him on the appointment of inspectors from accountancy firms.

Mr. Redwood: I select the appropriate person for appointment as an accountant inspector; in doing so I take into account the views of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales.

Investment Businesses

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many applications by investment businesses for authorisation under the Financial Services Act have been rejected to date; and how many of those applications were made to each of the self-regulatory organisations and to the Securities and Investments Board, respectively.

Mr. Redwood: This is a matter for the Securities and Investments Board and the self-regulatory organisations, but I understand that the figures are not available because of difficulties of definition.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many investment businesses are trading with interim authorisation under the Financial Services Act at the latest available date; and if he will provide an analysis of these showing *(a)* those subject to the appeals procedure, *(b)* those awaiting a memorandum of understanding with an overseas country and *(c)* any others; and a further analysis showing how many of these applications were made to each of the self-regulatory organisations and to the Securities and Investments Board, respectively.

Mr. Redwood: At 21 March, a total of 98 businesses held interim authorisation:

	Interim authorisations
AFBD	7
FIMBRA	48
IMRO	7
TSA	34
SIB	2

The number subject to appeal is not available. Of the total, 10 applications to FIMBRA and 22 applicants to TSA are businesses incorporated abroad on which a decision is postponed awaiting entry into satisfactory arrangements with the regulatory authorities in the country of incorporation.

Financial Services Act

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether any individuals as opposed to businesses are vetted when applications are made for authorisation under the Financial Services Act.

Mr. Redwood: This is a matter for the particular regulatory body to which a business makes application for authorisation. I understand that all the regulatory bodies vet individuals of significance to the shareholdings or management of the business when they consider application for authorisation of that business. Some self-regulatory organisations have membership requirements that go further.

Rover Sale

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the dates in 1988 and those present when the tax arrangements governing the sale of Rover were discussed.

Mr. Ridley *[holding answer 12 March 1990]:* I understand that tax aspects of the sale of the Government shareholding in the Rover Group to British Aerospace were the principal subject discussed at the following meetings held in 1988:

Date	*Organisations represented*
29 February	DTI and Inland Revenue
8 March	DTI, Inland Revenue, Baring Brothers and Slaughter & May
10 March	Inland Revenue, Baring Brothers and Slaughter & May
24 March	DTI, Inland Revenue, British Aerospace, Slaughter & May, Peat Marwick McLintock and Linklaters & Paines
28 March	Inland Revenue, British Aerospace, Rover Group, Slaughter & May, Peat Marwick McLintock, Linklaters & Paines and Ashurst Morris Crisp
28 April	Inland Revenue and Slaughter & May
29 June	DTI, Inland Revenue, Her Majesty's Treasury, Rover Group, British Aerospace, Slaughter & May, Peat Marwick McLintock and Linklaters & Paines
6 July	DTI, Inland Revenue, British Aerospace, Slaughter & May, Linklaters & Paines, Peat Marwick McLintock

Footwear and Leather Goods

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what is the value of footwear and leather imports under the GSP scheme from Thailand into the United Kingdom since 1 January; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what steps the Government are taking to restore full duties where imports of shoes and leather goods have already exceeded the European Economic Community ceilings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* Footwear and leather goods enter the United Kingdom under a number of tariff headings and different categories are monitored differently, according to their treatment under the GSP. My Department has asked the European Commission to reimpose duty on footwear under tariff headings 6401 and 6402 from Thailand and Indonesia. The total value of imports from Thailand for tariff headings 6401 and 6402 from 1 January—14 March 1990 was 2,506,331 ecu. If the hon. Member requires figures for any other tariff headings, I should be happy to write to him.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Debt

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had concerning repealing the Payment of Debt (Northern Ireland) Act.

Mr. Cope: The Government keep the working of the Act under review. We also receive representations about the Act from time to time, including a recent letter from the hon. Gentleman.

Strangford Lough

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what date the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside met to give him advice about the proposed Strangford Lough (ASSI) (Part 3) declaration; and whether such advice given is in written form.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland was advised on nature conservation matters by the Committee for Nature Conservation (CNC) until 16 May 1989 when that committee (and the Ulster Countryside Committee) was replaced by the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside (CNCC).

On 20 November 1986 the CNC endorsed the Department's proposals for an area of special scientific interest (ASSI) at Strangford Lough. A revision to the proposed boundary was agreed by CNC at a meeting on 12

October 1987. The ASSI was declared in three parts, the third part, the Strangford Lough (Part 3) ASSI, being declared on 21 April 1989.

At a meeting on 7 July 1989 the CNCC endorsed the views of the CNC about the declaration of the ASSI. The views of the CNC and the CNCC were conveyed to the Department by means of copies of the minutes of their meetings.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he received prior advice from the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside before he confirmed the Strangford Lough (ASSI) (Part 3) declaration; and whether he made available to the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside information about objections from private individuals and public bodies to the proposed ASSI.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: At a meeting on 3 November 1989 the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside was informed by officials of the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland about the representations and objections to the declaration of the Strangford Lough (Part 3) area of special scientific interest (ASSI). The CNCC advised the officials of its support for the confirmation of the ASSI. The ASSI was confirmed on 16 November 1989.

Social Security Benefits

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for how long records of social security benefits paid to claimants are retained; and whether it is possible to obtain details of the period March 1985 to August 1987 relating to someone who qualified for and was in receipt of family income supplement in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: The length of time records of social security benefits paid to claimants are retained varies with the benefit and with certain other circumstances (for example, the death of a claimant). Records of family income supplement are normally retained for two years after the last date of payment and it is therefore unlikely that details of a claim relating to the period from March 1985 to August 1987 are available. However, if the hon. Gentleman has a particular case in mind my noble Friend —Lord Skelmersdale—will be pleased to look into it.

Electricity Prices

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish details of the criteria used to reach the decision to increase electricity charges in Northern Ireland by 8 per cent. from 1 April.

Mr. Needham: The main criterion was that electricity charges should reflect the economic price of supply in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the estimated level of profit likely to be produced by Northern Ireland Electricity in the period 1990-91 by the increase in charges to consumers from 1 April.

Mr. Needham: It is not practice to publish estimates by boards of public undertakings of their forecast performance.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether Her Majesty's Government and Northern Ireland Electricity have proposals to reduce electricity prices in Northern Ireland and to reduce the energy burden on industry and domestic consumers.

Mr. Needham: As regards electricity prices I refer the hon. Gentleman to the Secretary of State's answer to a question from the hon. Member for Newbury (Sir M. McNair-Wilson) on 13 March, *Official Report*, columns *139-40*.

On reducing the energy burden, the Government actively encourage consumers to use energy efficiently so as to reduce their energy costs.

St. Louis School, Ballymena

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his policy on the inclusion by the grant-aided St. Louis R.C. voluntary grammar school, Ballymena, in its enrolment criteria of the statement, "Any prospective entrant must accept the Catholic ethos of the school".

Dr. Mawhinney: Under the new open enrolment arrangements all secondary schools must have regard to parental preference. If they are oversubscribed the criteria which they will use in selecting pupils is a matter for the board of governors. I will be considering the need to issue further guidance on criteria in the light of experience in the 1990-91 school year.

Ballinamallard Primary School

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Ballinamallard primary school, County Fermanagh, which was bomb-damaged in 1985 will be given priority for capital funding; and when a permanent extension will be provided to replace mobiles.

Dr. Mawhinney: Extensive damage to the school as a result of a van bomb in September 1985 has been repaired. The provision of a permanent extension at the school has recently been the subject of an investment appraisal which is still under consideration by the Department of Education. It will depend upon the future detailed planning of the scheme, on the priority which will be attached to it by the Western education and library board and the level of financial resources available to the Department for the education capital programme. I cannot, therefore, predict a time scale for the project at this stage.

Fair Employment Legislation

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he has taken to expedite the formulation of new guidelines for the Local Government Staff Commission in accordance with the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Local Government Staff Commission has a statutory responsibility to recommend the procedures to be followed by district councils in making appointments or promotions. It is currently setting up a working party, which will include representatives of staff associations, to review the existing employment and promotion procedures. It anticipates the completion of this review in two to three months.

There is no statutory requirement under the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989 for employers, including district councils, to formulate new guidelines on fair employment matters.

All employers should have regard to the code of practice on fair employment published by the Department of Economic Development on 31 December 1989. The code exhorts employers to draw up a clear policy of promotion and equality of opportunity in the workplace and to make this widely known, especially among employees and job applicants.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many of the staff, other than home helps, of the Western health and social services board in Northern Ireland are *(a)* Protestants, *(b)* Roman Catholics, *(c)* religion not known because they were educated in the Irish Republic and *(d)* religion not known because they were educated elsewhere than the island of Ireland;

(2) what information he has on the religious composition of the 110 home helps mentioned in his reply of 7 March, *Official Report,* columns *660-61,* who were educated outside Northern Ireland;

(3) what information he has on the religious composition of the 767 home helps mentioned in his reply of 7 March, *Official Report,* columns *660-61,* for whom no record of primary school attended is held;

(4) what information he has on the religious composition of the 989 home helps mentioned in his reply of 7 March, *Official Report,* columns *660-61,* who were educated in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 20 March 1990]:* The information requested by the hon. Gentleman is not available. All health and social services boards are required to monitor the composition of their work force and to make returns to the Fair Employment Commission. No board has yet completed its analysis of the data concerned.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the Fair Employment Commission will publish detailed information on the religious composition of *(a)* its staff and *(b)* its applicants who are not appointed.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 20 March 1990]:* In due course such information will be published by the Fair Employment Commission.

Community Care

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he intends to publish a White Paper on community care in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: My noble Friend Lord Skelmersdale will tomorrow be publishing a policy paper on community care in Northern Ireland. The paper will explain how the national objectives in the White Paper "Caring for People" are to be pursued in the context of Northern Ireland's unique integrated health and social services. A copy will be placed in the Library.

Electoral Registration Office, Strangford

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what instructions have been given to the electoral registration office for Strangford as to the times of day that telephone calls should be made.

Mr. Cope: Routine administrative matters of this nature are the responsibility of the chief electoral officer for Northern Ireland.

Hepatitis B

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases of hepatitis B there have been in Northern Ireland in each of the last three years for which figures are available; and in each year, how many have been fatal.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 20 March 1990]:* The information is as follows:

	Cases	*Deaths*
1987	9	1
1988	8	nil
1989	8	[1]1

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[1] Up to 30 September 1989.

Long-term Unemployment

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons in Northern Ireland have been unemployed for more than 10 years and more than 15 years; and for each period, how many are *(a)* male and *(b)* female.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 20 March 1990]:* The information, at 8 February 1990, is as follows:

	Male	*Female*	*Total*
More than 10 years	4,104	381	4,485
More than 15 years	650	60	710

The figures are not mutually exclusive since those unemployed for more than 15 years will also be included in the more than 10 years category.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has on the longest period of continuous unemployment for any person in Northern Ireland at the present time; and whether the person concerned is a male or a female.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 20 March 1990]:* The information requested, at 8 February 1990, is 28 years nine months and the person concerned is male.

Security Vetting

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many persons selected as suitable applicants for posts for which they had applied by the Eastern health and social services board during each of the last three years have subsequently been refused an appointment because an adverse security report was received by the board from the Northern Ireland Office;

(2) whether there is any appeal against an adverse security report issued by the Northern Ireland Office on an otherwise suitable applicant for a job with a health and social services board;

(3) who is *(a)* responsible for and *(b)* carries out security vetting of otherwise suitable applicants for posts with the Eastern health and social services board.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 20 March 1990]:* It has been the policy of successive Governments not to give detailed information about security vetting procedures.

Higher Education

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his estimate of the number of young people who became, or will become, 19 years old during the current academic year and who are refused Department of Health and Social Security benefit although they are undergoing a course of education entered into before they became 19 years old.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 20 March 1990]:* No such estimate is available.

Salmon (Bushmills)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will indicate the Department of Agriculture (Northern Ireland) commitment to the continuation of scientific studies of salmon at the Bushmills site; how long the Department's lease on the site and river has to run; and whether it is intended to continue to base scientists on this site for the remainder of the lease.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 23 March 1990]:* The Department's future strategy for research on salmon is currently under review with a view to expansion across Northern Ireland. The Department's lease on the Bushmills site and river extends to 2002. Until now no DANI scientists have been based on this site—they visit as required by seasonal factors.

Marine Research

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how many occasions a fisheries scientist from his Department has attended meetings of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea in each of the last three years.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 23 March 1990]:* The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Number*
1987	3
1988	4
1989	3

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the projected annual savings to his Department which will arise by transfer of all fisheries research laboratory staff and the freshwater biological staff to Belfast; what percentage of the research vessel Lough Foyle annual running costs in a full year this represents; and what percentage of the research vessel's total annual costs this represents, including depreciation and replacement costs.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 23 March 1990]:* An investment appraisal estimated that over a 25-year period, relocation of staff from fisheries research laboratory, Coleraine and freshwater biological investigation unit, Antrim to Belfast and the location of the scientific staff from the research vessel on the same site would have the lowest discounted net cost compared to other options.

The decision to relocate was driven primarily by the scientific benefits to be gained from having a unified division located at the Department of Agriculture's scientific base in Belfast.

The question of savings expressed as a percentage of research vessel costs is not relevant.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what scientific evidence is put to meetings of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea on behalf of his Department.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 23 March 1990]:* Scientific evidence presented to ICES consists of fish population parameters obtained from samples of the Northern Ireland sea-fish catches and fishing vessels. These Northern Ireland input data are combined with analogous data supplied by scientists from other EC countries exploiting Irish sea stocks and stock assessments are carried out using internationally agreed modelling techniques. Results derived in future through the MV Lough Foyle will provide essential fishery-independent data hence greatly enhancing accuracy of stock assessments and the resultant total allowable catches.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what would be the total savings for *(a)* 1990-91, *(b)* 1991-92 and *(c)* 1992-93 if the research vessel Lough Foyle were now to be sold.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 23 March 1990]:* Total savings from selling the Lough Foyle have not been estimated as our current policy is to enhance marine research through the facility of a sea-going research vessel.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether a place on the United Kingdom delegation of scientists to meetings of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea is reserved for a scientist from his Department.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 23 March 1990]:*

HEALTH

Drugs (Education Programmes)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost in the latest year for which figures are available for education programmes designed to reduce the demand for drugs.

Mr. Freeman: Last month, at a cost of £3·8 million spread over two financial years 1989-90 and 1990-91, the Department launched the latest national drug publicity campaign warning young people of the dangers of becoming involved with drug misuse. Complementary regional campaigns are being run in Yorkshire, Mersey and west midlands.

Residential Homes, Easington

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds are provided in the Easington constituency by private residential and nursing homes; and if he will indicate the number of beds home by home.

Mr. Freeman: Information about nursing homes and residential care homes is not collected centrally in this form. Details of nursing homes and residential care homes registered under the Registered Homes Act 1984 are kept by district health authorities and local social services authorities respectively.

NHS Expenditure

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those years in the period 1974 to 1989 when financial cuts in real terms were made in the National Health Service in England and Wales.

Mr. Freeman: Over the period 1974-75 and 1989-90 there has been a reduction in real terms in spending in the NHS in England in only one year—1977-78. Over the same period there were real terms reductions in NHS spending in Wales in 1976-77 and 1977-78.

Disabled People

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which disability organisations his Department has met this year to discuss the Government's proposals contained in "Caring for People."

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Ministers have met a number of organisations this year as part of the consultation process for implementing the community care proposals. These organisations have included the Prince of Wales Advisory Group, the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation and the Keighley Disablement People's Council.

Health Care Research

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in the establishment of the post of chief of research and development at the Department of Health; and what role he expects the research and development division to have in the support of research into nursing care.

Mr. Freeman: The post of chief of research and development (CRD) has been advertised in the press, and once the closing date has passed a short list of candidates to be invited for interview will be drawn up.

The Department's present research management division, suitably strengthened and perhaps renamed, will form the basis of the support to be provided for the CRD. The CRD will be responsible for advising Ministers and the chief executive of the NHS on what relative priority should be given to research on any particular topic.

Mental Hospitals

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list in the *Official Report*, for the latest available date, the numbers of mental illness beds in secure accommodation in each district health authority and those district health authorities where no secure accommodation is available; what action he has taken to promote the development of comprehensive secure provision, including that for those chronically mentally ill and behaviourally disturbed people not appropriate for regional secure units, in pursuance of the recommendation of the interdepartmental Home Office and Department of Health and Social Security working group accepted in 1987; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Tables with the numbers of mental illness beds in secure accommodation in district health authorities at the end of 1986, the most recent date for which figures are available centrally, and those districts without secure mental illness beds, have been placed in the Library.

The Department continues to work closely with regional health authorities and professional bodies in developing a full range of secure provision. In particular it remains our policy that, in all appropriate cases, mentally disordered offenders should be kept out of, or transferred from, the penal system. To that end, we are fully committed to the implementation of all the recommendations made by the joint working party. Its report provides a co-ordinated strategy to guide the work of both the Department of Health and the Home Office. It identified a series of practical and achievable measures aimed at improving access to health and social services, and ensuring that full use is made of existing provisions.

Good progress has been made in implementing the report's recommendations, including the recent publication of guidelines for health authorities on services for mentally handicapped people with challenging behaviour. We know that there are still occasional difficulties in placing particular patients quickly in appropriate accommodation; in some cases improvements in local referral systems are required; in others some additional facilities may be needed. But there are a number of places in which excellent work is being undertaken. We will be drawing on experience gained from these initiatives in formulating national guidelines in due course.

Health Visitors

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many health visitors there are as a proportion of children on the child care register in each borough in England and Wales.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is not possible to calculate the proportion requested. The number of children and young persons on child protection registers in each local authority area is published in "Survey of Children and Young Persons on child protection registers year ending 31 March 1988: England". This is available in the Library. Data for health visitors are shown by region in table C9.5(a) in the 1990 edition of "NHS Workforce in England" (page C102). I have arranged for a copy of this to be placed in the Library.

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take steps to improve health visiting facilities where the infant mortality is above national average; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The measures we are taking to achieve further reductions in infant mortality were described in the Government's reply to the first report from the Social Services Committee on perinatal, neonatal and infant mortality (CM 741). We accept that health visitors play a key role in the health surveillance and care of infants: the organisation and staffing of these services is best determined by health authorities in the light of local circumstances.

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average caseload of a health visitor.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information is not available in the form requested. The average number of people seen by each health visitor (whole-time equivalent) in England in the financial year 1987-88 was 395. Each person may be seen more than once, the annual average being three visits per person.

Figures for 1988-89 are not yet available.

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that there is an effective and safe child care service provided by health visitors; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Provision of health visiting services is the responsibility of health authorities. Guidance on child protection was given in "Working Together: A Guide to Arrangements for Interagency Co-operation for the Protection of Children from Abuse" prepared by the Department and "Child Protection: Guidance for Senior Nurses, Health Visitors and Midwives" prepared by the Standing Nursing and Midwifery Advisory Committee; both of which were published in 1988; copies are available in the Library.

Any evidence of shortcomings in a health authority's children's services could be taken up in the annual review process and, if appropriate, discussed at the review meeting between the management executive and the region.

Infant Mortality

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the infant mortality rate in each of the boroughs in England and Wales.

Mr. Freeman: The information has been placed in the Library.

AIDS (Diets)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information is available to him on the costs of diets for people with AIDS or with HIV infection; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I have nothing to add to the reply my right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security gave the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) on 8 December 1989 at column *419*.

General Practitioners

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to make the grounds for eligibility for general practitioners' targets more flexible should it become apparent that it is in the patients' best interests to do so.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The GP target payments system will reduce the number of unnecessary deaths from cancer of the cervix and help to eliminate childhood diseases. It is therefore clearly in the patients' best interests. The Government have already given an undertaking to monitor all aspects of the GPs' new contract and to consider further improvements should this prove necessary.

EMPLOYMENT

Regional Functions

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what functions his Department carries out at the regional level; where the regional offices are located in each of the regions; what staff are employed and at what grades; what proportion of his Department's budget is spent in each of the regions; and what geographical boundaries determine his Department's regions.

Mr. Eggar: Due to the unusual length of the information requested, I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my reply in the Library.

Students

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the number of unemployed students in each region of the country for each month from May 1989 to November 1990.

Mr. Nicholls: The information is available in the Library. The following table shows for each month from May 1989 to February 1990 the number of unemployed students in each region of the country. Unemployment figures are not available for the requested group in Northern Ireland and no figures are available beyond February 1990. Figures on unemployed students are published separately and are not included in the monthly claimant count.

The number of students on vacation and claiming unemployment related benefits
(not seasonally adjusted)

South East

	Total
May 1989	316
June 1989	509
July 1989	11,488
August 1989	12,618
September 1989	13,115
October 1989	1,814
November 1989	604
December 1989	499
January 1990	366
February 1990	319

West Midlands

	Total
May 1989	120
June 1989	286
July 1989	8,081
August 1989	7,677
September 1989	8,392
October 1989	850
November 1989	189
December 1989	138
January 1990	96
February 1990	74

Yorkshire and Humberside

	Total
May 1989	77
June 1989	241
July 1989	9,006
August 1989	8,579
September 1989	9,635
October 1989	970

	Total
November 1989	117
December 1989	88
January 1990	85
February 1990	68

East Anglia

	Total
May 1989	11
June 1989	35
July 1989	1,310
August 1989	1,230
September 1989	1,414
October 1989	108
November 1989	24
December 1989	23
January 1990	16
February 1990	22

South West

	Total
May 1989	36
June 1989	89
July 1989	3,944
August 1989	3,904
September 1989	4,121
October 1989	315
November 1989	70
December 1989	47
January 1990	30
February 1990	26

East Midlands

	Total
May 1989	70
June 1989	170
July 1989	5,115
August 1989	4,936
September 1989	5,715
October 1989	469
November 1989	111
December 1989	80
January 1990	54
February 1990	37

Northern

	Total
May 1989	47
June 1989	198
July 1989	5,840
August 1989	5,338
September 1989	6,645
October 1989	402
November 1989	68
December 1989	62
January 1990	37
February 1990	34

Scotland

	Total
May 1989	205
June 1989	2,010
July 1989	13,853
August 1989	13,949
September 1989	13,204
October 1989	1,248
November 1989	226
December 1989	163
January 1990	119
February 1990	88

Great Britain

	Total
May 1989	1,102
June 1989	4,083
July 1989	78,223
August 1989	77,362
September 1989	83,682
October 1989	7,840
November 1989	1,761
December 1989	1,334
January 1990	989
February 1990	832

North West

	Total
May 1989	153
June 1989	412
July 1989	12,962
August 1989	13,037
September 1989	14,362
October 1989	1,163
November 1989	280
December 1989	188
January 1990	139
February 1990	126

Wales

	Total
May 1989	67
June 1989	133
July 1989	6,624
August 1989	6,094
September 1989	7,079
October 1989	501
November 1989	72
December 1989	46
January 1990	47
February 1990	38

Training and Enterprise Councils (Nottingham)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he received in the last month from the chair of education, Nottingham county council, regarding consultations in the setting up of the Greater Nottingham training and enterprise councils; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: I have received a letter from the chair of the education committee for Nottingham county council concerning consultation with the education services by the prospective Greater Nottingham training and enterprise council. I place great importance on training and enterprise councils consulting the wider community.

Genetically Engineered Organisms

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Gordon, *Official Report*, 23 March, columns 783-84, why it would be inappropriate to list the locations of the three centres where applications for the release of genetically manipulated organisms are under review.

Mr. Nicholls: Applicants are in discussion with the Health and Safety Executive and relevant Government Departments about these proposals and final clearance is expected shortly. In accordance with its normal practice in such circumstances the Health and Safety Executive will ask the centres concerned to issue a press release. Until the current discussions are completed there is no certainty that any release will take place and it is reasonable to respect concerns regarding commercial confidentiality.

Pig Farming Industry

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has in respect of chest complaints among workers in the pig farming industry.

Mr. Nicholls: The Health and Safety Executive is aware of respiratory problems in people working in pig houses and is currently undertaking research to identify the possible causes. A report on the research will be published later this year.

Advertising Expenditure

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total publicity and advertising expenditure, including for privatisation, of his Department and public bodies for which his Department has responsibility in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1989.

Mr. Eggar *[pursuant to his reply, 19 March 1990, c.503]:* In my reply of 19 March I referred in error to Government expenditure plans as set out in the public expenditure White Paper for 1989. I should have referred to the public expenditure White Paper for 1990.

The correct reply should have read:

"The planned expenditure by my Department on total publicity in (b) 1989-90, to include that for the Training Agency, remains as stated in table 6.31 on page 29 of the public expenditure White Paper, Cm. 1006, published in January 1990. No further detailed information is yet available."

SCOTLAND

Local Government Finance

17. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will take immediate steps in order to exempt from poll tax payments *(a)* students, *(b)* the disabled and *(c)* pensioners.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to change the present community charge arrangements for these groups.

19. **Mr. Nicholas Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of the Scottish population, eligible for payment of the community charge, has paid in 1989-90.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is not held centrally but we understand that in most regions 85 per cent. to 95 per cent. of those eligible for the community charge have made some payment, with a figure of 98 per cent. in one area.

28. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to review the operation of the poll tax.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The operation of the community charge arrangements is kept constantly under review and my right hon. and learned Friend will bring forward changes in these as and when he considers appropriate.

29. **Mr. Stern:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proportion of collectable community charge remains unpaid at the latest available date; and what proportion of collectable rate was unpaid at the last year of the rating system in the equivalent date.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is not held centrally.

Fishing Industry

18. **Mr. Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met representatives of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Lang: My right hon. and learned Friend met representatives of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation on 7 February to discuss the management of the North sea haddock fishery. My noble Friend the Minister of State participated in that meeting and met representatives of the federation again on 8 March, to inform them of the Government's decisions on management of this fishery.

33. **Mr. Robert Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the current situation in the Scottish fishing industry.

Mr. Lang: The total value of landings into Scotland in January and February this year was slightly higher than that recorded in the corresponding period last year with the reduction in the volume of whitefish being offset by increased prices.

A1 Improvements

20. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what estimate he has made of the effect on traffic flows and safety on the A1 in Berwickshire of improvements to the road south of the border.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As part of our "Routes South of Edinburgh" study, consideration was given to the extent of any traffic increase which might be generated on the A1 in Scotland by road improvements south of the border. The effect on traffic was concluded to be minimal, however, and therefore is likely to have no road safety consequences. However, the whole question of traffic and safety on the route can be addressed by the A1 steering group which we propose to set up and which the hon. Member recently agreed would be an appropriate forum for monitoring such issues.

Regional Development

21. **Sir Russell Johnston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the European Commissioner responsible for regional development; and if he will make a statement.

41. **Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will take steps to secure continued funding by the European Community of regional development in the highlands and islands.

43. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a further statement on the loss of European Community funds to the highlands and islands.

Mr. Lang: I last met Commissioner Millan on 24 November 1989 when I represented the United Kingdom

Government at an informal seminar of European Community Ministers responsible for regional planning and development held in Nantes. The Government are seriously concerned by the European Commission's recent proposals for regional fund assistance to the highlands and islands and Dumfries and Galloway. We shall be making every effort to persuade the Commission to reconsider its proposals and recognise the needs of these areas.

Rents into Mortgages Scheme

22. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to extend the rents into mortgages scheme to more public sector tenants.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) on 29 November 1989 at column *282*.

Scottish Assembly

23. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many representations he has received during the past six months about a Scottish assembly.

Mr. Rifkind: Four.

Investment

24. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what new inward investment projects have been announced in the last two months.

Mr. Lang: In the last two months, three major inward investment projects have been announced for Scotland.

These are *(a)* British Airways' announcement to establish a major telephone sales centre in Glasgow; *(b)* Conner Peripherals' announcement to manufacture Winchester hard disk drives at Irvine; and *(c)* Motorola's announcement to set up its European cellular subscriber division in a new plant in West Lothian.

Fish Farming

25. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has evaluated the marine environment implications of the fish farming industry.

Mr. Lang: A wide range of studies have been carried out, or are currently under way to consider the environmental effects of fish farming in Scotland. These have been undertaken mainly by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland, the Highlands and Islands Development Board and the Nature Conservancy Council. River purification boards in their role as pollution control authorities may carry out relevant monitoring.

The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland's marine laboratory is studying hydrographic, chemical and biological characteristics in order to determine the flushing times and dispersion and dilution characteristics of sea lochs, where most of Scotland's salmon farming is carried out. Studies are also being carried out to assess any chemical or biological impact of fish farming operations and to model the physical and biological processes in coastal waters.

Speech Therapy

26. **Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many speech therapists are employed by Glasgow health board per 100,000 population; what is the level recommended by the Government-commissioned Enderby report on speech therapy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Based on the 1988 population figure of 939,000 for the Greater Glasgow health board area, the board currently employs 66·1 whole-time equivalent speech therapists, which equates to approximately seven per 100,000. The Enderby report is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

Nature Conservation

27. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what further plans he has for improving nature conservation in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Environmental Protection Bill now before Parliament provides, inter alia, for the establishment of a Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland. We propose to establish, by subsequent legislation, a natural heritage agency which will merge the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland with the Countryside Commission for Scotland. This will ensure a co-ordinated, integrated and sensitive approach to nature conservation and countryside issues in Scotland.

Scottish Development Agency

30. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the chairman of the Scottish Development Agency, and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Lang: My right hon. and learned Friend last met the chairman of the Scottish Development Agency on 24 March at a dinner for UK-Japan 2000.

Electricity Exports

31. **Mr. Eadie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much electricity, in coal equivalent, has been exported from Scotland since 1 January to date and what is the estimated total for a full year.

Mr. Lang: This is a commercial matter for the Scottish

Scottish Police Federation

32. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the chairman of the Scottish Police Federation; and what matters were discussed.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. and learned Friend and I met the chairman and general secretary of the Scottish Police Federation on 8 February to hear their representations on the proposed changes to police rent allowance.

Community Care

34. **Mr. Graham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what extra money he will make available for community care in Scotland in 1990-91.

Mr. Lang: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman).

Family Conciliation Services

35. **Mr. Buchanan-Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangements he is making for the Scottish Association of Family Conciliation Services and regional family conciliation services in Scotland to secure a level of funding which will meet the needs of all sheriff courts and the Court of Session, in light of the forthcoming rules of court which will empower sheriffs and judges to remit parties to the conciliation services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: The Scottish Association of Family Conciliation Services has been offered grant for 1990-91 under section 10 of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968, amounting to £45,500 in respect of revenue and £6,250 in respect of capital expenditure. The local services are not funded by central Government except where local authority expenditure attracts urban programme grant.

It has always been open to judges to refer parties to conciliation. The new court procedures will make this explicit.

I am considering the question of funding for conciliation services.

Takare plc

36. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if there are any proposals to award further contracts to Takare plc for the provision of services to National Health Service elderly patients.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This is a matter for health boards in the first instance.

Self-employment

37. **Mr. Allan Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his latest estimate of the number of self-employed persons in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: There were an estimated 239,000 self-employed in Scotland in September 1989, the highest ever recorded total. In the past two years the number of self-employed in Scotland has increased by over a fifth, a faster rate of increase than in the whole of Great Britain.

39. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people in Scotland were self-employed in 1979 and at the latest date for which figures are available.

Mr. Lang: The Department of Employment estimates that there were 159,000 self-employed in Scotland in September 1979. By September 1989, the latest date for which figures are available, the number had increased by over 50 per cent. to 239,000.

River Tay Flood Barriers

38. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has any plans to delegate responsibility for the supervision of flood barriers on the banks of the River Tay and for the issuing of flood warnings.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are no plans to change the present arrangements which work satisfactorily. Responsibility for floodbanks lies primarily with the riparian owners. Regional and islands councils have discretionary powers to carry out flood prevention works to protect non-agricultural land under the Flood Prevention (Scotland) Act 1961. River purification authorities have discretionary powers to instal and operate flood warning systems.

Sheriff Officers

Mr. Douglas: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the number of commissions issued by sheriffs principal authorising individuals to act as sheriff officers since 1 January.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: In the period from 1 January to 20 March 1990 the sheriffs principal granted seven applications for commissions. Individual sheriff officers can hold commissions for more than one sheriffdom.

CBI Scotland

42. **Mr. Oppenheim:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met CBI Scotland; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Lang: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to him on 20 December 1989.

British Steel

44. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next expects to meet the chairman or chief executive of British Steel.

Mr. Lang: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of today to the hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid).

Students

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of students at universities in Scotland in the current academic year who are domiciled *(a)* in Scotland, *(b)* in England and Wales and *(c)* overseas; and if he will also list the same information in respect of Scottish central institutions.

Mr. Lang: The number of students by domicile in full-time higher education in universities and central institutions in Scotland in 1988-89 (the latest year available) is as follows:

	Universities	*Central Institutions*
Scotland	31,888	25,558
Other United Kingdom	11,494	1,693
Overseas	6,397	826
TOTAL	49,779	28,077

Consultancies

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total amount spent by the Scottish Development Agency in 1989 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by the Scottish Development Agency in 1989, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment; and what is the total amount that the Scottish Development Agency has budgeted to spend in the current year.

Mr. Lang: Expenditure by the Scottish Development Agency on management and computer consultancy contracts for the period 1 April 1989 to 23 March 1990 amounted to £7,961,000. The budgeted figure for the financial year 1990-91 is £10,722,000. Both these figures include fees for research and development, advisory services, appraisal and administration, such as tax and accounting advice, pension and legal consultancies.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Refrigerator Thermometers

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what advice he has given the manufacturers of domestic refrigerators regarding the fitting of internal thermometers.

Mr. Maclean: I have not formally given any advice to manufacturers of domestic refrigerators but officials of my Department and of the Department of Health have met with them to discuss the feasibility and benefits of fitting integral thermometers.

Liquid Egg

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has made an assessment of the level of bacteria, expressed as numbers of bacteria per gram, expected to be found in bulk liquid eggs immediately prior to pasteurisation.

Mr. Maclean: Several factors including the quality of raw materials and the hygienic conditions of the breaking-out plant affect the level of bacteria in bulk liquid egg. No general assessment may therefore be made.

Salmonella

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will specify the evidence available to him indicating that salmonella can multiply in intact grade A eggs kept at room temperatures for a period not longer than five days.

Mr. Maclean: Published research undertaken by the public health laboratory service showed that salmonella inoculated into whole shell eggs multiplied at room temperature. This implies that any salmonella present in intact shell eggs might also be able to multiply but research continues to investigate the factors which govern the multiplication of salmonella in shell eggs.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food under what basis the compensation for birds compulsorily slaughtered under the Zoonoses Order 1989 and the Animal Health Act 1981 is calculated.

Mr. Maclean: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to her on 5 March (*Official Report*, column *498*) and, in addition, to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) on 26 March (*Official Report*, columns *54-55*), which explain changes to the arrangements for the disposal of birds from salmonella-infected laying and breeding flocks.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment was made of the levels of employment in meat processing plants in the formulation of his policy on compulsory slaughter of salmonella-affected chickens.

Mr. Maclean: No specific assessment of this kind has been made. As announced in the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) on 26 March (*Official Report*, columns *54-55*), birds from salmonella-infected laying and breeding flocks are to be sent for processing subject to strict safeguards.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what level of salmonella contamination in bulk liquid eggs, expressed in numbers of bacteria per gram, is likely to cause a liquid egg pasteurisation process to fail.

Mr. Maclean: The Liquid Egg (Pasteurisation) Regulations 1963 require pasteurised egg to pass the alpha-amylase test specified in the regulations. This test is not affected by the presence of salmonella.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether the level of contamination by salmonella of grade A eggs produced by farms which are subject to infected place notices under the Zoonoses Order 1989 is such as would overwhelm a pasteurisation process.

Mr. Maclean: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer which I gave on 12 March 1990, *Official Report*, column *78*. The pasteurisation process is never totally effective at destroying all salmonella and the risk remains that some salmonella may survive the process.

Consultancies

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1989 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1989, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment; and what is the total amount that his Department has budgeted to spend in the current year.

Mr. Curry: We estimate that our expenditure on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases, will be £2,963,175 in the financial year 1989-90. Our provision for the financial year 1990-91 is set at £4,403,198. A list of contracts awarded in 1989-90 is given in the table:

MANAGEMENT CONSULTANCY CONTRACTS AWARDED IN 1989-90

Company and Contract

Deloitte Haskins and Sells—Review of veterinary manpower

Deloitte Haskins and Sells—Relocation of work: preliminary studies

Mr. R. S. Crespi—Intellectual property rights and exploitation

Professor Righelato, Ashbourne Biosciences—Link programme on agro food quality

IT Computer Consultancy Contracts awarded in 1989-90

Company and contract

Software AG of UK—Technical support on 4th Generation Environment

PA Consulting Services Ltd.—IT Sub-Strategy for Veterinary Medicines Directorate

PA Consulting Services Ltd.—Integration of MAFF IT strategies

Grafton Database (Consultants) Ltd.—Mainframe performance tuning

Logica UK Ltd.—Scoping study on knowledge-based systems

Asterisk Computer Systems Ltd.—Time recording system for Legal Department

The Instruction Set Ltd.—Development of strategy for IT standards

PA Consulting Services Ltd.—IT Sub-Strategy for Establishments Group

Admiral Management Services Ltd.—Quality management

PA Consulting Services Ltd.—Feasibility study on sea fisheries management

Triad Special Systems Ltd.—IT Sub-Strategy for Data Evaluation Unit

Peat, Marwick McLintock—Support to development of financial systems

BDO Binder Hamlyn Ltd.—Support to development of financial systems

CHISQ—Support to full study of Farm Survey System

Prime Computer (UK) Ltd.—Minicomputer performance tuning

Kermon Associates Ltd.—Office systems full study

Touche Ross Management Consultants—Office systems full study

Mouncey and Partners Ltd—Development of Set-Aside system

Corporate Computers Plc—Development of bird mortality system

BIS Systems Ltd—Review of IT security

BGS Systems Ltd—Mainframe technical support

Mouncey and Partners[1] (2)—Grants and subsidies system

Edwin E Tozer Ltd—Data management study

Computercenter Ltd—Technical support on PC issues

Forvus Computer Services—Initial study of National Food Survey system

Aims System Ltd—Design of a grochemicals database

Godfrey Durham[1] (3)—Support to Regional Administration project

Triad Special Systems Ltd[1] (3)—Support to Regional Administration project

Asterisk Computer Systems[1] (3)—Support to Regional Administration project

Quanta Learning Systems Ltd—Support to Regional Administration project

Pergammon Infotec—Support to Regional Administration project

Mouncey and Partners Ltd—Support to Regional Administration project

Pergammon Infotec—Support to Regional Administration project

Prime Computer (UK) Ltd—Support to Regional Administration project

Aims Systems Ltd—Mastitis monitoring project

Aims Systems Ltd—R&D registrations project

Aims Systems Ltd—Sheepmaster project

Peat Marwick McLintock—Milk and Dairies Regulation project

Touche Ross Management Consultants—Telecommunications strategy

Kermon Associates—Telecommunications strategy

PA Consulting Services Ltd.—IT Sub-Strategy for Economics and Statistics

PA Consulting Services Ltd.—IT Sub-Strategy for Food Safety Group and Food Science Group

Timberlake Clarke—Statistical support to Farm Survey System study

Eosys—Evaluation of local area network standards

Hayes-Davies Ltd.—Quality management initiative

Amdahl (UK) Ltd.—Technical support on mainframe

Applied learning—Strategy for end-user IT training

Corporate Computer plc—Design of data system for salmonella in poultry

PA Consulting Services—Support to IT studies in Animal Health and Horticulture Group

Data Dictionary Systems Ltd.—Data management study

MMT Computing (Reading) Ltd.—Analysis/design of National Food Survey System

Mouncey and Partners Ltd.—Strategic IT project co-ordination

Mouncey and Partners Ltd.—Use of IT in accommodation planning

Admiral Management Services—IT standards in ADAS

Learmouth and Burchett Ltd.—Design of agrochemicals database (Part 2)

[1] Refers to number of contracts on one project.

Fishing Vessels

Mr. Harris: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to put into effect the changes to the fishing vessels grant scheme which he announced in his statement of 20 December.

Mr. Gummer: Following my announcement last December that the present vessel grant scheme served to distort rather than encourage sensible investment by vessel owners I am proceeding to restrict the availability of these grants. A draft order under the Fisheries Act 1981 will be laid before Parliament shortly with a view to it coming into force at the beginning of April. The order will amend the present scheme (the Fishing Vessels (Acquisition and Improvement) (Grants) Scheme 1987) by providing aid only to essential safety improvements and to those cases where it is needed to provide back-up for EC grant aid.

The rates of grant for essential improvements will continue to be 30 per cent. (10 per cent. for vessels greater than 33m in length). The rate of back-up grant will be 10 per cent. regardless of vessel size.

These measures form part of our process of rationalisation of fleet capacity.

DEFENCE

Reply-paid Cards

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will reconsider the design of the reply-paid cards used for armed forces reservists to offer more security for the names, addresses and service status of the personnel concerned.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Yes.

Computer Hacking

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if any British database based in Europe was infiltrated by computer hacking by the West Germans convicted on 15 February of selling the information obtained to a foreign power.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I am not aware of any evidence to suggest that the three West Germans convicted on 15 February breached the security of any United Kingdom military database, either in this country or overseas.

RAF Finningley

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what services will be open for private contractoring tenders at RAF Finningley; and what will be the future role of service personnel currently carrying out these duties.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: At present, accommodation cleaning and local ancillary tasks at RAF Finningley, such as pest control and chimney sweeping, are carried out by private contractors. Tenders have been invited for the engineering and supply tasks at RAF Finningley and, subject to the acceptability of a contractor's bid in operational, technical and financial terms, it is hoped to let a contract for these services in April 1991. Service personnel currently carrying out these duties will be redeployed to other tasks within the RAF.

Security

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what update of security safeguards has been implemented for *(a)* employees and *(b)* companies employed on private tendered services at military establishments.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The security provisions concerning companies and their employees employed at military establishments are kept under constant review. It is not our practice to discuss the details of such arrangements.

Defence Spending

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the amount spent on national defence per head of the adult population.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In 1989-90 some £470, on latest estimates.

Nuclear Missiles

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which cities in Europe are within the range of the United Kingdom nuclear missiles.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In theory, all European cities could fall within the range of Polaris. However, it is not our practice to comment on targeting policy.

Mallet Blow Exercise

Mr. Jack Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether aircraft involved in exercise Mallet Blow will be involved in low flying over areas of population in Northumberland.

Mr. Neubert: All military aircraft taking part in exercise Mallet Blow will be governed by the normal United Kingdom low flying regulations, which require aircrew to avoid flying low over the centres of major conurbations and towns and to avoid all other populated areas wherever possible.

Military Training

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give the figures for the number of deaths and serious injuries that were sustained as a result of participation in Royal Marine training courses or exercises in 1988, 1987, 1986 and 1985.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Figures for deaths and serious injuries attributable to Royal Marine training courses and exercises in the years 1985 to 1988 are as follows:

Year	*Deaths*	*Serious injuries*
1985	2	—
1986	1	2
1987	—	2
1988	1	—

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the number of fatalities from all causes that have occurred in military exercises and training in each year since 1978.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The tri-service deaths attributable to training and exercise injuries from 1978 to the last year for which firm figures are available (1988) are as follows:

Year	*Royal Navy and Royal Marines*	*Army*	*Royal Air Force*	*Total*
1978	1	26	10	37
1979	4	14	3	21
1980	9	16	4	29
1981	5	13	6	24
1982	5	17	10	32
1983	3	10	13	26
1984	2	16	2	20
1985	2	10	7	19
1986	1	16	2	19
1987	—	10	4	14
1988	1	10	4	15
				Overall Total 256

The figures for 1989 will be promulgated in the "Service Annual Health Tables" to be published this summer.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South, *Official Report*, 13 March, column *202*, if he will outline the nature of the PULHHEEMS system of fitness assessment; and if he will specify how frequently it is applied to an individual member of the forces.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The PULHHEEMS system of medical classification involved assessment of:

P = physical capacity
U = upper limbs
L = locomotion
HH = hearing (hearing acuity)
EE = eyesight (visual acuity)
M = mental capacity
S = stability

The system is designed to:

a. provide a functional assessment of the individual's capacity for work;
b. assist in expressing the physical and mental attributes appropriate to individual employments within the services;
c. assist in posting people to the employment for which they are most suited in the light of their physical, intellectual and emotional make-up;
d. provide a system which is administratively simple to apply.

All new applicants to the services are required to have a PULHHEEMS medical examination at the pre-service stage and thereafter initial and service assessments following completion of their basic training. Further PULHHEEMS examinations are undertaken, with variations according to the branch of service, depending on the age of the individual and his employment. More regular assessments are given following injury and/or hospitalisation. The allocation of a PULHHEEMS assessment is a medical responsibility, but officers in command are responsible for ensuring that all ranks are referred to a medical officer.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South, *Official Report*, 13 March, columns *198-99*, if he will ensure that all training instructors are required to read, understand and observe the newly issued defence council instructions on heat illness.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: They are already required to do so.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South, *Official Report*, 13 March, columns *201-02*, how many men took part in the Royal Marine training courses and exercises in 1989 during which three died and one suffered serious injury.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The number of personnel involved in Royal Marine training courses and exercises in 1989 in which three died and one suffered serious injury was in the region of 3,500.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South, *Official Report*, 13 March, column *199*, what category of medical fitness was used for the Royal Navy survival course before the injury to Lieutenant Simon Rowland; and what is the new category.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The category of medical fitness used for the Royal Navy aircrew survival course is unchanged at P2—Physically Fit.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South, *Official Report*, 13 March, column *198*, if he can obtain without disproportionate cost and effort the number of disciplinary inquiries that have followed the 12 cases of heat-induced fatalities which have occurred since 1978.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the right hon. Member.

Consultancies

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1989 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1989, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment; and what is the total amount that his Department has budgeted to spend in the current year.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Ministry of Defence expects to spend £18 million in the financial year 1989-90 on management and computer consultancy contracts. Details of the management consultancy contracts are listed. Contractual responsibility for computer consultancy contracts rests with the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency. CCTA does not currently maintain separate details of consultancy contracts, which, in many cases, form part of wider computer procurement and support contracts. Details of individual contracts could therefore be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Management consultancy contracts let in financial year 1989-90

Firm and subject of assignment

Arthur Anderson and Co.—Support to the RAF TOPMIS Team.
Sir J. H. Biles (Naval Services) Ltd.—Load Testing of Upper Deck Equipments in RN and RFA vessels.
Chinal Management Services Ltd.—Review of Productivity

Scheme.
Deloitte Haskins and Sells—Initial Provisioning of RN vessels.
Deloitte Haskins and Sells—Support to the Army TOPMIS Team.
Ernst and Young—Management Information System for the Rapier Project Office.
Ernst and Young—Review of the Base Repair Organisation.
HACAS Ltd.—Housing Association Study.
Integrated Resource Management—Review of Regular and TA Recruitment.
PA Consulting Services—Review of PE Airfields.
PA Consulting Services—Performance Indicator Study at RAF Support Command.
Peat Marwick McLintock—Review of United Kingdom Service Hospitals.
Peat Marwick McLintock—Support to the Navy TOPMIS Team.
P. E. Inbucon—Future Strategy for the Overhaul of Diesel Engines.
P.E Inbucon—Total Quality Management Project for DG Mil Svy.
P. E. Inbucon—Consultancy Assistance to the Naval Aircraft Repair Organisation.
People in Business—Graduate Recruitment for the IT Function.
Price Waterhouse—Naval Recruitment Marketing Strategy.
Profile Group Ltd.—Improving Job Opportunities for Dependents.
Systems Consultancy Training Development—Support to the RAF Ground Defence Training Review Team.
University of Surrey—Tri-Service Ration Scales Review.
Touche Ross and Company—Sea Systems Controllerate Co-location Study.
Touche Ross and Company—Market Survey for the Sale of Hydrographic Charts.
Harold Whitehead and Partners—Support to Core TOPMIS Team.
Harold Whitehead and Partners—Review of Productivity Scheme.

Army Equipment Exhibition

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military personnel will be on duty in support of the British Army equipment exhibition 1990.

Mr. Alan Clark: Some 720 military personnel will be on duty in support of the British Army equipment exhibition 1990.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if any firepower or mobility demonstrations are planned in conjunction with the British Army equipment exhibition 1990.

Mr. Alan Clark: In conjunction with the 1990 British Army equipment exhibition there will be mobility demonstrations but no firepower demonstrations.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the list of names of countries to which invitations to the British Army equipment exhibition 1990 have been extended.

Mr. Alan Clark: No. It has been the consistent policy of successive Administrations not to release details of invitation lists to British forces equipment exhibitions. Invitations are issued on a confidential basis and it would be a breach of trust to release names.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who will be opening the British Army equipment exhibition to be held at Aldershot from 3 to 8 June.

Mr. Alan Clark: Detailed arrangements have yet to be finalised, but it is expected that the exhibition will be opened at ministerial level.

Fire Safety Standards

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what criteria govern the application of the Government fire standards code to major refurbishments of his Department's storage facilities.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The code is applied to major refurbishments of MOD storage facilities where feasible or cost-effective.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the annual amount of expenditure on improving fire safety standards in his Department's storage depots for each year since 1979.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Figures for years prior to 1984 are not readily available. Fire safety-related expenditure by calendar year since 1984, which includes spending on specific fire safety enhancements and on new buildings which meet the Government fire standards code, has been broadly as follows:

	£ million
1984	1·3
1985	11·7
1986	22·7
1987	8·9
1988	14·0
1989	6·4

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the legal status of the Government fire standards code; and whether the code applies to his Department's storage facilities in other countries.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The code is an advisory document, and has no statutory force. It is applicable to the Ministry of Defence's storage facilities worldwide.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what regulations govern the liaison between the various military fire services and local civilian fire services in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* abroad.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Departmental regulations, applicable in the United Kingdom and overseas, provide for visits to Ministry of Defence establishments by local fire brigades, for joint exercises and mutual assistance.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 29 March 1990

TRANSPORT

Ferries (Safety)

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he has taken to improve the safety of existing roll on/roll off ferries since the sinking of the Herald of Free Enterprise.

Mr. McLoughlin: We have taken a number of steps to improve ferry safety since March 1987. Firstly, new legislation and guidance—including eight sets of regulations—have been introduced. The control of operational procedures which the new regulations have ensured has been fully supplemented by increased numbers of random and unannounced inspections by Department of Transport marine surveyors. Secondly, we have required all United Kingdom flag ferries, irrespective of year of build, to meet the United Kingdom residual stability standards introduced for new vessels in 1980. All but a handful of the older United Kingdom ships, which are at present being phased out, now meet these standards, which exceed current international stability standards. Thirdly, a wide-ranging research programme to examine the capability of roll on/roll off passenger ships to survive after sustaining collision damage has been undertaken. Its findings will be made public shortly.

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether all roll on/roll off ferries now comply with the passenger ships regulations in respect of stability in the event of an incident at sea.

Mr. McLoughlin: All United Kingdom registered roll on/roll off passenger ships comply with the United Kingdom and international passenger ship regulations which include requirements in respect of stability in the event of an incident at sea.

London Underground

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will call for a report from the chairman of London Underground Ltd. about plans to refit the automatic ticket barriers on the London underground and as to what is proposed, for what reason and at what cost; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: This is an operational matter for London Underground Ltd. I am not aware of any plans to refit the gates, but I understand that a new touch-and-pass system of operating automatic ticket gates will be adopted at certain stations for a trial period of six months.

I am sure that London Underground would be happy to provide the hon. Member with full information on how the system works and what its benefits are.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will call for a report from the chairman of LRT on the policy of extending one-person operation of trains on deep tube lines of London; what assessment has been made of the risk to passengers of such a policy; whether this policy has been approved by the railway inspectorate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The decision to extend one-person operation on any part of the underground is for London Underground. I understand that it commissioned an independent assessment before introducing one-person operation on the Bakerloo line last year.

Although the railway inspectorate has no statutory role in approving one-person operation, there is full consultation with London Underground over all safety aspects. The inspectorate observed a recent exercise, which simulated an emergency caused by incapacitation of a one-person-operation train driver. The chief inspecting officer of railways has assured me that he regards the arrangements as acceptable in safety terms.

"Marchioness"

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what representations he has received to set-up a full public inquiry into the sinking of the Marchioness; and what has been his response;

(2) whether he will publish in full his Department's inquiry into the sinking of the Marchioness; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Several requests have been made for a formal investigation into the sinking of the Marchioness. The present preference of my right hon. Friend is to publish in full the report by the chief inspector of accidents as soon as possible.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the Bowbelle and other sand dredgers are working on the Thames outside daylight hours; and what changes in their operation since the Marchioness sinking his Department had required of them.

Mr. McLoughlin: Bowbelle, other sand dredgers and other ships operate on the Thames at all hours provided that they follow the general directions for navigation issued by the Port of London Authority. These directions have been reconsidered and amended since the Marchioness tragedy, in consultation with the Department of Transport, to improve safety on the river.

Jubilee Line

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) at what stage of the Jubilee line project Olympia and York will pay its contribution to the cost of the extension;

(2) what was the financial contribution that Olympia and York was going to make to the Jubilee line under the terms of the provisional contract or orginal agreement.

Mr. Portillo: Under the agreement reached last November Olympia and York will make a cash contribution of £400 million to the Jubilee line extension. Of that sum, £100 million will be paid within the next three years with the balance to be paid in the years following the opening of the line.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his practice from time to time to travel on the Jubilee line of London Underground between St. John's Wood and Charing Cross stations in order to experience for himself the conditions undergone by regular passengers.

Mr. Portillo: No, but I have travelled on many parts of the underground at peak times and I am aware that congestion can be severe. London Underground is investing record sums, with Government support, to bring about improvements. St. John's Wood station will be renovated this spring at a cost of about £1 million.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which developers other than Olympia and York will be contributing to the extension of the Jubilee line.

Mr. Portillo: British Gas and Regalian.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether there has been any change in the level of the net contribution which Olympia and York will be making for the Jubilee line extension.

Mr. Portillo: No.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether any options are being considered to reduce the number of intermediate stations in the Southwark stretch of the Jubilee line extension.

Mr. Portillo: Powers are being sought in the Bill for stations in the Southwark stretch of the Jubilee line extension at Waterloo, Southwark, London Bridge, Bermondsey and Canada Water (Surrey Quays). The case for providing stations at Southwark and Bermondsey, where patronage is expected to be light, is still being considered.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether a provisional contract or agreement for the funding of the Jubilee line has been signed by his Department or London Regional Transport with Olympia and York.

Mr. Portillo: A schedule of terms setting out the agreement reached last November has been initialled by the Department and Olympia and York. The final agreement will be executed by London Regional Transport and Olympia and York.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether Olympia and York will be taking a share of the ticket revenue from passengers after the opening of the Jubilee line extension.

Mr. Portillo: No.

London Assessment Studies

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many representations he received by 28 February relating to each of the four London assessment studies; and what percentage of the total *(a)* supported and *(b)* objected to these proposals.

Mr. Atkins: The number of responses received from local authorities, national and local organisations, pressure groups and individuals was approximately as follows:

	Number
South London	9,700
East London	9,500
West London	4,600
South Circular	2,600

An analysis will be published shortly.

"St Columbia"

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the marine accident investigation branch has investigated the role of the radio officer in maintaining vital radio communications with the emergency services during the fire which left the roll-on roll-off passenger ferry St. Columbia adrift without power in the Irish sea on Wednesday 31 January; and what conclusions have been drawn from the investigation.

Mr. McLoughlin: The purpose of an investigation carried out by the marine accident investigation branch is to determine the circumstances and causes of an accident. To this end, the inspector who carried out the investigation into the fire on board the St. Columbia on 31 January interviewed several of the ship's officers—including the radio officer. The inspector found that the fire occurred when fuel oil escaped from a pipe and sprayed onto a hot exhaust manifold, causing the oil to ignite. A report will be published to apprise the shipping industry of the lessons to be learnt.

Sprinter Units

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received on the safety of sprinter units; and what steps are being taken to ensure that the doors on such units lock securely.

Mr. Portillo: I have received a small number of representations. Problems with the door-locking mechanisms of class 155 sprinters developed towards the end of 1988. After modification, the doors have worked satisfactorily. The railway inspectorate is now examining at design stage all proposals for new BR rolling stock.

St. John's Wood Underground Station

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will call for a report on the safety aspects of the closure of both the up and down escalators at St. John's Wood underground station.

Mr. Portillo: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave to his question on 27 March.

Clyde Port Authority

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what are the names of the chairman, chief executive and directors of the Clyde Port Authority; what are their periods of office and their annual remuneration; and from which organisation they were recruited and appointed.

Mr. McLoughlin: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has appointed the following non-executive members of the Clyde Port Authority:

Name	*Organisation*	*Expiry date of appointment*
Sir Robert Easton CBE *(Chairman)*	Chairman and managing director of Kvaerner Govan, Shipbuilders	31 March 1992
L. McGarry	Chairman of Strathclyde regional council's economic and industrial development committee	31 March 1991
W. K. Mackay	Partner in Jamieson & Mackay Partners, consulting civil, structural and transportation engineers	31 March 1992
G. S. Milne	Managing Director of Scottish Metropolitan Property plc	31 March 1992
T. O'Connor	Chairman of the local port workers branch of the TGWU	31 March 1992
C. S. Paterson	Chief Executive of Caledonian McBrayne Limited	31 March 1992
J. M. Young	Former joint general manager and member of the management board of the Bank of Scotland	31 March 1991

The executive officers who are members of the board and whose appointments are at the discretion of the authority are:

J. Mather—managing director
G. P. Johnston—director and secretary
Captain D. B. McMurray—director marine and operations

According to the authority's accounts for 1988, the annual remuneration received by the chairman was £10,000 and by the other non-executive members was £3,500. The highest paid executive on the board received £44,385 and the other two received between £20,000 and £35,000.

Driving Tests

Mr. Andy Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what conclusions have been reached, as a result of the trial carried out by his Department, about conducting driving tests on Saturdays.

Mr. Atkins: The trial was very successful and confirmed that Saturday testing is a practical proposition at many centres. In the first year the service was used by some 30,000 candidates, and contributed three to four days to the reduction in waiting times. I have decided to continue the service on a permanent basis, and to extend it to all centres where it is feasible to do so.

ENVIRONMENT

Housing, Kent

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing the number of council houses, flats and sheltered accommodation owned by each local authority in Kent in 1978 and 1989, together with the amount collected in rent.

Mr. Chope: Local authorities provide estimates of their housing revenue accounts on their second advance subsidy claim returns. The latest available information for local authorities in Kent for 1978-79 and 1989-90 is as follows:

	1978-79		*1989-90*	
	Number of dwellings[1]	*Rent income*[2] *£ million*	*Number of dwellings*[1]	*Rent income*[2] *£ million*
Ashford	9,637	2·962	7,607	10·393
Canterbury	8,039	2·578	6,375	7·386
Dartford	7,882	2·643	5,971	6·979
Dover	9,209	3·172	6,564	8·123
Gillingham	5,090	1·490	3,935	5·142
Gravesham	9,425	3·163	7,642	8·562
Maidstone	10,158	3·854	8,354	7·789
Rochester	13,850	5·202	[3]8,880	11·274
Sevenoaks	7,855	2·389	61	0·075
Shepway	4,868	1·475	4,149	5·279
Swale	9,989	3·176	7,440	7·995
Thanet	8,302	3·240	[4]7,162	[4]6·802
Tonbridge	7,697	2·416	6,450	7·099
Tunbridge Wells	7,352	2·269	5,650	6·128

[1] Average of start year and end year stock.

[2] Gross of rent rebates.

[3] Stock at beginning of year, authority planned complete stock disposal at year end.

[4] Figures for 1989-90 not available; 1988-89 figures given.

Disabled People (Housing)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps his Department is taking to ensure a more even spread and consistent provision of improvement and disabled facilities grants to disabled home owners across the country.

Mr. Chope: When the main provisions of part VIII of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 are implemented on 1 July, mandatory disabled facilities grants will be available from all local authorities for a much wider range of adaptation works than the current home improvement grant system allows. Authorities will also be able to give discretionary grants for other works, which will vary according to local needs and priorities.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps his Department is taking to ensure that local housing authorities address the housing needs of disabled people in their area.

Mr. Chope: Local housing authorities are required by Section 3 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 to have regard to the special housing needs of disabled people when considering the housing needs of their district.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his Department will make a supplementary credit approval available for local housing authorities to adapt their own properties for disabled people.

Mr. Chope: Resources for local authority capital expenditure on housing are allocated through the annual round of housing investment programme (HIP) allocations. The distribution of these allocations reflects the entire spectrum of needs for local authority capital expenditure, including the adaptation of council housing stock for disabled tenants. There is no need, therefore, to issue supplementary credit approvals for this purpose.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his Department will take steps to ensure that landlords taking over local authority property under the Housing Acts 1986 and 1988 address the housing needs both of disabled tenants and of future disabled applicants for housing.

Mr. Chope: Purchasers of council housing, whether acquiring under tenants' choice or by a large scale voluntary transfer from a local authority, will be expected to subscribe to the tenants' guarantee, which requires landlords to pay special attention to the specific housing difficulties experienced by particular groups, including disabled people. Purpose-built housing for the disabled which has special facilities, such as a warden, is excluded from transfers under tenants' choice.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his Department will update the guidelines contained in HDD occasional paper 2/74 "Mobility Housing" and HDD occasional paper 2/75 "Wheelchair Housing".

Mr. Chope: I am satisfied that the guidelines contained in these papers are sound and have no plans to update them.

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps his Department is taking to encourage the provision of wheelchair and mobility housing by general needs housing associations.

Mr. Chope: The Housing Corporation requires new build and, where possible, rehabilitation schemes by housing associations to be built to mobility standards, and the cost criteria used by the corporation in assessing schemes and calculating grant make due allowance for this. Where associations wish to provide new housing designed specifically for tenants confined to wheelchairs, grant is available to cover the extra costs involved.

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps his Department is taking to ensure that local authorities' action on providing housing for homeless people addresses the housing needs of homeless disabled people.

Mr. Michael Spicer: A revised code of guidance is being prepared which will provide advice to local authorities on meeting their statutory duties to the homeless. This will include the need to recognise special requirements, such as those of the disabled, when securing permanent accommodation for homeless households.

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps his Department is taking to make supplementary credit approvals available to local housing authorities to provide housing for disabled people leaving residential care.

Mr. Chope: We have no proposals to issue supplementary credit approvals to local authorities for this purpose in 1990-91. The Department takes account of the housing needs of disabled people in the distribution of local authorities' housing investment programme (HIP) allocations each year. In addition, the Housing Corporation plans to maintain the output of their special needs programme in 1990-91 at no less than current levels, and disabled people are one of the groups helped by this programme.

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his Department will take steps to ensure that all private developers build to mobility standards with a minimum percentage of dwellings to wheelchair standards.

Mr. Chope: My Department fully supports the initiative by the National House-Building Council, in association with other interested bodies, to encourage private developers to design housing convenient for disabled people to live in or visit. We consider that voluntary action and good practice are the best way forward for private dwellings.

Community Care

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps his Department is taking to ensure that local housing authorities work with social services departments on the new community care initiatives being developed as a result of the White Paper, "Caring for People".

Mr. Chope: My Department has been in regular contact with the Department of Health in the preparation of the

White Paper and of the ensuing legislation. Clause 43 of the Bill as now amended will require social services departments to consult local housing authorities and other housing providers in the preparation and revision of communtiy care plans.

London Docklands

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what the financial arrangements will be for the remaining social homes, after taking account of the Winsor Park development, of the London Docklands development corporation programme of 2,000 new rented homes in the docklands area of the London borough of Newham.

Mr. Moynihan: The memorandum of agreement between the London Docklands development corporation and the London borough of Newham has the objective of producing 1,500 social housing units. The London Docklands development corporation's grants towards schemes at Winsor Park and North Beckton have secured 434 of these. The London Docklands development corporation is considering the arrangements for further schemes in consultation with the Housing Corporation and Newham.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the Government's estimate of the number of households excused from paying rates in the current financial year because of insufficient income and the number who paid a reduced rate for the same reason; how many in each case were estimated as liable to pay more and how many less under the poll tax in identical circumstances; and how many who were not eligible for a reduction in rates on income grounds, will be eligible for a reduction under the poll tax.

Mr. Chope: No such estimates were made when it was decided that the community charge offered the best alternative to domestic rates.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will exclude expenditure on education from relevant expenditure for rate-capping purposes;

(2) if he will exclude expenditure on maintenance of council housing from relevant expenditure for rate-capping purposes;

(3) if he will exclude expenditure on public libraries from relevant expenditure for rate-capping purposes;

(4) if he will make it his policy as part of his charge-capping proposals to indicate the areas of the capped budget in which he proposes each authority should make reductions.

Mr. Chope: It would not be right for me to speculate on the detailed operation of community charge capping, were my right hon. Friend to use his capping powers for 1990-91.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the Government's current estimate of the number of households paying the full rate whose occupants would contribute less under the poll tax, and the average amount saved in each case.

Mr. Chope: Had local authorities set community charges at the levels contained in the Community Charge Transitional Relief Report (England), I estimate that 55 per cent. of households with no entitlement to rate rebates in 1989-90 would pay a lower proportion of their net income in community charges in 1990-91 than they did in rates in 1989-90. The average amount paid in rates for these households in 1989-90 was £516 compared to £503 in community charge in 1990-91. These estimates are based on simple survey data taken from the family expenditure survey and are consistent with the analysis of the distributional impact of the community charge placed in the Library on 15 February.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* the estimate of the numbers who would have *(a)* gained and *(b)* lost if the level of poll tax had not exceeded the Government's targets.

Mr. Chope: The Government have not set targets for the level of the community charge in each area. An analysis of the effect on household finances of moving to the community charge was placed in the Library on 15 February. This showed 60 per cent. of households gaining.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to exempt from poll tax women residing in refuges who have been the victims of domestic violence and have been forced to leave the marital home.

Mr. Chope: A period of residence within a women's refuge does not confer exemption from the community charge unless it is a night shelter or hostel. But, in general, women will not be registered at refuges for the community charge unless, exceptionally, they are solely or mainly resident there. In almost all cases, women stay in refuges for short periods, during which they will be registered for the personal charge at their previous address.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the total figures for 1990-91 local government finance for *(a)* the distributable amount, *(b)* the distributable amount per adult, *(c)* net total standard spending, *(d)* revenue support grant and *(e)* population of England.

Mr. Chope: The information requested is as follows:
the distributable amount: £10·4 billion
the distributable amount per adult: 292·51
net total standard spending: £29·8 billion
revenue support grant: £9·5 billion
sum of the relevant populations of English charging authorities: 35·7 million.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, with reference to paragraph 2.5 of his Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England), what definition is used for *(a)* relevant populations as used in the explanation of distributable amount per adult and *(b)* relevant population, as used in the subsequent sub-paragraphs; and if he will list the relevant population for each authority.

Mr. Chope: The rules for calculating relevant population are set out in the Population Report (England) approved by this House on 18 January. Figures for each authority were placed in the Library on 11 January, with other details of the 1990-91 settlement.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, with reference to paragraph 3.7 of his Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England), if he will list the results for each authority of applying formulae to indicators in section *(a)* and multiplying by the area cost adjustment for education, but not scaling to control.

Mr. Chope: I have today placed in the Library a table which shows the standard spending assessment for primary education for each authority, prior to scaling to the control total for this sub-block.

Rateable Values

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what figures he has for the proportion of people living in properties of above average rateable value who have below average incomes.

Mr. Chope: I estimate that 40 per cent. of houses with above average rateable value are lived in by households who have below average incomes.

Toxic Wood Preservatives

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will review the regulations for the storage of toxic wood preservatives of the type which have polluted the River Bourne in Woking.

Mr. Trippier: I am satisfied that the existing controls over the storage of toxic wood preservatives are extensive and sufficiently comprehensive in most circumstances. In the case of the incident on the River Bourne at Woking, the cause is still under investigation by the local constabulary.

The storage of wood preservatives is covered by the general provisions of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act, 1974. More specifically, wood preservatives are subject to the Control of Pesticides Regulations (COPR) made under the Food and Environment Protection Act, 1985. Certain timber treatment activities are also subject to the requirements of the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazards Regulations, 1984, which aim to prevent and mitigate the consequences of major accidents to people or the environment. These regulations are due to be amended later this year to comply with the second amendment to the "Seveso" directive (82/501/EEC) to include additional premises storing toxic substances such as wood preservatives.

House Condition Survey

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will publish from the English house condition survey 1986 information on the means of heating the bathroom tabulated *(a)* by income and *(b)* by tenure;

(2) if he will publish from the English house condition survey 1986 information on the main form of heating in the living room tabulated by *(a)* income and *(b)* tenure;

(3) if he will publish from the English house condition survey 1986 information on the form of heating used in kitchen and hall tabulated by *(a)* tenure and *(b)* income;

(4) if he will publish from the English house condition survey 1986 information on the means of heating for other

(5) if he will publish from the House condition survey 1986 information on the main form of heating used in the interviewee's bedroom tabulated by *(a)* income and *(b)* tenure.

Mr. Chope: As I indicated in the answer I gave to the hon. Member on 18 January, *Official Report,* Column 366, information on these topics will be included in a supplementary report on the English house condition survey which will be published later this year.

Bathing Waters

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to require the sampling of bathing waters to be undertaken during specified conditions.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The National Rivers Authority is the competent authority for the purposes of the bathing water directive. It is for that authority to sample waters in accordance with the directive's rules.

Partnership Programme, Newcastle

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the environment what was the capital allocation for the 1989-90 partnership programme for Newcastle city; what has been the actual spend to date; what is the planned real outturn for 1989-90; and what will be the amount spent on projects within the parliamentary constituency of Newcastle upon Tyne, East.

Mr. Moynihan: The urban programme capital allocation to the Newcastle-Gateshead inner city partnership for 1989-90 is £12·3 million of which £6·14 million is allocated to Newcastle city. A total of £3·3 million of the Newcastle city allocation had been spent by 31 December 1989. The city council has recently informed my Department that there will be a £500,000 underspend on their capital allocation producing an estimated outturn figure of £5·64 million for Newcastle city for 1989-90. This underspend, however, has been contained within partnership through a transfer of resources to Gateshead MBC. My Department's regional office does not record urban programme expenditure by parliamentary constituency and therefore this information can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Brighton Aquarium

Mr Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will make it his policy to institute an inquiry into animal welfare and safety conditions at the Brighton aquarium and to suspend its operating licence pending the outcome of the inquiry;

(2) what educational purpose is served by the Brighton aquarium; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: Brighton aquarium is licensed by the local authority, Brighton borough council, under the Zoo Licensing Act 1981. The Act gives local authorities the powers, inter alia, to carry out special inspections and to withdraw licenses, in certain circumstances. Animal welfare, safety conditions and educational value are among the factors which are taken into account in the issue of a licence.

Dolphinaria

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what action he expects to take to review the operating licences of dolphinaria which have not replied to requests or reminders for details from United Kingdom dolphinaria of their operating plans for implementing new standards;

(2) what enforcement action he proposes to take in the case of operators of dolphinaria failing to respond to his Department's requests for the submission of operators' plans or implementing new standards for dolphinara, pursuant to the 1986 Klinowska report;

(3) when he expects to receive operators' plans for implementing new standards for dolphinaria from all four United Kingdom operators;

(4) whether he proposes to review the operating licences of United Kingdom dolphinaria.

Mr. Trippier: The steering group report makes it clear that display exemption licences will only be renewed by my Department in August 1991 if satisfactory progress has been made towards attainment of the revised standards by August 1993. All four dolphinaria operators are aware of this deadline and three have now responded to our requests for information about their plans.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he proposes to take regarding the implementation of the steering group's recommendations on the Klinowska report on revised criteria for licensing dolphinaria in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Trippier: My officials have undertaken consultations with all interested parties on the basis of the draft standards of modern zoo practice annexed to the steering group report. We will issue the additional standards once any outstanding technical questions have been resolved.

County Hall

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will consider the use of County Hall for hon. Members' offices or other public use; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: No.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will make it his policy in considering any planning appeals to ensure that in the event of development of County Hall the war memorial and inscribed marble detailing the offices of previous leading figures of the London county council and Greater London council will remain in situ;

(2) if he will make it his policy, in considering any planning appeal relevant to County Hall, to ensure that the council chamber is not affected by any development proposals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: My right hon. Friend cannot prejudge the outcome of any planning appeal.

Mr. Tony Banks To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what amount of money he estimates will be made available to London boroughs from the disposal of County Hall.

Mr. Moynihan: I cannot give an estimate in advance of the completion of a contract.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to announce his decision regarding the future of County Hall; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: My right hon. Friend will announce his decisions on the planning appeals which were the subject of a public inquiry last autumn when he has considered his inspector's report.

Ivory

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what contribution was made by Her Majesty's Government to the CITES secretariat ivory unit in the year 1989-90 to date.

Mr. Trippier: In the year 1989-90, the United Kingdom contributed £5,000 towards the running of the CITES monitoring unit for trade in raw ivory.

Local Authority Properties

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about inefficient use of resources in respect of local authorities completely reroofing properties in their ownership in place of reinstating them with a longer expectation of life at less cost.

Mr. Chope: None.

Heritage Organisations

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what grants will be available in 1990-91 for voluntary heritage organisations.

Mr. Trippier: The table gives the voluntary organisations to which grants will be made in 1990-91 in support of the work they do to promote and protect parts of the national heritage.

Applicant	*Grant*
	£
Architectural Heritage Fund	23,616
Cathedral Camps	21,500
Centre for Environmental Interpretation	8,666
The Insite Trust	3,900
The Garden History Society	10,700
The National Council for the Conservation of Plants and Gardens	5,000
Heritage Education Trust	16,000
Pennine Heritage	18,000
Theatres Trust	15,375
International Council on Monuments and Sites	12,000
The Ancient Monuments Society	16,810
The Council for British Archaeology	16,810
The Georgian Group	16,810
The Victorian Society	17,336
The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings	24,810

A separate announcement will be made about the amount of grant to the Civic Trust.

Consultancies

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1989 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1989, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment; and what is the total amount that his Department has budgeted to spend in the current year.

Mr. Chris Patten *[holding answer 28 March 1990]:* Central records are collated annually after the end of the financial year. The latest readily available information therefore covers 1988-89.

The total amount spent was £6·3 million and the contracts awarded to management or computing consultants, excluding consultancies in connection with water privatisation, by the Department of the Environment (excluding PSA) in the financial year 19988-89 were as follows:

Firm and subject of consultancy

Admiral Management Services—Review of BRE Computing Needs.
Aspinwall and Co.—Data Management System for HMIP.
D. E. Barnard Systems Ltd.—Water Services Office: IS Strategy.
Bickerdike Allen and Partners—Review of Fire and Building Regulations.
BIS Applied Systems Ltd.—H. C. Geotechnical Data Computerisation.
Building Design Partnership—Study of New Arts Building.
Business Statistics Office—Collection of data on Minerals by Annual Survey.
Claygate Services Ltd.—Large Colour Foils.
Coopers and Lybrand—East Thameside Housing Study.
Coopers and Lybrand—Extension of Merseyside Development Corporation.
DPM Design Consultants Ltd.—Colour Photography.
Downing White Project Management—Local Economic Issues—Private Sector Quantity Surveyors.
Halcrow Fox and Associates—East London Rail Study.
Halifax Building Society—Estate Action Consultancy.
Harwell Laboratory—Initial Development of a Universal Waste Classification System.
Healey and Baker—Advice on disposal of New Town Assets.
ICI—Radiochemical analysis Specification L.
Institute for European Environmental Policy—Assessment of Implications for UK Environmental Policy of the Single Market.
Institute for European Environmental Policy—EC Legislation and Implications for UK Policy.
ITEC—Waste Management Papers 4 and 27.
L G Management—Contact with Estate Action.
MVA Systematica—Migration model.
National Industrial Fuel Efficiency Service Ltd.—Energy Surveys.
N.E.R.C.—Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986.
P A Computers and Telecommunications Ltd.—Press Advice on Communications Links.
P A Computers and Telecommunications Ltd.—Local Government Finance Payment System.
Peat Marwick McLintock and Pic Ltd.—Housing Action Trust (Sunderland).
Pieda Ltd.—Leeds Housing Action Trust.
Price Waterhouse—Sandwell Housing Action Trust Main Study.
Price Waterhouse—Study of the Private Rented Housing Market.
Primagraphics—Preparation of Graphics for the 1986 English House Condition Survey Report.
Roger Tym and Partners—Study into Financial Aspects of Local Authority Building Control.
Stoy Haywood Associates—Urban Developmental Grant Appraisal.
Technical Writing Service Ltd.—Manual of Acidic Emission Technologies.
Travers Morgan Landscape—Advice on Community related Assets at Warrington.
Tree Conservation Ltd.—T.P.O. Appeals Site Inspections and Reports.
Willis Wrightson Ltd.—Professional Liability Review.
Sir Owen Williams and Partners—Assistance with consideration of Derelict Land Reclamation Schemes.

My Department's estimate of expenditure on computing and management consultancies in the financial year 1989-90 is £10·1 million.

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total amount spent by the Property Services Agency in 1989 on management and computer consultancy contracts; excluding hardware and software purchases; if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awareded by the Property Services Agency in 1989, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment; and what is the total amount that the Property Services Agency has budgeted to spend in the current year.

Mr. Chris Patten: Forecast expenditure by the Property Services Agency in the financial year 1989-90 will be £13·035 million. The planned expenditure for 1990-91 financial year is £9·5 million. This will be kept under review in the light of changing circumstances. The following consultancies were let in 1989-90:

Consultancy Firm and Subject of Assignment

Management Consultancy

W.S. Atkins Management Consultants—To review the information systems supporting the business objectives of PSA Fuel Branch.
P.A. Consulting Services Ltd.—Advice and support to PSA Projects Marketing Unit.
Micromoney Ltd.—Advice and Support to Financial Controller, PSA Specialist Services.
W.S. Atkins Management Consultants—Business study at Parliamentary Works Office.
Leads International—Development and Implementation of Project Services's Business Plan.
P.A. Consulting Services Ltd.—Advice and guidance to the Agency's Information Strategy and Planning Processes.
P.A. Consulting Services Ltd.—Assist in co-ordinating Agency's Business Plan.

Computer Consultancy

Cadvert Scanning Bureau—Conversion of 6 No Standard M&E Drawings.
Compsoft—Assistance in reconstituting corrupt data as Faslane.
Powerhouse Resources Ltd.—Assistance in drawing up a specification for the development of Digital computer interface system.
Myriad Computer Services Ltd.—Assistance in drawing up a specification for the development of ICL-Digital computer interface system.

Computer Consultancy

Amtec Consulting—Assist in development of procedures for configuration management.
Oracle Corporation (UK) Ltd.—Preliminary work for Professional Information Systems Project.
KPG Computer Support Systems Ltd.—Development of Oracle Applications progress from detailed specifications.
Elan Computing Ltd.—Support within IT Directorate for resolution of system management queries.
MDA Computer Group plc—Support within IT Directorate for resolution of system management queries.
DHP Consulting Group—Support for revised computer based management and cost accounting system for PSA Specialist Services.
Mouncey and Partners Ltd.—Assistance in National Implementation of Strategic Infrastructure for Building Management Business.
Peat Marwick McLintock—Assistance in National Implementation of Strategic Infrastructure for Projects Business.
Applications Development Group—Advice on transferring data between PCs and Digital computers.
Computastaff (UK) Ltd.—Programming of various applications from detailed specification.
Cyril Sweet and Partners—Support for introduction of

computer facilities to Quantity Surveyors in PSA.

Sophitscom Computer Services—Operational support to computer systems handed over from Crown Suppliers.

Computer Consultancy

Aptree Ltd.—Support for Computer Services help desk in Ashdown House, Hastings.

Mouncey and Partners Ltd.—Assist the introduction of Office Automation facilities in PSA.

P.A. Consulting Services Ltd.—Support to National Implementation of Strategic Infrastructure for Projects Business.

Vistec Business Systems Ltd.—Advice on use and implementation of Autocad software package into PSA.

P.E. Computer Services Ltd.—Assist design and installation of Government Car Service IT system.

Elan Computing Ltd.—Support within IT Directorate for resolution of system management queries.

Wocad Ltd.—Assist in the development of Autocad software package.

MDA Computer Group plc.—Managing hardware/software and telecommunications network.

GECS Ltd.—Training in use of Reinforced concrete CAD software package.

Loadplan—Conversion of document-based Airfield Pavement specification to computer disc.

Oracle Corporation (UK) Ltd.—Provision of Oracle Programming Support.

Civil Defence

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which local government unions and professional bodies are being consulted about the provision of nuclear, biological and chemical defence clothing and equipment to local authority staff with a civil defence role.

Mr. John Patten: I have been asked to reply.

No formal consultations are being held with these bodies in regard to protective clothing for civil defence purposes. A current working party, including representation from the Society of County Emergency Planning Officers, is concerned with the possible use of radiation survey equipment in wartime.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Food (Value)

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the proportion of the value of food which has gone to *(a)* the producer and *(b)* the processor, wholesaler and retailer in each year since 1973.

Mr. Curry: Figures for the period 1973 to 1987 are as follows. However, this series was discontinued due to doubts about the validity and meaningfulness of the calculations and the difficulty of making the necessary estimates given the increasing complexity of the food chain.

Percentage of the price of food going to the producer or to the processor, wholesaler and retailer

	Producers	*Processors, wholesalers and retailers*
1973	51·9	48·1
1974	52·6	47·4
1975	49·9	50·1
1976	52·2	47·8
1977	52·5	47·5
1978	49·2	50·8
1979	40·0	51·0
1980	43·9	56·1
1981	44·0	56·0
1982	45·8	54·2
1983	44·1	55·9
1984	46·6	53·4
1985	44·1	55·9
1986	42·0	58·0
1987	40·5	59·5

Notes:

1. The producers' share is derived from estimates of agricultural products produced in the United Kingdom for home consumption valued at farmgate prices and imported food valued at shipside prices.
2. The share of processors, wholesalers and retailers is derived from estimates of household expenditure on food at retail plus the estimates of the wholsale value of food used in the catering sector. The retail price of food is valued less taxes but including subsidies.
3. More detailed figures are given in CSO's Annual Abstract of Statistics, 1988 edition, Table 9.16.

Farms

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the proportion of total capital grant expenditure that is given to each category of small, medium and large farms.

Mr. Curry: Information on total capital grant expenditure is not available in the form requested. However, the proportion of grant expenditure in England and Wales under the agriculture improvement scheme is identifiable by size of farm holdings as measured in British size units (BSUs). The latest year for which data are available is 1988 and the proportions of total grant expenditure of £25·4 million for that year are as follows:

1988 Size of Holding (BSU)	*Per cent. of Total Grant Expenditure*
0–8	14·8
8–24	35·7
24–100	43·3
100 plus	6·2

Marine Coastal Eutrophication

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food why his Department decided not to be represented at the international conference on marine coastal eutrophication from 21 to 24 March.

Mr. Curry: The conference was principally concerned with the problems which are experienced in shallow, static, warm seas such as the Mediterranean. These issues are not relevant to the colder, well mixed waters round the United Kingdom.

Salmonella

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many samples from live poultry of all types have been examined by Ministry laboratories for the presence of salmonella during 1988 and 1989; and how many samples from other animal species were similarly examined.

Mr. Maclean: From 1 January to 31 December 1989, a total of 131,472 samples were submitted to the Department's veterinary investigation centres in England

and Wales for testing for the presence of salmonella in poultry. It is not possible to say how many of these samples came from live birds, carcases of birds or the environment of live birds or how many were examined in 1988 from live birds or other animal species.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many times in 1989 his Ministry's laboratories have misidentified or misreported the serotypes of salmonellas they have examined.

Mr. Maclean: There have been no occasions in 1989 when a salmonella serotype was misidentified by the Ministry's veterinary laboratories. However on four occasions misreporting occurred, primarily due to clerical-typing errors.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any plans to restrict the spreading of manure from calves and pigs infected with salmonella on to farmland in line with his restrictions on the spreading of manure from infected poultry flocks.

Mr. Maclean: We have no plans to do so.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of whether intact grade A eggs, derived from flocks infected with salmonella enteritidis, delivered to egg producing plants and pasteurised immediately after breaking out, would introduce such heavy contamination into the pasteurisation process that it would overwhelm the process and cause it to fail.

Mr. Maclean: As I explained to my hon. Friend in my answers to earlier questions, only a moderate heat treatment can be applied to liquid egg during the pasteurisation process otherwise its functional properties are destroyed. It is also important in processing to prevent salmonella contamination of the plant environment which would put the final pasteurised product at risk. For these reasons, processing plants cannot accept raw product from infected flocks which may be contaminated with salmonella enteritidis.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his assessment of the possibility of domestic wild birds infecting farm animals with salmonella typhimurium and enteritidis through their droppings.

Mr. Maclean: Salmonella organisms are widespread in the environment and the potential for the infection of farm animals through wild birds exists.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what provisions apply to the slaughter of laying flocks found to be infected with salmonella enteriditis; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The provisions relating to the compulsory slaughter of poultry laying flocks are contained in the Animal Health Act 1987 as applied in respect of salmonella through the provisions of the Zoonoses Order 1989.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether there is a difference in multiplication rates between salmonellas introduced into eggs and those introduced naturally into intact grade A eggs.

Mr. Maclean: Little information is available to indicate whether differences exist in the multiplication rates between salmonellas introduced into eggs and those introduced naturally into intact grade A eggs and research continues to investigate the factors which govern the multiplication rates of salmonella in shell eggs.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will define the terms egg and egg product as used by his Department.

Mr. Curry: An egg is a poultry egg in shell and an egg product is whole egg—a mixture of yolk and albumen—or its constituent parts, not in shell.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the current financial position of the egg producer industry and his assessment of the likely impact on it of the refusal to issue licences to producers with flocks subject to infected place notices under the Zoonoses Order 1989.

Mr. Curry: The market for eggs is firm and packer to produce prices are currently at high levels.

In granting licences for the removal of material from premises subject to an infected place notice under the Zoonoses Order 1989, the Government's priority is to protect public health. The reply given to my hon. Friend on 5 February, *Official Report*, column *499*, explains why eggs from an infected flock cannot be removed for processing. But it was announced on 26 March, *Official Report*, columns *54-55*, that carcases from infected flocks may be sold for processing under carefully controlled conditions and subject to stringent safeguards.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what financial contributions are intended to be made from former eggs authority funds to the British Egg Industry Council and the British egg information service during the financial year 1990-91; and what part of that sum is intended to support the recently announced British lion scheme.

Mr. Curry: Subject to the approval of the European Commission it is proposed to make up to £350,000 available to the British Egg Industry Council (BEIC) for the 1990-91 promotional campaign. In the financial year 1989-90, a total of £107,000 was made available to the BEIC for programmes previously approved by the European Commission. These sums include the cost of work carried out by the British Egg Information Service on behalf of the BEIC.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his response to the recent report sent to him by the Secretary of the United Kingdom Egg Producers Association.

Mr. Maclean: I assume that the hon. Member is referring to a letter from the Secretary of the United Kingdom Egg Producers' Association dated 6 February to which officials replied on my behalf on 28 February.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) why it has been decided not to make residual Eggs Authority funds available to organisations representing the majority of egg producers;

(2) why the Government provide funding to the British Egg Industry Council only; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The Argriculture Act 1986 requires the Agriculture Ministers to dispose of the net assets of the Authority for the benefit of persons engaged by way of business in the production, marketing and processing of eggs.

When the egg industry was consulted in 1986 on how the net assests should be used the National Farmers Union of England and Wales, the National Farmers Union of Scotland, the Ulster Farmers Union, the Scottish Egg Producer Retailers Association, the British Egg Association, the British Poultry Breeders and Hatcheries Association, the National Egg Marketing Association and the British Egg Products Association all urged that the Government should disburse these assets through the British Egg Industry Council. UKEP Association Ltd was the only association to dissent from that view.

The Government considered that it would be appropriate to follow the advice tendered by nearly all the industry associations which between them clearly represented the majority of those engaged in the production, marketing and processing of eggs.

Poultry Industry

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in light of his proposals to restrict the spreading of manure from infected broiler flocks, whether he intends to introduce compulsory testing of broiler flocks to enable identification of potentially contaminated manure.

Mr. Maclean: We have no plans to restrict the spreading of manure from infected broiler flocks or to introduce the compulsory testing of these flocks. Isolations of salmonella by laboratories are required to be reported to MAFF under the Zoonoses Order 1989. Flock owners are advised to stack and disinfect manure removed from houses where salmonella infected broilers have been kept.

Wild Birds (Infection)

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has any plans to restrict the access of wild birds to sewage works and refuse tips.

Mr. Maclean: We have no plans to do so.

Pesticides

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what information he has concerning the research currently being undertaken in Reading university on the toxicity of pesticide mixes; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what research he is undertaking into the toxicity of approved pesticides when ingested in combination.

Mr. Maclean: Research into this subject has been carried out jointly by Reading university and the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, part of the National Environment Research Council. One of the Reading team, Dr. Colin Walker, is a member of the environmental panel of the advisory committee and a proposal for the funding of follow-up studies is currently lodged with the Department of the Environment.

Dairy Crest (Redundancies)

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many jobs are to be lost in the latest round of Dairy Crest creamery closures; how many redundancies are expected in Derbyshire; what are the levels of redundancy payments arising directly, or indirectly, from European Economic Community funds; what steps he is taking to prevent the closures; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Dairy plant closures are a matter for the firms concerned. Dairy Crest Limited has announced a rationalisation programme involving the loss of 450 jobs, of which 153 are at the company's Alfreton creamery which will close at the end of December 1990. There are no Community funds for redundancy payments, but the company's own arrangements provide for payments which exceed the statutory minimum. In addition, the company is setting up job shops at the various sites and is confident that most of those looking for new jobs will be successful.

Agriculture Council

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Agriculture Council held this week in Luxembourg.

Mr. Gummer: I represented the United Kingdom at the meeting of the Agriculture Council from 26 to 29 March together with the Parliamentary Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry). Discussion concentrated on the 1990 price fixing. Detailed and intense discussions over several days resulted in two presidential compromises. However, a qualified majority could not be found. Discussion is expected to resume at the next meeting of the Council beginning on 25 April.

EMPLOYMENT

Earnings

Ms Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the proportion of female and male full-time workers in the United Kingdom, the south-west and Avon, respectively, whose hourly earnings, exclusive of overtime, fell below (a) £2·80, (b) £3·00, (c) £3·20, (d) £3·60, (e) £4·00 and (f) £4·50 in April 1989.

Mr. Nicholls: The estimated percentages of full-time adult female and male employees earning below specified amounts in the new earnings survey sample in April 1989 are provided in the table. Figures for Great Britain are given as the equivalent information for the United Kingdom as a whole is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Hourly earnings less than:—

per cent.

	£2.80	*£3.00*	*£3.20*	*£3.60*	*£4.00*	*£4.50*
Females						
Great Britain	14	19	25	36	46	57
South West	16	21	28	41	52	64

	£2.80	£3.00	£3.20	£3.60	£4.00	£4.50
Avon	10	14	21	33	46	59
Males						
Great Britain	5	7	10	17	24	35
South West	5	8	12	20	28	39
Avon	4	6	9	15	21	31

Hourly earnings excluding overtime, earnings not affected by absence.

YTS Allowances

Mr Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will arrange for YTS allowances to be increased to cover community charge payments for young people who have never paid rates and who are on a scheme living away from home.

Mr. Nicholls: There are no plans to do so. YTS non-employed trainees who need to live away from the parental home in order to benefit from a training course receive a lodging allowance to cover their lodging costs.

Wakefield TEC

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish the names of the business people who are involved with the Wakefield training and enterprise council; and if he will give information as to their business interests.

Mr. Eggar: The Wakefield TEC is currently drawing up its corporate plan which will list the board of directors.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment on what date the Wakefield training and enterprise council was established; what consultations took place with interested organisations including the trades councils and local authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: An employer-led group was awarded development funding to establish a training and enterprise council in Wakefield on 25 January 1990. It is now preparing its corporate and business plans and I expect it to consult all relevant local interests in drawing up these Plans.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what amount of funds has been allocated to the Wakefield training and enterprise council for the current year.

Mr. Eggar: Development funding of £109,000 has been awarded to an employer-led group in Wakefield to set up a training and enterprise council for the area.

Consultancies

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total amount spent by the Training Commission in 1989 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by the Training Commission in 1989, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment; and what is the total amount that the Training Commission has budgeted to spend in the current year.

Mr. Eggar: *[holding answer 28 March 1990]*; The Training Agency estimate, that expenditure in the financial year 1989-90 will be £3.4 million on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases. No management consultancy contracts were awarded during 1989-90. The total budget for 1990-91 has not yet been agreed. The list of computer consultancy contracts awarded during the financial year 1989-90 is as follows:

Consultants and Subject of Assignment

Arthur Young—Consultant to review a payment system.
MFT Computer Systems—Amendments to the file registry System.
RTI—Consultants to establish the environment within the field system.
Computer People North—SSADM System Analyst.
Telfast Computer Service—Analyst for development work.
Softel—Oracle Project
PA—Head office configuration technical study.
Arthur Young—A consultant to assist in developing the accounting structure of training and enterprise councils.
PA—To examine implications of procuring terminals and keyboards capable of supporting X-Windows.
AMP Systems Ltd.—Support for small firms.
D. England—Assistance with the Cimetrics package.
BIS Applied Systems—Consultancy support for the local area network project.
RTI—Consultancy to resolve problems when trying to run ingres on NCR computer.
Yale Data—Technical assurance co-ordinator.
CCTA—Financial and management accounting post-implementation review.
Easams Ltd.—Ingres application developers for the field system.
RTI—Training access point scoping study.
Yale Data Management Consultants—A consultant to assist the stage manager.
Relational Technology—Supply of Ingres training.
Ernst and Whinney—Consultant to advise on the field system and training and enterprise councils.
Relational Technology—Assisting with the setting up of accounts, directories etc.
CSL—Review of system methodology.
Price Waterhouse—Ingres developers/testing.
Yale Data—Ingres developers/testers.
SEMA Group—Ingres support.
Telfast Computing—Ingres application developer with accountancy experience.
CCTA—Service agreement hardware/software.
CCTA—Migration study X25 1980 to X25 1984.
Level 7—Network names and addressing.
CCTA—Telecommunications section—study to look into staffing needs.
FM—Provide software support to regional and HQ systems.
CCTA—CCTA support agreement.
MFT—Contract programmer ('C') for 4 weeks.
RTI—Consultant to assist in setting up Ingres database.
Yale Data—Ingres application developer (4 weeks).
Scientific Business Systems—Applications developers to work on the record trainee system.
PA—Assistance with the Mascot operational requirement.
Hoskyns Group—Project management for privatisation of the Skills Training Agency.
Meridan Systems Management Ltd.—Online access to a Polis database.
Yale Data Management—Applications developer to help on trainees volume system.
Skills Training Agency—Training in Q-office development.
RTI—Application developers to assist with development work.

Logica—Consultants to assist in system testing.
RI—To assist with benchmarking.
Coopers and Lybrand—Support to project manager in the development of plans and progress measurement tools to monitor the status of the training and enterprise councils implementation project.
SBS—Ingress application developer.
The Instruction Set—Development of system standards.
Ernst and Young—Design review.
Yale—Assistance with system testing.
SBS—Applications developers.
RTI—Application developer.
Digitus Applications developers.
LBMS—System Testing.
Yale Data—Applications developers.
Yale—System testing.
Easams—Applications developer.
Yale Data—Unix and Ingres support for field systems.
RTI—Ingress development.
System Reliability—Application software for call logger.
Ernst and Young—To advise training agency on support to training and enterprise councils after April 90.
Yale Data Management—Systems analyst record trainee volumes.
Oscar Communications—Marketing.
Novatek—Manuals.
Digital—Linking training and enterprise Councils to the network.
NCC—Communications consultancy.
The Instruction Set—Consultant to discuss report on system management.
Computer Search and Select—Analyst/developer.
Marketing Perspective—Marketing the field system.
Ingres—Ingres training.
Yale Data—Analyst/developer.
Lorien—Analyst/developer.
Marketing Perspective—Account manager training.
P-E International—Analyst/developer.

THE ARTS

Disabled People

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will make a statement on British Telecom's forthcoming A-Z business and services phone book as it affects reference to access for people with disabilities to arts and leisure venues, and the role played by Arts Access in encouraging this and other provision of facilities for disabled people.

Mr. Luce *[holding answer 28 March 1990]:* I welcome the initiative to include a reference guide for disabled people in the London business and services phone book. I was pleased to be present at the launch and to be able to congratulate Arts Access and British Telecom for putting this simple but effective idea into practice. It will certainly help to improve access to the arts for disabled people.

Consultancies

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Minister for the Arts what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1989 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1989, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment; and what is the total amount that his Department has budgeted to spend in the current year.

Mr. Luce *[holding answer 28 March 1990]:* The Office of Arts and Libraries had no management and computer consultancy contracts in 1989-90, and has no present plans for any in 1990-91.

Works of Art

Sir Hal Miller: To ask the Minister for the Arts if there have been any items accepted in lieu of tax or allocated since he last made an announcement on the subject to the House.

Mr. Luce: Since my announcement on 14 February *Official Report,* column *239,* I am pleased to announce that three further offers have been accepted in lieu of tax: a woodcut by Edward Munch, "Two People—the Lonely Ones" and two paintings, one by Corot entitled "Richmond pres Londres", and one by Jan van der Heyden, "The Westerkerk". The tax satisfied was £57,539, £361,500 and £2,800,000 respectively. The acceptance of the van der Heyden painting was made possible by a call on the Reserve.

No decision has yet been taken on the allocation of the Corot painting, but in accordance with the conditions on which they were offered the Munch woodcut will go to the Whitworth art gallery, Manchester and the van der Heyden painting will be allocated to the National gallery. Finally, I would like to inform the House that because of a change in the tax liabilities due on the estate concerned, the cost of the acceptance of the Kirckman harpsichord, announced on 14 February, has been reduced to £25,276·95.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Taxation

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing tax and national insurance contributions, less child benefit, where appropriate, for 1990-91, and comparable figures for 1989-90 and 1978-79, with the multiples of average earnings of half, two thirds, one, five and 10 times for *(a)* a married couple with part-time working spouse, *(b)* a married couple plus two children with part-time working spouse and *(c)* a single person.

Mr. Lilley: The information requested for a single person is given in the table. Figures for married couples with part-time working spouse will depend on how much the part-time worker earns.

Payments of income tax and national insurance contributions by a single person (£ per week at current prices)
Multiples of average male earnings[1]

	½	⅔	1	5	10
1978-79	10·93	17·04	29·25	242·17	625·97
1989-90[2]	32·71	48·60	80·31	506·61	1,066·61
1990-91	33·98	51·23	85·62	553·05	1,160·65

[1] Full time males on adult rates (all occupations), using illustrative assumption of 8½ per cent. growth in earnings between 1989-90 and 1990-91.

[2] Financial year average of pre- and post-October regimes for employees national insurance contributions.

Ivory

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if any ivory is currently being held by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

Mr. Ryder: Yes. Quantities of ivory are regularly seized by customs and held pending disposal.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he is now in a position to produce records of ivory seizures since 12 April 1989.

Mr. Ryder: No. As I said in my reply of 23 October 1989, *Official Report,* columns *286-87* to an earlier question on this topic, detailed information about such seizures is compiled only periodically. Customs will be doing so in connection with publication of the commissioners' annual report for the year ending 31 March 1990.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give details of the fate of the five consignments of ivory held at Heathrow airport and referred to in his reply to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West on 6 June 1989, *Official Report,* column *118.*

Mr. Ryder: All five consignments have now been seized. No further details can be given at this stage because court proceedings in relation to forfeiture of the goods are in prospect.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many consignments of ivory were detained or seized by customs officers in 1989 and 1990 to date.

Mr. Ryder: Records of detentions which do not result in seizure are not maintained centrally and information about them could be obtained only at disproportionate expense. Information about seizures is compiled only periodically. Customs will be doing so in connection with publication of the commissioners' annual report for the year ending 31 March 1990.

Income Tax

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what was the revenue from income tax in Scotland, broken down by district and islands authorities, in *(a)* the period between April 1987 and April 1988 and *(b)* the period between April 1988 and April 1989;

(2) what was the total revenue from income tax raised in Scotland in *(a)* the period between April 1987 and April 1988 and *(b)* the period between April 1988 and April 1989.

Mr. Lilley: The latest information is for the 1987-88 tax year and covers the income tax liabilities of residents of Scotland. The estimates in the table are based on samples, which places limitations on their reliability, particularly in the case of smaller districts.

Income tax liability of residents—1987-88

Districts	*£ million*
Borders	90
Central	192
Dumfries and Galloway	121
Fife	231
Grampian	351
Highland	150
Lothian	559
Strathclyde	1,410
Tayside	224
Island Authorities	5[illegible]
Scotland	3,380

Banking Services

Mr. David Davis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he proposes to publish the Government's response to the report of the review committee on banking services law and practice.

Mr. Major: The Government's full response to the report of the review committee is published today in a White Paper "Banking Services: Law and Practice" Cm1026.

The review committee was commissioned by the Government, jointly with the Bank of England, in January 1987 to undertake a full review of the legal framework for banking services. The committee was chaired by Professor Robert Jack CBE, and the other members were Mrs. Liliana Archibald and Mr. Geoffrey Taylor. Their report, which was published on 23 February 1989 (Cm622), provided a very clear and comprehensive critique of the existing law. The Government are extremely grateful to the committee for all its work in producing the report.

The committee found that the legislative framework had stood the test of time remarkably well, despite the very rapid changes seen in banking in recent years; there were no major deficiencies or gaps, but the committee indentified a number of areas where banking practice could be improved and where they felt the law might be usefully clarified or tightened up. The Government made it clear when the committee's report was published that in considering their response to its recommendations, they would wish to take full account of the views of those who would be affected by the proposals, and would, therefore, consider carefully the implications for bankers, their customers and the general public interest. This the Government have done. The names of those who submitted comments on the review committee's report are set out in the White Paper.

The Committee's central recommendation was, in fact, addressed to the banks and building societies, rather than to the Government. It was that they should prepare and adopt a code of banking practice, aimed at ensuring that customers were made fully aware of the basis on which banks or building societies would conduct their dealings. The code would, for example, specify that customers should be given information in clear and simple language about the terms of their contract with the banker and the rights and obligations that apply on both sides; customers would be told of their rights to privacy under the law and the very limited circumstances in which any information about their personal finances may be passed on; customers would be told how to lodge a complaint if that proved necessary, how such complaints would be dealt with, and how matters might be referred to the relevant ombudsman; they should be told what banking charges might be levied in what circumstances; and they should be given a simple explanaton of the timing of the clearing cycle and when they might normally expect funds from a cleared cheque to be available.

The Banking Information Service announced on 1 March 1990 that an independent committe under the chairmanship of Sir George Blunden (former deputy governor of the Bank of England) had been set up to oversee the preparation of such a code by the British Bankers' Association, the Building Societies Association and the Association for Payment Clearing Services. The aim would be to get the main sections of the code in place by early 1991. The Government warmly welcome this initiative, and in particular welcomes the fact that the banks and building societies have undertaken to consult the consumer interests fully before the code is introduced. The White Paper comments on a number of issues which the Goverment expect the banks and building societies to wish to consider in the preparation of the code, in line with the recommendation of the review committee. These include notification of bank charges, credit marketing and customer privacy.

The review committee made a large number of other recommendations, some of them on highly technical points of banking law, and some involving codification of existing case law or consolidation of existing legislation. In drawing up their response, the Government have carefully considered the comments of interested parties and proposed legislation only where some change is justified and where the intended effect cannot be achieved in another way, such as through the proposed code of banking practice. In general, the Government have accepted the spirit, if not the detail, of most of the committee's recommendations.

The points on which the Government will legislate in due course are set out in annex 9 of the White Paper. They include extending to all payment cards the present £50 limit on customer liability for losses and the ban on unsolicited mailing of cards and PINs which at present applies only to credit cards; tightening up banks' liability for the failure of electronic funds transfer equipment; clarifying the legal status of the various crossings and markings such as "account payee" on cheques; allowing for the "truncation" of cheques (that is, allowing banks to exchange electronic information about cheques and not the actual pieces of paper); amending and updating the Bills of Exchange Act; and dealing with a number of other detailed points raised by the Committee. These proposals will be implemented when other pressures on the legislative timetable permit.

The review committee made the key point in their report that in considering any proposals in the field of banking services it is important, above all, to preserve flexibility, and to avoid cramping competition and innovation by excessive regulation. The Government wholeheartedly endorse that view. In recent years, it has been competition within a flexible regulatory framework that has benefited the customer most. It is from this source that further improvements are most likely to come; and that is the primary principle underlying the Government's response to the review committee's report.

Child Benefit

Mr. Squire: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the savings would be of taxing the child benefit for taxpayers at the 40 per cent. tax rate in 1990-91.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* The direct revenue yield for 1990-91 from taxing child benefit—which is paid to the mother—at 40 per cent. for those married women and single parents liable to higher rate tax is estimated to be about £20 million. If child benefit were taxed at the higher marginal rate of either spouse the yield, including that from single parents, is estimated at £175 million.

Consultancies

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what was the total amount spent by Her Majesty's Treasury in 1989 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by Her Majesty's Treasury in 1989, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment; and what is the total amount that Her Majesty's Treasury has budgeted to spend in the current year;

(2) what was the total amount spent by the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency in 1989 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency in 1989, giving in each case the name of the consulting firm and the subject of the assignment; and what is the total amount that the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency has budgeted to spend in the current year.

Mr. Ryder *[holding answer 28 March 1990]:* We estimate that our expenditure in the financial year 1989-90 will be some £5·1 million, including some £4·7 million by the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency. Figures given include the cost of development studies, which in turn include the cost of associated hardware and software; the latter items are not separately indentifiable.

The budget for the financial year 1990-91 is some £6·9 million, including some £6·3 million for the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency.

Firm and subject of assignment:

Roger Tym & Partners—Freeports study.

Transtech Consultancy services—Preparation of seminar on Transport and Distribution; production of technical guidance on car contract hire and model contract and employee agreements.

KPMG Peat Marwick—Contribution to the development of the Treasury's initiative on policy evaluation.

Coopers & Lybrand Assoc—Contribution to the development of the Treasury's initiative on policy evaluation.

Arthur Young—Contribution to the development of the Treasury's initiative on policy evaluation.

Moody International Developments—Materials handling.

Brian Farrington Ltd—Preparation of CUP guidance on purchasing procedures.

Linzey Associates—Advice on strategic and practical aspects of purchasing and supply.

C. D. Boylan—Advice on issues relating to project sponsorship and "untying" of services from PSA.

P. N. Parry—Preparation of CUP guidance on the management of works projects.

R. W. White—Advice on the implementation of the new recruitment and personnel management arrangements for the Purchasing and Supply Function in Government.

Logica (UK) Ltd—Consultancy Support for Government IT Infrastructure Management Methodology.

National Computing Centre—Consultancy for GOSIP Support.

Robert Wilmot—Consultancy for GOSIP Support.

Security and Standards Consultancy Ltd—Consultancy for GOSIP Support.

PA Consulting Group—Consultancy Support on IS (Information Systems) Guide.

Ashpier Ltd—Consultancy Support to Government Telecommunications Network (GTN).

Eosys—Consultancy Support to Government Telecommunications Network (GTN).

Butler Cox—Consultancy for GDN-SIGNET.

Kermon Associates—Consultancy for GDN-SIGNET.

Touche Ross & Co—Consultancy for GDN-SIGNET.

Ernst and Young—Consultancy for GDN-SIGNET.

Fastcharm Ltd—Provision of Consultancy Support.

Rollstest Ltd—Provision of Consultancy Support.

Grafton Dale Associates—Provision of Consultancy Support.

GSB Computer Projects Ltd—Provision of Consultancy Support.

Yale Data Management Consultants Ltd—Provision of Consultancy Support.

Coopers and Lybrand—Provision of Consultancy Support.

Quality Business Systems—Consultancy assistance with development of IT Infrastructure Library.

M Davighi—Consultancy assistance with development of IT Infrastructure Library.

Protocol International—Consultancy assistance with development of IT Infrastructure Library.

DJH Consultancy Services Ltd—Consultancy Assistance with development of IT Infrastructure Library.

Civil Service College—Consultancy assistance with development of IT infrastructure Library.

Crown Suppliers—Consultancy assistance with development of IT Infrastructure Library.

Babelease Ltd—Development of PROMPT and Configuration Management Method.

Kermon Associates Development of CCTA Telecommunications Guide.

Kermon Associates—Scoping Study on Automation of CCTA Standing Arrangement Procedures.

Logica (UK) Ltd—Development Study into NSAP Address Allocation Requirements in Government.

Praxis—Technical Authorship of CT5 Procurement Manual.

Rede Group—Development of CT3 Quality Management System for use within Government organisations.

Logica (UK) Ltd—Development of CT3 Quality Management System for use within Government organisations.

BIS Applied Systems—Development Study for phase 1 of CRAMM software.

Electronic Facilities Design—Review of Procurement Process.

Ingham Partnership—Assistance with User Interface Work.

Husat Consultancy—Production of Reference Model for I.S.E.

CSM—University of Durham—Survey of Software Maintenance.

Computer Sciences Co Ltd—Specialist technical support for Computer Supported Co-operative Working Study (CSAW).

Sunderland Polytechnic—Development of an SSADM and SDM Interface.

Metier Management Systems Ltd.—Enhancement to ADEPT Version 2.

J. Chittenden (FORMAT)—Assistance with Desktop Publishing for SSADM Version 4.

Ipsys Software plc.—Assistance with Process Logic Definition (PLD) Project.

Calyx—Consultancy for Computer Operations Management Module.

Logica (UK) Ltd.—Office Document Architecture (CODA) Scoping Study.

DMW Group Ltd.—Value Added Data Services (VADS) Security Development System.

Deuce Systems—Amendments to the CRAMM User Guide.

Admiral Management—Feasibility Study into the use of ISO9000 in connection with a Quality Management System.

DJH Consultancy Ltd.—Development of IT Infrastructure Management Codes of Practice.

Systems Assurance—Review of Guidelines for top management on Human Factors.

Systems Concepts—Review of Guidelines for top management on Human Factors.

Morrell Media Services—Production of IT Security Library documents.

DB Services—Production of a document on the fundamentals of magnetic media.

Chris Makenson Ltd.—Virtual terminal work in GOSIP.

Oval Computer Consultancy Services—Upgrades and reconfiguration of demonstration suite equipment.

Pensus Ltd.—Production of IT Infrastructure Library Module on Availability Management.

Data Systems—Development Stage 3 of Cursive Script Recognition Demonstrator.

Science Systems—GTN Network Management—performance improvement and management

Datasystems—reconfiguration of REOS Pad

Civil Service College—Development Study on Case Study for the Department of Justice

Services Sound Vision—Production of a "Strategic Planning" video

Office Workstations Ltd—Hypertext Project—Stage 1

Logica (UK) Ltd—Development of a detailed method for drawing up Contingency Plans

Format Desk Top Publishing—Review of desktop publishing techniques for KBS and DBMS book

Birmingham Polytechnic—Development Study on SSADM Support Tools Conformance

X-Tel Services Ltd—CSCW Concept Demonstrator development

Data Systems UK Ltd—Development of CSCW Demonstrator Remote Meeting Support System

KPMG, Regis McKenna & Co—Development of Government IT Marketing Copy

Kermon Associates—Development of Standing Arrangements Automation

Coopers & Lybrand—Development of Object Orientation

Savings Accounts

Mr. Speller: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has on the availability of savings accounts which pay a 20 per cent. or higher rate of interest; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder *[holding answer 28 March 1990]*: We do not keep information centrally on the full range of savings accounts that are available.

WALES

Labour Statistics

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will *(a)* state the number of people in employment in Wales for each quarter of 1979 and for the latest available date and sub-divided for males and females in employment and *(b)* provide an estimate of the extent of double-counting in *(a)*.

Mr. Peter Walker: The information requested is shown in the table:

Civilian workforce in employment[1]

(thousands)

	Male	*Female*	*Total*
1979			
March	711	429	1,140
June	716	441	1,157
September	720	440	1,160
December	712	443	1,155
1989			
September	692	521	1,213

[1] Defined as employees in employment, the self-employed and, from 1983 onwards, participants on work-related government training schemes.

Labour force survey estimates of the number of people in employment and with a second job for Wales, which are subject to large sampling errors, suggest that in 1979 there were about 17,000 such persons. The corresponding estimate for 1989 was 45,000.

Agricultural Land

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the loss of agricultural land for urban development for each of the last 10 years in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: Information on land use changes in Wales from 1985 to 1988 is included in appendices 3 and 4 of the "Environmental Digest for Wales, No. 4, 1988-89", a copy of which is in the Library. It should be noted that since changes are recorded by Ordnance Survey as part of its work on map revision, they are not necessarily recorded in the year they occur. Comparable data for earlier years are not available.

Myodil

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he proposes to take to ensure that patients in Wales who are suffering as a result of the side-effects of myodil are able to receive compensation rapidly.

Mr. Grist: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Clinical Regrading Review

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many appeals under the clinical regrading review are still outstanding in each health authority; and when the appeals procedure will be completed in each area.

Mr. Grist: Latest information on the number of outstanding clinical regrading appeals made at local level to employing authorities is as follows:

	Number
Mid Glamorgan HA	760
South Glamorgan HA	630
West Glamorgan	166
Gwent HA	392
East Dyfed HA	214
Pembrokeshire HA	88
Powys HA	298
Gwynedd HA	131
Clwyd HA	258

It is not possible to predict when the appeals procedures will be completed at the local level.

Hearing Aids

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, how many registered hearing aid dispensers there are in each health authority area.

Mr. Grist: The information is not available centrally.

Welsh Language

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish for each county education authority the number of teachers employed who are *(a)* able to undertake Welsh language teaching at the primary and secondary levels, as required by the national curriculum and *(b)* in possession of the appropriate subject qualifications to ensure the national curriculum is properly delivered in all Welsh language secondary schools.

Mr. Roberts: The number of teachers who have a qualification in Welsh as either a first or second language, and who will thus be able to contribute to the teaching of Welsh as part of the national curriculum is shown in the table:

Teachers with a qualification[1] in Welsh

	All teachers (full-time and part-time)			
	Primary (1987)		*Secondary[2] (1989)*	
	1st language	*2nd language*	*1st language*	*2nd language*
Clwyd	400	90	110	50
Dyfed	540	60	170	40
Gwent	30	10	10	10
Gwynedd	580	40	240	40
Mid Glamorgan	—	—	120	70
Powys	90	10	40	20
South Glamorgan	110	30	60	30
West Glamorgan	260	90	100	40
TOTAL	[3]2,010	[3]330	850	300

[1] Refers to all teachers with a post A-level qualification in Welsh. All teachers with a qualification in Welsh as a first language will be capable of teaching Welsh as a second language.

[2] Secondary figures are drawn from the 1989 secondary school staffing survey and are provisional estimates. The results of the survey will be published later in the year.

[3] Excludes Mid Glamorgan.

More detailed analyses including those of subject qualifications of teachers in Welsh secondary schools will be available later this year when the 1989 secondary schools staffing survey results are published.

National Curriculum

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his reply of 22 February, *Official Report*, columns *861-62*, if he is now in a position to publish for each county education authority the number of teachers needed to deliver all national curriculum subjects in Welsh secondary schools by teachers with the appropriate subject qualifications.

Mr. Roberts: A statistical model of the number of teachers needed to deliver the national curriculum in Welsh secondary schools is currently being produced. The model and assumptions which underlie it will be the subject of consultation with local education authorities later this year.

Nuclear Waste (Transport)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much nuclear waste is transported, by road, through Clwyd via the A5.

Mr. Atkins: The Department does not collect data of the kind requested.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

CERN

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received in the last 12 months on the funding of CERN.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. Friend has received no specific representations about CERN funding in the last year.

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the United Kingdom funding for CERN in 1979, 1985 and 1989.

Mr. Jackson: The United Kingdom contribution to the CERN budget in these years was as follows:

United Kingdom contribution

Calendar year	*Percentage of CERN budget*	*Cash £ million*
1979	15·8	25·2
1985	16·1	36·9
1989	16·1	50·3

Complaints

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish in the *Official Report* for each of the last 10 years *(a)* the number of complaints made against his Department to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, *(b)* the number of complaints upheld and *(c)* the action he took on *(b)*.

Mrs. Rumbold: The number of complaints *(a)* made and *(b)* upheld for the last 10 years is as follows:

	(a) complaints made	*(b) complaints upheld*
1989	[1]	[1]
1988	11	—
1987	10	—
1986	12	1
1985	20	—
1984	12	1
1983	12	2
1982	11	—
1981	18	1
1980	31	1
1979	20	—

[1] Figures not yet available.

When the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration upholds a complaint it is departmental practice to provide an appropriate remedy.

Devon County Council

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science pursuant to the oral answer given to the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West from the Under-Secretary of State on 27 February, *Official Report,* column 125, if he will specify how the Devon county council capital expenditure priorities differ from those of the Government.

Mr. Alan Howarth: In formulating annual capital guidelines for education for local education authorities for 1990-91, priority was given to items in LEAs' plans for committed expenditure flowing from projects covered in earlier capital allocations, new projects to meet population growth, new projects to remove surplus places, and to new major building projects at colleges. Any remaining resources were distributed by formula for improvement work in schools. Annual capital guidelines are, however, only indicative: local authorities are free to spend above the level indicated if they choose to finance such expenditure from receipts or other sources. Most of Devon LEA's plans were in respect of commitments over and above those allowed for in the department's previous allocations, and of improvement work in schools for which available resources fell well short of LEAs' plans.

Local Management of Schools

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will deposit in the Library copies of the approved schemes for local management of schools for each local education authority.

Mr. MacGregor: It is the responsibility of local education authorities to publish their approved schemes by distributing copies to their schools and to the Department, and by making copies available for reference in their local public libraries and education offices. I am asking authorities to consider making copies available to the Library of the House.

Examinations

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many people sat *(a)* GCSE and *(b)* A-level examinations in (i) politics, (ii) British constitution and (iii) political history in 1989.

Mrs. Rumbold: Figures for 1989 are not yet available; neither is information available specifically for the subjects requested. In 1988, there were 11,000 GCSE attempts in England in politics and British constitution by candidates in schools and colleges. Comparable information is not available in respect of A-levels, but in 1987-88, nearly 2,500 school leavers in England attempted an A-level in British constitution.

Art Students

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the total cost to the Exchequer and local government of educating a student at art college who completes the course.

Mr. Jackson: The data requested are not available centrally.

College of Europe

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether there are any plans to increase the number of bursaries offered to United Kingdom students at the college of Europe.

Mr. Jackson: The college of Europe at Bruges offers postgraduate courses in administrative, economic and legal studies, in preparation for employment in European Community institutions and similar fields. The Government wish to enable more United Kingdom students to take advantage of these valuable opportunities. We therefore intend to increase substantially the number of bursaries we offer, from four currently to 21 in the academic year 1990-91. Of these, 17 will be provided by my Department for students from England and Wales. My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Northern Ireland will increase their provision to two bursaries each. The additional cost will be met from within existing public expenditure plans. We envisage further increasing the United Kingdom total bursaries offered to 30 in 1991-92. Existing arrangements for selecting students will continue.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

South Africa

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on how British companies have complied with the European Community code of conduct for companies with interests in South Africa during the 12-month period to 30 June 1989.

Mr. Redwood: By 6 March 1990, a total of 111 companies had submitted reports to the DTI under the code of conduct. Copies of the reports and of the Department's analysis and summary have, as in previous years, been placed in the Library of each House. These documents may also be inspected at the Department's export market information centre, at the British embassy in Pretoria, at the British consulate-general in Johannesburg, and at the British consulates in Cape Town and Durban.

The analysis and summary is the fourth since the adoption of the revised code of conduct by EC Foreign Ministers in November 1985. Reports were received from all British companies whose interests are known or believed to warrant a full report under the code, with only one exception. This particular company has been undergoing reorganisation in South Africa and should be in a position to provide a report for next year's analysis and summary.

The reporting period under review has seen a further reduction in the number of black employees of British subsidiaries being paid below the code's recommended minimum level, with companies reports indicating that now over 98 per cent. were paid above this level. Companies' reports also indicated that the level of their involvement with trade unions representing black workers increased, with the majority of companies reporting formal involvement with the trade unions. In addition, companies continued to report impressive levels of involvement in projects benefiting not only their employees and their families but also the wider communities from which their workforces were drawn. Companies also continued to encourage the growth of black businesses.

The Government are once more grateful to companies for their continued co-operation in providing reports, and urges them to maintain this performance and to comply fully with the code.

Baltic States

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his latest assessment of trade opportunities with Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

Mr. Redwood: No assessment is possible at present. Above all, we need to know whether the Baltic republics will have control of their own production and its distribution. If they become free to trade their own products with the west there could be many opportunities for increased business.

Stock Exchange

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next plans to meet the chairman of the stock exchange; and what will be discussed.

Mr. Redwood: Ministers meet the chairman of the stock exchange whenever appropriate to discuss topics of mutual interest.

Company Audits

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many times in 1988 company auditors filed a statement in respect of section 390 2(a) and 2(b) of the Companies Act 1985.

Mr. Redwood: During 1988 the registrars of companies for England and Wales and for Scotland received copies of 9,167 auditors' notices of resignation under section 390 of the Companies Act 1985. These have been placed on the public files of the companies concerned. No information is readily available about the number of these notices which fall within the scope of section 390(2)(a), indicating that there were circumstances connected with the resignation which the resigning auditor considered should be brought to the notice of the members or creditors of the company.

Electricity Supplies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what reply he has sent to the letter from the chairman of the Electricity Consultative Council (South Wales) dated 14 March regarding the different treatment between the domestic and commercial markets.

Mr. Redwood: My reply was sent to the chairman of the Electricity Consultative Council (South Wales). It is a matter for him to decide whether to make the contents public.

Electricity Supply (Consumer Protection)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he anticipates being in a position to answer the letter to him of 14 March from Tom Keen, the chairman of the Electricity Consultative Council (South Wales), on consumer protection in the electricity supply industry.

Mr. Redwood: I have already replied to the letter.

Business Inquiries

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many major inquiries were made by business under the market information inquiries scheme for each month from September 1988 to date;

(2) how many substantive inquiries were made under the market information inquiries scheme for each month from September 1988 to date.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 21 March 1990]:* Following is the information.

Market information enquiry service (MIE)
June 1989—February 1990

Month	*Number of enquiries billed*
June	37
July	72
August	87

Month	Number of enquiries billed
September	103
October	108
November	135
December	104
January	97
February	182
Total	925

The market information enquiry service (MIEs) was introduced as a chargeable service on 1 April 1989. The information available is set out above. A breakdown of MIEs which are "major" and those which are "substantive" could be made available only at disproportionate cost. Figures were not collected prior to the introduction of charges.

Africa (Exports)

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make it his policy to reinstate Export Credits Guarantee Department cover for United Kingdom exports to Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and the Gambia; and if he will list the present value of exports and imports between the United Kingdom and those countries.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 27 March 1990]:* ECGD cover for exports on cash or short terms of payment—up to 180 days credit—is already available for these countries.

Cover for exports on longer terms of payment is in principle available for Ghana subject to ECGD's normal underwriting judgment being satisfied. The possibility of reinstating ECGD cover for longer payment term business with Gambia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone will be considered when this is justified by improvements in the economic situation in these countries and progress has been made in clearing past payment arrears.

The value of exports and imports between the United Kingdom and those countries, for the year ending December 1989, is as follows:

	United Kingdom imports £ million	United Kingdom exports £ million
Nigeria	129·406	388·777
Ghana	92·208	121·076
Sierra Leone	15·899	20·402
Gambia	2·340	16·563

Multi-fibre Arrangement

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has considered any changes in the multi-fibre arrangement in the light of the changes in central and eastern Europe.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 28 March 1990]:* The multi-fibre arrangement (MFA) lays down a multilateral framework for trade in textile products. The EC is already committed in the current Uruguay round to negotiating the phase out of the MFA on acceptable terms on its expiry in 1991. This commitment is unaffected by developments in central and eastern Europe. However the EC has a number of bilateral agreements with east European countries within the current MFA framework and changes to the agreements with Poland and Hungary have recently been agreed.

Cable Television

Mr. Hill: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many franchises have been granted for the issuing of licences by his Department for the establishment of television cable stations in the United Kingdom since such licensing started; and if he will list *(a)* the geographical location of such stations, *(b)* the name of each company which has been granted a franchise, *(c)* the name of the principal shareholder or parent company of such franchise holders, specifying whether such principal shareholder or parent is of United States of America, Canadian, United Kingdom or other origin and *(d)* how many applications are outstanding to the latest convenient date and still awaiting decision by the Cable Authority.

Mr. Mellor: I have been asked to reply.

The Cable Authority is responsible for awarding cable franchises under the Cable and Broadcasting Act 1984. A total of 71 cable franchises have been awarded since 1983 (including 11 pilot franchises awarded by the Home Office before the passage of the 1984 Act). Of these 20 have been licensed, of which 17 are operational. A further 63 franchises have been advertised by the Cable Authoritiy. The authority is considering a total of 139 applications, in respect of the 44 franchises for which the closing date has now passed. It intends to make its decisions known during the course of the summer. I have placed in the Library a list of the other information requested, where this is not commercially confidential.

PRIME MINISTER

Hong Kong

Q35. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Prime Minister if Her Majesty's Government are now ready to publish their proposals for legislation concerning the provision of United Kingdom passports for certain citizens of Hong Kong.

The Prime Minister: The Government intend to do so shortly.

East Germany

Q66. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on the implications for United Kingdom foreign policy of the recent elections in East Germany.

The Prime Minister: We welcome the holding of democratic elections in the German Democratic Republic. We believe that the establishment of genuine democracy in the German Democratic Republic, as elsewhere in eastern Europe, will strengthen confidence and understanding between east and west.

Prisons

Q108. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Prime Minister when she next expects to pay an official visit to one of Her Majesty's prisons.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to do so.

Cyprus

Q189. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Prime Minister if, during her future visit to Turkey, she will discuss with the Turkish authorities the urgent need for a settlement in Cyprus; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I look forward to discussing Cyprus and other matters of mutual concern with the Turkish Government during my planned visit to Gallipoli next month for the 75th anniversary of ANZAC day.

German Unification

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister if she will raise at the next meeting of the European Council the implications for the net contributions of member states of the proposed reunification of Germany; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: We hope that the informal summit to be held in Dublin on 28 April will agree a framework for detailed negotiation, by the Council and the Commission, of all the consequences for the Community of German unification. Germany is likely to remain the largest net contributor to the Community budget.

Cabinet Responsibility

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister what steps she is taking to strengthen collective Cabinet responsibility.

The Prime Minister: None is needed.

Correspondence

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Prime Minister what measures she will take to improve the performance of Government Departments in answering letters from hon. Members.

The Prime Minister: There are nearly 250,000 replies a year from Ministers to letters from hon. Members and replies are sent at official level to several million letters received direct from members of the public. It is clearly in the interests of Members, the public and Ministers that this correspondence is conducted speedily and efficiently. I have therefore asked the efficiency unit to conduct an interdepartmental scrutiny into the methods and costs of handling this correspondence, and to seek the views of hon. Members and others who receive replies, so as to identify good methods of operation and recommend them for adoption by all departments. Departmental performance will be monitored and a Minister in each Department will be given responsibility for overseeing progress. In appropriate cases, Members of Parliament are encouraged to write in the first instance to civil service agencies, or the local offices directly concerned.

Engagements

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 29 March.

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 29 March.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 29 March.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 29 March.

Mr. Stern: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 29 March.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 29 March.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I am speaking at the Anglo-German Konigswinter conference held in Cambridge.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Land Registry

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Attorney-General what is for each of the last three years *(a)* the minimum length of time and *(b)* the maximum length of time that Her Majesty's Land Registry has taken to deal with a first registration application.

The Attorney-General: No statistical information is available on either the maximum or the minimum processing times. The minimum processing time can be as low as one or two weeks for expedited applications and those where no queries arise. Some complex applications, involving clarification from an applicant's solicitors, take a considerable time to process.

The average time taken to process a first registration application is currently 27 weeks, compared with 30 weeks in 1989, 34 weeks in 1988 and 32 weeks in 1987.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Attorney-General on what date the Land Registration Act 1988 will come into force.

The Attorney-General: The Lord Chancellor hopes to bring the Land Registration Act 1988 into force in December 1990. An announcement of the exact date will be made in due course.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Attorney-General what action he is taking to reduce the delays at Her Majesty's Land Registry in dealing with applications to register title.

The Attorney-General: Since 1 March 1987 the Land Registry has increased its work force by over 3,000 staff. In order to move work away from the south-east of England, where the recruitment and retention of staff is difficult, four new district registries have been opened and two more are planned in the near future. Computerisation of the application processing system will have been introduced at a total of eight district registries by the end of this year and by 1993 all district registries will operate the computerised system. Average completion times on all types of application to register title are improving steadily, unit cost targets are being met and productivity is at record levels.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Attorney-General what representations he has recieved regarding the delays at Her Majesty's Land Registry in dealing with applications to register title.

The Attorney-General: A total of 128 representations about delay were received by the Lord Chancellor between January and December 1989.

Marconi

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Attorney-General what recent developments have taken place into the inquiry being carried out by the special fraud office into fraud in the Marconi company; and if he will make a statement as to general progress of that inquiry over the last six months.

The Attorney-General: A case in which the defendents are Marconi Company Limited, Marconi Space Systems Limited, Marconi Secure Radio Systems Limited and various former employees of those companies is pending before Winchester crown court. It results from inquiries carried out by the Serious Fraud Office. The remaining inquiries concerning Marconi companies are being carried out as expeditiously as possible.

ENERGY

Oil Companies

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has any plans to require all oil companies to deposit a bond with his Department that can be immediately used to finance clean-up operations in the event of an oil spillage around the British coast.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Primary responsibility for clean-up, following an oil spill from an offshore installation, rests with the operator. To ensure that operators have sufficient funds available to discharge any liability attributable to such an incident, the offshore pollution liability agreement (OPOL) was set up by the oil industry in 1975 at the request of the Department of Energy. This agreement ensures that funds are available, up to $60 million per incident, to meet claims for remedial measures and pollution damage from an offshore oil spill incident.

North Sea Oil and Gas

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the output of North sea oil and gas for each year since 1980.

Mr. Peter Morrison: North Sea oil and gas production in the period 1980 to 1989 was as follows:

	Crude oil (thousand tonnes)	*Natural gas liquids thousand tonnes)*	*Gas (Million cubic metres)*
1980	78,680	1,550	37,290
1981	87,714	1,534	37,186
1982	100,058	2,908	37,832
1983	110,566	4,078	38,690
1984	120,961	4,759	38,520
1985	122,069	5,150	42,961
1986	120,734	5,815	45,289
1987	117,030	5,693	47,623
1988	108,641	5,004	45,726
1989[1]	86,505	4,407	44,705

Source: Figures for 1980 to 1988. United Kingdom Digest of Energy Statistics 1989. Figures for 1989. February 1990 issue of Energy Trends.

[1] Provisional

Electricity Consumers

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will amend the part of the draft electricity licence dealing with domestic consumers in default, on the terms submitted to him by the National Consumer Council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Electricity disconnections are currently standing at the lowest level since records began in 1976. Careful consideration has been given to the NCC's proposals but we believe that the combination of protections we have provided for, including the role of the director general and the consumers committees, will give the best degree of protection to consumers and ensure that the downward trend continues.

DEFENCE

Community Charge

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many representations he has received regarding the community charge and its effect on service personnel.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Ministers have received about 85 such written representations or inquiries.

Trident

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will be ordering a fourth Trident nuclear submarine.

Mr. Neubert: We expect to issue an invitation to tender for the fourth Vanguard class submarine later this year.

WE177 Free-fall Bomb

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will reassess the basis for envisaging a requirement for a replacement for the WE177 free-fall bomb.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We keep our requirements for all weapons systems under review. As the WE177 free fall bomb approaches the end of its service life we are studying options for its replacement.

"Statement on the Defence Estimates"

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to publish the 1990 "Statement on the Defence Estimates".

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We expect to publish the "Statement on the Defence Estimates" on Monday 2 April.

School of Peace Studies

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether any serving members of the armed forces are currently studying at the School of Peace Studies in Bradford.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A serving WRNS officer is currently undertaking a one-year defence fellowship at the School of Peace Studies in Bradford. I am not aware of any other serving members of the armed forces who are studying at the school.

Warsaw Pact

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent contacts members of his Department have had with Warsaw pact countries.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There have recently been regular meetings with representatives of Warsaw pact nations at ministerial and official level. In the past month the Ministry has hosted visits by Colonel General Morocz, Hungarian State Secretary for Defence, Colonel General Stanculescu, Romanian Defence Minister and Colonel General Omelichev, Soviet Deputy Chief of General Staff. These contacts are a valuable means of building mutual confidence and improving understanding.

Accountancy Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the accountancy firms used by his Department.

Mr. Neubert: The two outside accountancy firms currently employed by the Ministry of Defence on accountancy-type tasks are:

Ernst and Young
Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Leicester (IRA Bomb)

49. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the consequences of statements made after the recent explosion of the Irish Republican Army bomb in the city of Leicester for the fight against terrorism.

Mr. Waddington: The statements made by the police following the incident provided the public with information about what happened in order to reassure them that the matter was under control, to learn of any possible further threat and to seek their help in identifying those who had planted the device. The public response once again has been of great assistance to the police in pursuing their investigations.

Rehabilitation of Offenders

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those organisations which sought inclusion in the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975.

Mr. John Patten: The following organisations sought exceptions under the 1975 exceptions order:

The Association of British Adoption Agencies
The National Deaf Children's Society
The National Council for Social Services
The National Association for Deaf/Blind and Rubella Children
The National Society for Mentally Handicapped Children
The Ockenden Venture
The NSPCC
The Church of England Children's Society
The Girl Guides Association
The National Institute for the Deaf
The National Council of Voluntary Child Care Organisations
The National Association of Boys Clubs
The Church Army
The National Association of Youth Clubs
The General Synod Board of Education
Christians Abroad
The Baden Powell Scout's Association
The Scout Association
The Methodist Church Division of Education and Youth
The Local Authority Associations (and individual local authorities)
The GLC and ILEA
The General Medical Council
The General Dental Council
The General Nursing Council
The Central Midwives Board
The General Optical Council
The Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain
The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons
The Law Society
The Senate of the Inns of Court and the Bar
The Architects Registration Council of the United Kingdom
The Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales
The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors
The Police
The British Bankers Association
The Building Societies Association
The London Diamond Bourse
The Committee of Magistrates for Inner London
The Fire Service
Representatives of the Press
The Bank of England
The Retail Distributors Association Incorporated
Augustus Barnett and Sons Ltd
The Museums Association
The London Diamond Club Ltd
The National Supervisory Council for Intruder Alarms Ltd
The National Supervisory Council for Intruder Alarms Ltd
The British Security Industries Association
The National Freight Corporation
The Association of British Investigators
The British Shipping Federation
The British Casino Association
The Betting Office Licensees Association
The British Bingo Association
The National Association of Licensed Bingo and Social Clubs
The Continental Oil Company Ltd.
Johnson, Matthey and Co. Ltd.
The Accepting Houses Committee
The British Jewellery and Giftware Federation Ltd.
The Wellcome Foundation Ltd.
Members of the London Gold Market
The British Museum
The Civil Aviation Authority
The British Insurance Association and Lloyd's
The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments

Accountancy Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether, further to his reply to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby on 8 January, *Official Report*, column *474*, he will provide a list of accountancy firms.

Mr. Waddington: The accountancy firms employed by the Home Office were:

Touche Ross
Peat Marwick and McLintock
Deloitte Haskins and Sells
Coopers and Lybrand.

RTL Astra Channel

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by what authority, and for what reasons, the Cable Authority ceased taking the RTL Astra channel.

Mr. Mellor: The Cable Authority is responsible under the Cable and Broadcasting Act 1984 for the regulation of programme content on cable television. Section 10 of the 1984 Act places the authority under a duty to do all that it can to ensure that all licensed services comply with a number of requirements, which are codified in the authority's programme codes and guidelines. I understand the Cable Authority concluded that RTL Plus was in breach of these requirements and that it was therefore no longer acceptable.

Thorp Arch Prison

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners have been allocated to Thorp Arch prison and are now awaiting transfer at the latest count.

Mr. Mellor: On Friday 23 March, 275 inmates were allocated and awaiting transfer to Thorp Arch prison.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners have been transferred to Thorp Arch prison in the last three months.

Mr. Mellor: On 19 March, 27 of the 134 inmates held at Throp Arch had been received since 19 December 1989. The numbers of inmates who may have been transferred to Thorp Arch in that period, and subsequently moved elsewhere, cannot be readily identified.

Firearms

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many compensation claims have been received in relation to the Firearms Amendment Act 1998; how many of these claims have been *(a)* paid, *(b)* refused and *(c)* are still pending; and when such outstanding claims will be settled.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: A total of 2,906 claims have been received from applicants in England and Wales for payments under the Government buy-in scheme for weapons newly prohibited under the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988. Of these claims, 2,727 have had payments authorised and 73 have been refused as ineligible under the scheme. A further 106 claims have yet to be determined. These will be resolved as soon as we are able to determine their eligibility.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many firearms were handed into police stations under the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988 bringing-in scheme since its commencement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: A total of 2,906 applicants in England and Wales have submitted claims in respect of 3,607 weapons, surrendered to the police or otherwise disposed of, for a payment under the Government buy-in scheme. Separate figures on the number of weapons surrendered to the police and the number otherwise disposed of are not collected centrally.

Young Persons (Police Charges)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children and young persons, having been charged by the police, were transferred to the care of the local authority or detained by the police in pursuance of section 38(6) Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 in the last two years for which figures are available; and how this total figure is subdivided by police force area and local authority area.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I regret that this information is not available.

Police (Protective Clothing)

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he is considering issuing to police forces nuclear, biological and chemical defence clothing and equipment.

Mr. John Patten: The need for specialist clothing and equipment is kept under review.

Deportation

Mr. Litherland: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many defendants found guilty of a criminal offence, during the last five years, have been recommended for deportation by the court; and how many of these recommendations the Home Secretary has supported;

(2) in how many cases where there were no court recommendations for deportation after conviction of a criminal offence the Home Office has served notice to deport on grounds conducive to public good over the past five years.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The available information for 1985 to 1988 is published in table 24 of the Home Office Command Paper "Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom 1988" (Cm. 726), and for 1987 to 1989 in table 14 of the Home Office statistical bulletin 8/90 "Control of Immigration: Statistics—Fourth Quarter and Year 1990". Copies of both publications are in the Library.

The numbers of notices of intention to deport served on grounds conducive to the public good include a small number where there was no criminal conviction.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Refugee Camps, Thailand

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what he is doing to ensure United Kingdom food aid to the Cambodian camps on the Thailand border is not going to the Khmer Rouge.

Mrs. Chalker: I have nothing to add to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) on 19 February, Column 486.

Indonesia

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether human rights matters, including the situation in East Timor and the recent execution of six political prisoners in Jakarta and in

Medan, will be included on the agenda of the 1990 meeting of the intergovernmental group on Indonesia, scheduled for June.

Mrs. Chalker: Her Majesty's Government have not received the proposed agenda for next June's meeting of the intergovernmental group on Indonesia. The meeting will be chaired by the Dutch Minister for Development Co-operation and no doubt he will be discussing the draft agenda with the Indonesian Government and the World Bank in the coming weeks.

Czechoslovakia

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals Her Majesty's Government have to assist economic, social and educational development in Czechoslovakia; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced on 21 March, during the visit of President Havel to Britain, that the know-how fund for eastern Europe had been extended to cover Czechoslovakia. The aim will be to provide advice, skills and training to aid Czechoslovakia's transition towards democracy and a market economy. We shall be discussing an overall strategy for the use of the fund with the Czechoslovak authorities.

Ivory

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what monitoring is being undertaken by his Department of elephant conservation schemes funded by Her Majesty's Government, following the decision to allow Hong Kong ivory to be traded.

Mrs. Chalker: We regularly monitor all development projects funded by Her Majesty's Government, including those in the wildlife conservation sector.

Zaire

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what advice the Overseas Development Administration has given to Grindlay's bank about financing Babcock Electric in its logging projects in Zaire.

Mrs. Chalker: No advice has been sought or given.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

UNESCO

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to complete his review of the progress the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation is making in resolving the difficulties which prevent the United Kingdom from rejoining.

Mr. Maude: We are currently reviewing comments received from a large number of organisations consulted as part of our review of policy towards UNESCO. We will also be taking into account the views expressed in the report on UNESCO by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House.

We hope to be able to announce the outcome of the review during the course of the next few weeks.

Complaints

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* for each of the last 10 years *(a)* the number of complaints made against his Department to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, *(b)* the number of complaints upheld and *(c)* the action he took on *(b)*.

Mr. Maude: The number of complaints *(a)* made and *(b)* upheld for the last 10 years is as follows:

	(a) complaints made	*(b) complaints upheld*
1989-90	[1]	[1]
1988-89	5	1
1987-88	7	—
1986-87	5	—
1985-86	7	—
1984-85	10	—
1983-84	6	—
1982-83	13	—
1981-82	14	—
1980-81	6	—

[1] Figures not yet available.

When the PCA upholds a complaint it is departmental practice to provide an appropriate remedy.

Guatemala

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will make representations to the Government in Guatemala on the abduction on 27 February of Benjamin Diaz Arévalo, a student at the universidad de San Carlós in Guatemala;

(2) if he will make representations to the Guatemalan Government concerning the safety of Carlos Luna, a student of the San Carlos university, Guatemala city.

Mr. Maude: We are making inquiries about these cases. We will continue to monitor the human rights situation and make representations when appropriate, either acting alone or in concert with our European partners. The Guatemalan authorities are in no doubt about the concern felt in this country about human rights violations in Guatemala.

Refugee Camps, Thailand

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government are taking to support European Commissioner Abei Mauters, to establish neutral refugee camps on the Thailand border.

Mr. Maude: We support all efforts to improve the lot of displaced persons in camps along the Thai-Cambodian border. Since 1979, the United Kingdom has contributed over £13·7 million in humanitarian assistance via international agencies. If and when neutral camps under direct United Nations administration need to be created as part of a comprehensive political settlement in Cambodia, we would be ready to play our full part in their establishment.

Indonesia

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has concerning the human rights situation in East Timor, following the United States ambassador's visit to Dili in January.

Mr. Maude: We believe that generally the situation has improved following the changes in military command structure last December. We continue to monitor the situation.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on the instructions given by the Indonesian Minister for Defence in February to the armed forces about how to handle demonstrators in favour of independence from Indonesia.

Mr. Maude: We are not party to instructions issued by the Indonesian Minister of Defence. We understand that the authorities' intention is that peaceful demonstrations should be allowed to pass off without intervention.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations the British Government have made to the Indonesian authorities about the use of violence against peaceful demonstrators for independence in East Timor.

Mr. Maude: The Indonesian authorities are well aware of our views on the need to respect human rights. Two recent demonstrations that we know of passed off peacefully without incident.

Eastern Europe

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what steps the Government are taking to promote educational exchanges between the United Kingdom and the emerging democracies of eastern Europe and, in particular, to assist students from these countries to study at United Kingdom universities.

Mr. Maude: We have been progressively extending our educational exchange programmes in response to changes in eastern Europe and introducing new schemes to bring eastern European students to our universities and polytechnics, funded jointly with the private sector, with academic institutions and with bodies such as the Soros Foundation.

Kenya

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contact his Department has had in recent weeks with Dr. Richard Leakey, director of the Kenyan wildlife department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: The British High Commission in Nairobi is in regular contact with Dr. Leakey and senior officials of the Kenya Wildlife Service. The high commissioner in Nairobi last met Dr. Leakey on 15 March.

Kenya

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has regarding the level of elephant poaching in Kenya following the decision to enter a reservation on behalf of Hong Kong ivory.

Mr. Maude: The Kenya Wildlife Service does not produce official figures of monthly poaching. The service knows of only three killings in March in Tsavo and, although not all poached elephants are discovered, it anticipates that the total killed for this month in Kenya will be in single figures. During the previous two months we know that 50 elephants were illegally killed in the Tsavo area.

Ivory

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on world price movements of ivory following the decision to enter a reservation on behalf of Hong Kong; and what monitoring is maintained of price movements.

Mr. Maude: None. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office does not monitor price movements in the ivory market.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from the Environmental Investigation Agency concerning poached ivory being laundered into Hong Kong using spare CITES permits.

Mr. Maude: None.

SCOTLAND

Health Spending

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those years in the period 1974 to 1989 when financial cuts in real terms were made in the National Health Service in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) on 15 November 1989, *Official Report*, columns *362-63*. In the period 1974-1989, the only year in which gross National Health Service spending in Scotland fell in real terms was 1977-78.

Speech Therapy

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the total number of vacancies for speech therapists within each health board area and the agreed establishment for speech therapists.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not available centrally.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what is the average case load covered by a speech therapist;

(2) if he will provide a percentage breakdown of the communication-handicapped population who receive speech therapy in *(a)* the hospital site, *(b)* National Health Service premises, *(c)* local authority premises, *(d)* patients' homes and *(e)* other locations;

(3) if he will provide statistics on the levels of speech therapy service currently available in each area health authority in Scotland; if work is currently in progress to analyse the levels of services required for areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 27 March 1990]*: Information available centrally about speech therapy staffing, patients, workload and location of treatment in health boards is collated annually by the information and statistics division of Common Services Agency. The latest tables are as follows, and copies are in the Library. Assessment of the need for speech therapy services is a matter for health boards.

Table 1—Speech therapy statistics: year ending 31 March 1989

	Scotland	*Argyll and Clyde*	*Ayrshire and Arran*	*Borders*	*Dumfries and Galloway*	*Fife*	*Forth Valley*	*Grampian*
Patients attending[1]								
All ages								
Number	51,083	3,928	4,263	1,480	1,788	3,658	3,308	5,644
Rate[2]	*10·0*	*8·9*	*11·4*	*14·4*	*12·1*	*10·6*	*12·2*	*11·3*
Aged under 5	30·7	41·5	33·6	24·7	33·8	32·0	23·3	34·9
5-18	41·8	35·2	51·2	42·0	49·0	35·1	47·2	41·1
19-64	14·1	13·8	8·5	19·9	8·3	12·3	18·5	12·0
65 and over	13·3	9·6	6·7	13·4	8·8	20·6	10·9	12·1
New patients								
All ages								
Number	22,447	1,834	1,381	719	526	1,593	1,157	2,203
Rate[2]	*4·4*	*4·1*	*3·7*	*7·0*	*3·6*	*4·6*	*4·3*	*4·4*
Aged under 5	38·6	46·0	56·0	27·0	47·5	38·3	35·8	40·8
5-18	23·3	21·5	20·2	41·2	29·1	17·0	17·7	23·3
19-6[illegible]	17·0	16·9	11·4	17·8	9·5	11·7	24·0	14·7
65 and over	21·1	15·6	12·3	14·0	13·9	33·0	22·5	21·2
Attendances								
All attendances	465,226	36,101	34,545	21,906	23,552	37,456	26,806	39,422
Hospital								
Inpatient	14·8	13·8	6·2	9·6	3·4	10·5	28·3	17·8
Outpatient	13·0	11·7	6·5	4·6	3·1	7·7	12·8	9·3
Health Centre/Clinic	22·4	31·6	42·0	6·0	0·8	24·9	9·3	25·5
School	38·3	36·1	41·5	49·3	67·1	39·0	35·7	38·5
Domiciliary	4·7	2·2	2·7	10·1	16·8	6·3	4·4	3·3
Other	6·8	4·7	1·1	20·4	8·8	11·6	9·6	5·7
Speech therapists[3]								
Number	446	38	26	14	18	30	23	56
Whole-time equivalents	363·4	30·2	22·4	10·7	16·1	26·4	17·8	43·7

Table 1—continued

	Greater Glasgow	*Highland*	*Lanarkshire*	*Lothian*	*Orkney*	*Shetland*	*Tayside*	*Western Isles*
Patients Attending[1]								
All Ages								
Number	8,274	2,998	3,570	7,329	478	356	3,706	303
Rate[2]	*8·8*	*14·9*	*6·4*	*9·9*	*24·6*	*15·9*	*9·4*	*9·8*
Aged under 5	24·0	27·0	36·7	29·6	16·5	16·3	34·7	21·1
5-18	38·6	55·5	39·9	35·4	78·2	73·6	39·7	49·5
19-64	20·8	9·2	12·7	15·8	1·7	4·5	11·6	20·1
65 and over	16·6	8·3	10·7	19·2	3·6	5·6	14·0	9·2
New Patients								
All Ages								
Number	4,301	1,069	1,738	3,827	157	186	1,622	134
Rate[2]	*4·6*	*5·3*	*3·1*	*5·2*	*8·1*	*8·3*	*4·1*	*4·3*
Aged under 5	30·7	37·7	49·5	34·4	29·9	21·0	39·3	35·8
5-18	25·5	37·4	20·9	16·9	64·3	68·8	19·7	45·5
19-64	21·2	11·6	15·1	21·2	1·9	5·9	15·4	13·4
65 and over	22·6	13·3	14·4	27·5	3·8	4·3	25·6	5·2
Attendances								
All Attendances	66,689	17,764	30,913	79,510	2,422	3,645	42,343	2,152
Hospital								
Inpatient	18·9	14·1	9·6	20·6	3·3	1·6	13·6	4·6

	Greater Glasgow	*Highland*	*Lanark-shire*	*Lothian*	*Orkney*	*Shetland*	*Tayside*	*Western Isles*
Outpatient	24·3	5·6	15·5	13·5	0·2	14·7	21·7	0·9
Health Centre/Clinic	28·1	10·3	50·2	15·8	3·9	1·5	13·2	21·1
School	18·2	55·8	20·2	41·1	79·0	79·5	42·9	42·9
Domiciliary	2·8	10·3	2·2	3·4	9·3	2·6	2·4	28·0
Other	7·8	3·9	2·3	5·6	4·2	—	6·3	2·4
Speech Therapists[3]								
Number	80	16	33	64	2	1	41	4
Whole-time-equivalent	65·7	13·4	26·8	53·1	2·0	0·7	31·3	3·1

[1] Old and new patients.

[2] Per 1,000 population.

[3] As at 31st March 1989 (provisional figures): excludes speech therapy helpers.

Source: Form ISD(S)31 and ISD (National Manpower Statistics).

Table 2

Speech therapists: by grade and health board: at 31 March 1989 (provisional)

Grade E

	Number	*WTE*
Scotland	5	5·0
Argyll and Clyde	—	—
Ayrshire and Arran	1	1·0
Borders	—	—
Dumfries and Galloway	—	—
Fife	1	1·0
Forth Valley	1	1·0
Grampian	—	—
Greater Glasgow	—	—
Highland	—	—
Lanarkshire	—	—
Lothian	1	1·0
Orkney	—	—
Shetland	—	—
Tayside	1	1·0
Western Isles	—	—

Grade D

	Number	*WTE*
Scotland	27	27·0
Argyll and Clyde	3	3·0
Ayrshire and Arran	1	1·0
Borders	1	1·0
Dumfries and Galloway	2	2·0
Fife	—	—
Forth Valley	2	2·0
Grampian	2	2·0
Greater Glasgow	3	3·0
Highland	1	1·0
Lanarkshire	1	1·0
Lothian	6	6·0
Orkney	—	—
Shetland	—	—
Tayside	4	4·0
Western Isles	1	1·0

Grade C (Senior)

	Number	*WTE*
Scotland	141	129·0
Argyll and Clyde	10	8·5
Ayrshire and Arran	8	7·5
Borders	4	4·0
Dumfries and Galloway	1	1·0
Fife	8	8·0
Forth Valley	4	3·4
Grampian	11	11·0
Greater Glasgow	43	38·4
Highland	3	3·0
Lanarkshire	11	10·5
Lothian	25	22·1
Orkney	1	1·0
Shetland	—	—
Tayside	11	9·6
Western Isles	1	1·0

Grade B (Basic)

	Number	*WTE*
Scotland	240	171·8
Argyll and Clyde	22	16·1
Ayrshire and Arran	15	11·9
Borders	9	5·7
Dumfries and Galloway	14	12·1
Fife	19	15·4
Forth Valley	13	8·4
Grampian	36	23·7
Greater Glasgow	27	18·1
Highland	12	9·4
Lanarkshire	20	14·3
Lothian	30	22·3
Orkney	—	—
Shetland	1	0·7
Tayside	20	12·6
Western Isles	2	1·1

Grade A

	Number	*WTE*
Scotland	33	30·6
Argyll and Clyde	3	2·6
Ayrshire and Arran	1	1·0
Borders	—	—
Dumfries and Galloway	1	1·0
Fife	2	2·0
Forth Valley	3	3·0
Grampian	7	7·0
Greater Glasgow	7	6·2
Highland	—	—
Lanarkshire	1	1·0
Lothian	2	1·7
Orkney	1	1·0
Shetland	—	—
Tayside	5	4·1
Western Isles	—	—

ST Helper

	Number	WTE
Scotland	3	1·3
Argyll and Clyde	—	—
Ayrshire and Arran	—	—
Borders	—	—
Dumfries and Galloway	1	0·5
Fife	—	—
Forth Valley	1	0·3
Grampian	—	—
Greater Glasgow	1	0·5
Highland	—	—
Lanarkshire	—	—
Lothian	—	—
Orkney	—	—
Shetland	—	—
Tayside	—	—
Western Isles	—	—

Source: ISD (National Manpower Statistics).

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will give a breakdown of the percentages of speech therapy referrals which come from doctors and consultants, and from clinical medical officers, health visitors, community nursing, educational services, social services, speech therapists in other districts, from self-referrals and other sources;

(2) if he will provide statistics relating to the percentages of people receiving speech therapy services who have associated mobility problems or a level of social-economic difficulty.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 27 March 1990]:* This information is not available centrally.

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) on 20 December, *Official Report,* column *296,* if he will provide details of the numbers of speech therapists employed by each regional education authority in Scotland during the past five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 27 March 1990]:* Speech therapists are employed almost exclusively by health boards which provide the service for education authorities. The table shows the whole-time equivalent numbers of speech therapists employed by health boards at the latest available date and at the corresponding date in each of the years 1985-88.

Speech therapists in post: Whole-time equivalent at 30 September

Health board	1985	1986	1987	1988	[1]1989
Scotland	323·7	339·4	343·1	372·3	377·6
Argyll and Clyde	27·5	29·0	28·1	32·8	33·0
Ayrshire and Arran	17·9	19·3	20·6	20·5	21·5
Borders	10·2	10·3	11·2	10·7	11·7
Dumfries and Galloway	15·6	16·5	15·9	15·8	16·1
Fife	23·7	25·3	28·0	27·5	28·1
Forth Valley	13·8	13·4	16·3	18·4	18·2
Grampian	28·6	35·6	33·5	40·2	45·5
Greater Glasgow	60·4	62·6	63·0	70·8	63·7
Highland	12·8	14·8	14·9	16·1	15·5
Lanarkshire	22·8	24·1	23·2	27·5	31·8
Lothian	53·4	50·2	52·5	53·6	56·4
Orkney	2·0	1·2	2·0	1·6	1·0
Shetland	0·8	0·8	0·8	0·7	0·7
Tayside	31·9	33·0	29·8	33·5	31·3
Western Isles	2·3	3·3	3·3	2·6	3·1

[1] Provisional.

Greater Glasgow Health Board

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the name and address of the company which is transferring the Greater Glasgow health board's medical records onto computer.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No such transfer is being undertaken at this time.

Examinations

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people sat public educational examinations in *(a)* politics *(b)* constitutional studies and *(c)* political history in 1989.

Mr. Lang: The Scottish Examination Board does not offer examinations in any of these subjects. Figures for presentations in these subjects in the further and higher education sectors are not collected centrally.

A9

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* those stretches of the A9 lying within Caithness and Sutherland in respect of which since 1970 improvement plans have been announced; and if he will indicate, for each stretch of road, whether *(a)* work has been completed, *(b)* work is in progress and *(c)* an economic assessment is still in train.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The position with respect to major schemes for which plans have been announced since 1970 is as follows:

A9 Schemes within Caithness and Sutherland

	Year completed	Length kms
Completed		
Helmsdale Bridge Diversion	1973	0·9
Bonar Bridge Replacement	1973	0·4
Knockinnon-Latheronwheel	1976	2·4
Mound Bridges	1988	0·6
Dornoch Firth Northern Approach Road	1988	4·0

	Year completed	*Length kms*
Dunbeath Bridge Diversion	1990	1·6
	Expected completion	
In progress		
Dornoch Firth Bridge	1991	0·8
Economic assessment not yet available		
Windyhouse-Borgue Bridge	—	2·8
Portgower-Greenpark	—	1·6
Berriedale	—	5·0
Crackaig-Culgower	—	1·8
Helmsdale-County Boundary	—	5·2
Brora Bypass	—	2·5

Clothing and Textiles

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps his Department intends to take in order to protect the clothing and textiles industry in Strathclyde after the eventual phasing-out of the multi-fibre arrangement.

Mr. Lang: This is primarily a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. The Government have made it clear that progress in phasing out the multi-fibre arrangement must be on the basis of a strengthening of GATT rules and disciplines, particularly those relating to safeguards, unfair trade, intellectual property and the reduction of trade barriers. It is by progress in those areas that the industry will be assisted in coming to terms with the liberalisation of trade in the clothing and textile sector.

Portland Street, Kilmarnock

Mr. William McKelvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will report on the progress of the planning application submitted by Balfour Beatty to redevelop Portland street, Kilmarnock.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Office inquiry reporter carried out his accompanied site inspection of Portland street on 16 January. His report in relation to the listed building consent applications associated with the proposed Balfour Beatty development is at present under consideration. I expect to reach a conclusion on these applications very soon.

National Health Service (Competitive Tendering)

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on competitive tendering for the non-emergency patient transport services in the Forth Valley and Lanarkshire health board areas.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Common Services Agency, having considered the tenders received, has decided to award the contract to the Scottish ambulance service in-house team for a five-year period from 1 July 1990.

The tendering exercise has been proved successful and will result in substantial savings of £500,000. These savings will be reinvested into the accident and emergency service to further improve the level of care provided with no detriment to the non-emergency patient transport service.

In the light of this experience, I have asked the agency to begin the preparatory work which will allow the tendering exercise to be extended to other areas in Scotland.

GPs (Fees and Allowances)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to publish the amendment to the statement of fees and allowances to be administered by the Scottish Rural Practice and Fund Committee for the benefit of general practitioners who practise in less densely populated country areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* The Scottish rural practice fund committee has not yet formulated detailed proposals concerning the new scheme. It has recommended that in the first instance the transitional payments scheme at present set out in paragraph 83 of the statement of fees and allowances (SFA) should apply to all GPs who meet the criteria, including those who receive payments from the Scottish rural practice fund. An amendment to the SFA will be made shortly to give effect to this recommendation. This will allow the longer-term scheme covering doctors who work in the less populated areas of Scotland to be worked out carefully and in detail. The details of that long-term scheme will also be set out in an amendment to the SFA in due course.

Health Service Staff

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many physiotherapists, occupational therapists, clinical pyschologists and pharmacists are employed in each area health authority in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 27 March 1990]:* The information is as follows:

Staff in post: Whole-time equivalents at 30 September 1989 (provisional)

Health Board	*Physiotherapist*	*Occupational therapist*	*Clinical psychologist*	*Pharmacist*[1]
Scotland	1,253·3	592·3	184·5	489·8
Argyll and Clyde	79·1	32·1	17·6	29·0
Ayrshire and Arran	88·5	29·0	8·0	27·9
Borders	24·8	9·7	3·0	6·6
Dumfries and Galloway	21·0	17·3	10·0	7·4
Fife	71·7	33·7	15·0	18·0
Forth Valley	56·0	34·4	11·8	19·2
Grampian	114·8	65·3	21·7	41·5
Greater Glasgow	315·0	136·0	29·5	155·6
Highland	45·8	14·9	4·0	17·5
Lanarkshire	105·5	28·1	12·4	36·6
Lothian	225·8	135·9	35·6	82·5

Health Board	*Physiotherapist*	*Occupational therapist*	*Clinical psychologist*	*Pharmacist*[1]
Orkney	5·0	0·6	0·0	0·0
Shetland	5·0	1·0	0·0	0·0
Tayside	84·7	53·3	14·9	45·0
Western Isles	10·6	1·0	0·0	2·0
CSA	0·0	0·0	1·0	1·0

[1] hospital based.

Infertility Services

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he anticipates receiving the report of the working party set up by the National Medical Consultative Committee to examine the provision of infertility services in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 28 March 1990]:* The report of the working group on infertility is currently being drafted. Following consideration by the national medical advisory committee, it is hoped that the final report will reach the Scottish Health Service Advisory Council in June, and be submitted to my right hon. and learned Friend thereafter.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Income Support

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the annual cost of administering income support benefits for free school meals, free milk, wigs, fabric support, prescriptions, false teeth and glasses; and what is the annual value of these benefit payments.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The administration costs arising in the Department of Social Security in respect of the free welfare milk scheme are estimated to be £9·3 million in the year 1989-90. The administration costs in respect of the free school meals scheme and the exemption from NHS charges of income support recipients are not separately identifiable.

Administration costs in other Departments and elsewhere, and the benefits costs, of providing these schemes for income support recipients are the responsibility of my right hon. and learned Friends the Secretaries of State for Health and for Scotland and my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Education and Science and for Wales.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give his latest information on the number of claimants living in the Greenock and Port Glasgow parliamentary constituency aged below 25 years, over 25 years and married couples, receiving income support and the number of dependants covered by each of these three groups of payments.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information is unavailable and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the latest available information on the number of claimants of income support, together with the number of dependants, in each of the parliamentary constituencies in the Strathclyde region; and if he will give the comparable information for 1979 and 1987.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Data on the number of dependants are unavailable and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Data on the number of claimants of income support are unavailable by parliamentary constituency. Data for the Department's offices covering Strathclyde region as a whole are in the table.

Number of supplementary benefit/income support claimants

Year	*Numbers*
1990	289,589
1987	253,955
1979	173,068

Source: 100 per cent. count of cases in action which include a number where payment has ceased but other action is continuing. Data for 1990 is provisional and subject to amendment.

Benefits (Take-up)

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate of the rate of take-up of (i) housing benefit and (ii) income support by *(a)* all claimants and *(b)* pensioner households.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The latest available information on take-up of income-related benefits is contained in the technical notes on take-up of benefits, copies of which are available in the Library.

Child Benefit

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the current level of child benefit if it had been raised in line with inflation.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Child benefit was fully introduced from April 1979 at a rate of £4 a week. Increasing that by the movement in the index of retail prices to April 1989 would give a current amount of £8·42.

Community Care Grants

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether community care grants are available to persons moving from long-stay psychiatric hospitals to housing association houses where care staff are provided.

Mr. Scott: Directions and guidance for the award of social fund community care grants appear in the social fund manual, a copy of which is in the Library. The guidance makes it clear that community care grants are intended to promote independent living in the community. In any particular case it will be for the social fund officer to decide whether a move from long-stay hospital care to a home with some provision for care can be regarded as a return to the community. One of the factors taken into account will be the level of care provided.

Social Fund

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish in the *Official Report* the final expenditure for each local social fund office for the year 1988-89, separately for loans and grants expressed as a proportion of the total annual allocation made to each office.

Mr. Scott: The information requested can be derived from data in the Library.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish in the *Official Report* the names of offices given extra allocations for social fund loans or grants from 1 January to the present and the value of those allocations.

Mr. Scott: We shall place a full list of the additional allocations in the Library after the end of the current financial year.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what proportion of successful applicants to the social fund had support for their application from *(a)* hon. Members, *(b)* social workers, *(c)* welfare rights workers and *(d)* voluntary groups both (i) initially and (ii) after request for review for (1) community care grants, (2) budgeting loans and (3) crisis loans;

(2) what proportion of unsuccessful applicants to the social fund had support for their application from *(a)* hon. Members, *(b)* social workers, *(c)* welfare rights workers and *(d)* voluntary groups both (i) initially and (ii) after request for review for (1) community care grants, (2) budgeting loans and (3) crisis loans.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is not collected.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the number of people in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Dunfermline, *(c)* Cowdenbeath, *(d)* Leven and *(e)* Kirkcaldy receiving income support in November 1989; and what is his estimate of the number of dependents of each of these at the same date.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* Data on the number of dependants are unavailable and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Data on the number of claimants of income support are in the table.

Number of income support claimants

Area	*Number*
Scotland	506,853
Dunfermline	5,718
Cowdenbeath	4,407
Leven	5,114
Kirkcaldy	11,052

Source: 100 per cent. count of cases in action which include a number where payment has ceased but other action is continuing. Data are provisional and subject to amendment.

Family Credit

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye of 21 March, *Official Report*, column *642*, if he will ensure that payment of the claim for family credit dated November 1989 made by the Reverend and Mrs. John MacLeod of Ross-shire, about whom the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye wrote to the Minister on 13 February and 13 March, respectively, will not be delayed by the appeal of the Department of Social Security to the Social Security Commissioners against the award made under the claim for family credit dated November 1988 made by the Reverend and Mrs. John MacLeod; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The latest claim was decided on 22 March. An award of family credit was made and has been put into payment.

Community Charge

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the figures showing the amounts of community charge benefit payable during 1990-91 to pensioner couples with joint community charge bills *(a)* £500, *(b)* £750, *(c)* £1,000 and *(d)* £1,250, assuming in each case that they have £15,000 invested in the building society and occupational pensions of (i) nil, (ii) £500, (iii) £1,000 and (iv) £1,500.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information requested is in the table.

Community charge benefit (weekly). Pensioner couple, capital £15,000, aged 60-74, on state retirement pension for a couple of £75·10 per week.

Annual joint community charge	*Occupational Pension (per annum)*			
	Nil £	*£500* £	*£1,000* £	*£1,500* £
£500	0·54	Nil	Nil	Nil
£750	4·38	2·92	1·48	Nil
£1,000	8·20	6·76	5·32	3·08
£1,250	12·04	10·60	9·16	7·72

Whooping Cough Vaccine

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether there has been any change in *(a)* departmental policy and *(b)* the adjudicating doctor's attitude towards payments for damage from the whooping cough vaccine following the Loveday case.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Departmental policy towards vaccine damage payments has not changed since the Loveday case. It remains our intention to make payments under the vaccine damage payments scheme for people who show that they are severely disabled as a result of the effects of vaccination against certain diseases, including whooping cough. The Vaccine Damage Payments Act 1979 requires that the question whether the severe disablement results from vaccination is to be decided on the balance of probability. Adjudicating doctors have to look at all the relevant evidence available to them when making this decision in individual cases. The Loveday judgment forms part of this evidence.

Benefits

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about the level of benefits.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to the statement on uprating social security benefits made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 25 October 1989 at col. *841-69*.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Economy

13. **Mr. Allan Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the performance of the Northern Ireland economy over the last 12 months.

Mr. Cope: The latest information shows that, in the last quarter of 1989, manufacturing output was 7 per cent. above the same quarter of the previous year, the number unemployed in February 1990 was 10,900 down on a year earlier and growth in Northern Ireland's gross domestic product since 1981 has been similar to the United Kingdom's.

Dublin (Official Visit)

15. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he hopes next to pay an official visit to Dublin; whom he proposes to meet; and what he hopes to discuss.

42. **Mr. Duffy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he next plans to meet his co-chairman of the Anglo-Irish intergovernmental council; and what he hopes to discuss.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he next hopes to meet the Foreign Secretary of the Republic of Ireland; and what he plans to discuss.

Mr. Brooke: I plan to meet Mr. Collins in Dublin shortly to discuss political development within Northern Ireland. Other current issues affecting Northern Ireland are likely to be raised.

Local Government

16. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with representatives from political parties in Northern Ireland regarding the transfer of various powers to local authorities.

36. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he has any plans to increase the scope and accountability of local government in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney: In their talks with us, most Northern Ireland politicians have looked towards the establishment of a devolved form of government for Northern Ireland as a whole, with an appropriate role for representatives of the minority community. The Government would give serious consideration to any proposals for more local involvement in the government of Northern Ireland which were workable and seemed likely to command widespread acceptance.

Stevens Inquiry

17. **Mr. Molyneaux:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he proposes to publish the report of the Stevens inquiry.

Mr. Cope: I understand that Mr. Stevens has not yet delivered his report to the Chief Constable, who commissioned it. At this stage, it is too early to say when or in what form its conclusions may be made public.

35. **Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Stevens inquiry.

Mr. Cope: So far, 58 people have been charged with offences as a result of the inquiries of Mr. Stevens and his team. The inquiry continues. I understand that Mr. Stevens is now expected to report the findings of his inquiry to the Chief Constable of the RUC during the month of April.

Anglo-Irish Agreement

18. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions he has had with representatives of Eire regarding the Anglo-Irish Agreement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: I last met Ministers from the Republic of Ireland at the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference meeting on 2 March. The two Governments remain committed to the Agreement and the principles it embodies.

30. **Mr. John D. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the status of Northern Ireland as embodied in the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Mr. Brooke: Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom. The Governments of the United Kingdom and of the Republic of Ireland affirm in article 1 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement that any change in the status of Northern Ireland would only come about with the consent of a majority of the people in Northern Ireland and recognise that the present wish of a majority is for no change in that status.

School Assemblies

19. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has any plans to introduce legislative proposals relating to the conduct of school assemblies; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: No.

Community Relations

20. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on community relations in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney: Steps have been and are being taken to improve relations between the two sides of the community in Northern Ireland. These include measures directed at: increasing contact and co-operation across the community; increasing greater mutual respect and understanding; and ensuring the existence of equality of opportunity and equity of treatment.

Terrorists (Extradition)

21. **Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many applications by the Royal Ulster Constabulary for the extradition of persons sought

for terrorist-type crimes have been made during the last 10 years to the Irish Republic; and how many persons have subsequently been handed over.

Mr. Cope: During the past 10 years the Royal Ulster Constabulary has requested the return of 51 persons for terrorist offences from the Irish Republic. Six persons have subsequently been returned, three of them in the past 20 months.

Security

22. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the current security situation in Northern Ireland.

26. **Rev. William McCrea:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the present security situation in Northern Ireland.

25. **Mr. Flannery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in Northern Ireland.

37. **Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the current security situation in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Brooke: Since I answered a similar question on 1 March 1990 there have been six deaths arising from the security situation in Northern Ireland. A part-time member of the UDR, a member of the RUC Reserve and a civilian were murdered by republican terrorists. Following the latter murder, I have proscribed the Irish People's Liberation Organisation. Two civilians were murdered by loyalist terrorists, and a further civilian died in the course of an attempted robbery. I know the House will join me in condemning the vicious and cowardly murder of the RUC Reserve Constable George Starrett, who was cruelly shot last night at his home in Armagh. This sickening attack on a man who was convalescing at home is yet one more example of the depravity of these evil men.

NHS Expenditure

23. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the levels of planned expenditure on the National Health Service in 1990-91 broken down by region.

Mr. Needham: A total of £1,035 million will be provided for the health and personal social services in Northern Ireland. Of this sum, £742,847 million will be allocated directly to the four health and social services boards. Excluding sums set aside for priority developments the balance will be allocated as follows: the Eastern board, £392,372 million, the Northern board, £123,891 million, the Southern board, £113,982 million and the Western board, £113,525 million.

Voluntary Organisations

24. **Mr. Brandon-Bravo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has any plans to increase grants to voluntary bodies in 1989-90; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: Grants to voluntary bodies are reviewed each financial year and adjusted as necessary. However, there are no plans to increase grants to voluntary bodies in the remaining part of the 1989-90 financial year.

Cross-border Co-operation

27. **Mr. Allen McKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what subjects of cross-border co-operation were discussed at the last meeting of the Anglo-Irish ministerial council.

Mr. Brooke: Discussions at the last meeting of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference on 2 March included cross-border co-operation on security and social and economic matters.

34. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what issues of non-security related cross-border co-operation will be discussed at the next meeting of the Anglo-Irish ministerial conference.

Mr. Brooke: Among the items for discussion at the next Conference will be cross-border economic and social co-operation and the implications of 1992.

38. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on cross-border security co-operation between the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic.

Mr. Brooke: Enhancing cross-border co-operation on security matters remains a fundamental objective of the Government in their discussions with the Irish Government. Progress has been made since the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, but there remains considerable scope for further improvement. We shall continue to explore, through the Conference, ways in which this can be achieved.

Prison Visits

28. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what requests he has received from the Irish Government for visits to prisons in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Cope: None.

Hospitals

29. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many patients were treated in hospitals in Northern Ireland in 1987 and 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: The total numbers of in-patients treated in 1987 and 1989 were as follows:

	1987	*1988-89*
Ordinary admissions	266,622	266,530
Day cases	27,707	42,423
TOTAL	294,329	308,953

Industrial Development Board

31. **Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the annual amount of Industrial Development Board assistance to aid employment.

Mr. Needham: The Industrial Development Board's expenditure to aid employment was £94 million in 1988-89. Forecast expenditure for the current year is £85 million.

Inward Investment

32. **Mr. Janman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a further statement on inward investment.

Mr. Needham: Recent successes and current levels of interest by potential investors in the far east, United States and Europe suggest that an increasing number of companies are prepared to give serious consideration to investment in Northern Ireland.

39. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is being done to promote overseas investment in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: Our efforts are concentrated on major markets for mobile investment, with increasing emphasis on the far east and the USA, and sectorally in areas where Northern Ireland has particular strengths.

47. **Mr. Beggs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the benefits of advance factory provision and availability of sites with development planning approval in attracting inward investment to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: The IDB's advance factories provide high quality and immediately available industrial accommodation for inward investors who may wish to purchase or rent premises. Twelve such factories are currently available throughout the Province. Serviced industrially zoned land provides investors with the opportunity to acquire sites quickly and at market price for early project implementation. Some 500 acres of fully serviced land are available in the major centres of population.

Northern Ireland Railways

33. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he last met the chairman of Northern Ireland Railways; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I met the chairman on 2 March 1990 at the scene of the level crossing accident at Slaght, near Ballymena, Co. Antrim. We viewed the damage to the rolling stock and track and discussed steps necessary to set up an inquiry into the accident and the arrangements to visit the local hospital to see those who had been injured.

Area Health Boards

40. **Mr. John Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whan he last met representatives of the area health boards; and what issues were discussed.

Mr. Needham: My noble Friend Lord Skelmersdale has met representatives of the boards on a number of occasions. His discussions with them have covered a wide range of issues concerning the policy and administration of the health and personal social services in Northern Ireland including the progress of the boards in taking forward the reforms set out in "Working for Patients".

Constitutional Reform

41. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what practical alternatives to devolution have emerged from his exploratory meetings with the main constitutional political parties.

Mr. Brooke: All the main constitutional political parties in Northern Ireland have expressed a willingness to work towards the devolution of powers to local elected representatives. The Government support this aim, because it seems the approach most likely to command widespread acceptance and serve the interests of all. My discussions with the leaders of the parties have concentrated on this approach.

Community Care

43. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals he has for the reorganisation of community care.

Mr. Needham: My noble Friend Lord Skelmersdale is today publishing a policy paper, entitled "People First", which sets out the Government's proposals for the development of community care in Northern Ireland. A copy is being placed in the Library.

Cross-community Projects

44. **Mr. Dover:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many schools are involved in cross-community projects; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: In October 1987 I introduced the cross-community contact scheme to stimulate the development of cross-community projects between schools, and youth and community groups.

Since its introduction, some 400 schools—about one third of all schools in Northern Ireland—have applied for assistance under the scheme which has an actual budget in 1989-90 of £450,000. Grant is available for joint, continuing projects most of which are curriculum based.

Private House Building

45. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will estimate private sector house building in 1979 and 1989.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Private house building starts rose 64 per cent. from 4,127 in 1979 to 6,763 in 1989.

Planning Legislation

46. **Mr. Clifford Forsythe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what changes he proposes to make to Northern Ireland planning legislation.

Mr. Needham: I intend to lay a draft Planning (Northern Ireland) Order before the House in April.

Northern Ireland Members have already been consulted on the proposed draft order, the main points of which will be the introduction of simplified planning zones; discontinuance notices; planning agreements and measures for controlling the storage and use of hazardous substances. This will bring the planning law in Northern Ireland substantially into line with that in Great Britain. Also, the draft order will introduce a new measure—a submission notice procedure whereby the Department of Environment (NI) could require the submission of a planning application from anyone carrying out development without planning permission.

Prison Service

48. **Mr. Kilfedder:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the prison service in the light of the decision of the Dublin Supreme Court.

Mr. Cope: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in the House on 14 March the suggestion that persons returned to custody in Northern Ireland would be subject to ill treatment was

> "an unacceptable slur on the professionalism of the men and women of the Northern Ireland prison service."—[*Official Report*, 14 March 1990; Vol. 169, c. 481.]

whose members work with courage and commitment often in difficult circumstances. Conditions in the Maze prison and throughout the Northern Ireland prison system compare most favourably with those found elsewhere in Europe and prisoners are able to enjoy the benefits of an imaginative and constructive prison regime.

Strangford Lough

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the representations about the declaration of the Strangford Lough (ASSI) Part 3 were taken into consideration during the consultative period by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland considered all representations and objections to the declaration of the Strangford Lough (part 3) area of special scientific interest before confirmation took place on 16 November 1989. At a meeting on 3 November 1989 the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside was given information regarding the representations and objections and took this into consideration before advising the Department of its support for the confirmation of the area of special scientific interest.

Primary Schools, County Fermanagh

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will make a statement on progress towards resolution of controlled post-primary provision in County Fermanagh for the future.

Dr. Mawhinney: The future of controlled post-primary school provision in County Fermanagh is a matter for the Western education and library board. No development proposals relating to controlled post-primary schools in this area have been published. However, at the request of the board of governors of Portora royal school—a voluntary grammar school for boys—the board has published a proposal to the effect that girls should be admitted as day pupils to the school with effect from 1 September 1990. No decision on this proposal can be taken until after the expiry of the statutory two-month objection period which ends on 25 April 1990.

Purchasing Costs

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if his Department achieved the target of 5 per cent. saving in purchasing costs in 1988-89, set by the Paymaster General, through use of the central unit on purchasing.

Mr. Cope: Through the co-ordinating efforts of the central unit on purchasing for Northern Ireland, we achieved savings of 6·3 per cent. worth £17·7 million in 1988-89—significantly above the target which had been set.

Child Poverty Action Group

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has any plans to meet representatives of the Child Poverty Action Group.

Mr. Needham: My noble Friend the Minister responsible for health and social services has agreed to meet representatives of the group but not date has yet been arranged.

Energy

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to what extent Northern Ireland is self-supporting in terms of fuel for energy production.

Mr. Needham: At present Northern Ireland is entirely dependent on imported fuels for all its energy needs.

Debt Payments

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the working party on the Payment of Debt (Northern Ireland) Act 1971.

Mr. Cope: The Payments for Debt (Emergency Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 1971 does not make provision for a working party; but the public debt policy committee, comprising officials from all Government Departments in Northern Ireland with a major interest in public debt, keeps the problem of public debt under review.

Integrated Schools

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in establishing integrated schools since the making of the Education Reform (NI) Order in 1989.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 only came into force on 20 February. Since then, however, a number of schools have approached the Department of Education (NI) for advice about integrated status. Statutory proposals have already been submitted to education and library boards on behalf of five proposed new grant-maintained integrated schools and acquisition procedures for integrated status have also begun at a number of existing grant-aided schools. These latter procedures will include the holding of secret, postal ballots of parents, and it has been arranged that these will be conducted on behalf of school governors by the Electoral Reform Society in London.

Violence

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he intends to take any further measures in the light of recent violent incidents in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: I have signed an order to proscribe the Irish People's Liberation Organisation (IPLO) under the

Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978. The order has been laid before Parliament and since midnight the IPLO has been a proscribed organisation. We shall be asking both Houses to affirm the order in the next few weeks. Organisations such as the IPLO have no place in a democratic society such as ours.

Fair Employment

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Londonderry, East of 20 March he will state whether the Fair Employment Commission has indicated that it will be bound by the agreement reached with the Fair Employment Agency.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 23 March 1990]:* The code of practice was agreed with the former Fair Employment Agency. The question of the agency or the new commission being bound by the code of practice does not arise.

The code of practice and the questionnaire used to collect the "religious affiliation" of Northern Ireland civil service staff gave an assurance to staff that such information would be treated confidentially. The code of practice states that the information will be used solely for the purposes of monitoring the policy on equal opportunities and on no account will statistical summaries be produced for any other purpose.

Exceptionally, the code of practice does provide for the release of information to the Fair Employment Commission in the discharge of its statutory responsibilities. Section 19 of the Fair Employment (NI) Act 1989 places regulations on the commission regarding the confidentiality of such information.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland further to his answer to the hon. Member for Londonderry, East of 8 February, *Official Report*, column *745*, how many *(a)* Protestants and *(b)* Roman Catholics in each grade and section listed in that answer, the Fair Employment Commission must employ to comply with present requirements; and what percentage balance it is seeking to reach those targets.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 20 March 1990]:* The Fair Employment Acts 1976 and 1989 make preferential treatment of individuals of one religious belief or political opinion unlawful but affirmative action measures to encourage members of an under-represented group, including goals and timetables, are lawful. The commission has a target for its workforce and at a press conference in February 1989, the chairman of the then Fair Employment Agency said that the agency advertisements would specify that it is particularly interested in receiving applications from Protestants. He also said that for its support staff, the agency should have a target of 25 to 30 per cent. Catholic and 70 to 75 per cent. Protestant and that this was already being achieved. For operations staff the target was to achieve a Protestant share of applicants for each vacancy advertised of 50 to 55 per cent. and a target for the group as a whole of 50 to 55 per cent. Protestant and 45 to 50 per cent. Roman Catholic. The commission intends to publish information on the composition of its staff and the applicant flow when it has reached it full staffing complement later this year.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information the Fair Employment Commission has on religious affiliations of its present staff.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 20 March 1990]:* The commission is monitoring the community background of its applicants and staff in accordance with the provisions of the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989. The commission intends to publish information on the composition of its staff and the applicant flow when it has reached its full staffing complement.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects the Fair Employment Commission to reach its final staffing complement; and which posts at present remain unfilled.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 20 March 1990]:* The commission hopes to reach its full staffing complement by autumn 1990. At present, posts are unfilled in the following Northern Ireland civil service equivalent grades: one grade 6, two deputy principals (one of which is a research post), one staff officer (complaints), one administrative assistant and the chairman's personal secretary.

Salmon

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many salmon and grilse were caught in River Bush in each of the last 10 years; how many were recorded passing upstream at Bushmills each year; how many each year are believed to have spawned naturally and successfully; what is the estimated number of *(a)* parr and *(b)* smolts produced each year; what has been the estimated survival rate of smolts to adults; how far the information acquired corresponds with information gained from other studies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* Following is the information:

Salmon-grilse catches in the River Bush

	Number caught (angling in restricted stretches	*Number passing upstream*	*Estimate number spawning*	*Number of smolts*	*Marine survival smolt to adult percentage*
1980	246	973	783	20,503	12·0
1981	219	925	798	14,537	6·3
1982	224	850	741	10,779	10·4
1983	138	520	480	26,968	8·6
1984	87	[1]	[1]	30,009	[1]
1985	433	1,765	1,501	30,514	7·9
1986	519	2,584	2,271	19,066	9·8
1987	406	2,209	1,952	22,156	11·7

	Number caught (angling in restricted stretches	*Number passing upstream*	*Estimate number spawning*	*Number of smolts*	*Marine survival smolt to adult percentage*
1988	474	2,783	2,442	22,994	12·5
1989	140	733	579	17,812	4·3

[1] No data due to breakdown of electric barrier.

The River Bush experiment is highly regarded internationally and the data produced are regularly integrated with those from other studies, through the ICES salmon working group on which DANI scientists are represented. This is a continuing process and current comparisons are not yet available.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has as to the total catch of salmon at sea which are bound for *(a)* the Foyle river system including the Roe and the Faughan, *(b)* the River Bann system, *(c)* the River Bush and *(d)* other salmon rivers in Northern Ireland; and what percentage of the total run this represented in each of the last five years, or as much of such information as is available to him.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* Following is the information:

(a) None.

(b) None.

(c) For River Bush wild salmon stock information is only available for the last three years as follows:

Year	*Estimated sea catch of salmon bound for the River Bush*	*Relevant percentage of total run*
1987	4,804	68·5
1988	5,237	65·3
1989	5,931	89·0

(d) None.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has on the age at which salmon smolts in the River Bush migrate to the sea; how long they normally spend there; what percentage of an annual cohort returns are *(a)* one sea winter, *(b)* two sea winter, *(c)* three sea winter and *(d)* four sea winter fish; and what percentage of the annual salmon run over the last five years has returned in each month of the year.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* In the last 10 years 25·1 per cent. of River Bush smolts have migrated to sea at one-plus years of age, 73·8 per cent. at two-plus years of age and 1·1 per cent. at three-plus years of age.

The percentage of annual returns of various sea ages is as follows (average of last 10 years):

(a) 1 sea winter : 87·8 per cent.
(b) 2 sea winter : 12·2 per cent.
(c) 3 sea winter : 0
(d) 4 sea winter : 0

Mean Percentage Monthly Returns 1985-89

Month	*Percentage of Run*
January	0·007
February	0·020
March	0·280
April	0·587
May	1·283
June	3·944
July	26·215
August	25·655
September	14·656
October	15·079
November	2·402
December	1·276

The three places of decimals indicate activity throughout the year rather than precision.

Fisheries Research

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many permanent staff, and of what grades, have left employment at the fisheries research laboratory at Coleraine in each of the last three financial years and the current year; which of these posts have been filled with *(a)* permanent appointments and *(b)* temporary staff; how many of the temporary staff (i) were and are presently employed for periods of less than one year and (ii) were and are as well qualified as the permanent staff they replaced; and what training programme is employed for such temporary staff.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Grade of staff leaving*[1]	*Replacement action*
1986-87	Principal scientific officer	Post filled by permanent appointment
	Laboratory attendant	None, the post was dropped fom complement
1987-88	None	
1988-89	None	
1989-90	Higher scientific officer	Post to be advertised for permanent appointment

Year	*Grade of staff leaving*[1]	*Replacement action*
	Assistant scientific officer	Post initially filled by temporary staff pending the transfer of a permanent assistant scientific officer from within DANI on 5 March 1990
	Laboratory attendant	Post filled to date by temporary staff

[1] Includes resignation, retirement, promotion, transfer and career breaks.

In each case the temporary staff were appointed for periods of less than one year. The temporary assistant scientific officers appointed in 1989-90 were at least as well qualified as the previous permanent postholder. There are no formal qualifications required for laboratory attendant appointments. Appropriate on-the-job training was provided for temporary staff to allow them to carry out the duties required.

Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the latest figures for the number of staff presently employed, and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts in the press and public relations office of his Department; and what is the proposed complement for 1990-91.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 12 March 1990]:* At present, 54 staff are employed in the Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments. The full complement, including vacant posts is 59. The proposed complement for 1990-91 is 61.

HEALTH

Infertility

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the prevalence of infertility in England.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally. The White Paper "Human Fertilisation and Embryology: A Framework for Legislation" (Cm. 259) published in November 1987 indicated that about one in 10 couples are thought to be infertile and a greater number are estimated to seek specialist help at some stage.

AIM Programme

Dr. Bray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he is supporting the extension of the European Commission AIM programme for health care.

Mr. Freeman: We strongly support the continuation of the advanced informatics in medicine (AIM) programme. The Department has been pressing for an adequate budget through the relevant official committees, and I have written in support to Vice-President Pandolfi, the Commissioner responsible. United Kingdom organisations have made the largest contribution of any EC member state to the present stage of the programme, and we wish to see this continue.

Care Funds

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to issue guidelines on the assessment of individual needs by social services departments under the care funds system.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We expect to issue guidance in the autumn after wide consultations in the summer.

Medical Research Ethics

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he intends to introduce a legally binding code of medical research ethics as proposed by a committee of Ministers in the Council of Europe.

Mr. Freeman: No. The recommendation accepted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 6 February 1990 was that member states should either adopt legislation or take any other measures to ensure the implementation of a series of principles concerning medical research on human beings. The Department of Health will shortly be issuing updated and expanded guidance on the supervision of research on human beings. This guidance may be further revised in the light of experience.

Drug Trials

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will require all authorities running drug trials to offer no-fault compensation to all participating healthy volunteers.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Guidance to health authorities, which will be issued shortly, emphasises that those volunteering to participate in research studies should be made aware of what the arrangements are for obtaining compensation in the event of an injury arising from the research. It is then a matter for the individual concerned to decide whether or not the arrangements are acceptable.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will place a statutory limit on the number of drug trial studies a healthy volunteer can participate in per year;

(2) if there is any monitoring of the number of drug trials each volunteer student participates in over time;

(3) what safeguards there are to prevent students from taking part in more than one drug trial simultaneously;

(4) if there is any evidence of volunteers taking part in more than one drug trial simultaneously.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No information is held centrally about individuals who choose to volunteer to participate in medical research projects. There are no plans to introduce limits on the number of times a person can volunteer.

The Department recommends that a declaration about the state of health and any current medication should be obtained from healthy volunteers. They should also be asked to give their permission for notice to be sent, when necessary, to their general practitioner. Refusal to permit such communication should lead to rejection as a participant.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines have been issued to regional health authorities in assessing the business plans of National Health Service opt-out trusts and in particular on whether such trusts will be expected to shoulder their share of health authorities' deficits in the form of loans or other short-term finance from regional health authorities.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Subject to the passage of the necessary legislation. It will be for my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State to assess applications including business plans submitted by applicants for NHS trust status—on an individual basis in the light of local circumstances.

Private Homes (Fees)

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that where a person moves from a National Health Service hospital to a private nursing home or private elderly persons home, it will be made clear to her or him, in writing, before the transfer, whether the district health authority will pay the fees under a contractual arrangement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Circular HC(89)5 which was issued to health authorities in February 1989, together with a booklet "Discharge of Patients from Hospital"—copies are available in the Library—emphasised that proper arrangements should be made for any necessary continuing care before patients are discharged from hospital. Arrangements, including care in a private residential or nursing home, should be made in good time and be acceptable to the patient and, where appropriate, the patient's relatives or carers. Where a person moves from hospital to a private nursing home, it should be made quite clear to him or her in writing before the transfer whether or not the health authority will pay the fees, under a contractual arrangement.

Charges

Ms. Jo Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a table showing prescription, dental and optical charges in April 1979 and April 1990 in current and constant prices showing both the cash and real increase for each charge.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The table sets out the latest available information in relation to prescription and dental charges. No comparable figures for optical charges are available because the supply of NHS spectacles ceased in July 1986. Information relates to financial years.

	£
Prescription charges	
1979-80	0·20
[1]1990-91	3·05
[2]1990-91	1·43
Average dental charge	
1979-80	6·83
[1]1988-89	19·84
[2]1988-89	10·54

[1] Current prices.

[2] 1979-80 prices.

In 1979 a total of 185 million NHS prescription items were dispensed without charge. In 1988, the latest year for which figures are available, 269 million items were dispensed free.

Wakefield DHA

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will call for a report from the chairman of Wakefield district health authority on the full cost of *(a)* the out-of-court settlement to be paid to Mr. Ray Corner, the authority's former district finance officer, *(b)* the legal fees incurred by Mr. Corner which are to be met by the authority, and *(c)* the authority's own legal fees in its defence against the action; and under which budget heading the payments will be made;

(2) if he will direct Yorkshire health authority to conduct an inquiry into the circumstances leading up to the dismissal of Mr. Ray Corner as district finance officer of Wakefield district health authority and to publish the report of the inquiry.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This is a local management issue; the hon. Member may wish to contact the chairman of Wakefield district health authority, Mr. Brian Hayward for further information.

Guy's Hospital (Psychiatric Team)

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to reach a decision on the request that his Department's funding of the psychiatric team for single homeless people, attached to Guy's hospital, London, be extended for a further year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman The funding of the team is secure until the end of May. We are considering the possibility of extending support thereafter and expect to be in a position to reach a decision soon.

Beverley Lewis

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what action he intends to take as a result of the reports he has received from the Gloucester health authority and Gloucestershire social services department into the death of Beverley Lewis;

(2) when he expects to receive the coroner's report on Beverley Lewis's death.

Mr. Freeman: We have now received reports from the health and social services authorities concerned and the conclusions and verdict of the coroner, and are considering them before deciding whether any further action is warranted.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration is being given into the need for additional legislation following the death of Beverley Lewis; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The Government have recently received the coroner's report as well as reports from both the health and local authorities and are examining what, if any, changes are needed to existing legislation or policy.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on the need for a public inquiry into the death of Beverley Lewis.

Mr. Freeman: We have received a number of letters from Members and members of the public.

Hearing Aids

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many manufacturers of hearing aids have approval to market their hearing aids in the United Kingdom; and what criteria governs their approval.

Mr. Freeman: No formal approval is necessary in the United Kingdom for manufacturers to market their hearing aids to their dispensers.

The retailing of hearing aids to the private user is governed by the Hearing Aid Council Act which is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

The Department runs an NHS product approval scheme for hearing aids purchased on central contract by Mersey regional health authority to meet large-scale demand throughout the NHS. Currently eight models are approved under that scheme and have to meet the requirements of specifications drawn up by the Department in consultation with professional NHS staff. The detailed requirements run to several pages but the main factors are the levels of maximum gain and maximum output, and the frequency response.

A further 300 to 500 other models of hearing aid are also being marketed in this country at present.

Agency Nurses, Clerical and Administrative Staff

Mr. Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the amount spent on *(a)* agency nurses and *(b)* agency clerical and administrative staff for the latest available year for each district health authority, special health authority and regional health authority and England as a whole.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information derived from annual accounts submitted to the Department for 1988-89 (the latest available) is shown in the table which has been placed in the Library.

As a result of various initiatives achieved or pending such as nurse clinical grading and local pay flexibility for administrative and clerical and other staff groups the total expenditure incurred on agency staff should reduce in the future.

As shown in the table the expenditure is incurred predominately in the Thames regions which together with the special health authorities for the London postgraduate treaching hospitals accounted for some 85 per cent. and 77 per cent. of the England totals for nursing and administrative and clerical staff respectively.

Mental Incapacity

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the Law Commission's review of mental incapacity to be complete.

The Attorney-General: I have been asked to reply. The Law Commission hopes to be able to publish a discussion paper on mentally incapacitated adults later this year.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 30 March 1990

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Drink-Driving

Mr. Alton: To ask the Attorney-General what steps he takes to ensure that the Crown prosecution service determines the correct charges to be brought in cases of drink-driving.

The Attorney-General: Prosecution decisions are taken after careful consideration of the police report and evidence submitted to the Crown prosecution service by the relevant police force. The criteria for such decisions are set out in the code for Crown prosecutors promulgated by the Director of Public Prosecutions in accordance with section 10 of the Prosecution of Offences Act 1985. Subject to the requirement that certain categories of case must be submitted to the Crown prosecution service headquarters for consideration, it is the responsibility of the chief Crown prosecutor to establish arrangements within his area to ensure that decisions in particular cases are taken at a level of seniority commensurate with the gravity and difficulty of the particular case.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Organic Farming

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many inquiries about organic agriculture his Department has received in the last 12 months.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Over the past year the Department of Agriculture dealt with inquiries and requests for advice on organic agriculture from approximately 40 farmers and growers. We do much to promote more natural food and farming.

Rural Regeneration

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what work has been undertaken by the inter-departmental committee on rural regeneration which was established by the Department of Agriculture in December 1989; and when the committee's findings will be publicised.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The inter-departmental committee on rural development has been in operation since January 1990. It continues to work to its general remit of preparing advice for Ministers on how best to carry forward action to tackle the social and economic problems in the most deprived rural areas.

Discussions have taken place with district councils, the rural action project and the promoters of rural development projects. Following a recommendation from the committee it was agreed to fund the rural action project for a further year to 31 March 1991.

The work of the committee is to provide advice to Ministers on the effective delivery of policies and programmes. Decisions following from the committee's recommendations will be announced.

Extradition

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many applications relating to terrorist offences have been made for extradition from the Irish Republic to Britain *(a)* between 1972 and 14 November 1985 and *(b)* since 15 November 1985; how many have been refused; how many have been granted; and for how long any outstanding cases have been under consideration.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 23 March 1990]:* I have been asked to reply.

In the period covered by the question, so far as England and Wales are concerned, the centrally available information on extradition requests made to the Republic of Ireland, in cases believed to have been related to terrorist offences, is as follows:

1986 One application made and refused;
1988 Two applications made: one refused and one outstanding as the person cannot be traced;
1989 One application made and granted, but now subject to appeal.

I understand from my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland that although information about requests made to the Republic of Ireland was not centrally recorded prior to 1987, two such applications are know to have been made in the period from 1972 to the present:

1973 One application made and refused;
1984 One application made and outstanding because of the failure of the person to appear at an appeal hearing. He remains at large.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Student Grants

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many students in each local education authority area received the full mandatory grant for undergraduates in the last year for which figures are available; and what percentage they formed of all recipients of mandatory awards.

Mr. Jackson: The data requested are listed in the table.

England and Wales 1987-88

Local education authority	*All mandatory award holders*[1]	*Mandatory award-holders in receipt of a full maintenance grant*[1]	*Percentage in receipt of a full maintenance grant*
Barking	307	168	55
Barnet	3,819	1,185	31
Bexley	1,253	362	29

Local education authority	*All mandatory award holders*[1]	*Mandatory award-holders in receipt of a full maintenance grant*[1]	*Percentage in receipt of a full maintenance grant*
Brent	2,626	1,447	55
Bromley	2,951	686	23
Croydon	2,943	1,072	36
Ealing	2,466	967	39
Enfield	2,118	691	33
Haringey	1,791	1,113	62
Harrow	2,433	791	33
Havering	1,131	346	31
Hillingdon	1,507	449	30
Hounslow	1,580	568	36
Kingston-upon-Thames	1,355	419	31
Merton	1,568	496	32
Newham	1,081	754	70
Redbridge	1,803	707	39
Richmond-upon-Thames	1,963	473	24
Sutton	1,358	384	28
Waltham Forest	1,085	648	60
ILEA	16,875	9,047	54
Birmingham	6,959	4,698	68
Coventry	2,443	1,227	50
Dudley	1,894	775	41
Sandwell	1,258	693	55
Solihull	2,114	468	22
Walsall	1,742	780	45
Wolverhampton	1,859	927	50
Knowsley	774	442	57
Liverpool	3,454	2,137	62
St. Helens	1,397	532	38
Sefton	3,363	1,315	39
Wirral	3,510	1,385	39
Bolton	2,224	975	44
Bury	1,737	708	41
Manchester	2,776	1,942	70
Oldham	1,401	623	44
Rochdale	1,352	568	42
Salford	1,150	554	48
Stockport	3,248	952	29
Tameside	1,152	510	44
Trafford	2,633	876	33
Wigan	2,097	872	42
Barnsley	1,221	586	48
Doncaster	1,823	841	46
Rotherham	1,616	730	45
Sheffield	3,559	1,578	44
Bradford	2,894	1,724	60
Calderdale	1,310	522	40
Kirklees	2,809	1,160	41
Leeds	4,561	1,880	38
Wakefield	1,801	690	39
Gateshead	1,109	511	46
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	2,010	847	42
North Tyneside	1,437	557	39
South Tyneside	964	482	50
Sunderland	1,677	849	51
Isles of Scilly	27	13	48
Avon	7,643	2,898	38
Bedfordshire	3,831	1,200	31
Berkshire	6,913	1,853	27
Buckinghamshire	6,630	1,532	23
Cambridgeshire	5,074	1,620	32
Cheshire	9,772	3,117	32
Cleveland	4,209	1,592	38
Cornwall	3,396	1,723	51
Cumbria	3,470	1,449	42
Derbyshire	6,201	2,048	33
Devon	7,412	3,153	43
Dorset	4,456	1,757	39
Durham	3,741	1,402	37
East Sussex	5,106	2,168	42
Essex	9,874	3,292	33
Gloucestershire	4,617	1,623	35

Local education authority	*All mandatory award holders*[1]	*Mandatory award-holders in receipt of a full maintenance grant*[1]	*Percentage in receipt of a full maintenance grant*
Hampshire	12,061	4,097	34
Hereford and Worcester	5,088	1,916	38
Hertfordshire	9,763	2,520	26
Humberside	5,623	2,201	39
Isle of Wight	807	371	46
Kent	11,309	3,762	33
Lancashire	12,430	5,472	44
Leicestershire	7,099	2,782	39
Lincolnshire	4,246	1,633	38
Norfolk	4,089	1,516	37
North Yorkshire	7,288	2,276	31
Northamptonshire	3,364	1,315	39
Northumberland	2,390	707	30
Nottinghamshire	6,247	2,318	37
Oxfordshire	5,291	1,332	25
Shropshire	3,297	1,340	41
Somerset	3,417	1,276	37
Staffordshire	7,443	2,951	40
Suffolk	3,849	1,344	35
Surrey	11,794	2,450	21
Warwickshire	6,736	1,690	25
West Sussex	5,561	1,675	30
Wiltshire	4,019	1,391	35
Clwyd	3,406	1,433	42
Dyfed	3,246	1,603	49
Gwent	3,551	1,449	41
Gwynedd	2,757	1,370	50
Mid-Glamorgan	3,434	1,331	39
Powys	988	430	44
South Glamorgan	3,957	1,659	42
West Glamorgan	3,219	1,239	38
ENGLAND AND WALES	393,882	150,978	38

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[1] Excluding award-holders on postgraduate courses.

School Building

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on his proposals to ensure that all schools comply with the school building regulations due to come into force in April.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The current standards for school premises are set out in the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981. No changes to these regulations are due to come into effect in April. Responsibility for meeting the requirements of the school premises regulations rests with the local education authorities and governing bodies.

Non-teaching Time

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to provide non-teaching time for teachers in *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools to enable them to implement (i) the teaching, testing and assessment provisions of the national curriculum and (ii) the proposals of the Elton report on discipline in schools.

Mrs. Rumbold: The use of teachers' directed time, and in particular its division between teaching and non-teaching duties, is a matter for head teachers to decide.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what policy considerations determined his decision to accept the recommendations of the IAC on teachers' pay and conditions report in respect of the awards to main scale teachers on scale points 1, 6, 7, 8 and 9.

Mrs. Rumbold: The IAC has produced an outstanding report, which sets out the thinking underlying its recommendations. My right hon. Friend has welcomed the report and proposes to accept its recommendations in full.

Workers Educational Association

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what allocations will be made to local education authorities to support the activities of the Workers Educational Association under the education support grant programme for 1990-91; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: My Department is today writing to local education authorities in England to inform them of the level of expenditure which I have approved for the WEA activity in the education support grants (ESG) programme for 1990-91. The information is shown in the table.

A total of 102 authorities have submitted bids for this ESG, out of a total of 107 that were invited to do so. This is a most encouraging result, which demonstrates the support of the local education authorities for the Workers Educational Association. It confirms the willingness of statutory and voluntary providers to work in partnership to assist the better overall planning of adult education locally.

Local education authorities	*Expenditure (£)*
Barking	690
Barnet	9,445
Bexley	6,920
Brent	1,125
Bromley	6,920
Croydon	1,210
Ealing	1,820
Enfield	1,905
Haringey	695
Harrow	7,555
Havering	810
Hillingdon	3,645
Hounslow	1,125
Kingston upon Thames	1,905
Merton	1,210
Newham	1,125
Redbridge	2,020
Richmond upon Thames	3,035
Sutton	1,125
Waltham Forest	605
Camden	17,810
Greenwich	430
Hackney	1,735
Hammersmith and Fulham	430
Islington	430
Lambeth	650
Lewisham	430
Southwark	1,515
Tower Hamlets	865
Birmingham	9,415
Coventry	15,695
Dudley	3,135
Sandwell	3,135
Walsall	6,280
Wolverhampton	5,480
Knowsley	3,255
Liverpool	29,340
St. Helens	3,255
Sefton	4,070
Wirral	7,330
Bolton	9,375
Bury	1,485
Manchester	12,550
Oldham	3,720
Rochdale	3,500
Salford	3,060
Stockport	7,470
Tameside	3,000
Trafford	9,625
Wigan	2,922
Barnsley	4,450
Doncaster	3,505
Rotherham	9,680
Sheffield	18,455
Bradford	6,505
Calderdale	2,395
Kirklees	3,990
Leeds	16,500
Wakefield	4,070
Gateshead	3,290
Newcastle upon Tyne	9,870
North Tyneside	3,375
South Tyneside	2,665
Sunderland	10,615
Avon	24,345
Bedfordshire	5,305
Berkshire	20,025
Buckinghamshire	21,455
Cambridgeshire	11,375
Cheshire	23,405
Cleveland	11,630
Cornwall	17,355
Cumbria	23,925
Derbyshire	27,753
Devon	40,500
Dorset	12,340
Durham	16,445
East Sussex	10,835
Essex	26,980
Gloucestershire	11,830
Hampshire	31,000
Hereford and Worcester	12,555
Hertfordshire	16,760
Humberside	18,125
Isle of Wight	1,075
Kent	24,500
Lancashire	21,320
Leicestershire	19,840
Lincolnshire	18,845
Norfolk	10,615
North Yorkshire	27,580
Northamptonshire	6,065
Northumberland	6,545
Nottinghamshire	40,215
Oxfordshire	30,040
Somerset	7,610
Staffordshire	13,340
Suffolk	12,890
Surrey	6,340
Warwickshire	5,180
West Sussex	18,665
Wiltshire	19,720

DEFENCE

Radar Base, Brawdy

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to make any financial contribution to the proposed building of a radar base at Brawdy for the United States navy.

Mr. Alan Clark: A decision in principle has been taken to embark, in collaboration with the United States, on a two-year joint trial of a United States navy over the horizon radar (OTHR) in the United Kingdom. This equipment is a high-frequency radar which uses the ionosphere to refract beyond the normal radar horizon. It can therefore supplement the coverage obtained by conventional microwave radars and enhance the effectiveness of airborne early warning and air defence resources.

The trial is planned to start in 1993, and the information obtained from it will be fully shared between ourselves and the United States. The United States Government will supply the radar; the United Kingdom Government will provide and prepare the operational sites; and the running costs of the trial will be shared. Once the results of the trial have been fully assessed, further consideration will be given whether to retain the OTHR as a permanent operational facility.

To be effective, the system needs separate transmitter and receiver sites. After extensive studies and assessment of possible locations, we have concluded that the most suitable site for the transmitter is St. David's airfield, Pembrokeshire, and that that for the receiver is Blakehill radio station, near Cricklade, Wiltshire. Both sites are MOD owned. We will shortly be submitting formal notices of proposed development to the appropriate planning authorities in accordance with normal planning procedures. These will be supported by full environmental impact assessments. No construction work will be carried out at either site before the necessary approvals have been obtained.

When installing the transmitter, we will ensure that there is no danger of any radio frequency or other environmental hazard to any member of the public outside the MOD boundary of the site. The receiver site will present no environmental hazard.

War Widows

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the financing of the special payments to be made to pre-1973 war widows.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced on 11 December 1989 at columns 677-78, the special payments to pre-1973 war widows will be paid from the beginning of the financial year 1990-91 by the Department of Social Security on behalf of the Ministry of Defence. The necessary provision is being sought in the 1990-91 main estimate for class I vote 3. Pending parliamentary approval of that estimate, urgent expenditure estimated at £55 million will be met by repayable advances from the Contingencies Fund.

Greenham Common

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received concerning the future of RAF Greenham Common.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave at column *615* of *Hansard*, dated 6 March.

Chemical and Biological Weapons

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what evidence his Department has that the Soviet Union is reducing its capacity to produce chemical and biological weapons.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Soviet Union declared in 1987 that it had ceased production of chemical weapons. We are, however, not aware of any change in Soviet capacity to produce them since then. The Soviet Union is a signatory of the 1972 biological warfare convention and has stated it is in compliance with its obligations. Any production of biological weapons would be in breach of the convention.

US Defence Secretary

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next plans to meet the United States of America Defence Secretary; and what he expects to discuss.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Wallace) on 6 February 1990 at column *597*.

Mallet Blow Exercises

Mr. Jack Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list for the years 1975 to 1989 *(a)* the number of Mallet Blow exercises, *(b)* the number of missions in each exercise, *(c)* the types of aircraft involved in each and *(d)* the accidents involving low flying in each exercise.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Exercise Mallet Blow was not introduced until 1980. Records of exercises since that date have not been retained in their entirety. I am able, however, to supply the following details of Mallet Blow exercises since 1984:

Exercise	*Missions flown*	*Offensive aircraft types*[1]
Mallet Blow 84/1	66	A-10, Harrier, Jaguar, Tornado, F-111
Mallet Blow 84/2	42	A-10, Jaguar, Harrier, Tornado, F-111
Mallet Blow 84/3	139	A-10, F-111, Draken, Tornado, Jaguar, Harrier
Mallet Blow 84/4	83	Draken, Tornado, A-10, F-111, Harrier, Jaguar
Mallet Blow 85/1	77	Harrier, Tornado, Jaguar, F16, A-10, F-111, Dracken, Buccaneer
Mallet Blow 85/2	88	Jaguar, Tornado, Harrier, F-16, Draken, RF-4, F-111
Mallet Blow 85/3	73	Tornado, Jaguar, Draken, F-111, Harrier, A-10
Mallet Blow 86/1	42	Harrier, Tornado, Jaguar, Draken, F-111
Mallet Blow 86/2	123	Tornado, Harrier, Jaguar, F-16, F-111, Buccaneer
Mallet Blow 86/3	63	Jaguar, Harrier, Tornado, Draken, F-5, F-16, F-111, Mirage, F-18
Mallet Blow 86/4	85	Tornado, Jaguar, Harrier
Mallet Blow 87/1	60	Tornado, Harrier, Jaguar, Draken, F-111
Mallet Blow 87/2	133	Tornado, Jaguar, Harrier, F-16, F-111
Mallet Blow 87/3	12	Harrier, F-111, Tornado, Jaguar
Mallet Blow 88/1	86	Tornado, Harrier, Jaguar, Draken, F-111
Mallet Blow 88/2	100	Tornado, Harrier, Jaguar, F-111
Mallet Blow 89/1	74	Tornado, Jaguar, Harrier, Draken, A-10
Mallet Blow 89/2	193	Tornado, Jaguar, Harrier, F-111, F-16, F-18

[1] A number of other support aircraft (tankers, air defence fighters and airborne early-warning aircraft) participate in Mallet Blow exercises but these do not take part in low-level flying in the Otterburn area.

There have been two major accidents to low-flying aircraft involved in Mallet Blow exercises: a German air force Tornado aircraft crashed during Mallet Blow 86/4, and two RAF Harrier aircraft collided in mid-air during Mallet Blow 87/3.

Mr. Jack Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the bases where aircraft involved in the Mallet Blow exercise from 26 to 31 March will fly from.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Aircraft participating in Exercise Mallet Blow 90/1 from 26 to 30 March 1990 will fly from the following bases:

RAF Brize Norton
RAF Coltishall
RAF Coningsby
RAF Cottesmore
RAF Honington
RAF Leeming
RAF Leuchars
RAF Linton-on-Ouse
RAF Marham
RAF Waddington
RAF Wattisham
RAF Wittering
A & AEE Boscombe Down
RAF Alconbury
RAF Bentwaters
RAF Lakenheath
RAF Upper Heyford
RAF Bruggen
RAF Laarbruch

RAF Gutersloh
GAF Büchel
GAF Bremgarten
GAF Leck
GAF Norvenich
NAEWF Geilenkirchen

Mr. Jack Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated cost of the Mallet Blow exercise from 26 to 31 March.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The full costs of individual exercises are not kept centrally and their calculation would involve disproportionate cost and effort.

Service Accommodation

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money has been spent in each year since 1979 on improving grade 4 service accommodation.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Figures for works expenditure are not kept in the format requested and could not be provided without incurring disproportionate expense.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much money has been spent in each year since 1979 on the improvement of service accommodation.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Department places a high priority on the improvement of service accommodation and consequently expenditure on improving this type of accommodation has increased substantially over the past two or three years. Figures for works expenditure are not, however, kept in the format requested and could not be obtained without incurring disproportionate expense.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans exist for bringing grade 4 service accommodation up to standard with civilian housing.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Service accommodation is graded according to amenity, locational and environmental factors as well as physical condition and facilities, so that the grading of properties has only an indirect bearing on whether they require modernisation. It is not clear on what basis the standard of a property such as a barracks could be compared with that for civilian housing. However, all three services have extensive rolling modernisation programmes for married quarters and single living accommodation, regardless of grading. They plan to complete the modernisation of the former within 10 to 15 years. Single living accommodation will take longer.

Chieftain Tank

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the industrial implications of a reduction in the planned order for the replacement of the Chieftain tank.

Mr. Alan Clark: No decision has yet been made on tank numbers.

Fire Standard

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what criteria govern the application of the Government fire standards code to the major refurbishment of Ministry of Defence storage facilities;

(2) what is the status of the Government fire standards code;

(3) what regulations govern the liaison between the various military fire services and local civilian fire services in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* abroad;

(4) what was the annual amount of expenditure on improving fire safety standards in Ministry of Defence storage depots for each year since 1979;

(5) whether the Government fire standards code applies to Ministry of Defence storage facilities in other countries.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave him on Wednesday 28 March 1990.

Community Charge

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the total amount of expenditure spent to date on reimbursing service personnel in Scotland in compensation for community charges that are above the average.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The estimated total expenditure for 1989-90 is £146,426.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average service community charge in Scotland, as calculated for the purposes of reimbursement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is £291 for 1989-90.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the estimated average service community charge in England and Wales, as calculated for the purposes of reimbursement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: For the purposes of accommodation charge refunds after 1 April 1990, the average service community charge for England, Scotland and Wales will be used. The actual figure will be available shortly. My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the percentage of service personnel in Scotland who are liable for community charges *(a)* below and *(b)* above the average, as calculated for the purposes of reimbursement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Some 35 per cent. of personnel in service accommodation in Scotland in 1989-90 are paying community charge below the service average, and 65 per cent. are paying above the average. I have no information on the community charge liability of service personnel living in their own homes, who are not eligible for accommodation charge refunds.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the percentage of service personnel in Scotland who will be responsible for community charges above the average, as calculated for the purposes of reimbursement, but are not eligible for reimbursement of accommodation charges.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Some 50 per cent. of those in service accommodation, in 1989-90, fall into this category.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the percentage of service personnel in Scotland who will be responsible for community charges above the average, as calculated for the purposes of reimbursement, and will be eligible for reimbursement of accommodation charges.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Some 15 per cent. of those in service accommodation, in 1989-90, fall into this category.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy in respect of the timing for starting negotiations for the reduction of nuclear systems, relative to implementation of any reductions under CFE; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Our policy remains as set out in the comprehensive concept adoped by NATO Heads of State and Government at their summit in May 1989.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy in respect of the timing of a decision on the modernisation of short-range nuclear weapons, relative to the West German election; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A decision on a replacement system for our WE177 free-fall bomb is not expected before the latter part of this year. With regard to the following on to Lance system, the agreed position remains that NATO will not take a decision before 1992.

Service Spouses and Children

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps the Ministry of Defence has taken to improve employment opportunities for the spouses and older children of service personnel stationed in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* Germany and *(c)* Cyprus.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the hon. Member.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Banks (Foreign Debts)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to have a precise figure for loss of mainstream corporation tax receipts from banks due to provisions on doubtful foreign debts incurred in Third world lending for the year 1985-86.

Mr. Lilley: The precise amount will be determined only when all banks with sovereign debt have agreed their tax assessments for the appropriate accounting period with their tax inspector. It is not possible to forecast with certainty when this will be. In any event, it would involve disproportionate expense to collect centrally information about all the adjustments which will be made by every bank, so the information collected centrally will remain an estimate with some degree of imprecision.

Professional Bodies (Membership)

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has any plans to allow unemployed professional people to claim tax relief on their membership of professional bodies as if they were employed.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 23 March 1990]:* The general position is that, under section 201 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988, an employee may have tax relief for annual subscriptions to a professional body if the subscription is paid out of the employee's pay, it is paid to a body approved by the Inland Revenue under section 201(3) of the 1988 Act and the activities of the body are relevant to the duties of the employment. A professional subscription paid during a period of unemployment would not normally satisfy the conditions for relief, but where a subscription is paid during a period of unemployment and the individual was employed during the same tax year (in a job to which membership of the professional body was relevant) tax relief would usually be given against the income from that employment. We have no plans for changing the rules of this tax relief.

Civil Service Medical Centre

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service how many persons made use of the civil service medical centre for vaccinations and inoculations in 1989; and what records are kept of such treatment of individuals.

Mr. Luce *[holding answer 27 March 1990]:* In 1989, about 4,000 persons received 10,929 vaccinations and/or inoculations at the central London clinic of the civil service occupational health service. The occupational health service maintains records of these items for administrative purposes. Each individual is supplied with a personal record of the procedure undertaken.

TRANSPORT

Complaints

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish in the *Official Report* for each of the last 10 years *(a)* the number of complaints made against his Department to the Parliamentary Commission for Administration, *(b)* the number of complaints upheld and *(c)* the action he took on *(b)*.

Mr. Atkins: The number of complaints *(a)* made and *(b)* upheld for the past 10 years is as follows:

	(a) complaints made	*(b) complaints upheld*
1989	[1]—	[1]—
1988	26	4
1987	24	1
1986	23	1
1985	17	nil
1984	34	4
1983	28	2
1982	23	4
1981	33	5
1980	33	2

[1] Figures not yet available.

When the PCA upholds a complaint it is departmental practice to provide an appropriate remedy.

Company Cars

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received from Friends of the Earth concerning the use of, and costs allowed to taxpayers through the use of, company cars.

Mr. Atkins: A number of branches of Friends of the Earth raised the issue of company cars in their responses to "Traffic in London" and the London assessment studies.

Light Rail Development

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what considerations the Department has given to the development of light rail in London.

Mr. Portillo: The docklands light railway opened in 1987 and is being extended to Bank and through the royal docks to Beckton. London Regional Transport is developing a case for a southern extension to Greenwich and Lewisham. In 1986 London Regional Transport and British Rail jointly published a report "Light Rail for London", which identified other possibilities. As a result, London Regional Transport and British Rail, together with the London borough of Croydon, are undertaking a detailed feasibility study of a light rail system in the Croydon area. The Government will consider carefully the financial and economic case for such schemes and their priorities, when they are brought forward.

A427, Theddingworth

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will now designate the A427 at Theddingworth, Leicester, as a trunk road.

Mr. Atkins: No. A new trunk road route, the M1-A1 link (A14), now under construction parallel to the A427, will offer a more appropriate route for longer-distance east-west traffic.

Wheel Clamping, Newham

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Newham, North-East of 20 March, *Official Report*, column *506*, if he will authorise wheel clamping in Green street and Katherine road, in Newham.

Mr. Atkins: Following a request by the local highway authority, wheel clamping is authorised by the Secretary of State for Transport, if he is satisfied that it is justified.

Stockport Bypass

Mr. Tom Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his latest estimate of the cost of the A6 (M) Stockport north-south bypass.

Mr. Atkins: A total of £89 million for works and land.

Consultancies

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1989 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1989, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment; and what is the total amount that his Department has budgeted to spend in the current year.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 28 March 1990]:* We estimate that our expenditure in the financial year 1989-90 will be £4·0 million. A list of contracts awarded is in the table. The provisional budget for the financial year 1990-91 is £3·5 million.

Comprehensive records of all contracts with consultancy firms are not held centrally. It would be disproportionately expensive to collect all the information required. The list identifies those management and computing consultancies which began in 1989-90 and are valued at £10,000 or more:

Firm and Subject of Assignment
W. S. Atkins—NIS Lighting Systems
W. S. Atkins—CHART, DEFLEC and CHAPS Programmes
BIS Applied Systems—Projects management feasibility study
S. G. Bisson—GWR enhancements
CACI—NIS Stage 2 Training
Civic Trust—Traffic regeneration
Coopers & Lybrand—Executive Agency (DVL)
Coopers & Lybrand—Management development (DVL)
DDI—Site collection system maintenance
Easams—NIS Database administration
Geografix—NIS Video Survey
Howard Humphreys—NatStr Database administration
IBM—IT Strategy (DVL)
Ian Catlin—Autoguide demonstration
Information Partnership—Review of TRRL Library Services
KPMG—NIS Configuration Management
LOGICA—NIS Video/Computer Interface
Mindworks—Business Analysis Support
Peat Marwick—NaRIS Post-implementation Review
Peat Marwick—Design and implementation of IFCOS Accounting System
Peat Marwick—IFCOS Integration (DTT/DSA)
Price Waterhouse—Management Training
Rendell Palmer Tritton—Bridge Maintenance System-Feasibility Study
Rendell Palmer Tritton—Streetworks Register
Software AG—IT Development (DVL)
Thompson Systems—SUNACCOUNT/IFCOS Interface
Transportation Planning Association—Pavement Parking
Wootton Jeffreys—Maintenance and Enhancement of COBA 9 and QUADRO 2
Wootton Jeffreys—URECA Maintenance and Enhancement
Wyndham Leigh—Sale of Vehicle Registrations Marks.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disabled People

Mr. Gerald Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a further statement on his proposals to extend help with the extra costs of disability to less severely disabled people of working age and below.

Mr. Scott: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) on 5 March at column *525-26*.

Child Benefit

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many young people without a job or YTS place have had child benefit terminated in advance of the cut-off date.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The precise information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, a study of summer school leavers in 1988 indicated that in some 1,200 cases, child benefit was terminated during the extension period (12 September 1988 to 1 January 1989) other than by reason of the child finding work or a YTS place. In 90 per cent. of those cases, the termination was because the child had reached the age of 18, the remainder being for a variety of reasons such as the child going abroad or into care.

National Insurance

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the yield from a 1 per cent. contribution by employed and self-employed persons, respectively, on all earnings above the upper earnings limits for class 1 and class 4 contributions in 1990-91.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: It is estimated that a 1 per cent. contribution on earnings in excess of the upper earnings limit would yield £275 million in class 1 and £70 million in class 4 national insurance contributions.

Social Fund

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to the reply to the hon. Member for Monklands, West, *Official Report,* 26 March, column *31,* on the social fund, how many personnel in his Department are involved in reviews; and where they are located.

Mr. Scott: In 447 local offices, there are social fund officers whose statutory functions include first-tier reviews. In addition, there are 44 social fund inspectors whose sole function is to undertake second-tier reviews. Social fund inspectors are independent of the Department. They are appointed by and accountable to the social fund commissioner, and their office is located in Birmingham.

Students

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many students in each of the last three years received housing and other benefits valued in current prices in excess of *(a)* £310 and *(b)* £420 in (i) England, (ii) Wales, (iii) Scotland and (iv) Northern Ireland.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle) on 16 February at column *893.*

Consultancies

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1989 on management and computer consultancy contracts; excluding hardware and software purchases; if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1989, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment; and what is the total amount that his Department has budgeted to spend in the current year.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 28 March 1990]:* The estimated expenditure on management and computer consultancy contracts in the financial year 1989-90, excluding hardward and software purchases, is £42·1 million. Details of the individual contracts are given in the table.

For the financial year 1990-91, the Department has budgeted to spend £29·3 million.

MANAGEMENT CONSULTANCY ASSIGNMENTS

Consultancy Firm and Subject of the Assignment

Andersen Consulting—Contributions Unit (Agency) Project

Andersen Consulting—Agency Planning for the Information Technology Services Directorate (ITSD)

Andersen Consulting—Director of Social Security's Central Unit

Applied Learning—Establishment of an Open Learning Centre for ITSD

Arthur Allwright Associates—Departmental Purchasing and Supply Directorate (DPSD) Purchasing Consultancy

Arthur Young—Integrated Complementing System

Arthur Young—Efficiency Scrutiny of Fraud: Consultancy Support

BDO Binder Hamlyn—Central Accounting System Study

CAS Marketing Services—DPSD Purchasing Consultancy —Engagement of the new Director

Cavendish Tricorne—Local Pay Addition Hazard

Cavenish Tricorne—Local Pay Addition: Overbearing Model

Cavendish Tricorne—Local Pay Addition Model

CCTA—Departmental Information Systems Strategy: Scoping Study

Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte—Property Consultancy for HQ Relocation

Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte—Benefit Agency Implementation Team: Development of Froject Timetable, Critical Path and Monitoring

Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte—Social Security Agency Study: Future Work

Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte—Senior Management Structure: Organisational Analysis and Design

Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte—Purchasing Information System

Easymove—Provision of Advice on Information Guides for Staff

Enator—Integrated Complementing System

Ernst and Young—Lone Parenthood Consultancy

Ernst and Young—Efficiency Scrutiny of management of the Departmental Debt: consultancy support

Ernst and Young—Integrated Complementing System: Management Support

Handley Walker—Post Office Counters: Fee negotiation

King's Fund College—Director of Social Security's Central Unit

Kinsley Lord—Social Security Policy Group Consultancy

Korn Ferry International—Benefits Agency Chief Executive: Consultancy to Assist Selection

Lloyd Northover—Corporate Image and House Style for DSS Property

Logica UK Ltd.—Integrated Monitoring System

MORI Human Resource Research—Headquarters Relocation Staff Preference Exercise

Modulus—Consultancy Support for the Staff Suggestions Working Party

Mr. D. Chislett—Review of Computer Security

Mr. M. Pickett—Accommodation Policy

Nationwide Anglia Relocation—General Relocation Services for Staff

P-E Inbucon—Survey of Local Authorities (Preparations for Community Charge Benefit)

P. A. Consulting Group—Review of the Management Formula in the Regional Organisation

P. A. Consulting Group—Enhancement of the MMD: BMD Data Base at the Nottingham Staff Resource Unit

P. A. Consulting Group—Pay Flexibilities for the Benefit Agency

P. A. Consulting Group—Review of Central Office Management

Peat Marwick McLintock—Efficiency Scrutiny of Management of the Departmental Debt—consultancy support

Peat Marwick McLintock—Centralised Receipts Collection System

Price Waterhouse—Integrated Complementing System

Price Waterhouse—Forecasting Social Security Expenditure

Price Waterhouse—Financial Planning and Control

Price Waterhouse—Performance Measurements for ITSA and the Contributions Unit

Price Waterhouse—Administrative Resource Management System

Price Waterhouse—Future Career Development for Staff within ITSD/ITSA

Professor Geoffrey Woodroofe DPSD—Purchasing Consultancy (Post Office Counters Fee—Expert Legal Advice)

Sema Group—Integrated Complementing System

Simmons Relocation Services—Advice on Relocation Package

The McNeil Robertson Partnership—Departmental Personnel Management Survey: Attitudes and perceptions of the service provided

Touche Ross—Integrated Complementing System

Touche Ross—Finance Information Strategy

Touche Ross—Administrative Resource Management System (ARMS Phase I)

Touche Ross—Administrative Resource Management System (ARMS Phase II)

Touche Ross—Benefit Agency Implementation Work, Management information Systems and Finance

Touche Ross—Patterns of business Study

Computer consultance assignments

Ace Data Systems—Efficiency Unit

Andersen Consulting — Operational Strategy Implementation

Andersen Consulting—Image Pilot Project

Andersen Consulting—Finance Information Strategy

Andersen Consulting—Training and Support Services

Andersen Consulting—Smartcard

Andersen Consulting—Executive Information System

BIS Applied Systems—Service Management Centre

C Data Services—Efficiency Unit

Cardline Ltd.—Capacity Management

CCTA—ARMS Feasibility Study

CCTA—National Health Service Superannuation

Code Recruitment Ltd.—Local Office Project

Computer Search Group—National Unemployment Benefit System

Computer Search and Selection—Service Management Centre

Computer People—Service Management Centre

Computer Management Group—Local Office Project

Consultancy Lecturing Services—National Unemployment Benefit System

D. P. Support—National Unemployment Benefit System

DI Limited—National Unemployment Benefit System

Dr. Morris—Human Factors Job Design

Dr. Morris—Job Satisfaction Evaluation

Eosys—Family Credit Automatic Credit Distribution

Ewing Systems Limited—Local Office Project

FI Group—Local Office Project

Forvus—Preferred Statistics Package

Forvus—Family Expenditure Survey Processing System

Gandlake—Laser Printer Replacement Study

Grafton—Information Centre Prototype

Holly Hill Ltd—Current Year Monitoring System

Hoskyns—Statistical Information Centre

Hunterskill—Local Office Project

Infologistix—Capacity Management

Jill Jones—Efficiency Unit

Lancaster University—Computer Based Graphics Study

Level-7 Ltd—X400 Support

Logica—Knowledge Based System

Logica—Quality Assessment

Logitek—Personnel Management Group

Lorien—Pension Strategy Project

Lorien—National Unemployment Benefit System

Lorien—Service Management Centre

Macleod Associates—Information Centre Prototype

Myriad—War Pensions Management Information System

Nesco—Service Management Centre

Nesco—Capacity Management

Oasis—National Health Service Superannuation Scheme

Oracle—Current Year Monitoring System

PA Consulting Services—Assist Project

PA Consulting Services—Service Management Centre

PA Consulting Services—Future Processing of NHS Stats

Placegold Ltd—National Unemployment Benefits System

Price Waterhouse—Financial Information Strategy

Rediffusion—Computer Based Graphics

Riverthorn—Local Office Micro-computer Project

Rullion—Service Management Centre

Scicon—Management Information System

SDS—Service Management Centre

SDS—Data Administration

Sema Group—Future Processing of the Social Fund

Softlab—Diadem Review

Support Training Services—Central Training Unit Feasibility Study

Task Force—Service Management Centre

Task Force—National Unemployment Benefits System

Task Force—Capacity Management

Telecomputing PLC — National Health Service Superannuation Scheme

Telfast Computer Services—Data Administration

Telfast Computer Services—Service Management Centre

Telfast Computer Services—Benefits Branch

Ultracomp—Capacity Management

VNG Nationwide—Service Management Centre

World Systems PLC—National Unemployment Benefits System

WS Atkins—Quality Assurance

WS Atkins—Quality Situation Review

WS Atkins—Private Circuit Configuration

PRIME MINISTER

Juno Project

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if she has any plans to involve Her Majesty's Government in the future of the Juno project; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The enterprise shown by the Juno initiative is welcome and we regret that it is encountering financial difficulties. However, Juno is a one-off private sector initiative angled at commercial sponsorship and media interest. Diversion of public resources from the Government's longer-term scientific and commercial space objectives would not be justified. Accordingly, the Government do not intend to intervene.

Quangos

Mr. Battle: To ask the Prime Minister if, pursuant to her reply to the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing), *Official Report*, 20 March, column *513*, she will deposit in the Library a list of the quangos operating now and in June 1979, giving alongside their areas of responsibility.

The Prime Minister: The Library of the House has copies of the Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies 1989", which lists all non-departmental public bodies, and Cmnd. 7797, "Report on Non Departmental Public Bodies", published in January 1980.

British Nuclear Forum

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if she will place in the Library a copy of her correspondence with British Nuclear Forum in the last year.

The Prime Minister: It is not my practice to do so.

Acid Rain

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if she will place in the Library a copy of her address to the Royal Society conference on acid rain on 22 March.

The Prime Minister: A copy is available in the House Library.

ENVIRONMENT

Property Services Agency

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research he has undertaken into the benefits of the privatisation of the Property Services Agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: It is clear that competition will make the PSA more efficient, and privatisation will give it freedom to compete more effectively. Both processes will benefit the PSA's customers.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what organisational changes he will effect in the Property Services Agency from 1 April.

Mr. Chope: On 5 May 1988, my right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr Ridley) announced that the PSA should become a commercial organisation. The PSA has made good progress towards that objective and, as from 1 April 1990, will be split into two oganisations—Property Holdings and PSA Services. Of the 13,700 non-industrial staff and 7,500 industrial staff in the PSA at present, some 700 non-industrial and 1,050 industrial staff will transfer with Property Holdings to DOE(C). The rest will remain with PSA Services.

Property Holdings will perform the Government's landlord functions for the common user estate as well as other long-term Government activities. Property Holdings will become an integral part of the Department of the Environment.

PSA Services, with initial staffing of £13,000 non-industrial personnel, comprises four operating divisions and a central headquarters group. The operating divisions will deal with maintenance and property management, design and project management, provision of specialist advice and overseas work. PSA Services will operate on simplified commercial accounts from 1 April 1990 and full commercial accounts will be introduced from 1 April 1991.

PSA Services will compete with the private sector for business from other Government Departments including Property Holdings, but will also be allowed some freedom to bid for work outside Government. PSA Services will be privatised as soon as the business is ready for it, probably in the second half of 1992, and the enabling Bill is presently under consideration in another place.

Disabled People (Housing)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his Department will revise the code of guidance on homelessness procedures to ensure that disabled people who are in residential or hospital care and who wish to have a home of their own are accepted as homeless by their local housing authority.

Mr. Michael Spicer: No. Health authorities and social services authorities may negotiate nomination arrangements with local housing authorities or housing associations but it cannot be right to give their ex-patients an automatic right to jump the queue for subsidised housing.

Surface Water (Acidification)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department will make funds available to enable the work of the surface water acidification programme to continue.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) in the *Official Report* on 23 March at column *770.*

The Department, with other Government Departments, will continue to fund wide-ranging monitoring and research programmes on the nature and impacts of acid deposition. Total Government expenditure in this field in 1990-91 is planned to exceed £2 million.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations his Department had at the Royal Society conference on water acidification in London between 19 and 22 March.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answers 29 March 1990]*: The surface water acidification programme (SWAP) final conference was attended by scientific experts from my Department. Additionally, many of the United Kingdom-based scientists participating in the SWAP research also have contracts from my Department to carry out parts of our continuing £1·5 million research programme into the processes, impacts and abatement of United Kingdom acid deposition.

Waste

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the 20Environment what consideration has been given to the European Commission proposal for a Council directive on civil liability for damage caused by waste, COM[89]282 final-SYN 217, dated 15 September 1989.

Mr. Trippier: The Government's initial consideration of the proposed Council directive was incorporated in an explanatory memorandum put before Parliament on 27 October 1989.

West Yorkshire Residuary Body

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what amount of money has been received by Kirklees metropolitan council from the West Yorkshire residuary body, in each year since the abolition of West Yorkshire metropolitan county council.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The information is as follows:

£ million

	1986-87	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*
Revenue balances	0·92	nil	nil	nil
Capital receipts	0·64	1·05	1·03	1·83

Sewage Sludge (Dumping)

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the estimated cost of ending the dumping of sewage sludge at sea for each water authority in England and Wales for each year to 1998.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We have begun discussions with the sewerage undertakers concerned to work out the details of the necessary programmes of work required to end sludge dumping at sea by 1998. The time scales of these programmes and their associated costs will depend on the particular circumstances in each undertaker's area.

Merseyside Residuary Body

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Merseyside residuary body will complete its work and be dissolved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Merseyside residuary body will be formally dissolved today by an order made under section 67 of the Local Government Act 1985. During the four years since abolition, the residuary body has sold or transferred to successor authorities 5,735 former county council property interests. It has distributed some £37 million from property sales and revenue balances for the benefit of local ratepayers.

The Merseyside residuary body is the fourth of the seven residuary bodies to wind up. It inherited a considerable number of property interests, rights and liabilities from the former Merseyside county council, not least those in respect of Croxteth hall and country park. It is a credit to all concerned that successful solutions were achieved with the full co-operation of the successor authorities.

The order transferred the remainder of the residuary body's property, functions, rights and liabilities to the city of Liverpool and the metropolitan boroughs of Knowsley, St. Helens, Sefton and Wirral on 31 January 1990. The residuary body's superannuation and compensation responsibilities were transferred to Wirral district council in October 1987. The residuary body's final report is being laid before Parliament today.

The two remaining metropolitan residuary bodies are on target to complete their abolition-related work within the five-year time scale.

London Residuary Body

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the London residuary body will complete its GLC-related business; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The bulk of the London residuary body's remaining GLC-related property, rights and liabilities were today transferred to the London boroughs and other functional successors by an order made under sections 67, 100 and 101 of the Local Government Act 1985. This marks the virtual completion of the residuary body's role in relation to the abolition of the GLC.

The residuary body inherited a considerable number of property interests, rights and liabilities, and a wide and complex range of tasks from the former GLC. To date, £184 million in revenue balances and £478 million in capital receipts have been distributed to the boroughs, with more to come. This is an impressive achievement by any standard, and I congratulate the chairman and board members of the residuary body on the effective manner in which they have carried out their tasks. The financial benefits to ratepayers and charge payers of abolishing the GLC are now increasingly apparent.

The London residuary body will continue to have responsibility for a limited number of ex-GLC tasks, including the disposal of County hall and the distribution to the London boroughs of the receipts generated. However, its main task from 1 April will be to act as the residuary body for ILEA functions, property, rights and liabilities which are not transferred to inner London boroughs on the abolition of that authority.

Local Authority Housing

Mr. Wolfson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what freedom he will give local authorities that dispose of all or most of their housing to new landlords to spend the resulting receipts; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The Government want to encourage innovative approaches to the ownership and management of subsidised rented housing and some local authorities are achieving this through large scale voluntary transfers of their housing to private bodies—usually housing associations. I am now in a position to announce decisions on the treatment of capital receipts in these cases.

Local authorities who transfer all or most of their housing will be required to set aside 75 per cent. of the receipt or an amount equivalent to the debt on the housing being transferred, whichever is the greater. The remainder of the receipt will be a usable receipt as defined in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. One way in which authorities will be able to use this part of the receipts is to secure the provision of additional low-cost housing through housing associations and the private sector. I hope they will make full use of the opportunity thus provided.

In view of the potential scale of these receipts, we believe that authorities should show restraint in the rate at which they are spent. We will discuss authorities' plans for spending their receipts with them before giving consent to transfers.

I know that a number of authorities have been waiting to find out what use they could make of voluntary transfer receipts. I hope that removing the uncertainty today will help those who are considering whether to pursue a transfer. Since the trend towards voluntary transfers is still at a relatively early stage, we will keep these arrangements under review to establish whether they are working satisfactorily for the Government and the local authorities concerned.

I have placed in the Library a note giving our guidelines on the use of such receipts. A copy of the note is being sent to the local authority associations and other interested bodies.

Non-domestic Rates

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps the Government propose to take to ensure that holiday caravans remain within the non-domestic rating system in England and Wales.

Mr. Chope: During the consideration of the Local Government Finance Bill in 1988, the Government, in response to representations made by the caravan industry, introduced an amendment intended to provide that holiday caravans should remain within rating, while the owners of caravans not occupied as sole or main residences but used as second homes should be subject to the standard community charge. The distinction was drawn according to whether or not the caravan was on a protected site, within the meaning of the Caravan Sites Act 1968. No holiday caravans were understood to be on such sites.

It has now become apparent, however, that many sites primarily occupied by holiday caravans are protected sites. A high proportion of holiday caravans may therefore attract the standard community charge. This was not the Government's intention and, even though we have prescribed a maximum standard community charge multiplier of one for caravans and drawn to local authorities' attention their discretion to set a lower multiplier still, it is likely that many holiday caravan owners in England and Wales would face a burden considerably greater than if their caravans had been rated.

After discussion with the caravan industry, therefore, the Government have decided to introduce shortly legislation to amend the Local Government Finance Act 1988 to provide for all caravans other than those occupied as a sole or main residence to be treated as non-domestic and subject to rating rather than attracting the standard community charge, whether or not they are stationed on a protected site. The legislation will provide for this amendment to the 1988 Act to take effect from 1 April this year. It will further provide that any standard community charge which may have been paid on a caravan before the legislation comes into force will be repayable. Once the legislation is in force, valuation officers will alter local non-domestic rating lists in respect of the affected sites to reflect the contribution that the caravans make to the assessment of the site as a whole.

My Department and the Welsh Office are today writing to all charging authorities in England and Wales to inform them of the Government's intentions. The legislative position is different in Scotland, where holiday caravans are not liable for the standard community charge unless they are able to be used for all year round residence. However, the change we are proposing may lead to caravans in England being subject to non-domestic rating which, in comparable circumstances in Scotland, would be liable to the standard charge. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland has concluded that legislative change is therefore required in Scotland and the necessary provisions will be included in the Bill which we will bring forward.

Shops Act 1950

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to monitor how much money has been spent by local authorities in the monitoring of shops' compliance with the Shops Act 1950 and on prosecutions for breaches of the Act.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 19 March 1990]:* My Department has no plans to collect such information.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Accountancy Bodies

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make it his policy as a condition of recognition to require the accountancy bodies seeking supervisory recognition under the Companies Act 1989 to ensure that persons from the accountancy firms criticised by his Department and the joint disciplinary scheme are not nominated to any policy-making committees.

Mr. Redwood: No. To impose such a condition as a general rule would be unreasonable.

Complaints

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish in the *Official Report* for each of the last 10 years *(a)* the number of complaints made against his Department to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, *(b)* the number of complaints upheld and *(c)* the action he took on *(b)*.

Mr. Forth: The number of complaints *(a)* made and *(b)* upheld for the last 10 years is as follows:

Year	*(a) complaints made*	*(b) complaints upheld*
1989	[1]—	[1]—
1988	26	—
1987	21	1
1986	10	2
1985	13	1
1984	13	1
1983	15	—
1982	14	4
1981	15	—
1980	19	1

[1] Figures not yet available.

When the PCA upholds a complaint, it is departmental practice to provide an appropriate remedy, agreed with the PCA.

Trading Standards Officers

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any plans to extend the powers of county trading standards officers.

Mr. Forth: I consider that county trading standards officers have adequate powers to enforce consumer protection legislation and I have no plans to extend those powers.

Auditing

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary State for Trade and Industry on how many occasions the auditors of any company have been replaced as a consequence of issuing a qualified opinion; and if he will publish the latest available statistics.

Mr. Redwood: This information is not collected.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will withdraw his representatives from any auditing policy-making organisation which allows any individual from the auditing firms criticised by his Department to influence the formulation of policy.

Mr. Redwood: My Department will continue to seek to make a constructive contribution to the development of guidance for the accountancy profession. An arbitrary policy of withdrawal in the circumstances suggested by the hon. Member's question would therefore be self-defeating.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will introduce legislation giving him powers specifically to investigate the affairs of auditing firms which according to his inspectors have performed poor audits.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 29 March 1990]:* No, but under the Companies Act 1989, which will provide a new supervisory system for company auditors, it must appear to the Secretary of State that recognised supervisory bodies have effective arrangements for the investigation of complaints against company auditors.

Currency Swaps

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will issue accounting recommendations to companies for the accounting treatment of currency swaps.

Mr. Redwood: No. This issue is being considered by the accounting profession and my Department is watching developments closely.

Plastics (Recycling)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress is being made in recycling plastics in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Forth: The United Kingdom plastics industry already recycles more than 95 per cent. of its in-house process scrap, and good progress is now being made in recycling used plastics such as agricultural and supermarket film, more than 150,000 tonnes being reprocessed last year. This figure is expected to increase in 1990 as newly installed plant comes fully on stream. A range of recent industry initiatives to recover and recycle post-consumer plastics waste, such as bottles, are also now beginning to have an impact. Methods of stimulating plastics recycling are being considered in the light of international practice by a working party set up by the recycling advisory group. Its recommendations will help inform the Government's consideration of policy options in the context of the forthcoming White Paper on the environment.

Computer-Aided Design Exhibition

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what contribution his Department made to the computer-aided design exhibition and conference in Birmingham between 27 and 29 March.

Mr. Forth: The Department made no financial contribution to the computer-aided design exhibition and conference. The Department was however represented by DTI west midlands offering advice on the enterprise initiative and by industrial material markets division providing information on the materials matter programme.

Atlas Steel Foundry

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had with the Director General of Fair Trading and the Monopolies and Mergers Commission about the purchase of the Atlas steel foundry in Armadale by William Cook plc.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 29 March 1990]:* This purchase is at present being considered by the Director General of Fair Trading under the merger control provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973. He will advise the Secretary of State as soon as possible on the question of reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in the normal way. It would not be appropriate for me to take a view on the merits of the purchase or otherwise comment on it in advance of the director general's advice.

Hearing Aids

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many registered hearing aid dispensers there are in each district health authority area; and what criteria govern their approval.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 29 March 1990]:* There are 617 hearing aid dispensers registered by the Hearing Aid Council. These are not recorded by the district health authority in which they practise.

Only registered persons may practise as hearing aid dispensers. In order to be registered, it is necessary to satisfy the standard of competence published by the council and pay the appropriate fee under the terms of the Hearing Aid Council Act 1968, as amended.

National Engineering Laboratory

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if a decision has been taken on the appointment for the new director of the National Engineering Laboratory; and if he will make a statement on the appointment.

Mr. Ridley *[pursuant to his reply, 12 March 1990, c. 44]:* A new chief executive has been appointed. He is William Edgar. Mr. Edgar will take up the appointment on 1 June 1990.

WALES

Homelessness

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many homeless households there are in bed-and-breakfast accommodation and in other temporary accommodation in Wales in each of the boroughs and districts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: The figures are as follows:

Numbers of households in temporary accommodation on 31 December 1989

	At end of quarter	
	Total	*Bed and breakfast*
Aberconwy	0	0
Alyn and Deeside	28	1
Arfon	3	0
Blaenau Gwent	12	0
Brecknock	7	0
Cardiff	179	110
Carmarthen	16	0
Ceredigion	3	2
Colwyn	5	0
Cynon Valley	8	0
Delyn	18	4
Dinefwr	4	4
Dwyfor	2	1
Glyndwr	1	0
Islwyn	14	1
Llanelli	25	17
Lliw Valley	30	0
Meirionnydd	7	0
Merthyr Tydfil	2	0
Monmouth	36	2
Montgomery	8	0
Neath	20	7
Newport	141	1
Ogwy	8	0
Port Talbot	27	2
Preseli Pembrokeshire	12	4
Radnor	1	0
Rhondda	0	0
Rhuddlan	3	0
Rhymney Valley	17	13
South Pembrokeshire	10	0
Swansea	24	2
Taff Ely	5	1
Torfaen	18	0
Vale of Glamorgan	133	0
Wrexham Maelor	5	1
Ynys Mon	0	0
Wales	832	173

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are homeless in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: In the period October to December 1989, 1,618 households were accepted as homeless by local authorities in Wales. I announced a package of measures to tackle homelessness in Wales on 11 December.

Offshore Dumping

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list where, in offshore areas of Wales, the dumping takes place of *(a)* sewage sludge, *(b)* fly ash and *(c)* industrial wastes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: Sewage sludge is dumped in Liverpool bay and in two sites in the Bristol channel (one of which is used in bad weather only). No fly ash or industrial wastes are currently dumped in offshore areas of Wales.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food announced on [illegible] March that the Government intended that all dumping at sea of sewage sludge would end by 1998.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will pay transitional relief for the poll tax for five years in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: No. The introduction of the community charge will promote the accountability of local government. An over-extended transitional period would preclude the early realisation of that accountability. The three-year transitional period for which I have provided strikes the right balance between protecting the interests of the charge payers affected by the structural changes to local government finance, and ensuring that full accountability will be obtained relatively quickly.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which Welsh councils have not supplied him with all the details required of their spending plans and community charge for 1990-91 by the appropriate deadline; and if he will describe any action he will now take.

Mr. Grist: The information required by the Department relating to district council transfers from, and county council precepts upon, collection funds has been received from all Welsh local authorities. The information requested by the Department relating to the community charges set by Welsh local authorities is not due until 2 April, although most councils have already provided this.

Mentally Ill People

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list in the *Official Report*, for the latest available date, the numbers of mental illness beds in secure accommodation in each district health authority and those district health authorities where no secure accommodation is available; what action he has taken to promote the development of comprehensive secure provision, including that for those chronically mentally ill and behaviourally disturbed people not appropriate for regional secure units, in pursuance of the recommendation of the inter-departmental Home Office and Department of Health and Social Security working group; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: I understand from returns submitted by health authorities that, as of 31 December 1988, the latest date for which information is available centrally, the number of mental illness beds in permanently locked accommodation in each district health authority in Wales was:

	Numbers
Clwyd	20
East Dyfed	10
Gwent	Nil
Gwynedd	Nil
Mid Glamorgan	Nil
Pembrokeshire	Nil
Powys	Nil
South Glamorgan	48
West Glamorgan	5

On 21 February this year I announced proposals for the establishment of a departmental advisory group to determine a comprehensive policy for forensic psychiatric services in Wales in the context of the document "Mental Illness Services—A Strategy for Wales" published in May 1989, which sets out comprehensive proposals for the development of mental illness services. At the same time I announced that Clwyd and Mid Glamorgan health authorities have been asked to prepare proposals for interim secure facilities to be available until substantive medium secure units have been established.

Mental Hospitals

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list in the *Official Report* the hospitals for the mentally ill and handicapped which will become empty over the next five years, the number of patients in each at the latest available date, the district health authority in which each is situated; and whether it is in or near an urban area.

Mr. Grist: Proposals for any substantial variation in the service provided in a district, such as the closure of a hospital, are a matter in the first instance for the health authority. No proposals have been approved by my right hon. Friend which would lead to the closure in the next five years of a mental illness or mental handicap hospital in Wales.

Wrexham Art College

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if his Department has considered an application for an exhibition relating to Wrexham art college to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Roberts: I understand that, under procedures agreed by the Services Committee, arrangements have been made with the authorities of the House for the exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from 7 May to 11 May 1990.

Manufacturing Investment

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will state in the *Official Report* the value of manufacturing investment, including leased assests, in Wales for each year since 1978, in cash and constant prices.

Mr. Peter Walker: The following table shows, at current (cash) prices, the value of net capital expenditure in Wales from 1978 to 1987. Data for later years are not yet available. The data exclude the value of assets leased from the financial industries as this information is not available for Wales. Constant price data are available only for the United Kingdom as a whole.

Net Capital Expenditure

(£ million)

	SIC (1968) Orders III to XIX	*SIC (1980) Divisions 2 to 4*
1978	331·2	—
1979	495·1	472·1
1980	—	380·3
1981	—	370·9
1982	—	337·9
1983	—	353·2
1984	—	471·0
1985	—	563·0
1986	—	523·6
1987	—	632·9

Source: Annual Census of Production, Central Statistical Office.

Home Improvement Grants

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library a copy of the new means-testing scheme relating to home improvement grants to be introduced in April 1990.

Mr. Grist: My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment announced on 22 February that implementation of the major provisions of part VIII of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 relating to home improvement grants in England and Wales is being deferred to 1 July 1990. The relevant circulars will be published and placed in the Library before that date.

Complaints

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* for each of the last 10 years *(a)* the number of complaints made against his Department to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, *(b)* the number of complaints upheld and *(c)* the action he took on *(b)*.

Mr. Peter Walker: The number of complaints *(a)* made and *(b)* upheld for the last 10 years is as follows:

	(a) complaints made	*(b) complaints upheld*
1989-90	[1]	[1]
1988-89	9	—
1987-88	6	—
1986-87	7	—
1985-86	6	—
1984-85	6	—
1983-84	6	—
1982-83	4	—
1981-82	9	—
1980-81	6	2

[1] Figures not yet available.

When the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration upholds a complaint it is departmental practice to provide an appropriate remedy.

Hospital Treatment

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of those medical conditions which cannot be treated by hospitals within Wales but can be treated by hospitals within England.

Mr. Grist: Information on every medical condition which cannot be treated by hospitals within Wales but can be treated by hospitals within England is not held centrally. However, there are a number of health services which, to be clinically effective and economically viable, need to be provided to a population greater than that of Wales or any single English region. Those services, known as supra-regional services, which are provided to the population of Wales and England by hospitals in England, are as follows:

Chorioncarcinoma Services
Craniofacial Services
Endoprosthetic Service for Primary Bone Tumours
Heart Tranplantation
Liver Transplantation
Non-Transplant Liver Services
Neo-natal and Infant Cardiac Surgery
Psychiatric Services for Deaf People
Retinoblastoma Services
Stereotactic Radiosurgery

Public Expenditure

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on which date he will publish the 1990 Welsh Office public expenditure commentary.

Mr. Peter Walker: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) on 9 March.

Colwyn Bay Disaster Fund

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much his office has contributed to the disaster fund recently set up by the lord mayor of Colwyn Bay.

Mr. Peter Walker: My Department has conributed £135,000 to the fund established by the mayor of Colwyn. In addition, £12,000 has been donated to the appeal fund at Rhuddlan, and £3,000 to the fund at Delyn.

Teachers (Courses)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish for each local authority area the number of teachers in each of the last three years who have undertaken INSET and other courses of professional development *(a)* during school hours and *(b)* after school, at weekends and during school holidays.

Mr. Roberts: This information is not held centrally.

Radioactivity

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on his response to the conclusions in the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority report on "Artificial Radioactivity on the Coasts of Wales", about the influence of Sellafield on radioactivity levels found on beaches and in the sea.

Mr. Grist: The conclusions of the report, which are reassuring, have been noted, in particular the view that environmental concentrations were generally low and that the total dose by all pathways reflected in the results was found to be a small fraction of the recognised limit.

Flood Prevention

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has proposals to appoint or create a single body to take charge of sea defences and flood prevention in the light of the recent flood disaster in north Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: I have no plans to change the present arrangements.

Education System

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to provide non-teaching time in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools to enable them to implement (i) the teaching, testing and assessment provisions of the national curriculum and (ii) the proposals of the Elton report on school discipline.

Mr. Roberts: The organisation of the school day and the duties to be undertaken by individual teachers in their 1,265 hours of directed time are matters for head teachers. The Interim Advisory Committee on School Teachers' Pay and Conditions has recently drawn attention to the scope that exists for LEAs and governing bodies to develop policies to increase teachers' non-contact time. Through the education support grant, the Government are supporting in-service training for teachers in the management of pupil behaviour. We are providing extensive support through ESG and the LEA training grants scheme for training in the introduction and assessment of the national curriculum.

EMPLOYMENT

Silicon Chips Industry

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list all the dangerous substances or chemicals with which workers involved in the silicon chips industry come into contact.

Mr. Nicholls: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) does not hold detailed information on all the substances and chemicals used in the silicon chip industry.

However, in 1985-86 HSE carried out a survey among factories manufacturing semi-conductor devices, including silicon chips, and found that the following substances were widely used:

arsine and other inorganic arsenic compounds, diborane, borontrifluoride, phosphorous oxychloride, organometallic compounds, hydrofluoric acid, glycol ethers, phosphine, phosphorus, silane, germane, gallium, and indium.

Wages Councils

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many persons are employed in each of the sectors covered by the 26 wages councils.

Mr. Nicholls: I would refer the hon. Lady to the first part of table 3 of the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) on 14 March, at columns *252-56*.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which wages councils he plans to abolish *(a)* in the current year and *(b)* at a later stage.

Mr. Nicholls: I would refer the hon. Lady to the reply given by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State to my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) on 6 March, at column *543*.

Health and Safety

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has for improvements in health and safety legislation.

Mr. Nicholls: The Health and Safety Commission is responsible for bringing forward proposals for the progressive modernisation of health and safety legislation. Details of the commission's future legislative programme will be contained in its plan of work for 1990-91 and beyond, which the commission hopes to publish in May.

Mrs. Kay Jackson

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how he intends to respond to the recent employment appeal tribunal decision on the case of Mrs. Kay Jackson; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: In line with the assurance given to the House in debate on 8 November 1989, the decision of the employment appeal tribunal will now be honoured in the case of Mrs. Jackson as well as in all the other outstanding tribunal cases. No appeal against it will be made. Following the decision the Treasury solicitor is in touch with the applicants to review their respective positions.

In making a child care allowance available to lone parents on ET, the Government sought to give special help and support to a group known to be particularly disadvantaged in the labour market and to face disproportionate difficulties in taking up training.

The resources that the Government can commit to child care are necessarily limited. The Government believe that it is right that lone parents should have the first claim on those resources. An order made under the Employment Act 1989 and effective from 19 December 1989 allows the continuation of current special arrangements to lone parents.

"Next Steps"

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when the employment service will be established as a "next steps" agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: The employment service becomes a "next steps" agency on Monday 2 April 1990. The employment service has 35,000 staff dealing directly with the public, helping unemployed people into jobs and paying £4·6 million in benefits for unemployment, making the agency the biggest and the most significant to be set up so far under the "next steps" initiative.

I will be publishing on Monday the agency framework document, which describes how the agency will operate in relation to the Department, and its annual performance agreement, which describes the specific performance targets the agency is aiming to achieve in 1990-91. Copies of these documents will be placed in the Library.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State is writing to all Members with more details about the agency arrangements and the responsibilities of the agency's chief executive.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Lithuania

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what direct representations he has made to the Soviet Union about the desirability of negotiations between the Soviet Union and Lithuania; and whether he intends calling for such negotiations to take place on neutral territory.

Mr. Maude: We have made a number of direct representations to the Soviet authorities urging that progress should be made through dialogue between the Soviet Union and the Lithuanians. We have not made any recommendation as to where such negotiations should take place.

Romania

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in alleviating the plight of Romanian orphans.

Mr. Maude: Since the Romanian revolution we have given over £6 million of medical and food aid to Romania (though not specifically to the orphanages) directly or through the EC.

Charitable organisations in the UK have sent food, clothes and medical aid to the orphanages. British doctors and nurses are helping, and arrangements are being made for two Romanians to receive training in the UK. We have made small cash grants to help with this, and also to other organisations in the same field.

We are now considering what more we can do.

Ivory

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current stock of ivory available in Hong Kong for trading.

Mr. Maude: The latest available figure for the current stock of elephant ivory held in Hong Kong with valid CITES documentation and therefore available for trade (to the nearest tonne) is 356 tonnes, comprising 102 tonnes of worked ivory and 254 tonnes of raw ivory.

SCOTLAND

Silicon Chips Industry

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people in Scotland work full or part-time in the silicon chips industry; and how many of them are in regular contact with *(a)* chemicals or substances dangerous to their health and *(b)* hydrofluoric acid.

Mr. Lang: The information requested is not available.

Sport

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many students in *(a)* secondary and *(b)* higher education in Scotland regularly take part in sporting activities.

Mr. Lang: Physical education, which may include sport, is a recommended part of the curriculum for all school pupils. Figures for participation by post-school students are not collected centrally.

Hazardous Waste

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many full-time hazardous waste inspectors there are in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Six professional staff are engaged for part of their time on waste inspectorate duties, amounting to the equivalent of three full-time officers.

Water Quality

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many scientific staff are employed by the river purification boards in Scotland to issue and enforce consents and to monitor water quality.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The numbers and types of staff employed by river purification boards are matters for each board to determine in the light of its circumstances. Such information is published annually in the reports of the boards which are lodged in the Library.

Waste Disposal

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will outline what measures have been taken to establish which waste disposal sites in Scotland pose a pollution problem from the escape of noxious leachate.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is a statutory requirement that river purification authorities (RPAs) be consulted on proposals for development of waste disposal sites. They will indicate whether there may be leachate requiring a discharge consent. Such consents would be given only subject to conditions aimed at ensuring that the discharge will not cause pollution of surface or groundwater. Any breach of discharge consent conditions, and any unconsented discharges, would be investigated by the RPAs as part of their statutory function.

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which waste disposal authorities in Scotland have still not submitted to him a waste disposal plan.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Final waste disposal plans have not yet been submitted by three district councils: Banff and Buchan, Kirkcaldy, and Skye and Lochalsh.

Contaminated Land

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures have been taken to establish the extent and location of contaminated land in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Development Department carried out a pilot survey of vacant land in Scotland in 1988 in collaboration with the Scottish Development Agency and the regional and district councils. This initial survey revealed 48 sites, comprising 402 hectares, that were known to be contaminated and a further 189 sites, comprising 834 hectares, that were suspected of contamination. A follow-up survey will be carried out shortly.

European Structural Fund

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which projects have to date attracted European Commission structural fund suppport, and how much.

Mr. Lang: To the end of 1989, Scotland has benefited from project awards[1] of around £1,268 million from the European Community structural funds. Details of the individual funds are set out in the table:

	£ million
European Regional Development Fund	869
European Social Fund	277
European Agricultural Guarantee and Guidance Fund	122

It is not practicable to list the projects individually because of the very large number which have been assisted.

Sewage Sludge

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the estimate of the additional poll tax that will have to be levied in each of the Scottish regions to cover the cost of the reduction of dumping of sewage sludge for each year to 1998.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: This is entirely a matter for the authorities concerned.

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many tonnes of sewage sludge were dumped at sea by each of the Scottish regions in each year since 1979;

(2) how many tonnes of sewage sludge will be dumped at sea by each of the Scottish regions in each year to 1998.

Mr. Lang: The information is set out in the table:

	(Wet tonnes) millions	
	Lothian	*Strathclyde*
1979	0·33	0·70
1980	0·32	1·71
1981	0·29	1·51
1982	0·25	1·47
1983	0·22	1·57

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[1] These figures relate only to projects: the Structural Funds have also provided, through the Agricultural Guidance Fund, assistance to pre-funded schemes such as livestock subsidies—some £290 million between 1979 and 1988.

	(Wet tonnes) millions Lothian	Strathclyde
1984	0·23	1·71
1985	0·21	1·69
1986	0·17	1·70
1987	0·25	1·70
1988	0·25	1·70
1989	0·25	1·70

The Government have already announced that the dumping of sewage sludge at sea will cease by 1998. Until then, local authorities wishing to continue the practice will require, as at present, to seek annual renewal of their sea disposal licences. It is not possible to say precisely how much sewage sludge will be dumped at sea in the future. However, the quantities of contaminants in the sludge will require, as at present, to be contained within 1987 levels.

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the estimated cost of ending the dumping of sewage sludge at sea for each of the Scottish regions for each year to 1998.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The only authorities affected by the ending of the dumping of sewage sludge at sea are Strathclyde and Lothian regional councils. They will be called upon to submit programmes before the end of 1990 for changing to land-based disposal routes. Preliminary assessments indicate that the capital cost of incineration as an alternative to sea disposal might be about £52 million for Strathclyde and £12 million for Lothian but, until the authorities' programmes are available, it is not possible to say what expenditure will be incurred in each year.

Mental Illness and Mental Handicap

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* mentally ill and *(b)* mentally handicapped persons are at present in prisons in Scotland; and in which prisons.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The latest figures for 1989 show that medical attention was needed for 4,896 inmates suffering from neurosis or mental disorder. Only 82 inmates, however, were diagnosed as suffering from psychoses and 10 inmates were found to be mentally handicapped in these establishments.

	Psychoses Sufferers
Her Majesty's Prison, Aberdeen	9
Her Majesty's Prison, Barlinnie	41
Her Majesty's Prison and Institution, Cornton Vale	9
Her Majesty's Prison, Edinburgh	6
Her Majesty's Prison, Friarton	1
Her Majesty's Prison and Institution, Glenochil	4
Her Majesty's Remand Institution, Longriggend	5
Her Majesty's Prison, Perth	5
Her Majesty's Prison, Peterhead	1
Her Majesty's Prison, Shotts	1
	Mentally Handicapped
Her Majesty's Prison, Aberdeen	4
Her Majesty's Prison, Barlinnie	5
Her Majesty's Young Offenders Institution, Dumfries	1

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Sir John Farr: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the amount spent on compensation for farmers experiencing bovine spongiform encephalopathy so far *(a)* at the full animal value and *(b)* at the 50 per cent. animal value.

Mr. Maclean: The information is not available in the form requested. In total, £4,135,729 was paid in compensation from the introduction of the compulsory slaughter policy on 8 August 1988 to the end of February 1990.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total number of cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy notified in the United Kingdom since June 1988; and if he will give the annual figures.

Mr. Maclean: The information is as follows for Great Britain:

Year	*Suspect cases notified*
1988[1]	2,517
1989	8,446
1990[2]	3,987
Total	14,950

[1] From 21 June, when BSE became notifiable.
[2] Up to 23 March.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what other countries apart from the United Kingdom have suffered from bovine spongiform encephalopathy; and if he will list the number of animals and countries concerned.

Mr. Maclean: Nineteen cases of BSE have been confirmed in the Republic of Ireland and two cases in cattle exported from Britain to Oman.

Sir John Farr: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress is being made in the discussions with West Germany relating to the resumption of normal export trade of British beef to that country.

Mr. Maclean: The Germans did ask for supplementary guarantees to accompany consignments of beef from the United Kingdom. However, following the European Community's scientific veterinary committee's endorsement of our view that British beef is not a danger to public health they are no longer seeking such guarantees for the great majority of our sales to them.

Salmonella

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list in the *Official Report* the plants and animals which can harbour salmonella enteritidis.

Mr. Maclean: Any animal or plant has the potential to harbour salmonella enteritidis.

Sewage Sludge

Mr. Graham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many tonnes of sewage sludge will be dumped at sea by each of the water authorities in England and Wales in each year to 1998.

Mr. Curry: It is impossible to estimate.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what weights of sewage sludge have been dumped in or off *(a)* the Bristol channel and *(b)* Liverpool bay each year since 1979; what licences he expects to issue before the end of 1998; and what weights of sewage sludge are covered under each licence.

Mr. Curry: The amounts of sewage sludge dumped in the Bristol channel and Liverpool bay each year since 1979 are as follows. About 95 per cent. of the weight is water.

tonnes, wet weight

	Bristol Channel	*Liverpool Bay*
1979	358,280	1,653,521
1980	482,000	1,759,883
1981	328,040	1,692,680
1982	319,880	1,642,410
1983	230,145	1,299,200
1984	305,200	1,282,800
1985	262,513	1,498,973
1986	257,405	1,541,456
1987	237,956	1,626,036
1988	273,609	1,628,937
1989	306,414	1,645,609

Licences are currently held as follows:

		Licensed tonnage (wet weight)
Bristol Channel	Wessex Water	300,000
	Welsh Water	55,000
Liverpool Bay	North West Water	1,970,000

I have announced that the Government intend to terminate sea disposal of sewage sludge as soon as possible, and at the latest by the end of 1998. Licence holders will be required to develop and implement plans for alternative disposal methods and a prediction of future disposals is not therefore practicable.

Mr. Graham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many tonnes of sewage sludge were dumped at sea by each of the water authorities in England and Wales in each year since 1979.

Mr. Curry: The information will take a little time to prepare, and will be supplied as soon as possible.

Veterinary Executive Agencies

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what further progress has been made towards establishing the central veterinary laboratory and the veterinary medicines directorate as executive agencies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Further to the Minister's written reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) on 26 February 1990 at column *69*, I am pleased to confirm that the central veterinary laboratory and the veterinary medicines directorate will become executive agencies with effect from 2 April 1990.

The efficiency of both agencies will be judged primarily through cost recovery. Additional performance measures relating to their objectives will also be used to measure operating efficiency and quality of service and will be developed through the agencies' corporate plans.

The financial targets for the central veterinary laboratory for 1990-91 will be:

- 100 per cent. recovery of full costs;
- an overall efficiency gain of 1·5 per cent.;
- a reduction of 1·5 per cent. on the 1989-90 index of representative unit costs for diagnostic tests.

The financial targets for the veterinary medicines directorate for 1990-91 will be:

- 100 per cent. recovery of full costs;
- an overall efficiency gain of 1·5 per cent.;
- a reduction of 1·5 per cent. on unit costs for appropriate areas of licensing work and residue sampling.

The performance indicators for both agencies are set out in their framework documents, copies of which are being placed in the Library of the House.

Animal Feed (Irradiation)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to what extent irradiation is used in respect of animal feed; what controls exist over kilogram dosage; what labelling requirements exist to inform end-users that irradiation of foodstuffs has taken place; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: No United Kingdom animal feedingstuffs are irradiated.

HEALTH

Agency Nurses

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of the number of agency nurses employed in the National Health Service.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The number of agency nursing and midwifery staff (whole-time equivalent) employed in the National Health Service in England at 30 September 1988, the latest date for which figures are available, was 6,240.

Hypnosis

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he intends to extend his policy governing practitioners of hypnosis to practitioners of subliminal techniques; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Hypnosis is subject to legislation only when used for entertainment purposes. We have no plans to seek to control the therapeutic use of hypnotism or similar techniques.

District Health Authority Chairmen

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he can now announce details of the outstanding appointments of district health authority chairmen from 1 April.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have today announced the following appointments:

Chairman	*District*	*Term of Office*
Mr. T. Benyon	Milton Keynes	2 years
Cllr. D. G. Lloyd	Shropshire	2 years
Mr. F. S. Cronin	Sunderland	2 years

One appointment is still under consideration and I expect to make an announcement on this shortly.

Dental Practitioners (Retirement)

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether it is intended to pay compensation to general dental practitioners who, having attained the age of retirement prescribed in the NHS (General Dental Services) Amendment (No. 2) Regulations 1989, SI 832, will have their names removed from dental lists on 1 April.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Yes. I have made a determination under section 8(3) of the Health and Medicines Act 1988 specifying the rates at which payments shall be made to eligible dentists whose names are compulsorily removed from the lists on 1 April 1990. Parliamentary approval of this new expenditure will be sought in the main estimate for family practitioner (part) and other services, England (class XIII, vote 2). Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £250,000 will be met by repayable advances from the Contingencies Fund.

Medicines

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) who attended the meeting of the Committee on Review of Medicines that reviewed the alcohol content of gripe water; who gave evidence to the meeting; and what conclusions were reached;

(2) if he will introduce legislation to permit publication on the deliberations and conclusions of the Committee on Safety of Medicines and the Committee on Review of Medicines;

(3) what alcohol limits are permitted in gripe water currently on sale;

(4) who are the members of the Committee on Review of Medicines.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There are no present plans to amend section 118 of the Medicines Act, 1968 which generally prohibits the disclosure of information obtained in pursuance of the Act. The statutory appeal procedures are not complete in the cases to which the right hon. Member refers. It would be inappropriate to comment in any way prejudicial to them.

The current membership of the Committee on Review of Medicines is as follows:

Professor D. H. Lawson (Chairman) MD FRCP
Consultant Physician, Royal Infirmary, Glasgow
Visiting Professor University of Strathclyde

Mr. A. G. Amias FRCS FRCOG
Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist, St. Georges Hospital, London

Professor T. H. D. Arie MA BM BCh FRCP FRCPsych FFCM DPM (Eng)
Professor of Health Care of the Elderly, Queens Medical Centre, Nottingham

Professor C. J. Bulpitt MD MSc FRCP
Reader of Epidemiology, Head of Division of Geriatric Medicine, Royal Postgraduate Medical School, Hammersmith Hospital

Professor J. E. Carless BPharm MSc PhD FRPharmS
Emeritus Professor of Pharmeutics, University of London

Mr. W. M. Darling CBE FRPharmS
Pharmacist, Chairman, South Tyneside Health Authority

Professor F. Fish OBE Pharm PhD FRPharmS
Dean, School of Pharmacy, University of London

Professor F. Harris MD MMed (Paed) FRCP (Ed) FRCP (Lond)
Professor of Child Medicine and Dean, Faculty of Medicine, University of Leicester

Professor J. G. R. Howie MD PhD FRCP (Ed) FRCGP
Professor of General Practice, University of Edinburgh

Dr. B. J. Kirby MB ChB FRCP
Deputy Director, Postgraduate Medical School, University of Exeter, Consultant Physician, Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital

Professor Rona Mackie MD FRCP FRCPath FRSE
Professor of Dermatology, University of Glasgow

Dr. Agnes McKnight MD MRCGP DObst RCOG
Senior Lecturer, Department of General Practice, Queens University, Belfast

Professor J. M. Midgley BSc MSc PhD CChem FRCS FRPharmS
Chairman and Head, Department of General Practice, Queens University, Belfast

Dr. A. T. Proudfoot MB ChB FRCP (Ed)
Consultant Physician, Royal Infirmary Edinburgh and Director of Scottish Poisons Information Bureau

Dr. L. E. Ramsey MB ChB FRCP
Consultant Physician, Royal Hallamshire Hospital, Sheffield

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the estimated annual cost to his Department of monitoring the promotion of prescription medicines to ensure that companies do not infringe the Medicines Act.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Approximately £8,000.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasions he has prosecuted pharmaceutical companies for infringing the Medicines Act through their promotion of prescription medicines.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Once. All notifications of possible infringements are investigated.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how often during the years 1983-88 he referred complaints regarding the promotion of prescribed medicines to the code of practice committee of the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Eleven. In addition, staff of the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) take up direct with companies issues which it would not be appropriate to refer to the ABPI committee such as those which should be considered for formal enforcement or warning letters.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce legislation to require the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (i) to have fewer than half the members on the code of practice committee from the industry, (ii) to give complainants the same right to hearing as defendants, (iii) to hold its hearings in public, (iv) to publish its reports and (v) to introduce a right of appeal.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have no present plans to do so.

GP Budgets

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the cash and percentage increase in absolute and real terms of the £360 million cash-limited budget of general practitioner premises and ancillary staff for 1990-91 and 1989-90, broken down by family practitioner committee;

(2) what is the cash and percentage increase in absolute and real terms of the £360 million cash-limited budget for general practitioner premises and ancillary staff for 1990-91 and 1989-90.

Mr. Freeman: The estimated total spend in England in 1989-90 on the direct reimbursement of GPs' ancillary staff and premises improvement cost is £267 million. The preliminary allocation to FPCs of £359 million for similar expenditure in 1990-91 therefore represents a cash increase of 34 per cent. and a real term increase of 26 per cent. Details of actual expenditure in 1989-90, and the final expenditure by each FPC, will not be available until after the end of the current financial year. The allocations for 1990-91 will not be finalised until FPCs have reported their actual level of commitments for practice staff reimbursement and premises improvements as at 31 March 1990. A further allocation will be made in June and July to meet any difference between the preliminary allocation for 1990-91 to fund existing commitments, and the actual level of commitments.

Eye Tests

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to undertake a survey of the effect of charging for eye tests; and when he expects to publish the results.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) on 23 January at columns *654-55*.

Data Submissions

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many district health authorities were unable to submit to his Department all the data items in Korner minimum datasets for the year 1988-89; and how many of these district health authorities are unlikely to be able to provide complete data for 1989-90.

Mr. Freeman: Korner minimum datasets contain hundreds of individual data items, not all of which are centrally required. It is not possible to say which district health authorities failed to collect particular data items. However, the overall picture shows that 92 per cent. of finished in-patient episodes were submitted, of which 76 per cent. had actual diagnostic information. The remainder of centrally required information is provided by aggregate returns, and 98 per cent. of the expected returns for 1988-89 have been received.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it has now been decided which sets of Korner data will be collected from National Health Service hospital trusts; and if similar data will be required from hospitals in the private sector.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No decision on data to be collected from National Health Service hospital trusts or private hospitals has yet been taken. Consultation on information required as a consequence of the NHS review is in progress. Recommendations based on comments received will be made in a final report currently scheduled for 31 May 1990.

Nurse Training

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses have been trained exclusively in the private sector in each year since 1985 in *(a)* basic nurse training and *(b)* post-basic nurse training.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 8 March at column *828*.

Private Patients

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give for each district health authority, SHA and regional health authority and England as a whole the amount written off as bad debts for private in-patients.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested derived from the 1988-89 annual accounts of district health authorities in England and those of the special health authorities for the London postgraduate teaching hospitals has been placed in the Library. The 1988-89 annual accounts of the 14 regional health authorities record no amounts written off for this category of income.

I should point out that we expect health authorities to take all reasonable action to collect their debts and that sums written off in a particular financial year sometimes include amounts due from earlier years.

For 1988-89, the total sum written off in respect of private in-patient debts (£575,819) represented approximately 1 per cent. of the equivalent income (£62,422,151 net of sums written off) for that year, which represented a valuable resource for the health authorities concerned.

Hospital Closures

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give for each year from 1979 to 1989 the number of hospitals *(a)* totally closed and *(b)* partially closed.

Mr. Freeman: The number of hospitals which were approved for permanent total or partial closure from 1979 to 1989 are shown in the table:

Year of approval	*Total closure*	*Partial closure*
1979	29	6
1980	38	4
1981	37	17
1982	18	10
1983	58	18
1984	59	27
1985	24	19
1986	48	29
1987	33	34
1988	64	[1]81
1989	22	[1]60

[1] Provisional figures.

Source: health authority returns.

Hospital closures are an integral part of local health authorities' planning and management. They are made for many reasons and are often balanced by new openings or other reprovision.

Blood

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the fee charged to non-National Health Service hospitals for handling each unit of blood for each year since 1982.

Mr. Freeman: Handling charges for whole blood supplied to non-National Health Service hospitals were introduced on 1 April 1984. The charges do not include any element for the blood itself, which is donated free of charge to the National Blood Transfusion Service for use where it is needed.

Charges for each year from 1984-85 to 1989-90 are given in the table:

1 April to 31 March	*Per unit of whole blood £*
1984-85	19·75
1985-86	19·75
1986-87	21·00
1987-88	23·00
1988-89	26·25
1989-90	29·25

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the total units of blood supplied in each year since 1982 to non-National Health Service hospitals.

Mr. Freeman: Blood issued to non-National Health Service hospitals is shown in the table:

National Blood Transfusion Service: England and Wales[1]
Units of blood issued to non-National Health Service hospitals

Year	*Units*
1982	31,437
1983	40,786
1984	49,232
1985	54,327
1986	64,040
1987	80,002
1988	75,961

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[1] The figures relate to Wales and 12 regions in England as information is not available for Oxford region.

Information Technology

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his reply of 28 November, *Official Report,* columns *228-31,* whom he is consulting about his strategy for information needs and use of information technology which he announced when he launched his document on 17 January.

Mr. Freeman: The proposals for information needs and the use of information technology were summarised in working paper 11 "(Framework for Information Systems: Overview)" which was sent to all Members of Parliament for England. This document was supported by two consultative documents for IT and information, the latter including 13 stand-alone annexes. The working papers and annexes are available in the Library. Working paper 11 and the full set of documents were sent to the general managers of all regions, districts, family health services authorities and special health authorities, to all relevant professional associations and trade unions, academic and research institutions, suppliers of IT and consultancy services as well as to other charitable and client group-based organisations. In addition, sets were sent to NHS staff who had contributed to the working groups making the proposals. During the consultation process, requests have been made for further complete sets of documents or for individual annexes. There have been in all approximately 4,000 copies of the main text of both the information and IT consultative documents and 3,100 of each annex distributed for consultation.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his reply of 28 November, *Official Report,* columns *228-31,* whether, once the National Health Service computer network is capable of linking family practitioner committees and individual practitioners, he plans to extend it to link them with district health authorities.

Mr. Freeman: The National Health Service communications network has been designed to cater for the wide area networking needs of all bodies in the NHS. Organisations such as regional and district health authorities will be encouraged to link to the network, so long as it is competitive on cost and service.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to repeat the waiting list initiative; and if he will make a statement about the previous initiative.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There are no such plans. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) on 18 January 1990 at columns *403-04.*

Registrar-General

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whom he consulted about his plans to change the name of the groupings of occupations now described as the Registrar-General's social classes; how long the consultation period lasted; and whether any press release was issued to publicise the consultation.

Mr. Freeman: "Social classes" is the name given to groupings of occupations which are used in the statistical analysis of census, mortality and other data. The name has been criticised because the classification is actually based entirely on occupation. The OPCS therefore decided to consult on whether the name should be changed before the tables to be produced from the 1991 census were specified. "Occupational skill groups" was suggested as a possible alternative.

Consultation took place in October 1989 with other Government Departments and externally through the OPCS census advisory committees, medical advisory committee and demographic liaison group. There was no press release. Responses were originally sought by the end of November, but the deadline was extended into December to suit, in particular, the BMA.

The consultation revealed some support for change, but there was also opposition. In particular, it was pointed out that, although the classification is indeed based on occupation, it is related to other factors, and is applied to all members of a family or household, including those without occupations.

In the light of these points, it was decided to retain the name, "social class", but to extend it, to make its basis explicit, to "social class as defined by occupation". In using the expanded name, the OPCS will also make it clear whether individual people are being classified by their own occupations or by that of someone else in the family or household.

The consultation also included a proposal to change the name of class II from "intermediate" to "managerial and technical"—again to clarify the basis of the classification. This change was welcomed, and it too is now being implemented in OPCS publications.

Disability

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he has any plans to enable local authorities to pay family members or individuals for taking over the care of disabled people now living in residential homes;

(2) if he has any plans to enable local authorities to pay family members or individuals for the care they give to disabled people living in their homes or those of members of their family.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 27 March 1990]:* As my hon. Friend the Minister for Health explained to the Standing Committee on the National Health Service and Community Care Bill on 22 February at column 1230, we are looking into the possibility of empowering people assessed by local authorities as needing community care services and unable to pay for them out of their own resources to arrange the services of their choice by making it possible for local authorities to make payment to them. Our conclusions will be announced in due course.

Consultancies

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1989 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1989, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment; and what is the total amount that his Department has budgeted to spend in the current year.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 28 March 1990]:* The estimated expenditure in the financial year 1989-90 on management and computer consultancy contracts (excluding hardware and software purchases) is £10·3 million. The amount budgeted to spend in 1990-91 is £8·5 million.

A list giving details of each health-related management or computer consultancy awarded in 1989-90 has been placed in the Library.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Complaints

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish in the *Official Report* for each of the last 10 years *(a)* the number of complaints made against his Department to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, *(b)* the number of complaints upheld and *(c)* the action he took on *(b)*.

Mr. Waddington: The number of complaints *(a)* made and *(b)* upheld in the last 10 years is as follows:

	(a) *Complaints made*	*(b)* *Complaints upheld*
1989-90	[1]—	[1]—
1988-89	31	6
1987-88	32	4
1986-87	28	3
1985-86	25	3
1984-85	34	6
1983-84	25	1
1982-83	30	4
1981-82	39	2
1980-81	50	6

[1] Figures not yet available.

When the PCA upholds a complaint it is departmental practice to provide an appropriate remedy.

Prison Officers

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current ratio of prison officers to prisoners.

Mr. Mellor: On 1 March there were 20,360 officers (including senior and principal officers) in post in establishments and the national inmate population was 46,984, giving an overall ratio of 2·3 inmates per officer. The ratio of inmates to officers varies considerably between the different types of establishment.

Private Security Firms

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what safeguards there are on the suitability of private security firms.

Mr. John Patten: A number of trade associations in the industry have developed standards and codes of practice, which their members are required to follow, and which are subject to inspection.

My right hon. and learned Friend is considering, in the light of the report of a Home Office working group on the self-regulation of the industry, the scope for improving existing regulatory arrangements.

Vehicle Removal

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis as to how many unlawfully parked vehicles have been removed in Green street and Katherine road in the London borough of Newham by vehicle removal teams.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the Commissioner that two unlawfully parked vehicles have been removed from these roads since 1 January.

Broadcasting Standards Authority (Chairman)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the current powers of the chairman-designate of the Broadcasting Standards Authority; and what is his current pay in that capacity, and from what date.

Mr. Mellor: The Broadcasting Bill, if approved by Parliament, will establish the Broadcasting Standards Council as a statutory body and confirm its existing functions as statutory powers. It will have the power to draw up a code of practice on the portrayal of violence and sex and on matters of taste and decency, the general effect of which the broadcasters will be obliged to reflect in their own programme codes; it will have the power to undertake and commission research; to consider and examine complaints and require broadcasters to publish its findings on the complaints in whatever form it considers appropriate; and to monitor programmes which originate within the United Kingdom and those broadcast to the United Kingdom from abroad. These powers are invested in the Council as a whole, rather than the chairman as an individual. The salary of the council's chairman, Lord Rees-Mogg, is £31,500 per annum with effect from 1 April 1989.

Mr. Les Huckfield

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the chief constable for Merseyside into the amount of time, the number of police personnel and the cost to the police authority of the inquiries that have been conducted into the affairs of Mr. Les Huckfield.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the Chief Constable of Merseyside that to date five police officers have been involved in the inquiries at different times, each on a part-time basis. It is not possible accurately to estimate the time spent and the cost of the inquiries.

Young Offenders

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to prohibit the practice of housing young offenders in adult jails while prisons built to cater for the young are closed or reclassified; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: No. Our plans are progressively to rationalise the prison estate so that the places needed are provided in the most cost-effective and efficient mix of new establishments and improvements to existing establishments. In particular, we are seeking to reduce the levels of overcrowding in adult prisons and to allow more young adult remand prisoners, currently held in adult prisons, to be held in discrete establishments.

Accommodation which is no longer needed for sentenced young offenders may be converted to adult or remand use where it would be practical and cost-effective. It would not however be sensible to retain uneconomic, poorly located or below standard young offender accommodation where this has no practical alternative use and is expected to be surplus to future requirements.

Police Force (Civilian Staff)

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he has any plans concerning trade union rights for civilian staff within the police force; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he has received any representations from the Association of Chief Police Officers concerning trade union rights for civilian staff within the police force.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Association of Chief Police Officers has suggested that civilian staff working within police forces might be represented by a single union. Any such development would be a matter for the staff themselves and their local authority employers. My right hon. and learned Friend has no plans to require police civilians to belong to a single union or to restrict their trade union or bargaining rights.

Drug Addiction

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people in Wales are addicted to heroin and cocaine in each health authority area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: In 1989 doctors in Wales notified persons addicted to heroin and concaine as follows:

Number of persons

	Persons notified in 1989 as addicted to:			
District health authority	*Heroin*[1]	*Heroin and cocaine*[2]	*Cocaine*[3]	*Total*
Clwyd	69	1	—	70
East Dyfed	7	—	—	7
Gwent	39	7	1	47
Gwynedd	3	—	—	3
Mid-Glamorgan	10	2	—	12
Pembrokeshire	—	—	—	—
Powys	3	—	—	3
South Glamorgan	35	1	2	38
West Glamorgan	6	—	1	7
All Wales	172	11	4	187

[1] Alone or with other drugs excluding cocaine.
[2] Alone or with other drugs.
[3] Alone or with other drugs excluding heroin.

Advertising Expenditure

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the figures for the spending by the Metropolitan police on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his latest estimate for the current year and budget for 1990-91.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 12 March 1990]*: I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that expenditure by the Metropolitan police on all forms of recruitment and other advertising, and other promotional literature, in each financial year since 1979-80 is as follows (it is not possible to disaggregate total spending in the way requested for years prior to 1987-88):

	£
1979-80	759,000
1980-81	967,000
1981-82	1,062,000

	£
1982-83	1,028,000
1983-84	1,675,000
1984-85	1,747,000
1985-86	1,868,000
1986-87	2,269,000

	Television advertising £	*Radio advertising* £	*Newspaper advertising* £	*Other promotional literature* £
1987-88	—	3,000	1,722,000	1,111,000
1988-89	—	6,000	1,881,000	1,258,000
[1]1989-90	472,000	15,000	1,587,000	868,000

[1] Estimated outturn.

Detailed decisions on expenditure for 1990-91 have not yet been taken, but the budget estimate is £3,124,000.

Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total expenditure by the Metropolitan police on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his latest estimate for the current year and budget for 1990-91.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 12 March 1990]:* I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that expenditure on staff and accommodation costs of the directorate of public affairs, and on recruitment and other advertising and other promotional literature, in each financial year from 1985-86, is as follows:

	£
1985-86	3,622,861
1986-87	4,444,103
1987-88	4,555,000
1988-89	5,475,000
[1]1989-90	5,508,000
[2]1990-91	5,845,000

[1] Estimated outturn.

[2] Budget estimate.

Figures for 1979-80 to 1984-85 are not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Birmingham Six

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he has taken in the light of recent representations submitted to him about the safety of the convictions of the Birmingham Six.

Mr. Waddington *[pursuant to his reply, 21 March 1990, c. 633]:* I have always made it clear that I will consider very carefully any evidence which might cast doubt on the safety of the convictions. I have seen the television programme "Who Bombed Birmingham?" and have received from Granada Television a copy of documents in its possession, one of which concerns the Birmingham public house bombings in 1974.

The programme did not put forward new evidence. The allegations about the ill-treatment of the convicted men while in police custody and about the forensic science evidence were fully considered by the Court of Appeal in 1987.

The document which was referred to in the television programme and a copy of which has now been sent to me is a police report about terrorist activities in the west midlands which was written in 1975. I understand from the Chief Constable of the West Midlands police that the people named in the programme were included in the police investigations into the Birmingham public house bombings and other terrorist activities at the time. One person, Michael Murray, stood trial with the Birmingham Six, and was convicted of conspiracy to cause explosions and causing an explosion, and sentenced to 12 years and 10 years' imprisonment respectively, to run concurrently. However, no sufficient evidence was found to justify prosecuting the people named in the report for the public house bombings. It was not the prosecution case that the Birmingham Six were the only people involved in the bombings, and the report does not contain information which might cast doubt on the safety of their convictions.

In 1986 the Home Office asked the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), who was not then a Member of this House, to discuss with the West Midlands police the information that he claimed to have at the time of the publication of his book, "Error of Judgement". At an interview with the assistant chief constable he refused to identify the people he claimed had been responsible. The police examined his book and tested the allegations made on the basis of the limited information that he provided. The police reported their conclusions to the Home Office in October 1986. Their report satisfied the then Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd), that the claims which had been made had been fully considered but did not constitute new evidence. He did, of course, refer the case to the Court of Appeal in 1987 on the basis of new evidence relating to the scientific evidence and alleging police ill-treatment. It would have been open to the appellants to raise in court the allegations made by the hon. Member for Sunderland, South. They chose not to do so and he did not give evidence to the court.

Further representations were made to me in December last year by the solicitor representing the Birmingham Six. On 23 January 1990 the West Midlands police provided me with a copy of the report which it is now clear is the same as the one which had come into the hands of Granada Television. (The people mentioned in this report were the subject of the report to the then Home Secretary in 1986). The information that it contained was carefully examined and I concluded that it did not constitute new evidence which might cast doubt on the safety of the convictions of the Birmingham Six. I have, however, passed to the chief constable of the West Midlands police a copy of the solicitor's representations. The Devon and Cornwall police will inquire into the existence of any relevant information as part of the investigation they have been asked to undertake by the chief constable of the West Midlands police.

Criminal Justice

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all the organisations and individuals that have made submissions to him since the publication and on the subject of "Supervision and Punishment in the Community: A Framework for Action".

Mr. John Patten: None as yet. We have asked for comments by 30 June.

ENERGY

Offshore Installations

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what regulations and guidance notes are in force governing the design, operation and construction of offshore installations and associated facilities; when these requirements were introduced; on what dates they have been revised, in respect of which platforms; and what dates and for what period exemptions to the regulations and requirements have been granted, and in what terms.

Mr. Peter Morrison: A detailed answer to the hon. Gentleman's question can be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, I am arranging for copies of my Department's evidence to the Piper Alpha public inquiry on the offshore safety regime to be placed in the Library of the House. This details legislation and guidance relevant to offshore safety. The following regulations have been made since the production of this evidence:

SI 1989 No. 840. The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 (Application Outside Great Britain) Order 1989.

SI 1989 No. 971. The Offshore Installations (Safety Representatives and Safety Committees) Regulations 1989.

SI 1989 No. 978. The Offshore Installations (Included Apparatus or Works) Order 1989.

SI 1989 No. 1029. The Offshore Installations (Emergency Pipeline Valve) Regulations 1989.

SI 1989 No. 1671. The Offshore Installations and Pipeline Works (First Aid) Regulations 1989.

SI 1989 No. 1672. The Offshore Installations (Operational Safety, Health and Welfare and Life Saving Appliances) (Revocations) Regulations 1989.

Electricity Licences

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he intends to issue a general authority under section 6(1) of the Electricity Act 1989 to enable the Director General of Electricity Supply to grant licences authorising the generation, transmission or supply of electricity.

Mr. Wakeham: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and I have now issued the general authority to the director. Copies have today been placed in the Libraries of each House.

Subsidence

Mr. Andy Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the time limits for claims arising from coal mining subsidence damage.

Mr. Baldry: My Department has been discussing with British Coal the need for improved guidance for those householders affected by damage arising from coal mining subsidence. We intend to publish in the near future a new leaflet setting out claimants' rights. This will incorporate a unified approach to handling subsidence claims that has been voluntarily adopted by British Coal and which, in the Government's view, will give claimants the more advantageous elements of the two existing statutes governing such claims in anticipation of the enactment of new legislation. As regards time limits for making claims, British Coal has agreed to accept claims within six years of the damage occurring or within six years from which it would have been reasonable for a claimant to have known that damage had occurred.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what are the total public funds allocated for research and development on *(a)* nuclear energy, *(b)* solar energy, *(c)* wind energy, *(d)* tidal wave energy, *(e)* hydro-electric energy and *(f)* other alternative sources of energy, for each year since 1976.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The figures requested are as follows (all figures in £ million):

	Nuclear[1] energy	*Solar energy*	*Wind energy*	*Tidal energy*	*Hydro[2] energy*	*Other renewables*
1976-77	110·0	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
1977-78	100·1	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
1978-79	127·4	0·2	0·3	0·0	—	3·1
1979-80	145·5	1·5	1·1	0·6	—	6·2
1980-81	186·2	1·2	1·4	1·4	—	9·1
1981-82	205·4	1·5	2·1	0·4	—	17·4
1982-83	214·8	1·7	4·6	0·0	—	12·2
1983-84	203·8	1·6	4·5	0·0	—	9·0
1984-85	196·1	0·8	6·6	0·3	—	9·6
1985-86	189·6	1·0	7·5	0·1	—	7·3
1986-87	174·5	1·0	6·0	0·1	—	7·4
1987-88	140·8	1·2	7·3	1·4	0·8	9·2
1988-89	159·1	1·5	8·5	1·2	0·8	9·4
1989-90	136·8	1·9	5·0	1·0	0·2	9·4

[1] Nuclear expenditure figures are D/Energy expenditure only: figures before 1986-87 include some non-R and D expenditure.

[2] Hydro expenditure not separately identified until 1987-88.

[3] All renewables 0·3.

[4] All renewables 1·3.

Notes:

1. Figures for 1989-90 are forecasts.
2. The table incorporates expenditure on renewable energy by Government Departments, SERC, NERC, and CEGB.
3. Renewables expenditure for 1976-77 and 1977-78 includes energy conservation expenditure.

Electricity Prices

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he will consult pensioners' organisations, local authorities, the electricity consultative councils and the proposed new electricity consumer committees before allowing the price increases proposed for the below 1 MW tariff market in England and Wales for the year commencing 1 April to proceed;

(2) if he will permit the Director General of Electricity Supply and the electricity consumer committee to review retrospectively the price increases applying to the tariff market in England and Wales from 1 April and announced during March; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will permit the Director General of Electricity Supply to review the pricing arrangement for above 1 MW and less than 1 MW, pursuant to the Electricity Act 1989 and vesting day on 31 March;

(4) if he will require the Director General of Electricity Supply on 1 April to review the proposed price increases for the below 1 MW captive tariff market, as though the price increases had been announced on 1 April or thereafter.

Mr. Baldry: Prices are a matter for the individual boards concerned, subject to their statutory and other obligations. All the boards have consulted their respective consultative councils about their proposals. I have no reason to believe that the boards have acted unlawfully in fixing their tariffs.

Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will close the nuclear power stations at Heysham and Hartlepool; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: No. Both the design and the operation of these stations conform to the highest standards of safety. From their inception, the two stations have been subject to inspection and to the licence conditions required by the independent nuclear installations inspectorate (NII) of the Health and Safety Executive. Siting of the installations was one of the factors extensively considered before the NII granted a licence for the construction of the plants.

The NII has full powers to order the shutdown of any nuclear installation which it judges to constitute a threat to safety.

Energy Technology

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Provan of 26 March, he will list the team members of the major research and development programme aimed at developing commercially viable and environmentally acceptable energy technologies and their qualifications.

Mr. Peter Morrison: In addition to seven full-time technically qualified officials in my Department, currently 41 full-time and six part-time scientific and engineering staff at the energy technology support unit at Harwell are engaged on the research and development programme supported by Government into sources of renewable energy.

However, this does not include those involved in the bulk of the research work in the United Kingdom, which is carried out by the industrial and academic sector. The number of qualified staff working in these sectors is not available.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 2 April 1990

TRANSPORT

Coastal Railway Lines

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what contingency transport plans exist in the event of storms destroying railways that run alongside the sea.

Mr. Portillo: Railway operations are the responsibility of British Rail, which has drawn up contingency plans covering a wide range of possible events. In the case of the recent flooding of the railway line at Towyn, full rail services were resumed after six days. British Rail operated a local bus service while rail services were disrupted.

Dunstable-Luton Railway Line

Mr. Madel: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether, following further representations from the hon. Member for Bedfordshire, South-West he has yet heard from British Rail as to whether it intends to re-open the Dunstable to Luton railway line for passenger traffic; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: British Rail management are continuing to appraise several options but they tell me that there has been a delay due to the heavy demands on the staff and computer programmes involved in appraising new projects. It will, I regret, be some time yet before they are in a position to take a decision.

Inventions and Proposals

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy for assessing transport proposals, inventions and ideas put up by members of the public to address particular transport problems.

Mr. Atkins: Where ideas or suggestions relate to my Department's responsibilities, they are naturally subject to analysis by my officials. Otherwise they are passed on to the appropriate public transport operator or local highway authority.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy on part-funding research and development of proposals, inventions and ideas proposed by *(a)* the private sector and *(b)* private individuals.

Mr. Atkins: The Department welcomes proposals, inventions and ideas for research and development. Practical assistance is being made available by the Department, in association with the Science and Engineering Research Council under a new £5·9 million LINK transport infrastructure and operations programme to be announced very shortly.

Under this programme, aimed specifically at small to medium-sized businesses and individuals, up to half the cost of transport research projects can be made available. It is intended that this combination of public and private funding will stimulate a net increase in research into basic transport-related processes and technologies. However the costs of developing specific products for the market place must be borne by the companies and individuals concerned.

Road Works

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action is being taken to improve the co-ordination of statutory undertakers' road works.

Mr. Atkins: Statutory undertakers' rights to excavate in roads in order to lay and maintain their apparatus are governed by the street works code in the Public Utilities Street Works Act 1950. The Government accept that a fundamental reform of this legislation as recommended by the Horne report is required. A Bill will be introduced as soon as a suitable opportunity can be found. This will include a new duty on highway authorities to co-ordinate all excavations in the highway with a view to minimising the disruption to road users and avoiding undesirable combinations of excavations.

Road Pricing Schemes

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if his Department will investigate the effectiveness or otherwise of Sweden's road pricing scheme and its implications for future United Kingdom road transport policy.

Mr. Atkins: My Department monitors a wide range of developments in the transport field and as part of its brief will keep developments in road pricing in Scandinavia and elsewhere under review.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which organisations have submitted correspondence on road pricing schemes since the beginning of the year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: A wide range of organisations and individuals have corresponded on the subject of road pricing since the beginning of the year. A number of organisations discussed road pricing and other forms of restraint in their responses to "Traffic in London" and the London assessment studies.

Ferries (Safety)

Sir David Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has received the report and recommendations of the steering committee supervising his Department's programme of research into the safety of roll-on roll-off passenger ferries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Parkinson: Immediately after the Herald of Free Enterprise capsised outside Zeebrugge harbour in March 1987 the then Secretary of State announced a public inquiry into the causes of the disaster.

The Sheen inquiry reported in July 1987, and its recommendations have been vigorously followed up by the Department. Firstly, by legislation, both in the Merchant Shipping Act 1988 and in no less than eight sets of statutory instruments laying new requirements on United

Kingdom-flag ships. Only one issue—concerning the detail of cargo securing—is still under review. Most of these requirements have also been extended to non-United Kingdom ro-ro passenger ships operating into United Kingdom ports.

Secondly, by requiring all United Kingdom-flag ferries not only to meet all current international stability standards, but in addition, and irrespective of age, to meet the United Kingdom residual stability standards introduced for new vessels in 1980. These standards exceed those applicable to foreign-flag ships, including those trading into United Kingdom ports. All but a handful of the older United Kingdom ships, which are at present being phased out, now meet these higher standards.

The third main Sheen recommendation was for a programme of research to examine the capability of ro-ro passenger ships to survive after sustaining collision damage. It should be noted that Sheen did not imply that current standards of intact stability were inadequate. In fact, all present evidence suggests that any undamaged United Kingdom ferry which complies with today's prescribed standards of intact stability and is operated in a proper and reasonable manner will successfully withstand the rigours of wind and sea likely to be encountered.

The Department of Transport made available £1 million for the research programme. To assist and advise the Department in the management of this programme, a steering committee, including eminent naval architects, was established. I am pleased to say that this important work has now been completed and I have received the steering committee's report. I have today placed copies of the report in the Library, and arranged for copies to be sent to interested parties.

The research programme, carried out by contractors selected by open tender, considered the risks of travel on passenger ro-ro ships; collision resistance; future hull design; internal structure; and how far existing ships met design standards for survivability recently adopted by the IMO and to come into force in April 1990 in respect of new passenger ships. In addition, models were tested in various wave conditions to determine the standards of stability necessary to provide protection against the possibility of rapid capsize of damaged vessels.

An overview report was commissioned to draw together and summarise the results of the research. This report comments in detail on each project, and on the various measures proposed for enhancing survivability, in terms of practicability, benefit and cost. A great deal of valuable information has emerged which should help designers and operators to develop the most suitable ways of improving the survival capability of ro-ro passenger ships. A copy of this overview accompanies the steering committee's report.

The main conclusions and recommendations in the steering committee's report are:

(a) that the new internationally agreed standards of residual stability after damage, applicable to all passenger ships built after 29 April 1990, appear to provide reasonable protection against rapid capsize, the United Kingdom should make the report and the overview publicly available. It should be offered to IMO and designers so that account can be taken of the various measures which, if incorporated in future designs, would enable vessels to meet the higher stability standards;

(b) that current international standards are not sufficient to rule out the possibility of capsize in respect of existing ferries, the United Kingdom should request IMO to give urgent consideration to the adoption of a higher standard of residual stability for existing ships;

(c) if it does not prove possible to achieve early international agreement on an acceptable level of residual stability for existing ro-ro passenger ships, and if the discussions in the IMO forum become unduly protracted, the UK should initiate discussions with European marine administrations. Should that approach fail then the UK should consider the possibility of unilaterally introducing higher standards of residual stability for all existing ro-ro passenger ships operating into UK ports regardless of flag;

(d) to assist international consideration, full details of the results of the research programme should be submitted to the fifty-eighth session of the IMO maritime safety committee (21-25 May 1990);

(e) further model testing should be carried out with a view to validating conclusions of the theoretical studies on the value of the various measures investigated to improve survivability;

(f) ship designers should be urged to pay special attention to the study on collision resistance, and the importance of stem construction and profile shape particularly when bulbous bows are fitted, as they can present a special hazard in the event of collision;

(g) the Department should commend the IMO guidelines for safe ship management for adoption by the industry.

I have already taken steps to ensure that these proposals are considered at the IMO maritime safety committee meeting this May. In addition, in order to promote discussion of this very important work, an international symposium devoted entirely to the results of the research programme will be held in London on 26-27 April. I am pleased that the Royal Institution of Naval Architects has agreed to co-sponsor this event, and I expect it to have a major impact internationally on the further development of ro-ro passenger ferry safety.

Learner Drivers (Supervision)

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to complete consideration of his proposals to amend the Motor Vehicles (Driving Licences) Regulations qualifying the age and experience of those who are supervising learner drivers.

Mr. Atkins: We are currently considering the reponses to our consultation document. In the light of those, I shall consult shortly on the necessary regulations with a view to bringing them into effect this summer.

Road Signs

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to introduce a more flexible policy on road signs for tourist sites and other tourist attractions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Signs to tourist destinations are traffic signs which are prescribed by regulations subject to confirmation by Parliament. Policy and guidance on the provision of tourist signs are currently being reviewed in consultation with the English tourist board and the local authority associations. Following this we shall be consulting more widely with a view to an announcement by the autumn.

Radioactive Waste

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much spent nuclear fuel is transported by road through Clwyd via the A5.

Mr. Atkins: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 29 March, *Official Report*, column *272*.

Company-assisted Travel

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to take into account the material used, and conclusions reached by, the study commissioned from Earth Resources Research Ltd. by Friends of the Earth into the financial and environmental costs of such vehicles in his commissioned research into company-assisted travel.

Mr. Atkins: The professional research commissioned by the Department is based on surveys of the travelling public and it would be inappropriate to incorporate material from other studies. The question of company car taxation is a matter for the Chancellor of the Exchequer. However, in so far as the research by Earth Resources Research Ltd. affects my Department's responsibilities, I shall be happy to take its findings into account.

Severn Crossing

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the likely final cost of the completed improvement works to the existing Severn crossing.

Mr. Atkins: The final cost of stengthening and resurfacing the Severn crossing is estimated at £70 million.

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the progress to date and likely completion date of improvement and strengthening work to the existing Severn crossing.

Mr. Atkins: Strengthening work on the Severn crossing will be completed during the course of 1990. Resurfacing of the crossing is due to be completed by early 1991.

Efficiency Unit

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what further progress he has made towards the implementation in his Department of the recommendations in the efficiency unit's report entitled, "Improving Management in Government: The Next Step"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Parkinson: I am today establishing three further executive agencies in my Department: the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA), the Driving Standards Agency (DSA) and the Vehicle Certification Agency (VCA). I am delegating clear responsibilities for improvements in efficiency, effectiveness and customer services to the chief executives. Those delegations are set out in the agencies' published framework documents; I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Library.

Each year, I shall set these agencies demanding financial and service targets, and those targets will be published in annual business plans. I have arranged for copies of the 1990-91 business plans to be placed in the Library. The agencies will also publish annual reports; again copies will be put in the Library.

DVLA has some 5,500 staff, the majority based at its headquarters in Swansea. It is responsible for the registration and licensing of vehicles and drivers, and for the collection and enforcement of vehicle excise duty. Following an open competition I am appointing Mr. Stephen Curtis, formerly chief executive of Companies House, to be DVLA's first chief executive. DSA is responsible for the testing of drivers and driving instructors. Most of its 2,000 staff are driving examiners, who conduct driving tests from the nationwide network of driving test centres. I am appointing Dr. Christopher Woodman to be DSA's first chief executive. VCA is a small specialised organisation less than 100 strong, which is responsible for testing new models of vehicles and vehicle parts for conformity to specific safety and environmental standards. Most of its staff are based at its headquarters in Bristol. I am appointing Mr. Derek Harvey as VCA's first chief executive.

I wish the chief executives and their staffs every success for the future. I am confident that the enhanced responsibilities which they will have in the areas of finance, contracts and personnel, will enable them to meet their twin objectives of providing yet further improvements in service to the public while giving better value for money.

Where hon. or right hon. Members have queries about matters relating to the operation of those agencies, I hope they will write in the first instance to the chief executives. I and my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for roads and traffic will of course continue to deal with questions of policy or where there is dissatisfaction with an agency's reply.

CIVIL SERVICE

"Next Steps"

Sir Hal Miller: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will make a statement about the progress of the "next steps" initiative.

Mr. Luce: The "next steps" initiative which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister launched in February 1988 continues to go well, and is starting to deliver results.

There will be 30 agencies established by the end of this week, covering some 66,000 people. We expect more to be set up by the summer, taking the total involved to some 80,000. A list of agencies and announced candidates is set out in the table and work continues in many other areas of Government. By the end of 1991 we expect that "next steps" will have been applied to at least half the civil service.

The establishment of agencies is only the first step. The aim of "next steps" is to deliver greater efficiency and better service to the public. Achieving one at the expense of the other is not good enough. Demanding performance targets, financial and non-financial, are being set, and will be refined and improved as experience is gained, and further freedoms and flexibilities and delegations are given.

Results from the early agencies are promising. Each agency will publish annually a report and accounts which amongst other things will set out what is looked for and what is achieved. To help the House and the public see what is happening, we propose to publish annually, starting later this year, a general report on the initiative overall including summaries of developments and results in individual agencies.

The "next steps" initiative although directed in the first place at activities within the civil service is of broad application and its benefits should be sought more widely within the public sector. Accordingly the Government have decided that these disciplines should be applied to non-departmental public bodies which have executive functions, where this is appropriate and where this is likely to improve their performance. I am announcing more details about this separately.

Overall, "next steps" is showing its worth in the delivery of improved performance and better service to the public. The Government will continue to press this important initiative forward with energy and urgency.

Executive Agencies Established or Expected to be Established by Easter 1990

Executive Agencies	*Date or expected date of establishment*	*Staff numbers*
Building Research Establishment	2 April 1990	650
Central Office of Information	5 April 1990	750
Central Veterinary Laboratory	2 April 1990	550
Civil Service College	6 June 1989	200
Companies House	3 October 1988	1,150
Department of the Registers of Scotland	6 April 1990	950
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	2 April 1990	5,250
Driving Standards Agency	2 April 1990	2,000
Employment Service	2 April 1990	35,000
Historic Royal Palaces	1 October 1989	350
Her Majesty's Stationery Office	14 December 1988	3,250
Hydrographic Office	6 April 1990	[1]900
Information Technology Services Agency	2 April 1990	3,000
Insolvency Service	21 March 1990	1,400
Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce	2 April 1990	850
Laboratory of the Government Chemist	30 October 1989	300
Meteorological Office	2 April 1990	2,450
National Weights and Measures Laboratory	18 April 1989	50
Natural Resources Institute	2 April 1990	450
Occupational Health Service	2 April 1990	100
Patent Office	1 March 1990	1,150
QE11 Conference Centre	6 July 1989	50
Radiocommunications Agency	2 April 1990	450
Resettlement Agency	24 May 1989	550
Royal Mint	2 April 1990	950
Training and Employment Agency (NICS)	2 April 1990	1,600
Vehicle Certification Agency	2 April 1990	50
Vehicle Inspectorate	1 August 1988	1,600
Veterinary Medicines Directorate	2 April 1990	50
Warren Spring Laboratory	20 April 1989	300
30 in number		66,350

[1] Defence Support Agency. Figure does not include service personnel.

Note: Figures based on staff in post 1 October 1989.

Announced candidates for Executive Agency status at Easter 1990
These activities have been announced by Departments as under consideration for Agency status

Candidate	*Staff numbers*
Cadw	200
Central Statistical Office	1,000
Civil Service Commission	300
Defence Accounts Organisation	[1]2,150
Defence Research Agency	12,000
Forensic Science Service	550
Fuel Suppliers Branch	50
Historic Buildings and Monuments	600
Land Registry	11,000
Military Survey	[1]850
National Engineering Laboratory	500
National Physical Laboratory	800
Ordnance Survey	2,600
Passport Office	1,100
Planning Inspectorate	550
Property Holdings	1,600
RAF Training	[1]2,500
Royal Parks	550
Service Children's Schools	[1]1,300
Social Security Benefits	72,000
Social Security Contributions	7,000
Training Agency	[2]3,500
Rating Division (NICS)	250
Social Security Operations (NICS)	4,250
24 in number	127,200

[1] Defence Support Agency. Figure does not include service personnel.

[2] Figures in Command 814: since revised downwards.

In addition work continues in many other areas of Government, including Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise, and other parts of the Ministry of Defence.

Sir Hal Miller: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what progress he has made with the creation of executive agencies within his Department.

Mr. Luce: In addition to the civil service college, which became an agency in June 1989, I am happy to announce that I have today launched the civil service occupational health service (the OHS) as an executive agency.

The occupational health service was set up in 1986 to implement the recommendations of a scrutiny by the Prime Minister's efficiency unit. Its job is to promote the health and safety of civil servants at work. Government Departments, like other employers, have to prevent or deal with the distinctive health problems which affect their staff by reason of their work or workplace, not only to meet their legal obligations but to reap the benefits of a fit, productive and well-motivated organisation. And large employers are increasingly finding it best to do so by means of their own dedicated health service.

The occupational health service has a key role to play in supporting management in Government Departments and in executive agencies. It provides expert advice on the statutory responsibilities of employers and on all aspects of occupational health, from recruitment to retirement. And it offers a complete range of supporting services like medical examinations, training in first aid, in the handling of hazardous substances and in the implications of legal changes; and tailor-made information and advice for civil servants working abroad.

This relatively new service has already risen to the challenge of change, and is admirably fitted to perform even better an executive agency. It carries out well-defined executive functions; it recovers its full costs from charges to customer departments, which may obtain services elsewhere where they see this as providing better value for money; and it is responsive to customer demand, designing new services as required to meet changing priorities on the job.

The OHS has a framework document which is designed to enhance its status, to sharpen its objectives, to encourage its customer-orientation, and to give its staff the incentives and the tools to go from strength to strength in improving the quality and efficiency of the service they provide.

The OHS framework document identifies two key indicators by which the performance of the organisation will be monitored. These are the cost per productive professional day (that is the fully loaded cost of the time of its professional staff) and the unit cost of advising on cases referred to the OHS for advice on sickness absence and the health of potential recruits to the civil service. The OHS is also committed to devising an indicator by which the quality of its services can be monitored in future.

Copies of the OHS framework document have today been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Sir Hall Miller: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what action the Government are taking to apply the "next steps" approach to non-departmental public bodies.

Mr. Luce: The Government have drawn up a programme of action for the selective application of the "next steps" approach to executive non-departmental public bodies. This will extend the benefits of "next steps" more widely within the public sector. It continues to be Government policy that new NDPBs will not be set up unless it can be demonstrated that creating a new public body is the most appropriate and cost-effective solution to the task in hand. When a new body is set up, it is important to ensure it starts off on the soundest possible managerial footing.

Sponsoring Departments will in future prepare a management statement, broadly on the lines of a "next steps" framework document, for all new executive NDPBs. The overall aim will be to delegate responsibility to the maximum extent practicable to the body, within an agreed framework which unambiguously sets out the relationship between each body and its sponsoring Department. The approach is designed to improve managerial responsibility for performance and the delivery of results, to improve service to the public, and to enhance accountability.

A similar approach will be applied selectively over a period to existing bodies. Departments and NDPBs have already put a great deal of effort into improving management arrangements. The existing system of comprehensively reviewing each NDPB at least every five years gives Departments the opportunity to consider which NDPBs will most benefit from the early preparation of a management statement, building on what is already in place, and taking account of the statute which sets the framework for each NDPB's relationship with its sponsoring Department. Details are set out in a note prepared by Cabinet Office (Office of the Minister for the Civil Service) and the Treasury. I am placing a copy in the Library of the House.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Manufacturing

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing in value terms for each year from 1970 to 1989 his estimate of gross and net output for manufacturing; and if he will add figures to show gross output after the elimination of transfers within the manufacturing sector.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The information on gross and net output for manufacturing industry is published annually at current prices in *Business Monitor* PA1002, report on the census of production, summary volume. Copies of this volume up to 1987, the latest available year, are available from the House of Commons Library.

Transfers of goods produced by a business to departments not covered by the census (including other businesses in the same enterprise group) are treated within output as sales, valued as if sold to an independent buyer.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Warren: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether Her Majesty's Government have implemented regulations under all the opportunities available under the European Economic Community value added tax directive relating to not-for-profit organisations covered under article 13 of the directive relating to the reimbursement by Her Majesty's Government of value added tax paid by such organisations and similar relief on donations listed as sales for a nominal amount to such organisations.

Mr. Ryder: Article 13 of the EC sixth VAT directive includes various activities where services and goods supplied by charities or non-profit-making organisations shall be exempted from VAT.

Under the normal EC VAT rules, when a business donates equipment it is required to account for VAT on the supply, but donors are not obliged to pass this VAT charge on to the recipient of the equipment.

There is no provision in EC legislation for national Governments to reimburse VAT incurred by non-profit-making organisations on their exempt or non-business activities.

Rateable Values (Fylde)

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which office of the rating and valuation service holds the records of the rateable values of the domestic properties within the Fylde constituency.

Mr. Lilley: The statutory valuation list was prepared for Fylde borough council by the valuation officer, Lancaster. A copy of this list is held for public inspection in the office of Fylde borough council.

Treasury Bills

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the total value of the Treasury bills issued for each of the last 12 months.

Mr. Ryder: The results of the weekly Treasury bill tender are contained in table 3.8 of "Financial Statistics." Table 3.7 shows the distribution of holdings of Treasury bills.

Royal Mint

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made in developing the Royal Mint as an executive agency.

Mr. Ryder: I am pleased to announce that the Royal Mint will today become an executive agency under the "next steps" initiative. The present Deputy Master of the Mint, Mr. A. D. Garrett will be chief executive of the agency.

The mint has been a Government trading fund since 1975 and since that time has consistently achieved a high level of profitability. Its contribution to exports has been recognised by the Queen's Award on four occasions.

As an executive agency the mint will have greater management freedom to develop its thriving business on sound commercial lines in accordance with best private sector practice, and to maximise the efficiency, effectiveness and profitability of its operations. This is reflected in the framework document governing the operation of the agency, copies of which are being placed in the Library of the House today.

A Treasury minute setting the new financial target for the mint of an average 12½ per cent. current cost return on assets for the period 1990-91 to 1992-93 was laid on 27 March 1990 in accordance with section 4(1)(b) of the Government Trading Fund Act 1973.

I wish the deputy master and chief executive and his staff every success in achieving their objectives.

Employee Share Ownership

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to evaluate the tax reliefs introduced in recent years to encourage employee share ownership.

Mr. Lilley: Information from the returns made by employers shows that impressive progress in developing employee share ownership has already been made with the help of the existing tax incentives, and the Government hope to see this progress maintained. To supplement the information already available, I have recently authorised the Inland Revenue to commission research into employers' attitudes to employee share ownership including, in particular, the factors which influence them in the introduction and operation of employee share schemes. The terms of reference for the study are being placed in the House Library.

European Community

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will outline the information which Her Majesty's Government are required to provide to the European Economic Community Commission in terms of the European documents considered along with his Budget statement; if this information is at present collected by Her Majesty's Government; and what will be the cost in future years of the collection and supply of the information so required.

Mr. Ryder: The European Commission's annual economic report is based on its own information and analysis. Member states may offer comments before the report is approved by ECOFIN. The cost to the United Kingdom of so doing is not significant.

Budget Yields

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish information in respect of *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* England, *(d)* Scotland and *(e)* Northern Ireland for the Budget years 1988-89 and 1989-90 on (i) total yield of national insurance, (ii) total yield of corporation tax, (iii) total net yield of value added tax, (iv) vehicle excise duty, (v) petrol and derv duty, (vi) tobacco duty and (vii) alcohol duty.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 29 March 1990]:* Figures for the United Kingdom as a whole are as follows:

£ billion	*1988-89*	[1] *1989-90*
Social security contributions (including national insurance)	33·00	33·1
Corporation tax	18·5	21·4
Value added tax	27·3	29·7
Vehicle excise duty	2·8	2·9
Petrol and derv duty	8·5	8·6
Tobacco duty	5·0	5·0
Alcohol duty	4·5	4·6

[1] Estimate

Data for central Government revenue are not generally broken down by territories. Of those categories requested, only for social security contributions is information available. Latest estimates suggest that these are made up as follows:

United Kingdom security contributions, percentage of total

	per cent.
England	85
Scotland	9
Wales	4
Northern Ireland	2
Total	100

Mortgage Interest Tax Relief

Mr. Clay: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table showing *(a)* the total cost of mortgage interest tax relief in 1990-91, *(b)* the average value of relief per mortgagor and *(c)* the numbers receiving mortgage relief, broken down in the income ranges: under £4,000, £4,000 to £5,000, £5,000 to £6,000, £6,000 to £7,000, £7,000 to £8,000, £8,000 to £9,000, £9,000 to £10,000, £10,000 to £12,000, £12,000 to £15,000, £15,000 to £20,000, £20,000 to £25,000, £25,000 to £30,000 and over £30,000.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 30 March 1990]:* Estimates for 1990-91 are not yet available. Estimates for 1989-90 were given in my reply to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East (Mr. Brown) on 19 February, *Official Report,* column *519.*

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the cost to the Exchequer of higher rate tax relief on mortgage interest in the year 1990-91; and what is *(a)* the likely number of beneficiaries and *(b)* the average size of the mortgage involved.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 30 March 1990]:* Estimates for 1990-91 are not available. In 1989-90, the estimated cost of relief at excess over the basic rate of income tax is £430 million. About 700,000 mortgagors are beneficiaries and their average mortgage is estimated at £28,500. Estimates are provisional.

PRIME MINISTER

Art Treasures

Mr. Wray: To ask the Prime Minister what specific measures have been taken by Her Majesty's Government, alone or with other European Community countries, in order to *(a)* identify and *(b)* protect from permanent removal from the United Kindom national artistic treasures after the single market comes into completion in 1992.

The Prime Minister: The Waverly system has worked well in enabling us to identify and protect national artistic treasures without infringing the rights of owners and unnecessarily impeding the operation of the market. We are considering what measures might be needed to strengthen its operation in the changed conditions after 1992.

Members of Parliament (Bribery)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister which action she is taking on the Salmon committee recommendation that Parliament should consider bringing corruption, bribery and attempted bribery of an hon. Member, acting in his parliamentary capacity, within the ambit of the criminal law.

The Prime Minister: The corruption, bribery and attempted bribery of Members of Parliament acting in their parliamentary capacities would be a contempt and would be a matter for the Committee of Privileges to deal with. We would consider bringing forward legislation to make the corruption or attempted corruption of hon. Members a criminal offence only if there was clear evidence that the present arrangements were ineffective and the House agreed.

European Monetary System

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister if she will seek to ensure that each Department affected publishes a statement on the implications for its activities of the joining of the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system.

The Prime Minister: No. The Government have made it clear that sterling will join the exchange rate mechanism (ERM) when the conditions set out at Madrid are met.

President Havel

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister what matters were discussed during her meeting with President Havel of Czechoslovakia on 21 and 22 March.

The Prime Minister: I discussed with President Havel his ideas for the future shape of Europe and some of the security problems which arise from the new situation. I also announced the extension of the know-how fund to Czechoslovakia.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Appeals

66. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Attorney-General what is the average period between a conviction and the hearing of an appeal against that conviction; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: In England and Wales the average period between lodgment of a notice of appeal against a decision of the magistrates court and hearing of the appeal in the Crown court is 8·36 weeks.

Of appeals to the Court of Appeal, criminal division, against convictions in the Crown court 32·3 per cent. are ready for hearing within six months and 84·3 per cent. are ready within 12 months. The time taken for an appeal to be heard is governed by the amount of preparatory work involved, and in trying to list cases with the minimum of delay the registrar of criminal appeals must ensure that counsel and solicitors acting for each appellant have adequate time to prepare their cases. Where delays in listing appeals occur they tend to be caused by the court's obligation to balance the conflicting needs of applicants who all wish their appeals heard as soon as possible. Those with leave to appeal against conviction, or short sentences, are, wherever possible, given earlier consideration than those appealing against long sentences.

Estate Agents

69. **Mr. Favell:** To ask the Attorney-General what recent representations he has received on the proposals to reform the legal profession in so far as they affect estate agents.

The Attorney-General: Since the publication of the Courts and Legal Services Bill on 6 December 1989, the Lord Chancellor has received eight representations concerning estate agency. The representations have been concerned with the suitability of allowing estate agents to offer conveyancing services as well as providing financial services in the house purchase market.

Director of Public Prosecutions

70. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Attorney-General when he last met the Director of Public Prosecutions; and what was discussed.

The Attorney-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) earlier today.

County Courts

72. **Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Attorney-General if there are any proposals to change the level of staffing in the county courts; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The number of court staff will be increased by about 350 in the coming financial year, and subsequently by up to a further 100 during the transitional period while new initiatives are being introduced.

At the same time the introduction of a computerised summons production centre and the curtailment of the county court banking function will release staff time savings equivalent to about 350 staff.

Immigration Appeals

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Attorney-General what is the average length of time taken by the independent appellate authority in dealing with an appeal against a decision of an entry clearance officer on an immigration matter.

The Attorney-General: The immigration appellate authorities (IAA) do not record information on the average time taken to deal with appeals. It is, however, possible to give an estimate of the average time taken by the IAA to deal with appeals at each stage of the proceedings, as follows:

(a) from the date of receipt of the notice of appeal and the explanatory statement at the IAA's headquarters to the date of dispatch of the case papers to the parties' representatives in the United Kingdom: two to three months;

(b) from the date on which both parties indicate readiness to proceed to a hearing to the date of the hearing: one and a half to two months;

(*c*) from the date of hearing to the date of dispatch of the adjudicator's determination to the parties' representatives in the United Kingdom: one month.

Thus, the current estimate of the average time taken by the IAA to deal with a case is four and a half to six months, to which must be added the time taken by the parties' representatives in the United Kingdom to indicate readiness to proceed after receipt of the case papers from the IAA. This latter period can vary considerably but the current estimate is from two to six months.

In addition, an appeal from a determination by an adjudicator to the immigration appeal tribunal is estimated to take four to six months.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Regional Functions

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what functions his Department carries out at the regional level; where the regional offices are located in each of the regions; what staff are employed and at what grades; what proportion of his Department's budget is spent in each of the regions; and what geographical boundaries determine his Department's regions.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The regional network of the Department of Trade and Industry comprises eight regional offices in England together with their sub-offices and satellites. Their main tasks are:

(1) To promote a better understanding of Government policies in the regions, to gather intelligence about industry and commerce, and to represent regional interests to Government.
(2) To promote and administer all parts of the Enterprise Initiative.
(3) To co-operate with other Government Departments, particularly through the City Action Teams, and with regional development organisations, local authorities, chambers of commerce, local enterprise agencies and other regional and local bodies.

Details of the geographical boundaries and location of the regional offices are contained in the DTI guide for business, a copy of which can be found in the House of Commons Library.

While some DTI programmes have a strong regional emphasis, the vast majority are delivered nationally and it is not therefore possible to provide precise figures for expenditure by region for all schemes. For areas where programme spend can be attributed to individual offices the proportional spends are as follows:

	Per cent. of spend under The Industrial Development Act 1982	*Per cent. of spend under The Consultancy Initiatives*
DTI NE	39·6	4·8
DTI NW	25·6	17·4
DTI YH	16·0	11·2
DTI EM	3·2	6·6
DTI WM	9·2	12·2
DTI SE	2·1	19·3
DTI SW	4·2	7·0
DTI East	—	5·4
Scotland and Wales	—	16·6

The budget for administrative expenditure in 1989-90 by the regional offices is £18·8 million, some 6 per cent. of the total administrative expenditure of the Department. The expenditure by region is as follows:

	£ million
DTI EM	1·6
DTI NE	3·4
DTI WM	3·0
DTI SE	2·7
DTI YH	2·3
DTI NW	3·7
DTI East	0·5
DTI SW	1·5

A breakdown of staff by grade in each of the regional offices is as follows:

Staff by grade (including casually employed staff) as at 1 February 1990

	DTI NE	*DTI NW*	*DTI YH*	*DTI EM*	*DTI WM*	*DTI East*	*DTI SE*	*DTI SW*	*Total*
Grade 3	2·0	1·0	1·0	—	1·0	—	—	—	5·0
Grade 4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Grade 5	1·0	2·0	1·0	1·0	1·0	1·0	1·0	1·0	9·0
Grade 6	4·0	4·0	3·0	3·0	3·0	2·0	5·0	3·0	27·0
Grade 7	10·0	10·0	7·0	4·0	9·0	3·0	5·0	4·0	52·0
SEO	15·0	14·0	10·0	5·0	14·0	—	4·0	1·0	63·0
SPTO/SSO	2·0	1·0	1·0	2·0	1·0	—	—	2·0	9·0
HEO	29·0	33·0	21·0	18·0	24·0	7·0	19·0	12·0	163·0
HPTO/HSO	1·0	1·0	3·0	1·0	2·0	—	1·0	—	9·0
IO	—	—	—	—	—	—	1·0	—	1·0
EO	51·0	39·0	26·0	15·0	31·0	10·0	32·0	19·0	223·0
AO	32·5	38·5	21·0	17·5	35·0	15·0	43·5	25·5	228·5
AA	25·5	28·0	19·0	9·0	27·5	3·0	13·0	5·5	130·5
TM/Typist	8·0	8·0	5·0	5·0	12·5	3·0	—	7·5	49·0
PS/SPS	6·0	7·0	4·0	3·0	5·0	2·0	5·0	2·0	34·0
Support staff	3·0	—	6·0	5·0	6·0	—	0·5	1·0	21·5
Total	190·0	186·5	128·0	88·5	172·0	46·0	130·0	83·5	1,024·5

In addition to its regional office structure, a number of other operations of the Department are sited, in whole or in part, in the regions. These include the inner-city task forces; provincial offices of the insolvency service; offices of the radio investigations service and the Department's financial investigations division; and a number of the Department's research establishments. Information broken down by region on the administrative costs of these operations is not readily available.

The staff that they employ, however, represent some 14 per cent. of total DTI staffing (excluding Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) and are located as follows:

Staff in post as at 1 January 1990

	Number
North East	58
North West	184
Yorks and Humberside	100·5
East Midlands	87
West Midlands	276
South West	125·5
South East (excluding London)	547
Total	1,378

Government Expenditure

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will provide the information contained in tables 4.11, 4.12 and 4.14 of "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1990-91 to 1992-93" for Wales only.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I am afraid that this information is not available.

Buy British Campaign

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received in favour of a Buy British campaign; and what response he has made.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Secretary of State has received a number of representations on this topic. Our response recognises the advantages of purchasing United Kingdom goods and services where they are competitive in design, quality and price.

Telecommunications

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will set out the terms of reference of the telecommunications review due to start later in the current year;

(2) what plans he has to extend the present duopoly in the provision of basic telephone services.

Mr. Forth: The Government will review the present duopoly in the provision of telecommunications over fixed links starting in November of this year. The terms of reference of the review have yet to be decided. I do not at present have any plans to extend the current duopoly.

Computer Programs (Copyright)

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps are being taken to ensure that the proposals for harmonised copyright protection for computer programs in the European Community that result from the Commission's 1989 draft directive do not permit *(a)* unfair competition and *(b)* trade secrets embodied in proprietary software to be published.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We—and, I believe, all other member states—are concerned to ensure that competition in the supply of computer software is fair. There is no provision in the draft directive requiring the publication of trade secrets embodied in such software.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps are being taken to ensure that the proposals for harmonised copyright protection for computer programs in the European Community do not prevent Britain from restraining unauthorised imports of copies of computer programs marketed outside the EEC.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There are no provisions in the draft directive which would prevent the owners of the United Kingdom copyright in a computer program from taking action to restrain the importation of infringing copies of that program from outside the EEC.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what steps are being taken to ensure that the proposals for harmonised copyright protection for computer programs in the European Community that result from the Commission's 1989 draft directive protect *(a)* members of the British software industry against uncontrolled access by competitors to the details and workings of their proprietary software and *(b)* the investment in research and development incurred by the British software industry in creating proprietary software;

(2) what steps are being taken to ensure that the proposals for harmonised copyright protection for computer programs in the European Community resulting from the Commission's 1989 draft directive provide sufficient protection to encourage long-term research and development;

(3) what steps are being taken to ensure that the proposals for harmonised copyright protection for computer programs in the European Community that result from the Commission's 1989 draft directive do not undermine the protection presently afforded the British software industry by the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 and other relevant legislation;

(4) what steps are being taken to ensure that the proposals for harmonised copyright protection for computer programs in the European Community resulting from the Commission's 1989 draft directive do not discourage innovation;

(5) what steps are being taken to ensure that the proposals for harmonised copyright protection for computer programs in the European Community that result from the Commission's 1989 draft directive do not by permitting limited access for specified reasons allow details and workings of proprietary software to become available to commercial competitors.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The draft directive does not provide for uncontrolled access to the details and workings of proprietary software, although the question of whether access should be allowed in certain limited circumstances is receiving further consideration. Investment by the British software industry will continue to be safeguarded in the United Kingdom by the rights accorded under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, which is not undermined by the draft directive. The draft directive would, however, improve the general level of protection of computer programs in the Community and should therefore further encourage investment, innovation and long-term research and development in this field.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give the total of European regional development fund moneys given to the borough of St. Helens in each of the last five years.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The totals of commitments from the European regional development fund in respect of projects in St. Helens, Merseyside in the last five years have been as follows:

	Industrial £	*Infrastructure* £	*Total* £
1985	55,783	142,500	198,283
1986	144,002	29,500	173,502
1987	45,057	185,400	230,457
1988	12,057	—	12,057
1989	50,958	—	50,958

The absence of commitments to infrastructure projects in 1989 is due to the European Commission's delay in approving the Mersey basin programme which includes St. Helens. With the recent approval of this programme commitments will resume.

Televisions

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many British-made televisions were exported to European Economic Community countries, and how many were sold on the British market, in the latest available 12 months.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A total of 1·2 million British-made television sets were exported to European Economic Community countries and 1·82 million British-made sets were sold on the British market in 1989.

Company Accounts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make it his policy as a condition of recognition to require the accountancy bodies seeking supervisory recognition under the Companies Act 1989 to make the minutes of their council meetings available *(a)* to their members and *(b)* to any member of the public on payment of a small fee.

Mr. Redwood: No. It is for a supervisory body itself to decide what arrangements are appropriate for informing its members and the public about its proceedings.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether his Department has any plans to legislate to strengthen controls over auditors establishing whether or not a business is a going concern.

Mr. Redwood: No. I refer the hon. Member to the answers that I gave to his questions on 5 March at column *415* and 27 March at column *125*.

European Postal Monopoly

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals have emerged from the European Economic Community Commission on the establishment of a European postal monopoly; what assessment has been made of the implications for the United Kingdom and for private delivery services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: Discussions on postal policy in Europe are taking place in Brussels between member states and the European Commission but no proposals have yet been made by the Commission and it is too early to speculate what the implications might be for the United Kingdom and for private delivery services. I understand that the Commission intends to publish a Green Paper in June.

Radiocommunications Division

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made towards establishing his Department's radiocommunications division as an executive agency.

Mr. Ridley: I am establishing the radiocommunications executive agency today. It is the seventh executive agency to be established within DTI.

Operating as an agency will give the agency further incentive in its efforts to provide an effective, quality service to radio users throughout the country. To that end I have set the radiocommunications agency the following efficiency and quality of service targets for 1990-91:

(a) to achieve an efficiency increase of 3 per cent. in its overall operations;

(b) to maintain and improve existing levels of quality of service in its licensing and enforcement activities through a comprehensive set of quality of service targets as follows:

(i) Licensing

Aeronautical—90 per cent. of new applications to be processed and despatched within one working day;

Aircraft—90 per cent. of new applications to be processed and despatched within two working days;

Ships radio—80 per cent. of licences to be issued within one month;

Maritime business radio—90 per cent. of cases to be actioned within three months;

Private mobile radio

Average time for processing applications:

New applications—within 15 working days;

Amendments—within 30 working days;

On-site paging—90 per cent. of new applications and amendments to be processed and, where appropriate, despatched within three working days.

In each case the target is for action within the number of days specified, following receipt by the agency;

(ii) Enforcement:

95 per cent. of safety of life services complaints to be handled within 24 hours;

95 per cent. of business complaints to be handled within five working days;

95 per cent. of domestic complaints to be handled within one month.

I propose in due course to set the radiocommunications agency similarly challenging targets for the improvement of efficiency in later years.

Textile and Clothing Industry

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if any studies have been conducted on the likely impact of the changes in central and eastern Europe on the textile and clothing industry in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 28 March 1990]:* I am not aware of any such study.

Consultancies

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1989 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1989, giving in each case the name of the consulting firm and the subject of the assignment; and what is the total amount that his Department has budgeted to spend in the current year.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 28 March 1990]*: My Department's expenditure on consultants engaged in the financial year 1989-90 is estimated to be £6,979,000 of which £3,967,000 is for computer consultancy contracts excluding hardware and software purchases. The allocation for 1990-91 will be set shortly in the light of the Department's annual activity and resource management review. Expenditure on management consultants is not recorded separately.

The following is the list of management or computer consultancy contracts awarded for the financial year 1989-90:

Firm and subject of assignment
National Computing Centre—Focus Software Quality Paper Update
Trichem Consultants Limited—Petrochemical Industry Study
Trichem Consultants Limited—Petrochemical Industry Study
Trichem Consultants Limited—Petrochemical Industry Study
Ernst and Whinney—Inward Investment Study
SEMA Group (UK) Limited—IT Security Standards
Benchmark—Engineering Computer Survey
Martec Associates—Diesel Generating Sets–Market Study
Policy Studies Institute—Evaluation of OSTT and AIT Ref (1725)
March—Maintenance Initiative Report
Coopers and Lybrand—Barriers To Takeover
Victor Hausner & Associates—Task Forces Advice and Support On Policy Guidance
Taylor Hitec—Famos Management
W. S. Atkins—IMM Market Study
SEMA—Slumen MR OSI Network Management
J. Westgate (Consultants) Limited—OSI Network Study
EOSYS Limited—OSI Implementor Groups
National Economic Research Association (NERA)—Copyright Protection Study
T. William Olle Associates—Open Distributed Processing Reference Model
T. William Olle Associates—Data Management Reference Model
SEMA Group Limited—OSI Upper Layer Architecture
Data Dictionary Systems Limited—Study On International Standards
Lighting Industry Federation—Certification of Lighting Equipment
Secure Information Systems Limited—Cleft Test Evaluation
Standardcorp—Nursery Goods European Standards
International Project Councellors Limited—Feasibility Study–Open Cast Mine
SEMA Group Limited—OSI Upper Layer Architecture
Coopers & Lybrand—Scrutiny Of Demand And Funding For Departmental Central Services
Malcolm Associates—Safety Critical Systems
Business in the Community (BIC)—Enterprise and education Sectoral Initiative
Coopers and Lybrand—Environmental/safety controls on chlorinated substances
Intermatrix—Study on the Japanese market for speciality chemicals:
Opportunity Japan campaign stage II
Metra Martech Limited—Expo 92—Spaniards' attitudes towards Britain survey
P-Four Consultancy Limited—Open systems technology transfer module (OSTT)
Segal Quince Wicksteed Limited—Consultancy initiatives evaluation next phase 1989/90
Dodwell Marketing Consultants—Study on the Japanese market for speciality food and drink
PA Consulting Group—Microengineering study
British Mining Consultants Limited—Mining sector study in Latin and South America
A. T. Kearney Limited—Computer integrated manufacturing market study
Artificial Intelligence Limited—Study of the adoption of parallel computing architectures
General Technology Systems—HDTV technology market study
General Technology Systems—Television studio equipment study
QU O-Tec Limited—Materials matter technology transfer programme
Ernst and Whinney—USSR consultancy opportunities study
Mott Macdonald International—Oman water master plan study
Peat Marwick McLintock—IT systems classification study
Peat Marwick McLintock—Public purchasing in the excluded sectors
HP-ICM—Management best practice/Action briefings
Furniture Industry Research Association—Furniture industry study
AMTRI—Study into human factor engineering in manufacturing
Coal Research Establishment—China coal utilisation study
Aspinwall and Co. Limited—Manufacturing sector environmental study
Logica Consultancy Limited—United Kingdom input to the ISO lower layer security model
Technopolis Limited—Science policy research unit electronic equipment sources study
National Council for Educational Technology (NCET)—CD Rom in schools
Coopers and Lybrand Associates Limited—Inward investment review
Ernst and Young—DTI enterprise initiative scheme contractors review
Scoll—DTI IT Security policy development
Coopers and Lybrand—CFC market study
Sambrook Research International—Evaluation of demonstration firms scheme
March Consulting Group—Batteries and accumulators community directive study
Coopers and Lybrand—Computing services industry study
National Computing Centre—Starts programme management
Cox Computer Consultants—Mobile monitoring data processing programme
Segal Quince Wicksteed Limited—Study (1) Survey on Otis and Techalert
Segal Quince Wicksteed Limited—Study (2) survey on Otis and Techalert
Segal Quince Wicksteed Limited—Regional enterprise grants evaulation
Roskill Information Services Limited—Chrome market assessment
Satellite International Limited—RAL polar platforms instruments studies
British Fashion Council—Fashion designer industry market study
SEMA Group—Performance testing of manufacturing networks
Benchmark Research—The 1989 Eureka materials survey
Levelphase Limited—Intelligent documentation advisory system
Headway Systems—Castelmaine design support
BT Research Labs—Ella behavioural synthesis
March Consulting Group—Managing maintenance in manufacturing programme
Power Management Associates—Research in hydraulic equipment
National Computing Centre—IT security awareness programme for business
Trichem consultants—Link asymetric synthesis programme
Optimat Limited—Materials technology audits
P-E Inbucon—EMC technology transfer campaign
Computer Services Association—CSA single European market study
Intermatrix Group—Japanese market for aerospace products
Peat Marwick McLintock—IT effectiveness report
SPG Management Consultants Limited—Market study: Textile machinery
Peat Marwick McLintock—Marketing testing and survey of

accounts branch services
Touche Ross and Company—Assessment of consultancy initiatives in the industry
Peat Marwick McLintock—Market assessment study on the recycling of tyres
Segal Quince Wicksteed—Consultancy initiatives evaluation next phase—1989-90
PA Consulting Group—Review of the information retrieval services (IRS)
Welding Institute The—Market study: United Kingdom welding market
PIRA—Study 6: Papermaking machinery
PIRA—Study 4: Printing machinery
Grant Thornton—Use of information systems in small/medium enterprises
Electrical Installation Equipment Manufacturing Association Limited (EIMA)—House service cuttout market study
Corporate Intelligence Group Limited—Construction and earth moving equipment
Coopers and Lybrand—Managing into the 90's programme: Review
Cousins Stephens Associates—Small firms constraints survey
Instruction Set—Consultancy to assess software for press office and IBB
Cranfield Institute of Technology—Import substitution mechanical handling
Federation of Materials Institutes—Requirements in structural materials technology
Topexpress Limited—United Kingdom advancement of the security framework
Douglas Westwood Associates—Compressors oil hydraulic and pneumatic control equipment
Escovale Research—United Kingdom market for electric motors
Corporate Development Consultants Limited—Industry profile of printed cartons in EC market study
Instruction Set—Open systems standards market study
Aegis Systems Limited—Very small aperture terminals (VSAT) study
RAPRA Technology Limited—Rubber and plastics working machinery study
Leicester Expertise Limited—Leather plan and machinery market study
Price Waterhouse—English unit consultancy
PA Cambridge Economic Consultants—Leisure engineering markets study
ERA Technology Limited—Market study on cable
PIRA—Printing, papermaking and packaging machinery
P-E Inbucon—Skill shortage in chemical industry market assessment study
Ernst and Young—IMM market with west midlands community assessment study
Merz and McLellan—Fabricator industries study
Merz and McLellan—Secondary battery industry market study: Import substitution
Michael Shortland Associates—Implementation of IED strategy for human computer interaction
General Technology Systems Limited—Britain's future competitiveness study
A. T. Kearney Limited—Wooden and upholstered furniture market assessment study
Quo-tec Limited—Computerised materials data market study
Trichem consultants—Review of United Kingdom valve industry
Communication Studies and Planning Limited—BNSC's press office distribution system
Electronic Publishing Services Limited—European information products and services study
PRS Consultancy Services Limited—Automotive components
Salford Software Services—OSI user application study
Benchmark Research Limited—MAS: CAD/CAE take-up constructional steel Fabrication sector
British Ceramic Research Limited—Glass and ceramics machinery
Quo-tec Limited—Materials matter case study
General Technology Systems Limited—Materials matter case study
Institute of Metals—Materials matter case study
Andrew Irvine Associates—DTI Enterprise and Education Initiative market study
PA Cambridge Economic Consultants—Non-survey methods to evaluate regional policy
Electrotech Research Limited—Jessi board support group
B.F.P.M.S—Electronic publishing strategic market study
Rail Technology Services—United Kingdom light rail transit vehicle market survey
British Computer Society (SGES)—Best manufacturing intelligence award
Levelphrase Limited—Evaluation and assessment measures for KBS
Rapra Technology Limited—Recycling of polymers from scrap products
WS Atkins—Environmental monitoring instrumentation market study
Fibre Research Consultants Limited—Construction of straw paper pulp mill
PDA International—Design and operation of an environmental labelling scheme
March Consulting Group—Cadmium community directive market assessment study
G. P. Wild (International) Limited—DTI photographic unit's study
BIS Mackintosh Limited—Capabilities of European GAAS electronic companies
Metra Martech—Single market campaign: barriers to trade
Institute of Electrical Engineers—Computer based systems safety practice
Ferranti Computer Services—Quantifying software costs estimation
John Westgate (Consultants) Limited—OSI products (2nd issue).
Ferranti Computer Services—Formal verification support for Ella.
Ferranti Computer Services—Sensing/Sensor fusion in complex man-machine systems
PA Cambridge Economic Consultants—Evaluation of ICU's task force programme.

Chatlines

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will immediately take steps to ensure that in future 0898 telephone services shall be provided only to Government, commercial and private subscribers following an opt-in decision by the subscriber, communicated to the telephone company in writing.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 30 March 1990]:* This is a matter for the Director General of Telecommunications, who has already taken firm action to control certain of these so-called premium rate services. He is keeping the matter under close review.

British Aerospace

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what *(a)* correspondence and *(b)* meetings his Department has had with the European Commission concerning subsidies to British Aerospace.

Mr. Ridley *[holding answer 27 March 1990]:* There have been various meetings and exchanges of correspondence with the Commission concerning its inquiries into the terms of the sale of Rover Group to British Aerospace. The Commission has not yet concluded its inquiries. My Department is also in regular contact with the Commission about support to the partners in Airbus Industrie, which includes British Aerospace.

Inspectors' Reports

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the investigations carried out by his inspectors in which they have alleged fraud or other irregularities, along with a list of the auditing firms that failed to detect and report such frauds and irregularities.

Mr. Redwood: No. It does not follow that if inspectors report fraud or other irregularities there has necessarily been some failure on the part of the auditors.

Trade Surplus

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry with which Group of Seven countries the United Kingdom has a trade surplus.

Mr. Redwood: Information on United Kingdom imports and exports with the Group of Seven countries is published in the "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom", *Business Monitor* MM20, table 1b.

Eastern Europe

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the prospects for British exports to eastern Europe; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: Prospects for British exports to eastern Europe vary from country to country and from industrial sector to industrial sector. Valuable opportunities for trade and investment exist in many sectors, including food processing and packaging, health care and medical equipment, computers, control equipment and office equipment. However, exports are limited by the lack of hard currency available and by competition from other major western suppliers. It is important that United Kingdom companies with the patience and persistence to tackle these markets should keep a high profile and be ready to seize new opportunities as they arise. This is particularly true at present in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland and the German Democratic Republic, as they leave the command economy behind them. United Kingdom companies should also take into consideration the various aid and multilateral investment funds available for economic reconstruction.

Single European Market

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimates he has available concerning the potential trade diversion from developing countries to members of the European Community when the single European market is established in *(a)* primary food products, *(b)* metal products, *(c)* petrochemicals and fertilisers and *(d)* manufactured food.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 27 March 1990]:* Completion of the single market will remove the remaining barriers to trade between the member states. This will also make it easier for overseas trading partners to do business throughout the Community. At the same time the Community is negotiating vigorously in the Uruguay round of GATT negotiations for the further liberalisation of international trade.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimates he has made of the consequences of the single European market on investment in developing countries.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 27 March 1990]:* Commercial investment decisions are determined by the laws in force in the countries concerned. Completion of the single market, including removal of controls on capital movements by member states, should have a beneficial effect from which all the Community's trading partners can benefit.

Ivory

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much *(a)* raw and *(b)* worked ivory has been imported into the United Kingdom since 1988.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 29 March 1990]:* For 1988 and 1989 combined, imports into the United Kingdom were *(a)* £678,000 for raw ivory (including powder and waste) and *(b)* £271,000 for worked ivory and articles of ivory. There were no imports of raw ivory in the last six months of 1989. No figures for early 1990 are yet available.

ENERGY

Offshore Oil Platforms

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) in respect of the Argyll production platform, how many times this has been inspected by the appropriate certifying authority in the last five years; what were the dates of inspection; what are the dates of inspection by his Department's inspectors in the same period; what was the result of these inspections; what regulations and guidance notes were in force at the time of construction of the installation; whether any exemption was applied for or granted to these provisions; whether the facilities on the installation comply with all current regulations and guidance notes; what is the number of injuries, including fatalities, occurring on the installation since it was positioned; how many breaches of regulations or Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 provisions have been reported to him; how many he has passed to the appropriate prosecution authority for action; and what is his latest estimate of the life of the installation;

(2) in respect of the Forties production platform, how many times this has been inspected by the appropriate certifying authority in the last five years; what were the dates of inspection; what are the dates of inspection by his Department's inspectors in the same period; what was the result of these inspections; what regulations and guidance notes were in force at the time of construction of the installation; whether any exemption was applied for or granted to these provisions; whether the facilities on the installation comply with all current regulations and guidance notes; what is the number of injuries, including fatalities, occurring on the installation since it was positioned; how many breaches of regulations or Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 provisions have been reported to him; how many he has passed to the appropriate prosecution authority for action; and what is his latest estimate of the life of the installation;

(3) in respect of the Tartan production platform, how many times this has been inspected by the appropriate certifying authority in the last five years; what were the dates of inspection; what are the dates of inspection by his Department's inspectors in the same period; what was the result of these inspections; what regulations and guidance notes were in force at the time of construction of the

installation; whether any exemption was applied for or granted to these provisions; whether the facilities on the installation comply with all current regulations and guidance notes; what is the number of injuries, including fatalities, occurring on the installation since it was positioned; how many breaches of regulations or Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 provisions have been reported to him; how many he has passed to the appropriate prosecution authority for action; and what is his latest estimate of the life of the installation;

(4) in respect of the Thistle production platform, how many times this has been inspected by the appropriate certifying authority in the last five years; what were the dates of inspection; what are the dates of inspection by his Department's inspectors in the same period; what was the result of these inspections; what regulations and guidance notes were in force at the time of construction of the installation; whether any exemption was applied for or granted to these provisions; whether the facilities on the installation comply with all current regulations and guidance notes; what is the number of injuries, including fatalities, occurring on the installation since it was positioned; how many breaches of regulations or Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 provisions have been reported to him; how many he has passed to the appropriate prosecution authority for action; and what is his latest estimate of the life of the installation;

(5) in respect of the Balmoral production platform, how many times this has been inspected by the appropriate certifying authority in the last five years; what were the dates of inspection; what are the dates of inspection by his Department's inspectors in the same period; what was the result of these inspections; what regulations and guidance notes were in force at the time of construction of the installation; whether any exemption was applied for or granted to these provisions; whether the facilities on the installation comply with all current regulations and guidance notes; what is the number of injuries, including fatalities, occurring on the installation since it was positioned; how many breaches of regulations or Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 provisions have been reported to him; how many he has passed to the appropriate prosecution authority for action; and what is his latest estimate of the life of the installation;

(6) in respect of the Beatrice production platform, how many times this has been inspected by the appropriate certifying authority in the last five years; what were the dates of inspection; what are the dates of inspection by his Department's inspectors in the same period; what was the result of these inspections; what regulations and guidance notes were in force at the time of construction of the installation; whether any exemption was applied for or granted to these provisions; whether the facilities on the installation comply with all current regulations and guidance notes; what is the number of injuries, including fatalities, occurring on the installation since it was positioned; how many breaches of regulations or Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 provisions have been reported to him; how many he has passed to the appropriate prosecution authority for action; and what is his latest estimate of the life of the installation;

(7) in respect of the Brent field production platforms, how many times this has been inspected by the appropriate certifying authority in the last five years; what were the dates of inspection; what were the dates of inspection by his Department's inspectors in the same period; what was the result of these inspections; what regulations and guidance notes were in force at the time of construction of the installation; whether any exemption was applied for or granted to these provisions; whether the facilities on the installation comply with all current regulations and guidance notes; what is the number of injuries, including fatalities, occurring on the installation since it was positioned; how many breaches of regulations or Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 provisions have been reported to him; how many he has passed to the appropriate prosecution authority for action; and what is his latest estimate of the life of the installation;

(8) in respect of the Claymore production platform, how many times this has been inspected by the appropriate certifying authority in the last five years; what were the dates of inspection; what were the dates of inspection by his Department's inspectors in the same period; what was the result of these inspections; what regulations and guidance notes were in force at the time of construction of the installation; whether any exemption was applied for or granted to these provisions; whether the facilities on the installation comply with all current regulations and guidance notes; what is the number of injuries, including fatalities, occurring on the installation since it was positioned; how many breaches of regulations or Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 provisions have been reported to him; how many he has passed to the appropriate prosecution authority for action; and what is his latest estimate of the life of the installation;

(9) in respect of the Beryl A production platform, how many times this has been inspected by the appropriate certifying authority in the last five years; what were the dates of inspection; what are the dates of inspection by his Department's inspectors in the same period; what was the result of these inspections; what regulations and guidance notes were in force at the time of construction of the installation; whether any exemption was applied for or granted to these provisions; whether the facilities on the installation comply with all current regulations and guidance notes; what is the number of injuries, including fatalities, occurring on the installation since it was positioned; how many breaches of regulations or Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 provisions have been reported to him; how many he has passed to the appropriate prosecution authority for action; and what is his latest estimate of the life of the installation;

(10) in respect of the Beryl B production platform, how many times this has been inspected by the appropriate certifying authority in the last five years; what were the dates of inspection; what are the dates of inspection by his Department's inspectors in the same period; what was the result of these inspections; what regulations and guidance notes were in force at the time of construction of the installation; whether any exemption was applied for or granted to these provisions; whether the facilities on the installation comply with all current regulations and guidance notes; what is the number of injuries, including fatalities, occurring on the installation since it was positioned; how many breaches of regulations or Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 provisions have been reported to him; how many he has passed to the appropriate prosecution authority for action; and what is his latest estimate of the life of the installation;

(11) in respect of the Central Brae production platform, how many times this has been inspected by the appropriate certifying authority in the last five years; what were the

dates of inspection; what are the dates of inspection by his Department's inspectors in the same period; what was the result of these inspections; what regulations and guidance notes were in force at the time of construction of the installation; whether any exemption was applied for or granted to these provisions; whether the facilities on the installation comply with all current regulations and guidance notes; what is the number of injuries, including fatalities, occurring on the installation since it was positioned; how many breaches of regulations or Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 provisions have been reported to him; how many he has passed to the appropriate prosecution authority for action; and what is his latest estimate of the life of the installation;

(12) in respect of the South Brae production platform, how many times this has been inspected by the appropriate certifying authority in the last five years; what were the dates of inspection; what are the dates of inspection by his Department's inspectors in the same period; what was the result of these inspections; what regulations and guidance notes were in force at the time of construction of the installation; whether any exemption was applied for or granted to these provisions; whether the facilities on the installation comply with all current regulations and guidance notes; what is the number of injuries, including fatalities, occurring on the installation since it was positioned; how many breaches of regulations or Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 provisions have been reported to him; how many he has passed to the appropriate prosecution authority for action; and what is his latest estimate of the life of the installation.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Offshore Installations (Construction and Survey) Regulations (S.I. 1974 No. 289) provide, inter alia, for the appointment by the Secretary of State of persons or bodies to certify offshore installations as fit for purpose and to carry out periodic surveys. On receipt of an application for a certificate of fitness or a renewal thereof the certifying authorities carry out, or ensure that there is carried out, an independent assessment of the design and method of construction of the installation and the provisions of its operation manual, and carry out a major survey of the installation. Thereafter there are regular annual surveys, which can be supplemented as necessary, for example where an installation has been damaged, shows signs of deterioration or its equipment has been modified.

All offshore installations are subject to this regime, and it is an offence to operate an installation without a certificate of fitness. In addition, the marine directorate of the Department of Transport conducts biennial surveys of life-saving appliances and fire-fighting equipment and plans, as provided under the Offshore Installations (Life-Saving Appliances) Regulations (S.I. 1977 No. 486) and the Offshore Installations (Fire-fighting Equipment) Regulations (S.I. 1978 No. 611).

My Department's safety directorate conducts inspections of offshore installations, during which it may look at any aspects of the installation and the working environment. The frequency with which installations are inspected varies according to the installation; an inspection rating system takes account of the nature of operations on the installation, the number of persons on board, an assessment of the effectiveness of management control, the lapse of time since the last inspection and other factors.

In line with these criteria, the most recent inspection of the Deepsea Pioneer (the Argyll floating production facility) took place in October 1989, of Forties FA in June 1989, of Forties FB in October 1989, of Forties FC in February 1989, of Forties FD and South East Forties in January 1990, of Tartan in September 1989, of Thistle in October 1989, of Balmoral in January 1990, of Beatrice A, B and C in May 1989, of Claymore in February 1990, of Brent A in January 1990, of Brent B in September 1989, of Brent C in December 1989, of Brent D in April 1989, of Beryl A in October 1989, of Beryl B in August 1989, and of Brae A in December 1989. Central Brae is a subsea drilling and production template to Brae A.

In common with other regulatory agencies, it is not the Department's practice to publish inspection reports. Operators are informed of any defects discovered and remedial action required at the time, and this is subsequently confirmed in writing.

The questions of regulations, guidance notes and exemptions in force were covered in my reply to the hon. Member of 30 March.

The dates on which the platforms in question were installed are as follows:

Platform	*Installation date*
Argyll	December 1984
Balmoral	June 1986
Beatrice A	September 1979 and June 1980
Beatrice B	June 1983
Beatrice C	September 1984
Beryl A	July 1975
Beryl B	May 1983
Brae A	April 1982
Brae B	June 1987
Brent A	May 1976
Brent B	August 1975
Brent C	June 1978
Brent D	July 1976
Claymore	July 1976
Forties FA	June 1974
Forties FB	June 1975
Forties FC	August 1974
Forties FD	June 1975
S.E. Forties	July 1986
Tartan	June 1979
Thistle	August 1976

Source: Development of the Oil and Gas Resources of the United Kingdom, Department of Energy 1989.

There have been four fatalities on these platforms during the last five years: on Brent C in March 1987, on Claymore A in May 1987, on Forties FB in October 1987 and on Brent D in November 1988. My Department investigates all fatal accidents.

Over the same period, there have been seven convictions for breaches of United Kingdom safety legislation on these platforms following investigations by my inspectors. The details are as follows:

Company	*Installation*	*Date of conviction*	*Penalty £*
Rigblast Offshore Ltd.	Beryl B	12 February 1985	1,000
Mobil North Sea Ltd.	Beryl A	17 January 1989	10,000
BP Development Ltd.	Forties FD	5 February 1985	15,000
Bawden International Ltd.	Forties FB	10 June 1985	1,750
Shell UK Ltd.	Brent C	28 August 1985	350
Jack Tighe (Offshore) Ltd.	Brent C	25 September 1985	900
Shell UK Ltd.	Brent D	19 October 1989	5,000

My safety directorate does not make estimates of the life of an installation; this is a matter for the operators and the certifying authorities. However, all offshore installations have to be registered in line with the provisions of the Offshore Installations (Registration) Regulations (S.I. 1972 No. 702). This provides for registration to expire at the end of 25 years in the case of a fixed installation or 10 years in the case of a mobile installation, although applications for re-registration can be made.

Mersey Barrage

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the bid by the Mersey Barrage Company to construct a barrage on the River Mersey.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The current phase of work on the proposed Mersey tidal barrage is still under way. Various proposals for the way forward have been submitted by the Mersey Barrage Company, and these are being considered by the Department.

Nuclear Power

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will estimate the share of the electricity generation industry of England and Wales that would be taken by the nuclear sector in the absence of any nuclear levy or nuclear subsidy.

Mr. Baldry: The non-fossil fuel obligation together with the fossil fuel levy will ensure that we continue to enjoy the strategic and environmental benefits of around 8GW of nuclear power.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will publish his correspondence with the Commissioners of the European Community regarding the nuclear levy and the nuclear subsidy.

Mr. Wakeham: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) on Monday 26 March at column 5.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will publish his correspondence with the directors designate of Nuclear Electric plc, regarding the directors' obligations to cease trading when their company is technically insolvent.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave on 27 March at column *122*, and to the departmental minute that he laid before the House on 6 March. I have arranged for a copy of the letter of comfort to be placed in the Library of this House.

Non-fossil Fuel Obligation

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will extend the period for contracts under the non-fossil fuel obligation for renewable energies to 15 years.

Mr. Baldry: The first order setting the level of the non-fossil fuel obligation in respect of renewables-sourced electricity generating capacity will cover the period from 1990 until 1998, and this is the period for which the fossil fuel levy will initially run. However, the arrangements that they make in order to meet their respective obligations are a matter for the public electricity suppliers.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Development Assistance

78. **Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he plans to announce the figures for the percentage of gross national product spent on official development assistance in 1989.

Mrs. Chalker: I expect to be able to provide this information in June.

97. **Sir David Steel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards attaining the 0·7 per cent. of gross national product level of aid/development spending.

Mrs. Chalker: In 1988 United Kingdom official development assistance as a percentage of gross national product was 0·32 per cent. The Government have accepted the United Nations target for official development assistance of 0·7 per cent. of GNP, but, like previous Administrations and many other donors, have not set a timetable for achieving it. Progess must depend on economic circumstances and other claims on resources.

South Africa

79. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much has been spent by the Overseas Development Administration in the past year on aid for black people in South Africa; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: Over the past year we have spent about £9 million on aid for black South Africans, including our share of European Community aid.

Cambodia

80. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has any plans to re-establish the British Council in Cambodia.

Mrs. Chalker: I understand that the British Council has no plans to return to Cambodia at present.

Palestine

81. **Mr. Livsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the Israeli Government about aid to Palestine.

Mrs. Chalker: It has not been Her Majesty's Government's practice to consult the Israeli Government about our bilateral assistance to the occupied territories.

Developing Nations (Aid)

82. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will take steps to increase the expenditure on aid to developing nations.

Mrs. Chalker: Expenditure on aid is increasing. The Government's Autumn Statement published on 15 November 1989 records that the aid programme is planned to rise from £1,500 million in 1989-90 to £1,587 million in

1990-91, £1,680 million in 1991-92 and £1,750 million in 1992-93. This represents a cash increase of 16 per cent. over the next three years.

Natural Resources Institute

83. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been achieved through the work of the Overseas Development Natural Resources Institute.

Mrs. Chalker: I am glad to have this opportunity to pay tribute to the Natural Resources Institute's role in the aid programme. It possesses a wealth of scientific expertise, developed over almost 100 years; and has done celebrated work across the developing world in land resource assessment, insect pest management, and food science and crop utilisation.

Mr. Gerald Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made with plans for the Overseas Development Natural Resources Institute to become an executive agency.

Mrs. Chalker: As foreshadowed in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) on 19 December 1989, at column *121*, the institute has been established as an executive agency under the Government's "next steps" initiative with effect from 1 April. The institute's aims, objectives and operating principles as an agency are set out in a framework document, copies of which have been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses. In accordance with "next steps" principles, the institute will be free to propose further adaptation if changing circumstances make this appropriate.

The institute's performance will be judged principally in terms of its ability to satisfy customers while covering its full economic costs. I have set NRI the target of improving its efficiency, as measured by unit costs, by 5·5 per cent. in the three years 1990-91 to 1992-93. Over the same period the institute plans to increase the volume of business it undertakes.

The institute's name will be the Natural Resources Institute or NRI.

Ethiopia

84. **Mr. Andrew F. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about current aid to Ethiopia.

98. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on the current arrangements for delivering relief supplies to northern Ethiopia.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Gentlemen to the answer which I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) and the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) on 26 March at column *18*.

ODA Training (Women)

85. **Ms. Short:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking to increase the percentage of women taking part in Overseas Development Administration-financed training schemes.

Mrs. Chalker: Our comprehensive women in development (WID) strategy includes dialogue at all levels with aid-recipient Governments on opportunities for women as well as requests that they nominate more women for ODA training awards. ODA and British Council officials are seeking more nominations for women on all types of courses. We are exploring opportunities for more in-country courses, where representation of women is often higher than for courses in Britain, and we have sought to remove obstacles which are particularly daunting for women in attending United Kingdom courses. But all our efforts will be ineffective if developing country Governments are not willing to nominate more women for training awards.

UN Development Fund for Women

86. **Ms. Primarolo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his estimates are for the United Kingdom contribution to the United Nations development fund for women in 1990.

Mrs. Chalker: Subject to parliamentary approval, £100,000.

Brazil (Forestry Projects)

87. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many forestry projects have been approved under the memorandum of understanding between Her Majesty's Government and the Brazilian Government.

94. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what forestry projects have been agreed with the Brazilian authorities for financing from the overseas aid programme.

Mrs. Chalker: One forestry project, on climate research, has been agreed with the Brazilian authorities. Details of this were given in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) on 1 March, column *283*. We have also recently told the Brazilian authorities that we are ready to provide finance to an ITTO-sponsored forest management project in the Tapajos reserve, the detailed project agreement for which is now under discussion between Brazil and the ITTO.

A further dozen proposals are under preparation or are being considered by the Brazilian Government. We hope to reach agreement shortly on some of these, to allow them to begin in the second quarter of this year.

India

88. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on current levels of British aid to India.

Mrs. Chalker: Last financial year (1988-89) British gross bilateral aid to India amounted to about £85 million, including £14 million from the Commonwealth Development Corporation. It continues to be the largest British bilateral aid programme.

Aid and Trade Provisions

89. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures Her Majesty's Government have taken, or propose to take, in co-ordination with other countries, to reduce the amount of aid which is tied to trade provisions.

Mrs. Chalker: Her Majesty's Government played an active part in the discussions between member countries of the OECD in 1987 to produce a package of measures to improve discipline in the use of aid for projects tied to procurement in the donor country. Those measures are now under review within the OECD and the United Kingdom will again play its full part in achieving further multilaterally agreed measures to avoid the possible aid and trade distortion that can result from the use of such aid.

Turkey (Refugees)

90. **Mr. Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on United Kingdom aid for Iranian and Iraqi refugees in Turkey.

Mrs. Chalker: Her Majesty's Government have provided two grants totalling £550,000 to assist Iraqi Kurds in Turkey and ethnic Turkish refugees from Bulgaria. Both the initial grant of £250,000 made in November 1988 and the £300,000 announced during my visit to Turkey in July 1989 were provided through the Turkish Red Crescent Society.

UNHCR is currently negotiating with the Turkish Government a new programme of assistance for which I have agreed to provide £250,000.

Developing Countries (Debt)

91. **Mr. John Garrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action the Government are taking to resolve the debt crisis of developing countries.

Mrs. Chalker: The Government will continue to provide financial assistance for indebted countries through IMF and World Bank, the rescheduling of official debt in the Paris Club and, where appropriate, bilateral aid. We will also continue to implement the special measures for the poorest debtors agreed at the 1988 Toronto economic summit. For middle-income debtors, specific support for commercial bank debt reduction will continue to be available through the IMF and World Bank. All this assistance is conditional on debtor countries pursuing economic reforms to lay the basis for sustained growth, as such reforms are essential for a lasting resolution of their debt problems.

99. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with members of the European Commission and Ministers of member states concerning the writing-off of debt owed by developing countries to the European development fund.

Mrs. Chalker: Discussion has concentrated on whether to cancel outstanding repayments on transfers made under the Stabex system during the first Lomé convention. I expect a decision to be taken shortly.

Nicaragua

92. **Mr. Boateng:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to restore bilateral aid to Nicaragua.

Mrs. Chalker: We have decided to start a modest bilateral technical co-operation programme to Nicaragua. We are in touch with our ambassador in Costa Rica, who has responsibility for our relations with Nicaragua, about how the programme could best be deployed.

93. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has made an assessment of Nicaragua's needs for international assistance since the election of Violetta Chamorro.

Mrs. Chalker: EC Ministers will be meeting their central American colleagues in Dublin on 9 and 10 April, and will be able to discuss the needs of the countries of that region, notably Nicaragua, then. Our main channel of international assistance in Nicaragua is through our contribution to EC aid to that country and, as indicated in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) on 12 March, we will seek to ensure that EC aid to Nicaragua is maintained, and possibly increased, once Senora Chamorro's democratically elected Government take office.

South-East Asia

95. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much he plans to provide in aid for the countries of south-east Asia in 1990-91.

Mrs. Chalker: I expect to provide approximately £15 million in 1990-91 to the countries of south-east Asia, most of it to Indonesia. Assistance is also likely to be provided under the aid and trade provision, but this cannot be quantified at present.

Elephant Conservation Schemes

96. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received on elephant conservation schemes currently receiving British Government development aid.

Mrs. Chalker: Elephant conservation forms part of our wider assistance to African wildlife in general. We are supporting an increasing number of long-term wildlife and conservation projects on which we receive regular reports. However, many of these projects are at an early stage of implementation and it is too soon to assess their full impact. We remain willing to consider further requests for help. The conservation projects receiving our support are as follows:

BRITISH SUPPORT FOR WILDLIFE CONSERVATION IN AFRICA

Country and activity

Botswana

Provision for one United Kingdom expert as Deputy Director of Department of Wildlife and National Parks to assist the Government of Botswana to develop a Wildlife Department which can effectively manage the wildlife resources of the country. Likely costs approximately £92,000.

Cameroon

Jointly funding with the International Council for Bird Preservation a project to conserve forest resources in the Oku mountains. Approximate cost £80,000.

Kenya

The provision of three United Kingdom experts (one wildlife adviser and two gamewardens) working in Kenya Wildlife Department. One gamewarden acts as co-ordinator of Kenya Rhino Rescue Project. Approximate annual cost £130,000.

The provision of spare parts for and rehabilitation of 19 ex-Army Bedford trucks previously gifted by Ministry of Defence for use in anti-poaching efforts. The provision of seven new Landrovers for the Department of Wildlife and a review of radio communications needs. Total cost likely to be £250,000.

Nigeria

Assistance planned for the Foresty Sector could include the management and conservation of forest reserves in the Cross River and Bendel States encompassing the Oban Hills National Park and the Okomu forest sanctuary. Costings not yet available.

Rwanda

Landrover presented to Karisoke Research Centre, internationally renowned for its research on gorillas. Cost £15,000.

Tanzania

Joint funding of the Faith Foundation's Operation Rhino Rescue Project, a scheme designed to provide sanctuary for Tanzania's dwindling rhino population. Cost £50,000.

Three Landrovers have been presented to the Ruaha Game Park for use in anti-poaching activities.

UK consultants have undertaken a study to identify possible ways of helping with wildlife conservation. Their proposal to assist with planning and management at Ruaha National Park is under consideration. Estimated cost of the study is £10,000. Final cost of proposal to be determined.

Zambia

Funding of a Wildlife Management Consultancy to review the management of wildlife in Mpika District. No costs available as this forms part of a wider District Development support project.

Zimbabwe

Equipment and buildings to Chirundu Conservation Education Camp in the Zambezi Valley. Cost approximately £9,000.

Co-financing Action Plan: an education programme aiming to promote conservation and sustainable use of natural resources. (The environmental health magazine produced as part of this project is also distributed throughout schools in Botswana and Zambia.) Cost £85,000.

Communal Areas Wildlife Management Projects in Northern Zimbabwe, to help local people develop the ability to manage their wildlife resources sustainably. Cost appoximately £800,000.

Wildlife Disease Epidemiology Project involving the provision of one UK expert and support equipment to carry out wildlife disease research and establish a database of the incidence and distribution of wildlife diseases. Estimated cost £340,000.

Regionally

£1 million block grant to World Wide Fund for Nature (formerly World Wildlife Fund) to help conserve forest and other resources, important habitats for many endangered wildlife species. Projects are being funded in Cameroon, Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Nigeria, Tanzania and Zambia.

Caribbean

100. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current level of assistance given to islands in the Caribbean.

Mrs. Chalker: We provide assistance both bilaterally and through multilateral institutions. Bilateral aid in 1988 (the latest year for which figures are yet available) was:

	Country programmes[1]	*£'000s Commonwealth Development Corporation*
Anguilla	1,599	—
Antigua	1,164	—
Barbados	505	—
British Virgin Islands	511	2,200
Cayman Islands	—	1,600
Cuba	2	—
Dominica	1,973	—
Dominican Republic	114	—
Grenada	1,225	—
Haiti	9	—
Jamaica	5,367	—
Montserrat	2,286	—
St. Kitts/Nevis	2,095	—
St. Lucia	808	2,040
St. Vincent	869	—
Trinidad	146	—
Turks and Caicos Islands	4,233	—

[1] There is also a regional technical co-operation allocation of about £2 million a year from which all the developing Commonwealth countries in the Caribbean region benefit, but it is not possible to attribute specific amounts to individual recipients.

We also provide disaster relief when the need arises. In 1988, we committed £3 million to Jamaica, following Hurricane Gilbert, of which £348,000 was spent in 1988.

It is also possible to calculate the share of multilateral aid attributable to the United Kingdom. In 1987 (the latest year for which the calculation can be made) the total was £15·540 million, of which £9·9 million was through the European Community.

Eastern Europe

101. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether any aid planned for eastern Europe will come from the overseas development budget.

Mrs. Chalker: The expenditure on aid for eastern Europe for which we have sought parliamentary approval in main estimates is additional to the official United Kingdom aid programme.

Rain Forests

102. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentages of Overseas Development Administration funds intended to help protect tropical rain forests, including and excluding funding for the Oxford Forestry Institute, are to be channelled through the tropical forestry action plan.

Mrs. Chalker: The tropical forestry action plan is not a fund or organisation to which donors contribute funds. It is a mechanism under which recipient countries review their forestry sectors and donors can co-ordinate assistance. Of the 51 bilateral projects currently under consideration for funding from the further £100 million for tropical forestry announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister last November, 19 are in the context of national forestry action plans. Some of the future projects which come forward for funding from the £100 million will also be so. Most of the support we give the Oxford Forestry Institute is for research, outside the context of national forestry action plans.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Learning Difficulties

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will ensure that CATE criteria include a provision for professional studies of the needs of pupils with specific learning difficulties in reading and writing.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Government's revised criteria for the accreditation of initial teacher training courses, which are set out in DES circular 24/89, include a requirement that the educational and professional studies of all students should develop in them the capacity to identify pupils with special educational needs or with learning difficulties and to understand the ways in which the potential of such pupils can be developed.

Universities (London)

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assessment he has made of the additional financial problems facing universities within the London area.

Mr. Jackson: This is a matter for the Universities Funding Council and for the universities concerned.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether in its bid to his Department as part of the 1990-91 Public Expenditure Survey Committee round, the Universities Funding Council supported the case for an additional £10 million per annum for universities in London facing exceptional costs because of their locations; and whether such a sum was included in the Universities Funding Council allocation for 1990-91 and identified as such.

Mr. Jackson: In line with long-established practice, advice from the Universities Funding Council on aggregate funding levels is confidential. It is entirely for the council to allocate its share of the 1989 public expenditure settlement between universities. Parliamentary sanction would be required under the Education Reform Act 1988 before my right hon. Friend could direct the council's action in relation to a particular university.

In-service Training

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish for each local authority area the number of teachers in each of the last three years who have undertaken in-service training and other courses of professional development *(a)* during school hours and *(b)* after school, at weekends and during school holidays.

Mr. Alan Howarth: This information is not collected centrally. However, the Department does collect data on volumes of training for which release is or is not required, expressed as training days. I will reply as soon as possible.

Education Expenditure

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the total expenditure in education in the years 1978-79 and in 1988-89; and if he will give the relevant figures for higher education.

Mr. Jackson: Total DES expenditure on education and science (covering schools, further education, polytechnics and colleges of higher education in England, universities in Great Britain, and the science budget for the United Kingdom) in the years in question was as follows:

£ million

	1978-79 (outturn)	*1988-89 (estimate)*
	7,754	18,412

Within these totals, DES expenditure on higher education (covering grants to universities in Great Britain, funding for local authority higher education in England, expenditure on mandatory awards for undergraduates in England and Wales and postgraduate awards) in the years in question was as follows:

£ million

	1978-79 (outturn)	*1988-89 (estimate)*
	1,668	3,891

Teachers

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he will now publish the final report of the university of Bath study on teacher shortage initiatives referred to by the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), *Official Report,* 22 February 1989, column *634*;

(2) if, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Blackburn, *Official Report,* 26 March, column *31*, he will publish in full the evidence received and the results of his Department's survey of bursary holders referred to in his answer.

Mr. MacGregor: Yes. I shall place a copy of the report in the Library.

Exchange Programmes

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the outcome of the first scientific support and exchange (stimulation) programme of the European Communities; and what progress has been made in developing a successor programme to SCIENCE within the European Communities and European Free Trade Association member states.

Mr. Jackson: Overall, 417 projects were financed under the first EC stimulation programme (1985-88) linking 1,257 laboratories all over Europe and involving 3,721 researchers (counted on a full-time equivalent basis). The successor to the first stimulation programme, SCIENCE (1988-92), is already operating successfully in the European Community. Agreements to include Austria, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland in the SCIENCE progsamme are at present under discussion.

Student Awards

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many undergraduate students in each local authority area received discretionary awards; and what percentage they formed of all undergraduates in receipt of awards in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 30 March 1990]:* The information requested is as follows:

England and Wales—1987-88

	Mandatory and HE discretionary award-holders[1]	*HE discretionary award-holders*[1]	*Percentage in receipt of an HE discretionary award*
Local Education Authority			
Barking	343	36	10
Barnet	4,023	204	5
Bexley	1,303	50	4
Brent	2,811	185	7
Bromley	3,115	164	5
Croydon	3,071	128	4
Ealing	2,713	247	9
Enfield	2,137	19	1
Haringey	1,923	132	7
Harrow	2,539	106	4
Havering	1,198	67	6
Hillingdon	1,590	83	5
Hounslow	1,625	45	3
Kingston-Upon-Thames	1,438	83	6
Merton	1,631	63	4
Newham	1,164	83	7
Redbridge	1,878	75	4
Richmond-Upon-Thames	2,082	119	6
Sutton	1,385	27	2
Waltham Forest	1,169	84	7
ILEA	22,908	6,033	26
Birmingham	7,327	368	5
Coventry	2,586	143	6
Dudley	1,941	47	2
Sandwell	1,368	110	8
Solihull	2,208	94	4
Walsall	1,825	83	5
Wolverhampton	1,941	82	4
Knowsley	800	26	3
Liverpool	3,580	126	4
St. Helens	1,444	47	3
Sefton	3,462	99	3
Wirral	3,523	13	0
Bolton	2,361	137	6
Bury	1,870	133	7
Manchester	3,035	259	9
Oldham	1,437	36	3
Rochdale	1,394	42	3
Salford	1,242	92	7
Stockport	3,448	200	6
Tameside	1,221	69	6
Trafford	2,763	130	5
Wigan	2,256	159	7
Barnsley	1,260	39	3
Doncaster	1,924	101	5
Rotherham	1,667	51	3
Sheffield	3,864	305	8
Bradford	3,412	518	15
Calderdale	1,388	78	6
Kirklees	3,201	392	12
Leeds	5,198	237	5
Wakefield	1,878	77	4
Gateshead	1,147	38	3
Newcastle-Upon-Tyne	2,132	122	6
North Tyneside	1,516	79	5
South Tyneside	1,028	64	6
Sunderland	1,803	126	7
Isles of Scilly	28	1	4
Avon	8,377	734	9
Bedfordshire	4,170	339	8
Berkshire	7,127	214	3
Buckinghamshire	6,865	235	3
Cambridgeshire	5,263	189	4

	Mandatory and HE discretionary award-holders[1]	*HE discretionary award-holders*[1]	*Percentage in receipt of an HE discretionary award*
Cheshire	10,186	414	4
Cleveland	4,458	249	6
Cornwall	3,547	151	4
Cumbria	3,567	97	3
Derbyshire	6,410	209	3
Devon	7,917	505	6
Dorset	4,745	289	6
Durham	3,916	175	4
East Sussex	5,302	196	4
Essex	10,374	500	5
Gloucestershire	4,921	304	6
Hampshire	13,970	1,909	14
Hereford and Worcester	5,501	413	8
Hertfordshire	10,352	589	6
Humberside	6,125	502	8
Isle of Wight	856	49	6
Kent	12,102	793	7
Lancashire	13,528	1,098	8
Leicestershire	7,411	312	4
Lincolnshire	4,298	52	1
Norfolk	4,628	539	12
North Yorkshire	7,616	328	4
Northamptonshire	3,582	218	6
Nothumberland	2,543	153	6
Nottinghamshire	6,723	476	7
Oxfordshire	5,517	226	4
Shropshire	3,443	146	4
Somerset	3,582	165	5
Staffordshire	8,065	622	8
Suffolk	4,064	215	5
Surrey	12,356	562	5
Warwickshire	6,894	158	2
West Sussex	5,808	247	4
Wiltshire	4,273	254	6
Clwyd	3,508	102	3
Dyfed	3,756	510	14
Gwent	3,819	268	7
Gwynedd	2,782	25	1
Mid-Glamorgan	3,438	4	0
Powys	1,040	52	5
South Glamorgan	4,357	400	9
West Glamorgan	3,529	310	9
England and Wales	423,135	29,253	7

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[1] Excludes award-holders on postgraduate courses.

History Teaching

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he intends to publish the final report of the national curriculum working party on history; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) when he first received the draft of the final report of the history working party;

(2) when he first received the final report of the history working party;

(3) on what dates in the last year he has met Commander Saunders-Watson, chairman of the history working party;

(4) when he expects to publish the final report of the history working party.

Mrs. Rumbold *[pursuant to her reply 28 March 1990, c. 184]:* The final report of the national curriculum history working group will be published tomorrow, Tuesday 3 April. Copies of the report will be placed in the Library.

HEALTH

Food Poisoning

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will identify the general locations of the food poisoning outbreaks occurring in 1989 in which the food vehicle was suspected to be mayonnaise made with fresh shell eggs.

Mr. Freeman: The three outbreaks of food poisoning in 1989 in which mayonnaise made from fresh shell eggs was suspected to be the cause occurred within the boundaries of the Trent, Oxford and Wessex health regions.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what criteria his Department uses to assess whether an outbreak of food poisoning has been caused by eggs;

(2) what distinction his Department draws between the phrases "associated with" and "caused by" in relation to food poisoning.

Mr. Freeman: The evidence linking eggs and salmonella infection in man is based on many different kinds of information. There is no absolute distinction between the phrases "caused by" and "associated with"; both include these different kinds of information. I also refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) on 14 March at column *281*.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has issued any specific guidance to caterers who use raw shell eggs for the production of mayonnaise as to how to prevent the multiplication of salmonella or other organisms.

Mr. Freeman: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave her on 9 March at column *896*. The Department asked chief environmental health officers to advise caterers in a letter of 2 September 1988.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many laboratory confirmed cases of salmonella food poisoning were reported by the communicable disease surveillance centre in the weeks ended 23 February, 2 March and 9 March; if he will show in tabular form how many were salmonella typhimurium, salmonella virchow and salmonella enteritidis; and of the enteritidis figures how many were phase type 4.

Mr. Freeman: The information is as follows:

	Week ending		
	23 February	*2 March*	*9 March*
Salmonellas total	208	175	77
Salmonella typhimurium	33	48	19
Salmonella virchow	6	3	1
Salmonella enteritidis	130	88	46
Phase type 4	99	67	33

Any weekly reporting system will inevitably be subject to short-term anomalies. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave her on 9 March at columns *895-96*. A local postal strike has resulted in fewer reports being received by PHLS communicable disease surveillance centre in recent weeks. This has now ended and coming weeks may therefore show spuriously high totals.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the food poisoning outbreak associated with coleslaw made with commercial mayonnaise at a golf club in the north-west, referred to in the memorandum submitted by the public health laboratory service to the Agriculture Committee, first report, Session 1988-89, HC 108, arose from the use of mayonnaise which had been made with pasteurised eggs.

Mr. Freeman: Coleslaw made using commercial mayonnaise was reported to the PHLS communicable disease surveillance centre as a suspected vehicle of infection in this outbreak. No further information as to the type, or manufacture, of the mayonnaise is available.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many Crown premises have been associated or involved with food poisoning in each of the last five years in which eggs or egg products have been identified or suspected of being vehicles of infection.

Mr. Freeman: The outbreaks formally reported to the PHLS communicable disease surveillance centre as having occurred in Crown premises in the past five years, where eggs or egg containing food were suspected vehicles of infection are as follows:

	Number
1985	0
1986	1
1987	0
1988	4
1989	2

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many food premises and National Health Service hospitals have been prosecuted or are under consideration for prosecution under the Food Act 1981 or the Food Hygiene (General) Regulations 1970 for offences relating to outbreaks of food poisoning in which eggs or egg products were identified or suspected of being vehicles of infection.

Mr. Freeman: This information is not held centrally for commercial food premises. We are not aware of any prosecutions or proposed prosecutions against NHS hospitals in relation to food poisoning involving eggs or egg products.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his assessment of the balance between the incidence of food poisoning caused by eggs and by egg products.

Mr. Freeman: In the context of outbreaks, the balance between the incidence of food poisoning caused by eggs, or by egg products or egg containing foods, is overwhelmingly in the direction of egg containing foods. This is because the only egg dishes which are normally free of other components are single cooked eggs such as a boiled egg, and a boiled egg is, by its nature, unlikely to cause an outbreak, because it is normally eaten by only one person.

A study of sporadic cases of infection with *S. enteritidis* PT4 (BMJ 1989; 299: 771-3) has shown an association between illness and eating egg dishes lightly rather than well cooked, and with other egg products. Without such a study most cases of sporadic food poisoning cannot be linked to a particular food vehicle with any confidence. Consequently there are insufficient data in sporadic cases to assess the overall balance of risk between eggs and egg products.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has any plans to ask the chief medical officer to withdraw his warning on eggs.

Mr. Freeman: The chief medical officer continues to keep under review all circumstances and evidence relevant to his current advice on the consumption of eggs.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the risk to humans of contracting salmonella from eating cooked salmonella-infected hens; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Birds from laying flocks which are infected with salmonella and are to be disposed of under special licence and controlled conditions will be slaughtered and sent to processing plants which use an industrial heat treatment process which achieves the temperatures necessary for the destruction of salmonella.

Providing poultry is cooked thoroughly and subsequently is handled hygienically there is minimal risk to health. I also refer the hon. and learned Member to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) on 9 March at column *896*.

Registered Homes Act 1984

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will introduce legislation to extend the provisions of the Registered Homes Act 1984 to all caring establishments irrespective of size and establishment.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We intend to seek a legislative opportunity to bring homes with fewer than four residents under statutory control.

HIV

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has any plans to enact policies to prevent discrimination against carriers of HIV.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: As the Government's response to the Social Services Committee (Cm 925) made clear, one part of our strategy on HIV infection and AIDS is:

> "Through a range of measures to foster a climate of understanding and compassion, to discourage discrimination, and to safeguard confidentiality, within the wider context of public health requirements."

We believe these objectives will best be achieved by educating and informing people, and not by adding to existing legislation.

Bathing Waters (Pollution)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence is available to his Department that differs from that included in the 10th report of the Royal Commission on environmental pollution regarding the health risks posed by bathing in grossly polluted bathing waters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: There is no evidence to dispute the conclusion of this report that the risk of contracting serious illness from bathing in the sea off the United Kingdom appears to be extremely small.

Research outside the United Kingdom has reported a small risk of contracting minor illnesses such as gastro-enteritis and skin complaints, but gives conflicting reports of which sewage indicator organisms give the best correlation with illness. We wish to be better informed about the position of minor illnesses in United Kingdom waters and the Department of the Environment has already carried out a pilot study to test the proposed methodologies.

Hepatitis E

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether there have been any cases in England whereby hepatitis E has been contracted from faecally infected drinking water.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is not available because there is, as yet, no diagnostic test for hepatitis E virus, though one is under development in the United States of America.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what grounds a formal application for National Health Service trust status will not be approved by his Department.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No units will apply for NHS trust status until Parliament has approved the necessary legislation. Each application will be considered by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State on an individual basis in the light of local circumstances, following consultation by the region.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the Health Service units listed in his Department's press release 89/471 have now indicated that they do not wish to proceed with a first wave application for National Health Service trust status.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: As my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State indicated in press release 89/471, formal applications for NHS trust status will not be invited until Parliament has given approval to the necessary legislation. It will be only at this stage that the number of units applying for trust status in April 1991 will be known.

I understand that five of the original 79 units intending to prepare draft applications for NHS trust status in 1991 have indicated that they may wish to develop their application over a longer time scale. However, I also understand that a number of other units have since indicated that they may prepare draft applications for trust status in 1991.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the waiting lists for each district health authority, SHA and regional health authority for 30 September 1989.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I am arranging for these summaries to be published in the next couple of weeks. Copies will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health with what frequency waiting list information is collected; and if he will consider publishing the regional and national totals on a quarterly basis.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 8 March at column *828*. We intend to continue the practice of routine twice-yearly publication of waiting list information so as to maintain a consistent series of statistics, without incurring unnecessary expense.

Manpower Statistics

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to be able to give the figures published in section III (manpower) of the health and personal social services statistics for 1988.

Mr. Freeman: The information will be published in full in this year's edition of health and personal social services statistics, which is expected to be available in August.

Menopause

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he proposes to make resources available to organisations which specialise in helping women overcome the trauma of menopause; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We already provide funds under the section 64 scheme to two voluntary organisations, Women's Health Concern and the Amarant Trust, which specialise in offering advice to women who are undergoing the menopause.

Health Authority Membership

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the membership of the 14 regional health authorities and details of the members' role, as under part I of schedule 5 to the National Health Service Act 1977.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Details of the membership of regional health authorities have been placed in the Library.

Members of regional health authorities are appointed by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State to help him discharge his duties to promote a comprehensive health service. Broadly, the role of members is to guide the work of their authority's chief officers, and help them to determine regional policies within the constraints of national policies and priorities.

Private Nursing Homes

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish his Department's guidelines on the transfer of the infirm from National Health Service care to the private sector with special reference to the procedure to ensure that a person's medical needs are met.

Mr. Freeman: Circular HC(89)5 which was issued to health authorities in February 1989, together with a booklet "Discharge of Patients from Hospital" emphasised that proper arrangements should be made for any necessary continuing care before patients are discharged from hospital. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received about the problem of the premature removal of old people from private nursing homes on the instructions of owners, in circumstances where such individuals have been accepted by the owners and then a decision by the owners taken subsequently that the home could not cope with a person's medical needs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: None. The primary role of a nursing home is to meet the nursing needs of its residents and the person responsible for the home has a duty to ensure that sufficient and suitable services are provided.

Health authorities inspect each home at least twice a year to ensure that the conditions of registration are being met. But inevitably some patients will deteriorate to a point where they need the level of medical care that can be provided only in a hospital.

Abortion

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the foetuses aborted during 1988-89 showed signs of handicap or disability.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally, but in 1988, the latest full year for which figures are available, 1,797 abortions were performed in which the ground of substantial risk of the child being born seriously handicapped was mentioned by the certifying medical practitioners. The provisional equivalent figure for the first six months of 1989 is 818.

Embryos (Experiments)

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether any human embryos have been used in the United Kingdom for medical experimentation during the past two years; and under what statutory provisions such work is performed.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Medical experimentation on human embryos is not at present controlled by legislation. However, the Interim Licensing Authority (ILA), which was established by the Medical Research Council and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, currently approves centres which carry out embryo research. The Government have introduced the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill to provide a legal framework for scientific developments in the field of human reproduction and embryology.

Radiation

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has yet received advice from the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment in respect of the case control study on leukaemia and lymphoma in young people resident in West Cumbria undertaken by the Medical Research Council epidemiology unit at Southampton university and published in February.

Mr. Freeman: Yes. The Government are grateful to COMARE for its preliminary advice and accept all the committee's recommendations. We note that COMARE agrees with the study methodology, and with the broad thrust of the main conclusions.

The committee advises that there is evidence of a statistical association between the recorded external radiation dose of those employed at Sellafield and the incidence of childhood leukaemia in their offspring. However, we note that the committee is cautious in its interpretation of the results since the study conclusions are based on very small numbers and that further evidence from other studies currently under way is called for. In particular, we note COMARE's view that the case control study demonstrates a statistical association, but no causal relationship. The committee has stated in its advice that workers with relatively high external radiation exposures may also be subject to other factors. In the committee's view, these include possible internal radiation exposure, the possibility of contaminated materials being carried off the site, or other factors, including chemical exposure or contamination. The committee suggests that it is possible that one of these factors, or a combination, could be important.

In response to the Government's request for advice on possible risks to workers receiving relatively high radiation doses, we accept COMARE's view that it is unable to make specific recommendations on this until the results of other studies are known and there is further information on possible causal mechanisms. However, the committee strongly supports the actions that have been taken to continue to reduce occupational exposures.

In response to the committee's specific recommendations on studies of the offspring of radiation workers, and on the need for co-ordination of research effort, the relevant Government Departments have set up arrangements to enable them to take this work forward as speedily as possible. COMARE will be kept informed at all stages and will be consulted as appropriate.

Following publication of the case control study, the Department and the Health and Safety Executive have received a number of related research proposals from various individuals and organisations. In addition to these expressions of interest, we will be advertising more widely to invite formal research proposals. Any such proposals will be subject to the usual independent review procedures, but will be considered as swiftly as possible.

Following is the full text of COMARE's preliminary advice:

"COMARE STATEMENT of ADVICE

Subject:

The Case-control study of leukaemia and lymphoma among young people near the Sellafield nuclear plant in West Cumbria

M. J. Gardner, M.P. Snee, A. J. Hall, C. A. Powell, S. Downes and J. D. Terrell.

BACKGROUND

1. In 1984, the Independent Advisory Group chaired by Sir Douglas Black, reported on the possible increased incidence of cancer in West Cumbria.[1] The group recommended that a case control study of leukaemia and lymphoma in young people resident in West Cumbria should be carried out. The study was commissioned by the Department of Health in 1984 and was undertaken by the Medical Research Council Environmental Epidemiology Unit at Southampton University.

2. The study was designed to examine whether the observed excess of childhood leukaemia and lymphoma near BNFL Sellafield was associated with established risk factors or with factors related to the plant. The results were published in the British Medical Journal dated 17th February 1990.[2]

3. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health has referred the study to this Committee for urgent consideration and preliminary advice.[3]

Results of the case control study

4. The study documents an association between the excess of leukaemia and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in children living in the vicinity of Sellafield, and employment of the fathers of the affected children at Sellafield over the period 1950 to 1985. The statistical association with employment at Sellafield generally and the risk of leukaemia in employee's offspring is raised, but is similar to that in the offspring of fathers employed in some other industries in West Cumbria namely the iron and steel, chemical and farming industries.

5. In particular, the study documents an association between the raised incidence of leukaemia and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in young people and the recorded level of external radiation dose received by the father, while working at Sellafield, before conception of the affected child.

6. The authors comment that other factors, including ante-natal exposure to x-rays, maternal age, employment elsewhere, eating seafood and playing on the beach did not explain these relationships. The authors also conclude that these results can explain statistically the observed geographical excess of leukaemia and lymphoma in young people in Seascale.

Government's request to COMARE

7. The Government noted the results of the study with concern and, in view of its importance, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Health referred the study to COMARE for our urgent consideration and preliminary advice. We were asked to consider the study further in the longer term, in conjunction with the results of other studies, completed, underway or planned, recommended in the Black report[1], or in our own second and third reports[4,5].

COMARE's preliminary advice to Government

METHODOLOGY

8. The Committee consider that the methods of investigation were appropriate to the aims of the study.

Conclusions

9. We agree with the broad thrust of the study's main conclusions which are outlined as follows. Although the number of cases is small, there is evidence of a statistical association between the recorded external radiation dose of those employed at Sellafield and the incidence of childhood leukaemia in their offspring during the study period. We note that the association between paternal occupational external radiation exposure and the incidence of leukaemia in their offspring could be sufficient to explain statistically the initial observation of an excess incidence of leukaemia in young people in Seascale.

10. We note that the risk of leukaemia in employees' offspring for some other industries in West Cumbria, namely iron and steel, chemicals and farming, is similar to that for employment at Sellafield generally. This study was not set up to investigate other industrial occupations in detail. The possible existence of health effects in offspring of workers in occupations other than those at Sellafield might be the subject of other investigations but they lie outside the scope of our own enquiries. Taken altogether, these results suggest to us that employment at Sellafield itself may not be such an important factor as certain specific occupations within Sellafield which are (in this study) characterised by a relatively high external radiation dose.

11. The important conclusions of this study are unavoidably based on very small numbers and as these are novel observations which have not been recorded previously, we are cautious in our interpretation. Further evidence from other studies currently underway and planned will enable us to make a firmer assessment of the implications of these results.

Possible causes

12. The case control study has demonstrated a statistical association between recorded external radiation dose and childhood leukaemia incidence but this type of study cannot provide evidence of causal relationship. Workers with relatively high recorded external exposures may also be subject to other factors. These include possible occupational internal radiation exposure (rather than external radiation exposure) which might involve radioactivity being concentrated in body fluids or tissues and might lead to a pre-conception or post-conception effect on their offspring; the possibility of contaminated materials being carried off the site leading to unexpected exposure of workers and their families; or other factors, including chemical exposure or contamination. The possibility that one of these factors or a combination of these factors could be important, needs to be investigated. In particular, the full occupational history of the group characterised by high recorded external exposure needs to be studied in detail.

13. The results from this study place greater emphasis on occupational rather than environmental factors. This is consistent with the view, as stated in our first report[6], that "the increased doses [to the local population from the discharges from the Sellafield site] are still well below those that would readily explain the observed cases of leukaemia in Seascale using conventional risk estimates". However, we cannot exclude environmental radiation as a possible contributory factor because causal mechanisms have not yet been identified.

14. We have already postulated in our second and third reports that the excess of childhood leukaemia observed around the nuclear sites that we have investigated, could be partly related to parental occupation at those nuclear installations. We discussed possible mechanisms by which parental occupational exposure could be implicated. This study supports the case for further investigation of factors related to occupation.

Recommendations to Government

15. In our second and third reports, we have already recommended that case control studies around Dounreay and Aldermaston and Burghfield should be set up to investigate the importance of parental occupations and other relevant factors which might be associated with the increased incidence of childhood leukaemia [and other cancers] in those areas.

> Recommendation 1. We now recommend that these case control studies, which are already underway, should be completed as soon as possible, subject to the maintenance of a high scientific standard.

16. In our second and third reports, we specifically recommended that epidemiological studies should be set up to consider any possible health effects in the offspring of parents occupationally exposed to radiation. The results of the current study strengthen the basis for those recommendations.

> Recommendation 2. We therefore recommend that these studies should be given high priority. A study involving direct approaches to workers to obtain information on their children's health and also a study linking records of all radiation workers to national records of childhood cancer and leukaemia would be complementary and we recommend that both should be undertaken.

17. We recognise that there are a number of areas of research where studies are necessary to confirm or refute these findings and further biological research is required to investigate possible causative mechanisms. However, we do not wish to see multiple independent studies which would cause undue inconvenience to the small numbers of individuals and families concerned.

> Recommendation 3. We, therefore, recommend that there needs to be some form of coordination of research, to ensure the best possible use of resources and to avoid unnecessary duplication of effort. This committee would wish to be consulted in any such research coordination.

18. In the longer term, as requested, we will reconsider the results from this study once the results of the various studies that we have recommended previously [4],[5] become available.

Interim action

19. At the request of Government, at the end of last year, we began a review of the situation around Sellafield.[7] This includes both current epidemiological evidence and information on discharge and environmental data. We propose to investigate any unexpected potential routes of exposure to radiation including routes via workers. We understand that initiatives have been taken by both the Health and Safety Executive and BNFL in collaboration with the MRC Environmental Epidemiology Unit, to investigate the situation on the Sellafield site in more detail and, in addition, relevant experimental studies are being done by NRPB and others. We would wish to be kept informed about progress of these investigations as they relate to our own review.

20. We wish to reiterate that the result of the Cumbria case control study documents an association between occupational external radiation exposure of parents and the incidence of leukaemia in their offspring. However, these findings require confirmation from other studies currently in progress. Furthermore, the causal mechanisms which might lead to this observation are not known. Thus, we are unable, at present, to make specific recommendations to reduce possible risks. We strongly support the actions that have been undertaken to continue to reduce occupational exposures, particularly to those likely to have children, and to counsel workers on the possible risks.

[1] "Investigation of the possible increased incidence of cancer in West Cumbria"—Report of the Independent Advisory Group, Chairman: Sir Douglas Black. HMSO 1984.

[2] "Results of case-control study of leukaemia and lymphoma among young people near Sellafield nuclear plant in West Cumbria." M. J. Gardner, M.P. Snee, A. J. Hall, C. A. Powell, J. D. Terrell, British Medical Journal 300 (6722) 423-429.

[3] Hansard Vol. 167 cols. *397-398*.

[4] "Investigation of the possible increased incidence of leukaemia in young people, near, the Dounreay Nuclear Establishment, Caithness, Scotland"—COMARE 2nd Report. HMSO 1988.

[5] "Report on the incidence of childhood cancer in the West Berkshire and North Hampshire area, in which are situated the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment, Aldermaston, and the Royal Ordnance Factory, Burghfield"—COMARE 3rd Report. HMSO 1989.

[6] "The Implications of the new data on the releases from Sellafield in the 1950s for the conclusions of the Report on the Investigation of the Possible Increased Incidence of Cancer in West Cumbria."—COMARE 1st Report. HMSO 1986.

[7] Hansard Vol. 164 Cols. *662-663*."

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisons (Bathing Facilities)

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many baths or showers there are; and how often each prisoner has use of a bath or shower in Leeds, Wandsworth, Birmingham and Wormwood Scrubs prisons, respectively.

Mr. Mellor: The information is as follows:

	Showers	*Baths*
Leeds	42	5
Wandsworth	69	6
Birmingham	69	9
Wormwood Scrubs	177	2

Prisoners have a minimum of one shower/bath each week, and are allowed more in certain circumstances (eg. following physical exercise or work).

Prison Statistics

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are currently being held in Leeds, Wandsworth, Birmingham and Wormwood Scrubs prisons, respectively.

Mr. Mellor: On Friday 30 March 1990 the number of prisoners being held in Leeds, Wandsworth, Birmingham and Wormwood Scrubs prisons was as follows:

Establishment	*Population*
Leeds	1,243
Wandsworth	1,501
Birmingham	981
Wormwood Scrubs	923

Electronic Tagging

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give a summary of the results of the recent electronic tagging experiment.

Mr. John Patten: The trials of electronic monitoring in three areas have yet to be fully evaluated, but it is already clear that the technology works and is extremely effective in detecting any violations of bail conditions, however slight.

We expect to make available later this year an evaluation of the outcome of these trials.

Prisoners' Pay

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he has taken following the outcome of the case of Leach *v.* Home Secretary on deductions from prisoners' pay; what is his estimate of the total amount of underpayment; what plans he has to make retrospective adjustments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: There has been no such judgment. On 22 February 1990 an instruction was sent to governors to stop taking automatic weekly contributions of 3p from prisoners' pay to their general purposes fund. Any such contributions taken after that date will be refunded from the general purpose fund.

Entry Certificates

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many entry certificates for visitors from Gambia to the United Kingdom have been *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused for the latest period of 12 months for which figures are reasonably available.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information available covers the total number of applications in Gambia in 1989 for entry clearance to the United Kingdom by visitors, students, passengers in transit, working holidaymakers, returning residents and persons for employment or self-employment for a period of six months or less; 1,030 such applications were granted initially or on appeal, and 40 were refused initially.

Trespass

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many responses he has received to the consultation on section 39 of the Public Order Act 1986; if it is his intention to publish those responses in due course; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We are giving careful consideration to the 36 responses received. We have no plans to publish them. It is too early to say when we shall have concluded our evaluation of section 39.

Diminished Responsibility

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many cases involving killing or rape, pleas of diminished responsibility have been accepted by the courts in the past 10 years.

Mr. John Patten: Information is not available centrally on the number of offences of rape where a plea of diminished responsibility was accepted by the court. Data for 1979 to 1988 on the number of convictions for manslaughter where a plea of diminished responsibility was accepted by the court are given in the table.

Data for 1989 will not be available until autumn 1990.

Persons convicted of manslaughter, diminished responsibility under the Homicide Act 1957, Section 2

England and Wales

Year	*Convictions*
1979	92
1980	78
1981	84
1982	90
1983	84
1984	72
1985	65
1986	49
1987	50
1988	53

Pentonville Prison (Unconvicted Prisoners)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the cost of holding a remand prisoner in Pentonville prison for one year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: In 1988-89 (the latest information available) the average cost per annum of holding a prisoner in Pentonville was £15,132. Information on remand prisoners is not held separately.

Colombia (Mercenaries)

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East of 21 March, *Official Report*, column *608*, whether he holds any information on organisations involved in the supply of mercenary services to groups in Colombia; and whether he has taken action to prevent British mercenaries from going to Colombia.

Mr. John Patten: While I am aware of suggestions that at least one British citizen has renewed an association with drug traffickers in Colombia, I am not aware of information on which criminal proceedings in this country might be founded. We are in touch with the Colombian authorities and have reaffirmed our readiness to co-operate with them in their investigations.

Police Housing Allowance

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by what method the police arbitration tribunal recommended that rent allowance should be updated in the 29 police forces in England and Wales where rent allowances were last reviewed in 1988; and how this method differed from the existing method of notional rental values.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It is not clear whether the tribunal ever addressed the question of forces in England and Wales which were due for an uprating and the recommendation from the Police Negotiating Board is apparently defective on this point. My right hon. and learned Friend is prepared, however, to accept that both bodies probably intended to endorse updating by an index partly based on the Building Societies Association's index of house prices and partly taken from the housing costs element of the index of retail prices. Rates increases were to be added.

Under the existing system force maximum limits of rent allowance are based on the district valuer's assessment of what a typical police house in the force area would fetch if let on the open market, plus rates.

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the cost *(a)* of uprating rent allowance in the 29 police forces whose rent allowance was last reviewed in 1988 by the agreed index recommended by the police arbitration tribunal and *(b)* by the movement in the retail prices index since their force maximum limit was last reviewed.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Only the broadest estimates are possible because the situation is a hypothetical one with wide regional variations. On the assumption, however, that the index agreed by the Police Negotiating Board would produce increases of the same order as those produced by the rent allowance reviews held in 1989, the likely cost would be at least £55 million in England and Wales. On the basis that the rise in the retail prices index might be 13·7 per cent. indexation on that basis is estimated to be likely to cost about £26·4 million a year in England and Wales.

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the cost of uprating police force housing allowance by employing a formula consisting of the movement in the housing costs element of the retail prices index and the movement in housing costs in an area as expressed in the building societies index for each of the next two years; and by how much less he estimates the allowance will be uprated by relating it only to the total movement in the retail prices index.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: None. There is no basis on which to make a realistic comparison of the likely performance of these indices over the next two years.

Prisoners (Mental Health)

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* mentally ill and *(b)* mentally handicapped persons are in prison in England and Wales and in which prisons.

Mr. Mellor: On 30 September 1989, the latest date for which information is available, 329 prisoners in England and Wales were considered by medical officers to meet the criteria for detention in hospital, as set out in the Mental Health Act 1983; 264 of these prisoners were considered to be mentally ill, within the meaning of the Act. The term "mentally handicapped" is not one of the four specific categories of mental disorder defined in part 1 of the Act.

Details of the establishments holding mentally ill and mentally disordered inmates

Establishment	*Number of mentally ill inmates*	*Total number of mentally disordered inmates*[1]
Ashford	1	1
Aylesbury	0	1
Bedford	8	8
Birmingham	3	3
Bristol	8	8
Brixton	98	98
Brockhill	1	1
Cardiff	0	2
Dartmoor	2	2
Durham	1	4
Exeter	3	4
Feltham	3	4
Garth	0	1
Glen Parva	3	4
Grendon	12	16
Holloway	7	8
Hull	1	1
Kingston	0	12
Leeds	14	17
Leicester	2	5
Lewes	6	6
Littlehey	5	5
Liverpool	2	2
Long Lartin	5	8
Maidstone	31	34
Manchester	18	20
New Hall	4	4
Norwich	5	6
Nottingham	0	1
Parkhurst	0	9
Pentonville	4	4
Preston	1	1
Pucklechurch	0	2
Risley	0	1
Rochester	1	4
Stafford	2	2
Styal	1	1
Swaleside	1	1
Swansea	1	1
Wakefield	6	13
Wayland	4	4

[1] Numbers include those who are mentally ill.

Immigration

Mr. Wells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of new immigrants admitted for settlement and the total immigration to and emigration from the United Kingdom, giving a net total, for each of the years 1978 to 1989, for Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Jamaica, Guyana, Barbados and Trinidad.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Estimates of total migration to and from the United Kingdom, including British citizens and all people intending to reside in, or out of, the country for a year or more, are published by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys in "International Migration 1988", a copy of which is in the Library.

These estimates are on a different basis from the figures of persons accepted for settlement in the United Kingdom. The total number of acceptances for the nationalities specified in the years 1978-89 are given in the following table. Further details are published in the annual Home Office volume "Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom" (most recently for 1988, Cm 726).

Acceptances[1] for settlement in the United Kingdom for certain nationalities, 1978-89

	1978	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
Pakistan	12,420	10,940	9,080	8,970	7,750	6,440	5,510	6,680	5,580	3,930	4,280	4,080
India	9,890	9,270	7,930	6,590	5,410	5,380	5,140	5,500	4,210	4,610	5,020	4,510
Bangladesh	4,380	3,920	5,210	5,810	7,020	4,870	4,180	5,330	4,760	3,080	2,890	3,780
Sri Lanka	850	920	770	790	790	920	760	930	840	720	860	790
Hong Kong British Dependent Territory Citizens	1,280	1,510	1,710	1,450	1,070	1,050	1,040	950	880	920	1,150	1,360
Kenya	710	600	490	430	490	640	610	520	350	400	440	370
Tanzania	460	400	340	280	320	320	300	330	250	210	230	250
Uganda	80	60	80	40	50	100	40	50	90	90	120	100
Jamaica	790	600	590	440	320	310	290	350	490	510	620	520
Guyana	300	280	240	220	180	190	190	200	140	180	200	120
Barbados	160	90	100	80	60	40	50	60	40	60	50	40
Trinidad and Tobago	260	160	150	150	150	170	150	160	160	140	160	170

[1] Includes those accepted after initial admission to the United Kingdom for a limited period, as well as those accepted on arrival.

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he has any proposals to improve the operations of the immigration service at Heathrow;

(2) what steps he has taken to expedite immigration procedures for tourists at Heathrow and Gatwick.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The operations of the immigration service at Heathrow and Gatwick are kept under regular review and available resources allocated to meet peak demands. Selective embarkation checks were introduced in April 1987 and a streamlined arrival channel for British and other EC passengers was introduced in March 1989. Both these measures have expedited the movement of passengers through the immigration control at Heathrow, Gatwick and elsewhere. I shall continue to monitor the situation closely.

Drugs

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information is available on the number and names of police forces which *(a)* already routinely refer drug possession offenders to independent drugs advice agencies and *(b)* have plans to do so.

Mr. Mellor: The Home Office is supporting an arrest referral pilot project which aims to put drug misusers arrested at Southwark police station in touch with the local community drug team whether or not they are also charged with a criminal offence. We do not collect information centrally on arrest referral schemes, but a recent survey by the Institute for the Study of Drug Dependence found that seven police forces have instituted similar arrangements and many more are planning to do so.

We greatly welcome schemes on the lines of the Southwark one, which were the subject of a specific recommendation in the "AIDS and Drug Misuse Part 2" report of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs.

Official Information (Disclosure)

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will publish a complete list of the statutory provisions bearing upon the disclosure of official information, other than the Official Secrets Act, in order to update the list of provisions published in appendix V of the Franks report (Cmnd. 5104);

(2) if he will publish a list of the clauses containing provisions bearing upon the disclosure of official information which appear in Government Bills published to date during the current parliamentary Session.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 16 January 1990]:* Following is the information requested:

Statutory provisions which create criminal sanctions for the disclosure of certain kinds of information

Abortion Act 1967, sections (2)1(c) and (3).
Agricultural Statistics Act 1979, sections 3 and 4.
Agriculture and Horticulture Act 1964, section 13.
Airports Act 1986, section 74.
Anatomy Act 1984, section 10(6).
Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, section 24.
Atomic Energy Act 1946, section 13.
Banking Act 1987, sections 82-87.
Biological Standards Act 1975, section 5.
Building Societies Act 1986, section 53.
Census Act 1920, sections 8(1)(a) and 8(2).
Cereals Marketing Act 1965, section 17.
Civil Aviation Act 1982, section 23.
Civil Defence Act 1948, section 4(4).
Clean Air Act 1956, section 26.
Coal Act 1938, section 1(3).
Coal Industry Nationalisation Act 1946, section 56.
Coast Protection Act 1949, section 25.
Companies Act 1985, section 449.
Company Securities (Insider Dealing) Act 1985, section 2.
Competitions Act 1980, section 19.
Consumer Credit Act 1974, sections 160(4) and 174(5).
Consumer Protection Act 1987, section 38.
Control of Pollution Act 1974, section 94.
Data Protection Act 1984, sections 15, 19, 20 and schedule 1, paragraph 3.
Deep Sea Mining (Temporary Provisions) Act 1981, section 13.
Diseases of Fish Act 1983, section 9.
Electricity Act 1989, section 57.
Employment Agencies Act 1973, section 9(4).
Employment and Training Act 1973, section 4(5).
Energy Act 1976, schedule 2, paragraph 7.
Energy Conservation Act 1981, section 20(8).
Estate Agents Act 1979, section 10.
European Communities Act 1972, sections 11(2) and 12.
Factories Act 1961, section 154.
Fair Trading Act 1973, sections 30(3) and 133.
Film Levy Finance Act 1981, section 8.
Finance Act 1969, section 58(6).
Finance Act 1989, section 182(8).
Financial Services Act 1986, part VIII.
Fire Precautions Act 1971, section 21.
Fisheries Act 1981, section 12.
Food Act 1984, sections 5(3) and 87(5).
Gas Act 1965, schedule 6, paragraph 9.
Gas Act 1986, section 42.
Harbours Act 1964, section 46.
Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, sections 27(4) and 28
Highways Act 1980, section 292(4).
Industrial Training Act 1982, section 6(2).
Insurance Companies Act 1982, section 47a.
Iron and Steel Act 1982, section 33.
Legal Aid Act 1988, section 38.
Local Government Finance Act 1982, section 30.
Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980, section 167 and schedule 20, part III.
Medicines Act 1968, section 118(2).
Merchant Shipping Act 1988, section 52(3).
Merchant Shipping (Liner Conferences) Act 1982, section 10(2).
National Health Service Act 1977, paras 5-7 of schedule 11.
Offices, Shops and Railway Premises Act 1963, section 59.
Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, section 98.
Population (Statistics) Act 1938, section 4(2).
Prices Act 1974, schedule, paragraph 12.
Public Health Act 1961, section 68.
Public Health (Control of Diseases) Act 1984, section 62(3).
Race Relations Act 1976, section 52.
Radioactive Substances Act 1948, section 7.
Radioactive Substances Act 1960, section 13(3).
Rahabilitation of Offenders Act 1974, section 9.
Rent (Agriculture) Act 1976, section 30(4).
Restrictive Trade Practices Act 1976, section 41.
Rivers (Prevention of Pollution) Act 1961, section 12.
Road Traffic Regulations Act 1984, section 43.
Sea Fish Industry Act 1970, section 14(2).
Sex Discrimination Act 1975, section 61.
Social Security Act 1989, section 19 and schedule 2.
Statistics of Trade Act 1947, section 9.
Telecommunications Act 1984, section 101.
Town and Country Planning Act 1971, section 281(3).
Trade Descriptions Act 1968, section 28.
Transport Act 1968, section 87.
Value Added Tax Act 1983, section 44.
Water Act 1989, section 174.
Weights and Measures Act 1985, section 64 and 79(7).
Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949, sections 5, (6)(ii) and 15(4)(c).

Provisions in Government Bills published in Session 1989-90 to date, which create offences of disclosure of certain kinds of information

Food Safety Bill, clause 33(7).
Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill, clause 37(5).

WALES

A5 (Accidents)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many accidents were reported during the period January 1988 to December 1989 on the stretch of the A5 which passes through Clwyd.

Mr. Roberts: There were 150 personal injury accidents reported during the period January 1988 to December 1989 on the stretch of the A5 which passes through Clwyd. Figures for 1989 are provisional.

Consultancies

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will state *(a)* the target figure for consultancies per month in Wales under the Government's consultancy initiatives and *(b)* the spending on consultancy initiatives in Wales for (i) 1988-89 outturn, (ii) 1989-90 estimated outturn, (iii) 1990-91 plans, (iv) 1991-92 plans and (v) 1992-93 plans.

Mr. Peter Walker: Formal targets are not set on a regional basis, but take-up of the consultancy initiatives in Wales has consistently been above the level that would be expected from the proportion of eligible firms in Wales. Expenditure on completed consultancies in 1988-89 was £343,000; in 1989-90 the latest figures available (to January) show expenditure at £1,622,000. (A regional analysis for total expenditure on consultancy initiatives, to include evaluation, administration and promotions is not available). It is not possible to provide a regional breakdown of provision for future years as the scheme is demand-led.

Workplace Nurseries

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the number of workplaces providing nursery care and the number of employees using such facilities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: Information on which to base reliable estimates is not available centrally. This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Welsh Craft Initiative

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the progress of the Welsh craft initiative.

Mr. Peter Walker: The craft initiative was launched in early 1988. Crafts business advisers have been appointed and have contacted more than 1,000 Welsh businesses to tell them when help is available. The "Data Crefft" information system for buyers and producers of crafts in Wales is in place and there have been craft initiative stands at all Welsh fairs. Showcases for Welsh craft products have also been set up at the national folk museum (St. Fagans), at the David Morgan department store in Cardiff and at the Wales Centre in Piccadilly, London. There has also been a strong Welsh presence at major trade fairs outside the Principality. A series of marketing and publicity weekends for craftspeople is in progress. An evaluation of the campaign's impact will be carried out once the final year, which starts on 1 April 1990, is complete. I am delighted at the progress that has been made in the improvement of both marketing and quality control.

Radioactive Dust

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what assessment he has made of the danger to Towyn residents of contamination by radioactive dust left behind by the floodwater; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what proposals he has to clean up radioactive dust left behind by floodwater in Towyn earlier this year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: Government scientists have visited Towyn and have measured external gamma dose rates, and the radioactivity in the sediment left by the floodwater. The gamma dose rates were indistinguishable from those expected due to natural radiation. The doses of radioactivity which could result from the radioactivity in the sediment were within the normal variations in the natural background exposure to the United Kingdom population.

The levels of radioactivity in the sediment are such that no special precautions are required for clean-up of the area or disposal of the sediment.

The impact of the radioactivity in the sediment on livestock is still being assessed.

School Meals

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish a table showing the expenditure on school meals for each year from 1978-79 to the latest date available, in current and constant prices.

Mr. Roberts: Local authority current expenditure on school catering for each year since 1979-80 is given in the table. Information for 1978-79 is not available. Catering includes both school meals and milk. The school meals element is not available separately.

School catering current expenditure

£ thousands

Local authority	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*[1]
Cash prices											
Clwyd	3,317	2,995	2,883	3,262	3,684	3,688	3,734	4,006	4,256	2,984	3,751
Dyfed	3,700	2,818	3,086	3,318	3,509	3,016	3,001	3,267	3,531	3,069	4,416
Gwent	3,969	4,110	4,406	4,846	4,925	5,182	5,150	5,691	5,577	4,260	4,582
Gwynedd	2,414	2,255	2,225	2,418	2,373	2,481	2,572	2,610	2,725	2,557	2,462
Mid Glamorgan	5,807	5,432	5,595	6,281	6,742	8,090	7,566	7,596	7,417	5,775	7,301
Powys	1,344	1,165	1,156	1,494	1,537	1,391	1,167	1,111	1,091	1,053	1,179
South Glamorgan	2,321	1,780	1,947	2,065	2,208	2,389	2,482	2,119	2,138	1,882	2,318
West Glamorgan	3,191	2,879	3,006	3,324	2,768	3,460	2,802	2,867	2,841	2,859	2,904
Total Wales	26,061	23,435	24,303	27,008	27,747	29,699	28,474	29,267	29,575	24,439	28,912

Local authority	*1979-80*	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*[1]
1989-90 prices[2]											
Clwyd	6,648	5,072	4,447	4,692	5,063	4,830	4,641	4,816	4,856	3,178	3,751
Dyfed	7,415	4,773	4,760	4,774	4,823	3,950	3,730	3,927	4,028	3,268	4,416
Gwent	7,956	6,960	6,796	6,972	6,769	6,785	6,400	6,841	6,362	4,537	4,582
Gwynedd	4,838	3,820	3,432	3,478	3,262	3,249	3,196	3,137	3,108	2,723	2,462
Mid Glamorgan	11,638	9,199	8,630	9,036	9,267	10,593	9,403	9,130	8,461	6,150	7,301
Powys	2,693	1,973	1,783	2,149	2,113	1,822	1,450	1,335	1,245	1,121	1,179
South Glamorgan	4,652	3,015	3,003	2,971	3,035	3,129	3,085	2,547	2,439	2,004	2,318
West Glamorgan	6,395	4,876	4,637	4,782	3,805	4,530	3,483	3,446	3,241	3,045	2,904
Total Wales	52,234	39,689	37,488	38,855	38,138	38,889	35,388	35,179	33,741	26,028	28,912

[1] Cash price budgets.

[2] Deflated using GDP deflator.

Conwy Tunnels

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the original estimated cost of the work on the Conwy tunnels; and what is the current estimate of the total cost.

Mr. Roberts: In 1986 when the formal decision to proceed was made and the main contract let, the estimated full cost of the scheme was £158·4 million of which the main contract comprised £102 million. The balance of £56·4 million comprised land, advance works, design and supervision costs.

The latest estimate of the total cost of the scheme is £170·8 million, as set out in the Welsh Office commentary on public expenditure in Wales 1990-91 to 1992-93, published in March.

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what date work commenced on the Conwy tunnels; what was to be the original date of completion; and what is now the estimated date of completion.

Mr. Roberts: Work commenced on Conwy crossing on 3 November 1986 and the projected date for completion at the time was January 1991. However, the contract date for completion is currently August 1991.

DEFENCE

Nuclear Submarines

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on faults reported in the cooling circuits of British nuclear submarines and their effect on the operation of the nuclear-powered submarine fleet.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answers that I gave him on 5 and 12 February, *Official Report*, columns *460* and *117* respectively. The programme of inspections of our nuclear-powered submarines is progressing.

Meteorological Office

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress towards establishing the Meteorological Office as an executive agency.

Mr. Tom King: I am pleased to announce that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement today visited the Meteorological Office in Bracknell to mark its launch as the first executive agency in the Ministry of Defence.

The Meteorological Office is a familiar part of our national life. As the United Kingdom's national weather service, it also plays a leading role in the international structure on which modern weather forecasting depends. It has established, over its 135-year history, an unrivalled reputation in its field. Its staff include some of the world's foremost experts in climatic prediction and research. Utilising these resources, one of the office's key aims will be to provide timely and authoritative advice on climatic change to Ministers nationally and internationally through the auspices of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climatic Change.

Over the next five years I will be setting the agency a range of targets to ensure that it delivers progressive improvements in the quality and efficiency of the weather-related services it provides to defence, civil aviation, commercial customers and the general public. The initial targets I have set for the Meteorological Office during the period 1990-95 are:

to devise and implement a system of performance measurement in each of the major activity areas based on output quantity, quality and timeliness and on input costs, to enable publication by 31 March 1991 of targets which require improvements to efficiency that will make a significant contribution to the efficiency targets of the Ministry of Defence as a whole;

to improve the efficiency of commercial services, measured as the ratio between revenue earned and the cost of provision of such services;

to reduce by 15 per cent. the standard-error of 48-hour forecasts of mid-atmosphere pressure fields over the North Atlantic and North West Europe;

to achieve measurable improvement in the quality of public warnings and services to MOD and the CAA, within available resources;

to achieve measurable improvement in the productivity of operational support services through the use of new technology, automation and the integration of functions;

to reduce net operating costs in real terms by 1 per cent. in 1990-91 and to continue to achieve this performance with the aim of doubling it by the end of the period;

to achieve a 6 per cent. per annum cumulative increase in the uptake of meteorological services as measured by revenue generated from commercial services offered to the public, commerce and industry, exclusive of services to the CAA; and

to achieve a 10 per cent. per annum cumulative increase in the contribution of commercial service revenue to offsetting core costs.

NATO Nuclear Planning Group

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what matters he expects to discuss at the next NATO nuclear planning group meeting.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend will discuss a wide range of current nuclear issues with his NPG colleagues.

German Unification

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will next be meeting his NATO counterparts to discuss the defence and security implications of a united Germany.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend will next be meeting his NATO counterparts at the nuclear planning group meeting in Canada on 9-10 May.

Low Flying

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what monitoring arrangements exist to assess the frequency of low-level aircraft training flights in those areas of the country where these exercises frequently occur.

Mr. Neubert: Current records are maintained of usage of the United Kingdom low flying system and these may be supplemented by information from covert surveys of low-flying activity in particular areas, including those where exercises frequently occur, which are carried out by the Royal Air Force police.

Exhibition (Upper Waiting Hall)

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department has considered an application for an exhibition relating to the Royal Navy to be displayed in the Upper Waiting Hall.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I understand that under procedures agreed by the Services Committee arrangements have been made with the authorities of the House for an exhibition to be held in the Upper Waiting Hall from 25 June to 29 June.

RAF Bentwaters

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) on what date he was first made aware of the purpose of the proposed flight simulator facility at RAF Bentwaters;

(2) what aircraft type would be supported by the proposed flight simulator building at RAF Bentwaters;

(3) what is the cost of the proposed flight simulator building at RAF Bentwaters;

(4) what is the scheduled date for the start of construction of the proposed flight simulator building at RAF Bentwaters.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answers that I gave him on 7 March 1990 at columns *705-6*. Her Majesty's Government have as yet taken no decision regarding approval for the additions and alterations to the flight simulator facility at RAF Bentwaters for which United States congressional funding approval has been granted. It is not for me to comment on the detail of United States internal planning proposals.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Leyton of 6 February 1989 *Official Report*, columns *515-16*, if he will seek information from the United States authorities with respect to their intentions regarding construction projects at RAF Bentwaters and as to when the process of seeking funding approval was first set in hand; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have nothing to add to my answers to the hon. Member on 6 February 1989 (columns *515-16*), and 7 March 1990 (columns *706-7*) and to the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) on 6 February 1990 (columns *603-4*).

F-15E Aircraft

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects any decision to be made on deployment of F-15E aircraft to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have nothing to add to the answer that I gave the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mr. Parry) on 6 February 1990 at column *604*.

Radar

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the planned new radar to be constructed at Brawdy; what will be the contribution to costs paid by the United Kingdom; and for how long negotiations have been under way with the United States Government on the project.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) on Friday 30 March at columns *328-29*. The United Kingdom share of the trial including our share of the running costs will amount to some £15·5 million.

UK-US Defence Agreements

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what bilateral defence agreements he *(a)* has signed and *(b)* expects to sign with the Government of the United States in 1990.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We have a variety of bilateral agreements under negotiation, and likely to be signed this year, dealing with host nation support, equipment, operations, and other matters. It is not our practice to disclose details of such agreements in advance of their conclusion, and some of them will be classified when finalised.

No major agreements have been signed this year but we expect a memorandum of understanding to be signed shortly to cover a joint trial in the United Kingdom of a United States "over-the-horizon" radar.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Farms

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the trend in the number of farms on which it is the farmer's sole occupation to run the farm; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Information is not available in the precise form requested. The following table gives the number of whole-time farmers, partners and directors in England over the last 10 years as collected at the June agricultural census:

Year (at June)	*Number of whole-time farmers, partners and directors*
1980	136,565
1981	134,428
1982	133,579
1983	132,922
1984	131,682
1985	129,830
1986	128,473
1987	126,671
1988	124,518
1989	122,351

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to help young entrants into farming.

Mr. Curry: As the Minister said in his reply of 8 March to my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Mr. Batiste), *Official Report*, column *839*, this Department gives grants to young farmers under the farm and conservation grant regulations at rates 25 per cent. higher than for other farmers.

We had also hoped to introduce a scheme to lend milk quota to new entrants. However, the Commission has ruled that there is no basis in Community law for such a scheme and has declined to propose the necessary changes at this stage. In view of strong objections to a scheme based on outright grant of quota, the Government have decided not to proceed with such a scheme.

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many people are employed for each one hundred hectares on farms of *(a)* under 200 hectares, *(b)* between 200 and 1,000 hectares and *(c)* over 1,000 hectares.

Mr. Curry: The information for England is given in the table, and is taken from the June 1989 agricultural census. Persons employed here cover all categories of the work force (full-time or part-time) including farmers, partners, directors, managers, family and hired workers, and seasonal or casual employees.

Total area of holding	*Persons employed per 100 hectares*
Under 200 ha	6·3
200 and under 1,000 ha	2·2
1,000 ha and over	1·2

Miss Emma Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his Department has any plans to introduce definitions of small, medium and large farms.

Mr. Curry: We have no plans to introduce such definitions, which would have limited relevance given the variations in types of farms and in farming conditions.

Extensification

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the European Community proposals for extensification.

Mr. Curry: We shall shortly be announcing decisions on pilot schemes for extensification of beef and sheep following consultations with interested organisations and with the Commission. We are also intending to issue a consultation document outlining a possible extensification scheme under which grant aid would be available to farmers wishing to convert from conventional to organic production.

Salmonella

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has on the quantities of salmonellas found in the stocks of intact grade A eggs.

Mr. Maclean: Stocks of intact grade A eggs are not required to be examined for the presence of salmonellas and no information is therefore available. However, I also refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health on 9 March, *Official Report*, column *895*.

Hydatid Disease

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to eradicate hydatid disease; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The Ministry, in conjunction with the Welsh Office Agriculture Department, has completed a six-year pilot project in Powys for this disease, where the problem is greatest. The objective of the project was to determine the feasibility of controlling or eradicating the disease through the regular dosing of dogs with a de-worming drug. This has resulted in a significant reduction of hydatid infestation in the area. We have no plans to introduce a national eradication policy for this disease.

NORTHERN IRELAND

St. Leonards Home

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he is taking concerning the closure of St. Leonards home, Warrenpoint, County Down.

Mr. Needham: This is primarily a matter for the Southern health and social services board which is currently exploring, with housing associations and voluntary groups, the possibilities of providing more suitable accommodation. Decisions on the future of the home will be taken only on completion of this investigation and will fully involve the existing residents.

Downpatrick Hospital

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what actions have been taken about the time scale and construction of a new hospital in Downpatrick on the site of the Downshire hospital site.

Mr. Needham: It is for the Eastern health and social services board to bring forward proposals. The Department of Health and Social Services will then consider the priority of any agreed scheme. The board is at present evaluating a report on the options.

Education Redundancies

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many redundancies are estimated as likely to occur among *(a)* lecturers and *(b)* ancillary staff in each education and library board area in Northern Ireland arising from new funding arrangements for further education colleges.

Dr. Mawhinney: Colleges of further education are currently finalising their business plans and these should identify the implications of the new funding arrangements for the staffing of the colleges. It is not yet possible to estimate how many redundancies, if any, are likely to arise as a result of these arrangements.

Pupil-teacher Ratios

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what is the pupil-teacher ratio for *(a)* primary and *(b)* post primary schools in Northern Ireland at the present time;

(2) what will be the pupil-teacher ratio in *(a)* primary and *(b)* post primary schools for the academic year 1990-91 in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney: The latest available information on pupil-teacher ratios for 1989 is as follows:

	Pupil-teacher ratios
Primary	23·2
Post-primary	14·9

Information about pupil-teacher ratios in 1990-91 is not available.

Discretionary Teaching Posts

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what was the total number of applications for discretionary teaching posts received for the 1990-91 academic year by area boards and DENI;

(2) what is the total number of discretionary teaching posts allocated by *(a)* area boards and *(b)* DENI for the 1990-91 academic year to each sector of education in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information in respect of full-time posts is as follows:

	Primary		*Secondary*	
	Requested	*Allocated*	*Requested*	*Allocated*
Education and library boards	[1]534	[1]431	[2]n/a	170
DENI	701	631	486	268

Notes:

[1] Information in the form requested is available in respect of four boards only since the other board—the South-Eastern education and library board—has adopted a different procedure for the allocation of teaching posts.

[2] The total number of applications to boards for discretionary posts is not available.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will publish details of the numbers of discretionary teaching posts allocated to each sector of education in Northern Ireland in each of the last three years by area board.

Dr. Mawhinney: The numbers are as follows:

Board	*1987-88* *Pri*	*Sec*	*1988-89* *Pri*	*Sec*	*1989-90* *Pri*	*Sec*
Belfast	307	93	318	113	320	116
Western	212	46	223	67	250	68
North-Eastern	222	69	226	92	248	115
South-Eastern	239	56	251	66	n/a	n/a
Southern	185	60	190	83	181	94

Grammar Schools

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what protection exists for pupils deemed suitable for an academic grammar school course when the grammar school of the parents' choice declines to enrol the child.

Dr. Mawhinney: Under the arrangements for transfer from primary to secondary education pupils are not deemed suitable or unsuitable for any type of school. All schools are required to admit pupils up to an approved admissions number and within an overall enrolment number. If a school is oversubscribed it must apply its admissions criteria to select which pupils should be admitted. If the parents of a child who has been refused a place in the school of their choice think the school has not applied its admissions criteria properly they can appeal to an independent statutory appeals tribunal.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the Department of Education for Northern Ireland can ensure that a transferring pupil from primary school deemed suitable for a grammar school course of study in Northern Ireland will have a higher priority for a grammar school place than a fee-paying preparatory pupil with lower academic potential at such a grammar school.

Dr. Mawhinney: No. The admission of any pupil to a grammar school this year is a matter for the school's board of governors acting within its admissions criteria. The Department of Education (NI) has, however, advised school authorities that if academic ability is a criterion it would be inappropriate for pupils from the preparatory departments of grammar schools to be admitted to secondary departments of grammar schools in preference to other applicants who are judged to have greater academic ability.

Robberies

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what information he has been given by Ministers from the Irish Republic concerning the number of bank, post office, wages and comparable robberies carried out in the Irish Republic since the beginning of 1989; which have been deemed attributable to the Provisional Irish Republican Army or other paramilitary groups; and what amounts of moneys were involved in those robberies;

(2) whether he has had discussions with Ministers from the Irish Republic on the extent of funding obtained by the Provisional Irish Republican Army or other paramilitary groups from bank, post office, wages and comparable robberies in the Irish Republic.

Mr. Cope: There have been several exchanges through the Anglo-Irish Conference and secretariat about the funding of terrorist organisations. It would not be appropriate to divulge the details.

Extradition

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will place a copy of the Irish Republic's Supreme Court judgment in the Finucane and Clarke extradition case in the Library.

Mr. Cope: I have already done so.

Prisoners (Mental Health)

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* mentally ill and *(b)* mentally handicapped persons are in prisons in Northern Ireland and in which prisons.

Mr. Cope: On 29 March 1990 there were 12 prisoners undergoing psychiatric treatment or observation as in-patients in prison hospitals in Northern Ireland. Of these, seven were in Her Majesty's prison, Maghaberry, four in Her Majesty's prison, Belfast, and one in Her Majesty's YOC, Hydebank. None is described as mentally handicapped. Other prisoners may be referred to a consultant forensic psychiatrist from time to time as appropriate.

Sexual Harassment

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his Department's policy on sexual harassment at work; whether guidance on reporting complaints has been issued to all staff; how many complaints have been reported in the past five years; and what disciplinary action has been taken.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 5 March 1990]:* Both the Northern Ireland civil service and the home civil service regard sexual harassment at work by their employees as a disciplinary offence.

Guidance on reporting complaints was issued to Northern Ireland civil servants on 12 October 1988. In the past five years, 13 cases have been recorded by its equal opportunities unit, two of which are still under consideration and five have resulted in disciplinary action being taken.

With regard to the home civil service part of the Northern Ireland Office, revised guidance on reporting complaints is shortly to be issued to staff. There is no record of any complaints of sexual harassment having been reported to the equal opportunities unit in the past five years.

Public Relations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total expenditure by his Department on press and public relations in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his latest estimate for the current year and budget for 1990-91.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 12 March 1990]:* The information is as follows:

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
DANI	—	—	45,900	50,100	53,600	55,900	54,700	56,000	61,300	59,000	74,700	66,600
DHSS	37,675	26,948	51,504	65,825	88,767	157,267	194,978	511,293	249,591	246,480	292,000	383,000
DENI	10,081	13,958	15,436	16,655	17,539	18,291	19,119	19,889	21,434	22,008	539,727	130,759
DOE	286,000	330,000	377,000	375,000	580,000	707,000	951,000	1,071,000	1,431,210	1,781,110	1,903,745	1,600,000
DFP[1]	—	—	—	—	—	333,000	379,000	372,000	435,000	493,000	—	—
DED	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,692,903	2,959,516	3,477,000	3,630,000
Northern Ireland Office Information Service[2]	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	950,910	1,204,000

[1] Cost of Information Service when under DFP.

[2] Cost of Information Service under NIO.

Advertising Expenditure

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the figures for the spending by his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his latest estimate for the current year and budget for 1990-91.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 12 March 1990]:* The information is not available in the form requested except at disproportionate cost; however the figures for the spending on all advertising and other promotional material in Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office for the years requested is as follows:

	£
1979-80	468,972
1980-81	487,393
1981-82	613,464
1982-83	1,550,896
1983-84	2,853,451
1984-85	2,699,659
1985-86	3,916,824
1986-87	3,787,628
1987-88	4,028,259
1988-89	4,606,655
1989-90	[1]5,043,463
1990-91	[2]4,716,900

[1] Estimate.

[2] Budget.

Management Consultants

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what were the total fees paid out by his Department to management consultants in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his latest estimate for the current year and budget for 1990-91.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 12 March 1990]:* The information for 1979-80 to 1983-84 throughout Northern Ireland Departments, and the Northern Ireland Office is available only at disproportionate cost. Information for the years 1984-85 to date and the budget for 1990-91 is as follows:

	£
1984-85	2,352,311
1985-86	2,427,200
1986-87	2,742,192
1987-88	3,363,213
1988-89	4,260,116
1989-90	[1]4,650,523
1990-91	[2]3,266,600

[1] Estimate.

[2] Budget.

Internal Audit

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the subject matter of the internal audit report which was brought to the attention of a Minister in his Department in 1989.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 20 March 1990]:* The relevant part of the report dealt with the administration of the sheep annual premium scheme and was referred to as background information in proposals for improving controls.

Civil Servants

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table to show the number of civil servants employed in each Department of Health and Social Services office by district council area in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 20 March 1990]:* The table gives the number of staff in post at February 1990, employed by the Department of Health and Social Services, by district council areas.

Council area	*Office*	*Staff in post*
Antrim	Antrim SSO	111
Ards	Newtownards SSO	87
Armagh	Armagh SSO	89
Ballymena	Ballymena SSO	102
Ballymoney	Ballymoney SSO	77
Banbridge	Banbridge SSO	66
Belfast	All Offices[1]	3,958
Carrickfergus	Carrickfergus SSO	64
Castlereagh	Knockbreda SSO	103
Coleraine	Coleraine SSO	111
Cookstown	Cookstown SSO	70
Craigavon	Lurgan SSO	104
	Portadown SSO	71
Down	Downpatrick SSO	64
	Ballynahinch SSO	41
	Newcastle SSO	42
Dungannon	Dungannon SSO	102
Fermanagh	Enniskillen SSO	116
Larne	Larne SSO	62
Limavady	Limavady SSO	61
Lisburn	Lisburn SSO	102
Londonderry	Londonderry SSO	262
	Lisahally	169
Magherafelt	Magherafelt SSO	85
Moyle	Nil	0
Newry and Mourne	Newry SSO	153
	Kilkeel SSO	41
Newtownabbey	Newtownabbey SSO	113
North Down	Bangor SSO	93
Omagh	Omagh SSO	96
Strabane	Strabane SSO	97

[1] An office breakdown for the Belfast area could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Fisheries Research

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the numbers of staff and salary scales and the total salaries projected for the full complement of scientific staff for the research vessel Lough Foyle in each of the present and the next two financial years.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 23 March 1990]:* The information is as follows:

Grade	*Average salary costs (1990-91 prices) £k*	*Staff in post 1989-90*	*Predicted staff in post 1990-91*	*Predicted staff in post 1991-92*
SPSO	35,446	1	1	1
SSO	20,699	0	2	2
HSO	16,568	0	3	3
SO	13,283	1	5	5
ASO	10,261	1	2	2
AO	9,145	0	1	1
Total Numbers		3	14	14
Total salary costs		[1]£9,570	£223,000	£237,000

[1] Variable part-year in post.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Londonderry, East of 7 March, *Official Report*, column 661, he will publish a table showing *(a)* the period of each charter of the vessel Lough Foyle since it came into Government ownership, *(b)* the lessee for each of those charters, *(c)* the average costs for each day and each charter, *(d)* the sum paid per day for each of those charters, and *(e)* the sum paid for each charter.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* No.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if, further to his answer to the hon. Member for Londonderry, East of 6 March, *Official Report*, column 571, he will publish a table to show *(a)* the projected total cost of the current year, *(b)* the projected total cost for each of the next three years or financial years and *(c)* the projected cost of (i) crew salaries, (ii) scientific staff salaries, (iii) shore-based staff, (iv) depreciation and replacement costs of the vessel, and (v) other costs associated with the vessel.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* The information is as follows:

		£
(a) Estimated running costs of the DANI research vessel for 1989-90		504,600

		£
(b) Projected running costs for the DANI research vessel:	1990-91	617,900
	1991-92	662,500
	1992-93	680,100

(c) *Projected salary costs for next three financial years:*

		£
(i) Crew salaries	1990-91	277,000
	1991-92	299,000
	1992-93	323,000
(ii) Scientific staff salaries (shore-based and sea-going staff)	1990-91	652,000
	1991-92	691,000
	1992-93	733,000

(iii) See (ii) above

(iv) Depreciation is estimated at 6 per cent. per annum. Replacement of the vessel has not yet been considered.

(v) None.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment has been undertaken of the total job loss to the Coleraine area, including spouses employment, staff employed in spouses' business full-time and part-time, as a consequence of moving the fisheries research laboratory to Belfast; and whether any assessment of the cost to state benefits has been taken into account as part of a cost benefit analysis.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* None.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what computer links exist between *(a)* the Coleraine fisheries laboratory and its Belfast headquarters and *(b)* the headquarters and the freshwater biological unit at Antrim.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* The answer is:

- *(a)* A PDP 11/73 computer at Coleraine is linked to a VAX 6320 computer at Belfast via a 1200 baud dedicated British Telecom line.
- *(b)* A computer terminal at Antrim is linked to a VAX 6320 computer at Belfast via a 1200 baud dedicated British Telecom line.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his estimate of the cost of the new building work required in Belfast to provide accommodation for *(a)* the scientific staff for the research vessel Lough Foyle, *(b)* the transferred fisheries research laboratory staff and *(c)* the transferred freshwater biological unit staff; and what is the size of the building required to house them.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* Staff from the research vessel Lough Foyle, the fisheries research laboratory and the freshwater biological investigation unit will be accommodated in the new building of 17,175 sq ft at the Department's agriculture and food science centre, Newforge lane, Belfast, at an estimated cost of £1·4 million excluding VAT but including 6 per cent. contingencies.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his estimate of the market value of *(a)* the fisheries laboratory building at Coleraine and *(b)* the building occupied by the freshwater biological unit at Antrim.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* The estimated market values of the fisheries research laboratory at Coleraine and the freshwater biological investigation unit at Antrim are £100,000 and £225,000 respectively. The latter accommodation will be fully utilised by Greenmount agricultural college when the accommodation becomes available.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the size of the building at Antrim presently occupied by the freshwater biological unit; and whether it is occupied to capacity.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* The freshwater biological investigation unit building at Antrim is some 5,128 sq ft and is fully utilised by DANI staff at the freshwater biological investigation unit.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the size of the fisheries research laboratory at Coleraine; and whether it is occupied to capacity.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* The fisheries research laboratory at Coleraine is approximately 9,400 sq ft and is fully utilised.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what research into salmon in the Foyle system has been carried out by the fisheries research laboratory at Coleraine in each of the last five years; and how much time and money was expended on such research in each of those years.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* None.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

USSR (Emigrants)

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has made any representations to the Government of the USSR regarding emigrants from that country to the state of Israel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: No.

Hostages (Middle East)

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about British efforts to free the hostages held in the middle east.

Mr. Waldegrave: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister of 30 January to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown).

Zimbabwe

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to meet his Zimbabwean counterpart.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has no such plans.

Horn of Africa

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the situation in the Horn of Africa.

Mr. Waldegrave: The escalation of fighting in northern Ethiopia has set back both the relief operations and the peace talks. We welcome the recent agreement to allow relief supplies across the lines from the south. The first food convoys are now entering Tigray by this route. Peace talks between the Government and TPLF have resumed in Rome. We are urging the resumption of talks between the Government and the EPLF. In Somalia, the Government have announced political and economic reforms, but the rebels refuse to negotiate.

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Don Valley, 19 February, *Official Report,* column *559,* what are the respective numbers of representatives currently allowed residence in each country.

Mr. Waldegrave: The present agreed overall limit for officials and certain other categories of representative in each country is 205.

Fiji

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will obtain copies of the latest proposals for a new constitution for Fiji and make them available to hon. Members.

Mr. Sainsbury: We are seeking copies of the latest proposals which were discussed at the recent Great Council of Chiefs meeting. I shall make arrangements for copies to be placed in the Library of the House.

India

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his statement of 22 March, *Official Report,* column 1338, how many of the *(a)* 1,839 Indian students admitted to the United Kingdom in 1988-89 and *(b)* 130 Indian students, awarded special Foreign Office scholarships for this financial year, are of Sikh origin; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: Her Majesty's Government-funded scholarships are awarded to Indian students regardless of religion or race, and no record is maintained of their religious or ethnic background.

Iran

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what protests he has conveyed through diplomatic channels to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran regarding the broadcast on Tehran radio on 6 March of a speech by the President of the Supreme Court of Iran regarding the alleged duty of Muslims to murder Mr. Salman Rushdie; and whether he will make it clear to the Iranian authorities that normal relations between the United Kingdom and the Islamic Republic will be impossible so long as prominent Iranian figures continue to repeat these threats.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have made it clear to Iran on many occasions that the threat to the life of Mr. Rushdie must be lifted. We can have normal relations with Iran only if she fulfils her international obligations, in particular by removing the use or threat of violence against citizens of other countries.

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will raise at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights the speech broadcast on 6 March by the President of the Supreme Court of Iran in which the President claimed that the Islamic Republic was implementing sentences such as stoning to death for adultery; and whether he will request that such punishments be investigated by the commission.

Mr. Waldegrave: The United Kingdom has played an active role in discussions on Iran in the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. We hope that when the UN special representative pays his second visit to Iran he will be given the opportunity to investigate thoroughly all aspects of human rights there by the Iranian authorities. We shall pay close attention to his findings.

Iraq

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will instruct his Department to convey to the official representatives of the Arab League in London the views of Her Majesty's Government on the resolution of the Arab League Council on 26 March supporting Iraq and criticising Her Majesty's Government regarding the killing of Mr. Farzad Bazoft; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: The Arab League in Tunis was fully briefed on our reaction to the Iraqi execution of Farzad Bazoft. We see nothing to be gained from pursuing this matter further.

Hong Kong

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many of the 25,000 citizenships offered to Hong Kong people by the Government of Singapore have been taken up, at the latest date for which information is available.

Mr. Maude: We understand that, at the end of February, 8,605 Hong Kong people had been granted approval in principle under the Singaporean Government's scheme for permanent resident status in Singapore (citizenship is not offered under the scheme). Of those granted approval, 588 are now settled in Singapore, of whom 494 had already been living there when the scheme was introduced.

EC Directives

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many European Community directives are the subject of legal action by the Commission against the United Kingdom; when each directive, respectively, entered into force; and what is the stated reason in each case for action taken by the Commission.

Mr. Maude: There are currently three cases brought by the Commission before the European Court of Justice involving alleged failure of the United Kingdom to implement EC directives correctly. The directives are:

—the Equal Treatment Directive (76/207), due for implementation on 12 August 1978;

—the Drinking Water Directive (80/778), due for implementation on 18 July 1982;

—the Bathing Water Directive (76/160), due for implementation on 31 December 1977.

EC Regulations

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many regulations have been issued by the European Commission since the United Kingdom joined the European Communities; and how many of these regulations Her Majesty's Government have not accepted.

Mr. Maude: Since the United Kingdom's accession to the EC a total of 21,806 regulations have been adopted, of which 4,946 are still in force. (Many regulations are short-lived, for example, in the agriculture sector). Regulations are directly applicable in all member states.

EC Court of Auditors

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the role of the Court of Auditors of the European Communities.

Mr. Maude: The role of the Court of Auditors of the European Communities is set out in detail in article 206a of the treaty establishing the European Economic Community. The latest Court of Auditors report on the Community budget was published in the *Official Journal* (C312) on 12 December 1989 and was placed in the Library of the House.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* a statement of forthcoming business in the European Community Council of Ministers.

Mr. Maude: The Foreign Affairs Council meets today. Ministers are expected to consider proposals from the Commission on European Community policy on Japanese car imports, and to discuss central Europe. The Commission will report on its explanatory talks with senior officials from the EFTA countries concerning a possible comprehensive EC/EFTA agreement to create an enhanced free trade area. Ministers will discuss preparations for the inter-governmental conference, and the implications of rising third country immigration into the Community. The already agreed EC/Argentina trade and economic co-operation agreement is expected to be signed in the margins of the Foreign Affairs Council, with Foreign Minister Cavallo signing for Argentina.

The Economic and Finance Council will meet on 23 April for a further discussion of economic and monetary union and to prepare for the spring IMF/IBRD meetings. Ministers will discuss the proposal to amend directive 69/169/EEC on intra-Community travel. As a transitional step towards completion of the internal market, the Commission proposes progressive increases in tax-paid allowances in intra-Community travel until they are completely lifted on 1 January 1993. ECOFIN will also discuss the package of three tax measures (the draft mergers directive, parent/subsidiaries directive and arbitration procedure) which are designed to encourage co-operation between companies based in different member states. There may be a discussion of the proposed increase in the EURATOM borrowing limit, on the proposal for a revision to the financial perspective and on the takeover directive.

The Agricultural Council will meet on 25-26 April to discuss the non-food uses for agricultural produce and beef balance sheet import quotas. It will possibly also discuss agriculture price proposals, the intra-EC trade in horses and veterinary medicines.

EMPLOYMENT

Wages Councils

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will update the breakdown, by wages inspectorate division, of the information given in his answer of 1 March 1989, *Official Report*, columns *199-201*, regarding the establishments underpaying and prosecutions for underpayment of wages council rates.

Mr. Nicholls: The information requested is given in the following tables:

Table A: Prosecutions for underpayment

Division	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
London	3	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
South East	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	2	1	4
Eastern	—	1	1	2	1	1	—	1	—	2	—
South West	4	2	3	—	1	1	—	—	—	2	2
Midlands	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1	1	1
North West	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	2	—
Yorkshire and Humberside	1	1	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	2	1
Northern	1	3	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Scotland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Totals	9	8	8	4	2	2	2	2	4	10	9

Table B: Establishments found to be underpaying 1979-85

Division	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*
London (East)	431	495	440	391	441	324	298
London (West)	249	259	270	294	339	354	357
South East	521	769	749	764	871	703	670
Southern	585	576	450	441	494	475	556
Eastern	685	941	848	726	727	914	688
South West	1,010	1,201	1,070	954	1,078	1,033	929
Midlands (East)	634	771	623	532	573	534	430
Midlands (West)	605	674	598	666	543	552	712
North West (East)	946	879	613	648	704	560	529
North West (West)	1,115	1,060	688	652	865	886	804
Yorkshire and Humberside	1,156	1,119	871	964	941	1,026	818
Northern	893	902	736	552	630	721	815
Scotland (East)	710	687	529	515	525	480	488
Scotland (West)	597	750	556	349	389	365	361
Wales	832	1,071	1,033	821	722	534	609
Totals	10,969	12,154	10,074	9,269	9,842	9,461	9,064

Table C
Establishments found to be underpaying 1986-89

Division	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
London	608	270	317	229
South East	646	503	537	478
Eastern	974	405	462	432
South West	832	961	1,156	960
Midlands	943	525	747	822
North West	1,397	541	869	1,104
Yorkshire and Humberside	805	511	631	569
Northern	844	404	369	387
Scotland	656	323	509	547
Wales	500	—	—	—
Totals	8,205	4,443	5,597	5,528

Note: The statistics of underpayments have been separated into two tables because the divisional boundaries were changed in 1986.

Textiles and Footwear

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the number of jobs lost in the textile and footwear industries, by industry, since January 1989, by month, giving the most recent figures available; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: There are no figures for job losses or job gains. The numbers of employees in the textile and footwear industries are supplied in the table.

Employees in textile and footwear industries
Great Britain

Thousands

	Textiles SIC class 43	*Monthly change*	*Footwear SIC group 451*	*Monthly change*
1989				
January	223·2	—	49·0	—
February	219·4	−3·8	48·5	−0·5
March	218·5	−0·9	48·1	−0·4
April	217·5	−1·0	47·7	−0·4
May	216·4	−1·0	47·3	−0·4
June	217·7	1·3	47·1	−0·2
July	215·4	−2·3	46·9	−0·2
August	215·6	0·2	46·3	−0·7
September	218·0	2·5	45·9	−0·4
October	217·2	−0·8	45·9	0·0
November	217·3	0·1	45·8	−0·2
December	214·6	−2·7	45·5	−0·3
1990				
January	213·2	−1·4	44·9	−0·5

Source: Standard Industrial Classification 1980.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list for each of the training and enterprise councils receiving development funding and those applications still under consideration *(a)* the number of board members, *(b)* the names of directors and occupation, *(c)* the company or interest group being represented and *(d)* the name of the chairperson.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* There are 66 training and enterprise councils (TECs) which have received development funding. These are shown together with the chair of each TEC and the position which the chair holds in his-her company. A full list of members of each TEC will be set out in its corporate plan.

South East

Mr. L. Grice (Interim Chairman), Essex TEC—*Chairman* Lafarge Aluminates

Mr. M. Wylie, Hampshire TEC—*Managing Director* Colt International Limited

Mr. J. Blackwell, Heart of England TEC—*Chairman* The Blackwell Group

Mr. A. Saint, Hertfordshire TEC—*Director and General Manager* British Aerospace

Mr. R. Barnes, Isle of Wight TEC—*Operations Director and General Manager* Plessey Radar Limited

Mr. A. Morton, Kent TEC—*British Co-Chairman* Eurotunnel

Mr. P. Muir, Milton Keynes TEC—*Managing Director* Avebury Products Limited

Mr. T. Evans, Thames Valley TEC—*Chairman* Foster Wheeler (GB) Limited

London

Mr. C. West, AZTEC (Kingston/Merton/Wandsworth)—*Director and General Manager* British Aerospace Military Aircraft Limited

Mr. D. Dickinson, London East TEC—*Corporate Director* Stanhope Properties Limited

Mr. D. Wells, South London TEC—*Regional Chairman* British Gas plc South Eastern Region

South West

Mr. A. FitzSimons, Avon TEC—*Managing Director and Chief Executive* Bristol and West Building Society

Mr. E. Dancer, Devon and Cornwall TEC—*Managing Director* Dartington Crystal

Mr. P. Allsebrook CBE, Dorset TEC—*Chairman* TNT (UK) Limited

Mr. J. Hazelwood, Gloucestershire TEC—*General Manager* Birds Eye Wall's Limited

Mr. D. Gwyther, Somerset TEC—*Managing Director* Showerings Limited

West Midlands

Mr. C. Darby, Birmingham TEC—*Managing Director* Bass Inns and Taverns Limited

Mr. E. Roberts, CENTEC (Central England)—*Chairman and Chief Executive* Heath Springs Limited

Mr. G. Whalen, Coventry/Warwickshire TEC—*Managing Director* Peugeot Talbot Motor Company Limited

Mr. P. White, Dudley TEC—*Chairman and Chief Executive* Wyko Group Limited

Mr. M. Worley, Sandwell TEC—*Chairman* William King Limited

Mr. C. Mitchell, Staffordshire TEC—*Chairman and Managing Director* Century Oils

Mr. J. Sayers (Interim Chairman), Walsall TEC—*Managing Director* InterTAN Europe plc

Mr. R. Carver, Wolverhampton TEC—*Chairman* Carver (Wolverhampton) limited

East Midlands and Eastern

Mr. I. Dixon, Bedfordshire TEC—*Joint Chairman and Chief Executive* Willmott Dixon Holdings Limited

Mr. A. Maltpress, Central and South Cambridgeshire TEC —*Managing Director* Ciba-Geigy Plastics Limited

Mr. P. Salisbury, Greater Peterborough TEC—*Managing Director* Peter Brotherhood Limited

Mr. J. Lineker, Norfolk and Waveney TEC—*General Manager* Birds Eye Wall's Limited

Mr. R. Pelham, North Derbyshire TEC—*Managing Director* Chesterfield Cylinders Limited

Mr. J. Darbyshire, North Nottingham TEC—*Chairman* A. H. Turner Group Limited

Mr. A. Stoughton-Harris, Northamptonshire TEC—*Executive Vice Chairman* Nationwide Anglia Building Society

Mr. P. Burden, Southern Derbyshire TEC—*Chairman* Rolls-Royce and Associates Limited

Mr. R. Chesterman, Suffolk TEC—*Managing Director* Delta (MB) Limited

Yorkshire and Humberside

Mr. M. Bainbridge, Barnsley and Doncaster TEC—*Works Manager* ICI Fibres

Mr. J. Donovan, Bradford and District TEC—*Chairman and Managing Director* Judith Donovan Associates Limited

Mr. T. Gartland, Calderdale and Kirklees TEC—*Chief Executive* FKI plc

Sir Gordon Linacre CBE, Leeds TEC—*Chairman* Yorkshire Post Newspapers

Mr. C. Shepherd, North Yorkshire TEC—*Chairman* Shepherd Building Group Limited

Mr. K. Knaggs, Rotherham TEC—*Chairman and Managing Director* Rotherham Engineering Steels

Mr. R. Field OBE, Sheffield TEC—*Chairman* J. and J. Dyson plc

Mr. C. Marshall, Wakefield TEC—*Managing Director* Anglo Bellamy Wilkinson

North West

Mr. D. Dewin, Bolton and Bury TEC—*Director and General Manager* British Aerospace

Mr. W. G. Byrnes, CEWTEC (Chester, Ellesmere Port and Wirral)—*Managing Director* UML Limited

Mr. A. Sanderson, Cumbria TEC—*Managing Director* Cavaghan and Gray Limited

Mr. H. A. Cann, East Lancashire TEC—*Chairman* Terminal Display Systems Limited

Mr. J. Taylor, LAWTEC (Lancashire Area West)—*Chairman* J. R. Taylor (Fashions) Limited

Mr. G. Maddrell, Manchester TEC—*Group Chief Executive* Tootal Group plc

Mr. A. Rothwell, Merseyside TEC—*Operations Manager* Ford Motor Company

Mr. N. Stoller MBE, Oldham TEC—*Chairman* Seton Healthcare Group

Mr. B. Heron (Interim Chairman), Rochdale TEC—*Formerly Chief Executive* TBA Industrial Products Limited

Mr. E. Judge, St. Helens TEC—*Chief Executive* Pilkington Glass

Mr. T. Booth, South and East Cheshire TEC—*Chairman and Chief Executive* Refuge Group plc

Mr. T. Weatherby CBE, Stockport and High Peak TEC—*Executive Chairman* Whitecroft plc

Mr. P. Sneddon, Wigan TEC—*General Manager* H. J. Heinz Company Limited

Northern

Mr. B. Robinson OBE, County Durham TEC—*Managing Director* Tallant Engineering

Mr. B. Best, Northumberland TEC—*Chairman and Managing Director* Tolag and Company Limited

Mr. P. Kerr, Teesside TEC—*Managing Director* Tioxide United Kingdom Limited

Dr. R. Iley CBE, Tyneside TEC—*Joint Managing Director* Cookson Group

Mr. J. Anderson, Wearside TEC—*Managing Director* Mill Garages Group

Wales

Mr. P. Quinn, Gwent TEC—*General Manager and Director* Lucas Heavy Duty Braking Systems

Mr. J. Phillips, Mid Glamorgan TEC—*Chairman and Managing Director* Reliance-Barker-Davies Limited

Mr. J. Troth, North East Wales TEC—*Managing Director* Denis Ruabon Limited

Mr. T. Jones, North West Wales—*Chief Executive* Pilkington Optronics Division

Mr. D. G. Margetts, Powys TEC—*Chairman* Elkay Electrical Manufacturing Company Limited

Mr. R. Helliwell, South Glamorgan TEC—*Group Director* William Cowlin and Sons Limited

Mr. P. Allen CBE, West Wales TEC—*Managing Director* British Steels Strip Products

Labour Stastistics

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number of people unemployed for less than *(a)* one year, *(b)* two years, *(c)* three years, *(d)* four years, *(e)* five years and *(f)* more than five years; and how many in each group are (i) male and (ii) female; for the United Kingdom and each standard region for Scotland and Wales.

Mr. Nicholls *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* The information is contained in the following table and can also be obtained from the NOMIS database system in the House Library.

Duration of Unemployment	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
South East			
Less than 1 year	178,454	71,278	249,732
Less than 2 years	207,990	80,818	288,808
Less than 3 years	220,573	84,611	305,184
Less than 4 years	228,495	87,098	315,593
Less than 5 years	234,754	89,041	323,795
5 years or more	19,787	5,119	24,906
South West			
Less than 1 year	50,595	22,079	72,674
Less than 2 years	57,678	24,743	82,421
Less than 3 years	60,507	25,744	86,251
Less than 4 years	62,253	26,401	88,654
Less than 5 years	63,684	26,916	90,600
5 years or more	4,581	1,633	6,214
East Anglia			
Less than 1 year	19,867	7,919	27,786
Less than 2 years	22,099	8,730	30,829
Less than 3 years	23,020	9,064	32,084
Less than 4 years	23,616	9,290	32,906
Less than 5 years	24,081	9,483	33,564
5 years or more	1,853	542	2,395
West Midlands			
Less than 1 year	69,046	29,830	98,876
Less than 2 years	83,670	34,811	118,481
Less than 3 years	90,127	36,856	126,983
Less than 4 years	94,310	38,288	132,598
Less than 5 years	97,774	39,465	137,239
5 years or more	15,617	3,606	19,223
East Midlands			
Less than 1 year	48,801	20,347	69,148
Less than 2 years	57,128	23,210	80,338
Less than 3 years	60,867	24,319	85,186
Less than 4 years	63,088	25,141	88,229
Less than 5 years	64,777	25,744	90,521
5 years or more	7,114	1,878	8,992
North West			
Less than 1 year	107,802	43,836	151,638
Less than 2 years	133,822	51,549	185,371
Less than 3 years	145,216	54,619	199,835
Less than 4 years	151,986	56,589	208,575
Less than 5 years	157,304	58,075	215,379
5 years or more	23,507	4,308	27,815
Yorkshire and Humberside			
Less than 1 year	79,658	30,882	110,540
Less than 2 years	95,608	35,831	131,439
Less than 3 years	102,498	37,927	140,425
Less than 4 years	106,955	39,287	146,242
Less than 5 years	110,584	40,351	150,935
5 years or more	13,538	2,875	16,413
Northern			
Less than 1 year	59,131	22,695	81,826
Less than 2 years	72,906	26,526	99,432
Less than 3 years	78,332	28,006	106,338
Less than 4 years	81,636	28,963	110,599
Less than 5 years	84,373	29,707	114,080
5 years or more	12,794	2,242	15,036
Wales			
Less than 1 year	46,126	17,265	63,391
Less than 2 years	54,679	19,554	74,233
Less than 3 years	58,153	20,490	78,643
Less than 4 years	59,940	21,046	80,986
Less than 5 years	61,418	21,462	82,880
5 years or more	6,318	1,151	7,469
Northern Ireland			
Less than 1 year	32,066	15,225	47,291
Less than 2 years	42,397	18,758	61,155
Less than 3 years	48,706	20,404	69,110
Less than 4 years	53,599	21,555	75,154
Less than 5 years	57,759	22,432	80,191
5 years or more	17,808	2,414	20,222
Scotland			
Less than 1 year	94,419	42,113	136,532
Less than 2 years	118,358	49,237	167,595
Less than 3 years	128,717	52,270	18,978
Less than 4 years	135,169	54,097	189,266
Less than 5 years	140,257	55,601	195,858
5 years or more	19,623	3,695	23,318
United Kingdom			
Less than 1 year	785,965	323,469	1,109,434
Less than 2 years	946,335	373,767	1,320,102
Less than 3 years	1,016,716	394,310	1,411,026
Less than 4 years	1,061,047	407,755	1,468,802
Less than 5 years	1,096,765	418,277	1,515,042
5 years or more	142,540	29,463	172,003

Consultancies

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1989 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1989, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment; and what is the total amount that his Department has budgeted to spend in the current year.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 28 March 1990]*: I estimate that the total expenditure by my Department (excluding the Training Agency) in the financial year 1989-90 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases, will be £3·1 million. The budget for the financial year 1990-91 is £5·0 million.

The following firms were awarded consultancy contracts by the Department of Employment, excluding the Training Agency, during the financial year 1989-90:

Firm and subject of assignment

Algis Consultants—Service excellence in personnel work

Arthur Anderson—Optical Technology. Planning for NUBS2.

Anderson Limited—BRPS2 Development.

Asset Technology plc—Customisation of optical character recognition interface.

D. E. Barnard Systems Limited—Implications of change study. Computer risk analysis review.

BIS Applied Systems Limited—Quality assurance on communications project. Communications requirements study. Communications security review. Communications study for relocation project.

British Research Market Bureau—Multi-functioning clients survey.

Business Intelligence Limited—Single Terminal Access Project.

Carrington Computer Consultants Limited—Specialist software advice.

Civil Service College—Analysis of trend in data from Labour Force Survey.

Coopers and Lybrand—Advice on procurement of replacement personnel records system.

Crow Associates—Improving communications.

Datasolve—Small systems development.

DBI Associates—System testing planning for NUBS2 Project Support and Technical Assurance. Single Terminal Access Project Evaluation and Development of NUBS2 Project Management System.

Denham Nash Limited—Staff Attitude Survey analysis.

Duhig Berry—PROMPT Training.

EECS and Partners—Energy Efficiency and Maintenance.

Eosys—Single Terminal Access Project.

Falkman Communications Limited—Examination of ES internal communications.

Frere Cholmely—Solicitors Service for Pilot Scheme.

Full Employment UK—Consultations with the over 50s.

HUSAT—Human involvement in computer technology.

Instruction Set—Network Study Evaluation.

Interact—Advice on office systems.

James Lang Wooton—Advice on running Estate Surveying Pilot Scheme.

Kinsley Lord—Performance Information Project.

Learmonth and Burchett Systems plc—Support on mini-computer Management replacement system. Scoping Study for PROMPT3. Implementation of PROMPT3.

Lloyd Northover—Design Guide Corporate.

National Computing Centre Limited—Critical systems training consultancy.

Nexus Connection—LAN trials.

NML Presentations Limited—ES Agency Launch.

OPC—Work on Employers Census.

PA Consulting Group—Evaluation of office automation pilot. Information systems strategy. Review of GPU needs on relocation. Single Terminal Access Project. Data Management/IT Strategy.

Pergamon Infotech—Prototype guides for NUBS2. Small systems development.

Rogers Chapman—Estate Surveying Pilot Scheme (London & SE Region).

Rosalie Silverstone—Evaluation of reconnaisance visits.

Sapphire—Small systems development.

SBS Alveus—BRPS1 Development.

SCPR—Evaluation of Restart. Evaluation of Jobstart. Restart Cohort Study.

Softlab Limited—IT security study.

Software Sciences—Small systems development.

Sphynx—Small systems development.

Support and Training Services Limited—Testing workshop support.

Timberlake Clarke Limited—Data Envelope Analysis in the ES.

Touche Ross—Advice on forecasting workloads in Central Pay Office Computer management.

Yale Data Computer Consultants—Extraction package study on statistical system. Facilities management study. Small systems development.

SCOTLAND

Complaints

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* for each of the last 10 years *(a)* the number of complaints made against his Department to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, *(b)* the number of complaints upheld and *(c)* the action he took on *(b)*.

Mr. Rifkind: The number of complaints *(a)* made and *(b)* upheld for the last 10 years is as follows:

	(a) Complaints made	*(b) Complaints upheld*
1989-90	[1]—	[1]—
1988-89	17	nil
1987-88	12	nil
1986-87	18	nil
1985-86	8	nil
1984-85	10	2
1983-84	15	2
1982-83	13	2

	(a) Complaints made	*(b) Complaints upheld*
1981-82	14	1
1980-81	17	4
General Register Office (Scotland)		
Nil except:		
1983-84	2	nil
Scottish Courts Administration		
Nil except:		
1988-89	1	nil

[1] Figures not available.

When the Parliamentary Commissioner upholds a complaint it is departmental practice to provide an appropriate remedy.

Gun Clubs

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will give details of the number of licensed gun clubs in Scotland; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will list all registered gun clubs in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are currently 271 approved gun clubs in Scotland. I will write to the hon. Member with a list of the approved clubs and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Any rifle or pistol club can apply to become an approved club. Before granting approval my right hon. and learned Friend requires to be satisfied, among other things, that the club is bona fide and has a proper constitution, that the principal officers are responsible persons, that the security arrangements for the storage of club firearms and ammunition are satisfactory, and also that a probationary period of at least six months' duration applies in respect to new members during which the probationary member is given a course of regular instruction on the safe handling and use of firearms.

Where approval is granted, the club may obtain a firearm certificate to purchase or acquire firearms and ammunition for the use of club members in, or in connection with, target practice. Club members do not require personal firearms certificates in these circumstances.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary announced in reply to a question on 23 January from my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice); at columns *592-93*, new and stricter conditions relating to membership of approved gun clubs covering such issues as probationary and novice members, day membership and guest days. That reply made it clear that my right hon. and learned Friend would adopt the same policy for approval of gun clubs in Scotland.

Appointments

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all the appointments he has made annually since 1979 where the remuneration for duties was in the ranges *(a)* £20,000 to £25,000, *(b)* £25,000 to £30,000, *(c)* £30,000 to £35,000, *(d)* 35,000 to £40,000 *(e)* £40,000 to £50,000 and *(f)* above £50,000 per annum.

Mr. Rifkind: Information about appointments made in each year is not consistently available in the form requested. Listed in the table are the current appointments made at the requested salary levels. The Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies" produced annually gives for each Government Department details of current appointments, including remuneration, as at 1 July each year.

In addition, I make some appointments jointly with other Secretaries of State.

Body	*Position*	*Remuneration*
Crofters Commission	Chairman	c
Highlands and Islands Development Board	Chairman	f
	Deputy Chairman	e
	2 Members	e
Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland	Member	b
	Member	e
	Member	f
North of Scotland Hydro-Electric Board	Chairman	d
	Chief Executive	f
Scottish Dental Practice Board	Chairman	c
Scottish Development Agency	Chairman	c
	Chief Executive	f
Scottish Homes	Chairman	b
	Chief Executive	e
Scottish Legal Aid Board	Chairman	a
Scottish Tourist Board	Chairman	d
Scottish Transport Group	Chairman	f
South of Scotland Electricity Board	Chairman	f
	Deputy Chairman	f

Hospitals, Clydesdale

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will visit Birkwood hospital in Lesmahagow to speak to the staff and patients about their concern about the future of the hospital; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will visit Law hospital in the Clydesdale constituency to discuss the future of the hospital with patients, members of staff and community groups.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have no immediate plans to visit either hospital. Developments there are a matter for Lanarkshire health board in the first instance and it is in touch with the views of the patients, staff and community groups.

Gun Controls

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what reply he has sent to the Strathclyde police force on its demands for stricter gun controls.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. and learned Friend has not received any recent representations from Strathclyde police about gun controls.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has had from each of the Scottish chief constables on the need to have stricter gun controls.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. and learned Friend has had no recent representations from any of the chief constables.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met representatives of the Scottish Police Federation to discuss gun control.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. and learned Friend and I last met representatives of the Scottish Police Federation on 8 February. The subject of gun controls was not raised.

Crime

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what resources he will give to the Scottish police authorities to enable them to combat the increases in violent crime and drug-related crimes.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The provision of resources to police forces is in the first instance a matter for police authorities. My right hon. and learned Friend stands ready to pay police grant on authorities' net approved expenditure on the police service. The level of police grant was increased from 50 to 51 per cent. on 1 April 1986 in recognition of the additional demands being made on the police, including the tackling of violent crime and drug-related crimes.

Speech Therapy

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill of 26 March, what assessment he has made of the effect of shortages in cover for maternity leave taken by speech therapists in Scotland; what information he has available on the average waiting time for children with speech difficulties *(a)* in Scotland as a whole and *(b)* on a regional or sub-regional level; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No central assessment of cover for maternity leave has been made. No information is available centrally about average waiting times for speech therapy treatment.

Wildlife Protection

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he is taking for the protection of the capercaillie.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The capercaillie is presently listed in part 1 of schedule 2 to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and may be killed or taken only outside the closed season, that is, between 1 October and 31 January. In view of the decline in numbers of capercaillie, I have recently written to a wide range of interests proposing that a statutory ban on their shooting should be introduced from 1 October 1990. Under my proposals, the ban would be reviewed annually, following consultation. A copy of my consultation letter has been placed in the Library.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on what date the accounting system in the Scottish Office indicated that £4 million was available to fund poll tax ex gratia payments; and from which spending head this money came.

Mr. Rifkind: This finance will be provided as part of the normal process of managing the resources available to me in the course of 1990-91.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has held with Mr. Michael Hirst on the spending head from which he has found £4 million on the Scottish Office budget to finance additional poll tax ex gratia payments.

Mr. Rifkind: None.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the accounting system in the Scottish Office has now identified any further savings over and above the £4 million allocated to poll tax ex gratia payments; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: It is too early to identify the full extent of the changes in requirements for specific spending programmes which may occur during the financial year.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will prepare a table illustrating the impact, in each islands and district council area, of a system which combines local income tax with capital value-based domestic rates, making the same assumptions as those used by the hon. Member for Wirral, West (Mr. Hunt) in respect of a similar table prepared for English local authority areas in a written answer to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) on 6 November 1989, *Official Report*, column *415*.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The table provided in the answer of 6 November 1989 referred to in the hon. Member's question was prepared on the assumption that English local authorities would budget for 1990-91 in line with their standard spending assessments, the Scottish equivalent of which is grant-aided expenditure (GAE) figures.

As it is now clear that some Scottish authorities have budgeted to spend below their GAE figure and others above it, I do not think I can justify committing the substantial resources needed to producing a table which would clearly be of no practical significance.

Court Reporting

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the function of shorthand writing in Scottish courts has been put out to tender.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Those shorthand writing services in the Scottish courts provided under Government contract have been put out to tender, and contracts awarded from 1 April 1990.

Sport

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many sports properties in the category of *(a)* stadia, *(b)* playing fields, *(c)* club houses and *(d)* sports grounds there are in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 30 March 1990]:* This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will detail the measures he is carrying out to encourage sporting activities of *(a)* secondary and *(b)* higher education students in Scotland.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 30 March 1990]:* Further action is required to reverse the present decline in school-aged team sport. The report of the Scottish Sports Council's school-aged team sport inquiry group made a number of welcome recommendations on which views are currently being sought. Participation in sport is also to be encouraged among post-school students. This is primarily a matter for the governing bodies of the institutions concerned.

ENVIRONMENT

Construction Works

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement regarding progress on construction of the two-stream nuclear refitting and refuelling complex at Rosyth.

Mr. Chope: Works currently in construction are of a preparatory nature and are on programme.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the current state of progress of Cementation Construction Ltd. in meeting acceptance, availability and safety standards for the construction of the shiplift at Faslane.

Mr. Chope: Acceptance of the shiplift depends upon stringent availability and safety standards being met to the satisfaction of the nuclear safety and quality assurance authorities at all stages of the contract. This is being done.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the current state of progress of construction of the floating jetty at Faslane.

Mr. Chope: The timetable is very tight, but construction is still on programme to meet the requirements of Trident.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what extensions of time have been awarded by the Property Services Agency to Cementation Construction on the contract for the shiplift at the submarine operating base at Faslane;

(2) what extensions of time have been awarded by the Property Services Agency to Tarmac Construction on the following contracts at the submarine operating base at Faslane: (a) asbestos decontamination and *(b)* north and south fences;

(3) what extensions of time have been granted by the Property Services Agency to Tarmac Construction on the contracts at RNAD Coulport for *(a)* jetty shore area and associated road, *(b)* explosives area and *(c)* advanced works.

Mr. Chope: Any extensions of time granted to the contractors have been in accordance with the terms and conditions of their contracts. Details of actual extensions of time are commercial and confidential.

Walkers and Climbers

Dr. Kim Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many walkers and climbers are estimated to have spent time on the paths, hillsides and crags of *(a)* the Brecon Beacons national park, *(b)* the Snowdonia national park, and *(c)* National Trust coastlines of Pembrokeshire and the Gower in 1987, 1988, 1989 and 1990.

Mr. Roberts *[holding answer 27 March 1990]:* I have been asked to reply. The information requested is not collected.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate for each district council in Lancashire the levels of local income tax that would result in order to maintain the revenue raised by the community charge in 1990-91.

Mr. Chope: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the Government, in deciding to replace rates by the poll tax, took into account the administrative cost; and if he will publish in the *Official Report* the latest estimate of the cost of administering the poll tax and rates as a percentage of the revenue yield to one place of decimals.

Mr. Chope: Administrative costs were taken into account in introducing the new arrangements. The latest estimate of the cost of administering the community charge and the national non-domestic rates as a percentage of the revenue yield is 1·9 per cent.

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, in calculating Brighton's standard spending assessment, what account was taken of *(a)* community charge collection costs, *(b)* inflation and *(c)* the population increase between 1989-90 and 1990-91.

Mr. Chris Patten: The standard spending assessment (SSA) for Brighton was calculated in the same way as that for all other authorities. The method of calculation is set out in section 3 of the Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England), which has been approved by the House. Community charge collection costs are included in the all other services block, the calculation of which is described in part VI of annex A to the report. SSAs are scaled to the control totals shown in annex B to the report (net total standard spending). These, together with specific grants, amount to total standard spending of £32·8 billion, an increase of 11 per cent. over the equivalent figure for 1989-90. Population assumptions were based on the most recent estimates from the Registrar General for England and Wales.

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Dagenham of 22 February on the difference between Brighton council's grant-related expenditure for 1989-90 and its standard spending assessment for 1990-91, whether he will publish a table in the *Official Report* giving this figure for all councils.

Mr. Chris Patten: I have today placed a table in the Library showing the information requested.

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the reasons for the net reduction in real terms in Government grant paid to Brighton council.

Mr. Chris Patten: External finance to local authorities in 1990-91 is designed to enable authorities to set a community charge of about £278 (subject to the safety net) if they spend at the level of their standard spending assessments (SSAs). This is as true for Brighton as it is for all other local authorities. Previous levels of grant are not one of the factors used in calculating SSAs, and there is no reason why grant calculated under the new system should bear any specific relationship to grant under the old. What is important is the level of expenditure which will enable an authority to provide a standard level of service. It is worth noting, however, that under the new system (which is based on population rather than rateable values) Brighton has to bear a smaller percentage of the county precept, and to that extent its grant requirement is less.

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what would Brighton's grant-related expenditure for 1989-90 have been had it been calculated on his Department's present criteria.

Mr. Chris Patten: It is not possible to calculate the figure requested. Many of the necessary factors are either not available in the form required, or do not exist.

Ballykelly (Fraud)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, further to the answer to the hon. Member for Londonderry, East of 20 March, when the possibility of a fraud squad operating at Ballykelly was brought to the notice of the Royal Ulster Constabulary; when it began its investigations; when he expects those investigations to be completed; when he was informed of the police investigation; and whether any investigations were carried out by the military police or any other military body before the Royal Ulster Constabulary was informed of possible fraud.

Mr. Chope: I have nothing to add to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member on 20 March 1990 at column *600*.

Council Housing

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the relative state of repair of council housing *(a)* currently and *(b)* in 1980.

Mr. Chope: Assessments of the state of repair of council housing currently and in 1980 are not available. Estimates provided by the quinquennial English house condition survey show 76,000 local authority and new town dwellings in serious disrepair in 1981 and 85,000 in 1986. These figures represent 1·5 per cent. and 1·9 per cent. of the local authority and new town stock in these years.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to review the Government's new financial regime for local authority housing.

Mr. Michael Spicer: No fundamental review is necessary. We are committed however to developing certain aspects of the policy further; we will, for example, consult on proposals to define more closely the items in the housing revenue account (HRA) and to target HRA subsidy on management and maintenance needs. We shall also follow the customary practice with a new policy of evaluating its effect over the first few years.

Grants, St. Helens

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the totals of *(a)* urban development grant and *(b)* derelict land grants in the borough of St. Helens in each of the last five years.

Mr. Moynihan: No project in St. Helens had received an urban development grant (UDG) by the time of the cessation of UDG in May 1988. Under the successor to UDG, city grant, I approved a grant of £6·33 million in October 1989 for a scheme to reclaim a derelict and contaminated site for a new housing development close to the town centre. This is the largest city grant so far awarded.

The totals of derelict land grant are as follows:

	£ million
1984-85	0·455
1985-86	0·694
1986-87	0·007
1987-88	0·498
1988-89	0·405

Sewage

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of those viruses that are not destroyed by passing through a sewage treatment works.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The best estimates that we have are that primary treatment removes up to 50 per cent. of viruses and that secondary treatment removes up to 99 per cent. of viruses from sewage effluent.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what provisions the new EEC draft directive on waste water contains on discharges in sewer outfalls in coastal waters within 5 km of bathing beaches.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The EC proposed municipal waste water treatment directive generally requires secondary treatment of sewage prior to discharge, but primary treatment may suffice for coastal discharges where it can be shown that there is no adverse environmental effect. These requirements are in line with my right hon. Friend's statement on sewage treatment policy on 5 March at column *452*. A copy of the explanatory memorandum on the municipal waste water directive is in the Library.

Planning

Sir Gerard Vaughan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list each instance when a Secretary of State has re-examined a planning decision once granted as the result of local public opposition, other than as the result of a court decision.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Once my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has issued a decision on a planning application or appeal, his jurisdiction ends. He can re-determine a planning decision taken by himself only if that decision is quashed by the courts. The Secretary of State has powers to revoke a planning permission under section 276 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971. My rt. hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), then Minister for Housing and Planning, set out the Government's policy on revocation in his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) on 20 December 1989 at column *329*.

Mr Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what response his Department has received on the draft planning policy guidance consultation on (i) housing, (ii) regional guidance and structure plans and (iii) the countryside and the rural economy.

Mr. Moynihan: Several hundred responses have been received to each of these draft guidance notes. Comments are now being analysed, and final versions of the notes will be issued in the spring or early summer.

Efficiency Scrutiny

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the efficiency scrutiny of the control of administrative costs of sponsored bodies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten: I am today publishing the report of this efficiency scrutiny into administrative costs of non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) and my Department's response to it. Copies of both documents have been placed in the Library of the House and are being sent to the NDPBs concerned.

This scrutiny was set up to look into current systems of contol over staffing and administrative costs in NDPBs, and to bring forward proposals which would enable more flexible and efficient use of administrative resources by NDPBs whilst still retaining an appropriate degree of departmental control.

The scrutiny's main finding, which the Department accepts, is that direct controls on manpower and administrative expenditure should be removed in favour of a system of strategic control, provided that the body's internal control mechanisms are sufficient to ensure that such strategic control would be effective. A single cash ceiling on administrative running costs should be introduced and rolled forward each year. This will provide NDPBs with an opportunity for more freedom to manage their own affairs and scope for greater administrative efficiency.

The action plan in the Department's response will be implemented primarily in the current round of financial management and policy reviews of NDPBs over the next three years.

Housing Improvement Programme (Liverpool)

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what was the amount of Liverpool city council's bid for its housing improvement programme;

(2) what was the amount of the Liverpool city council's allocation of housing improvement grant.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 27 March 1990]:* If the hon. Member intended to refer to the housing investment programme, the answer is that the bid was for £155·077 million and the allocation was £33·687 million—the third highest in the country.

Voluntary Organisations, Islington

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all those voluntary organisations in the London borough of Islington serving the needs of the ethnic minority communities which have been agreed by his Department in the past four years for funding under partnership arrangements; and if he will indicate the amount of Government contribution in each case.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* Voluntary organisations play a major role in the delivery of urban programme and partnership objectives, especially for ethnic minorities, one of the Department's target groups for urban programme support. Urban programmes are critically examined before being approved by my Department. The local authority is required both to monitor the performance and output of all approved projects and to evaluate each project in detail at least once during its lifetime.

The following is the information requested showing the full cost of support through the Islington partnership urban programme. The Government's contribution is 75 per cent. of these amounts. Of the 40 schemes listed 22 are being supported in the financial year 1989-90.

Urban programme schemes where at least 30 per cent. of the benefits of the project will go to ethnic minority groups

Name of group	*1986-87 £000s*	*1987-88 £000s*	*1988-89 £000s*	*1989-90 £000s*
Ujima Housing Association (3 projects)	100·0	43·4	13·0	35·0
Multi-racial Society for Asian Children	37·0	39·0	39·0	41·0
Factory Community Centre—Education project	22·0	99·0	n/a	15·0
Multi-ethnic Communication-Befriending Project	27·5	n/a	n/a	n/a
Muslim Welfare Centre	42·0	5·5	6·0	6·0
Bangladesh Womens Association	39·0	30·5	n/a	34·0
Union of Turkish Workers	33·0	2·0	n/a	n/a
Unity Association (Arts and Music Project)	40·0	n/a	54·0	56·0
West Indians Community Association	40·0	44·5	46·0	n/a
Turkish Education Group	45·0	25·0	25·0	n/a
Project Fullemploy—New Technology	20·0	32·0	n/a	n/a
Project Fullemploy—Minority Business Advice	5·8	32·0	n/a	n/a
Day Centre for the Greek Cypriot Elderly	67·0	10·0	n/a	n/a
Islington People's Rights (Independent Welfare Rights Agency)	1·0	n/a	n/a	21·8
Nafsiyat al atma (Inter-cultural therapy centre)	41·5	43·5	n/a	n/a
Ghana Union Printing Project	13·0	14·0	42·0	38·5
Community of Refugees from Vietnam Group	26·1	31·0	32·0	n/a
Anglo-Akanthou Community Association (plus building scheme shared with Islington African project)	n/a	31·5	33·0 (224·0)	(19·0)
Asian Resource Centre	n/a	41·0	n/a	n/a
Islington Muslim Association	32·0	91·0	5·0	n/a
Iscinin Sesi (Turkish Community) Library	34·0	36·0	38·0	n/a

Name of group	*1986-87 £000s*	*1987-88 £000s*	*1988-89 £000s*	*1989-90 £000s*
Hi-Fashion Music Co-operative	35·0	36·5	49·0	n/a
Patidar Samaj (National Association for the Gujerati community)	37·0	10·5	11·0	n/a
North London Bengali Association	5·7	6·0	16·0	n/a
Islington Chinese Group Chinese Centre	14·5	44·5	26·0	27·0
Kokayi Supplementary School (African and West Indian community)	38·5	56·0	72·5	18·0
St. Gabriels Youth Club-Endeavour Project	27·5	12·0	n/a	n/a
MENCAP—Beacon Youth Club	n/a	74·0	n/a	n/a
Mayville Youth Club Music Workshop	n/a	10·0	11·0	11·5
Holloway Youth Workshops Limited	n/a	88·0	n/a	19·0
Rockinghorse Playgroup	n/a	12·0	n/a	n/a
North London Bangladesh Welfare Association	13·0	7·0	n/a	n/a
Holloway Neighbourhood Group (Mayton Street Community and Youth Centre	n/a	44·0	49·5	39·0
The Angel Project Inner City Action on Drugs	16·0	17·0	32·0	33·8
SCOPE Christian Action	4·0	5·0	5·5	5·5
Anglo-Hellenic Association	n/a	20·0	24·0	32·5
Pharos Association (Employment Worker)	n/a	n/a	6·0	9·0
Islington Project—Youth Worker with Greek girls	n/a	12·5	14·0	14·7
Pakistan Womens Welfare Association	21·5	12·5	12·0	12·5
Newington Green Black Pensioners (previously Mildmay Grove Pensioners)	n/a	4·5	5·0	5·0
Finsbury Park Community Trust (Asian Women's Employment Project)	n/a	n/a	n/a	12·0
Totals	878·6	1,122·9	890·5	505·8

Source: London Borough of Islington. Urban Programme Project Information forms.

Shopping Centre, Trafford Park

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he is now in a position to announce his decision in respect of the proposed regional shopping centre at Dumplington Circle, Trafford park; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan *[holding answer 20 March 1990]:* No. Before reaching a final decision my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State must fully consider the traffic implications of this scheme, and other retail proposals, now before him. He cannot at this stage express any view about the likely outcome.

EC Environmental Matters

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proposals for environmental directives he has received from Directorate General XI on *(a)* environmental protection and pollution, *(b)* consumer protection from contamination and *(c)* nuclear safety since 1 January.

Mr. Trippier: Proposals from the European Commission for Council directives are deposited in Parliament. The following environmental proposals have been deposited since 1 January:

4353/90 Proposals for a Council directive amending for the 11th time directive 76/769/EEC on the approximation of the laws, regulations and administrative provisions of the member states relating to restrictions on the marketing and use of certain dangerous substances and preparations.

8065/88 Amendment to a proposal for a Council decision authorising the Commission to negotiate and approve on behalf of the Community certain measures as part of the implementation of international agreements of a regional nature relating to environmental protection to which the Community is a contracting party.

4467/90 Proposals for a Council directive amending for the seventh time directive 67/548/EEC on the approximation of the laws, regulations and administrative provisions relating to the classification, packaging and labelling of dangerous substances.

4733/90 Amendment of the proposal for a Council directive concerning the protection of fresh, coastal and marine waters against pollution caused by nitrates from diffuse sources.

4704/90 Proposal for a Council directive amending directive 70/220/EEC on the approximation of the laws of the member states relating to measures to be taken against air pollution by emissions from motor vehicles.

4822/90 Proposal for a Council directive amending directive 76/464/EEC on pollution caused by certain dangerous substances discharged into the aquatic environment of the Community (Article 12).

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what reports on environmental matters produced by the European Parliament he has received since 1 January; and what responses he has made to them.

Mr. Trippier: The European Parliament has delivered opinions to the Council of Ministers on the following environmental matters since 1 January:

Proposal for a Council regulation on the establishment of the European Environment Agency and the European environment monitoring and information network.

Proposal for a Council decision amending a Council decision (85/338/EEC) in order to provide for the continuation of the Commission work programme concerning an experimental project for gathering, co-ordinating and ensuring the consistency of information on the state of the environment and natural resources in the Community. (CORINE)

Proposal for a Council directive on the contained use of genetically modified micro-organisms.

Proposal for a Council directive on the deliberate release of genetically modified micro-organisms.

In addition, the Parliament has delivered a report on a programme of regional actions to be initiated by the Commission on the subject of the environment. (ENVIREG).

Opinions and reports delivered by the Parliament are taken into account in discussions in the Council of Ministers.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the outcome of European Council decision 85/338/EEC, the CORINE programme on data collection on the state of the environment in the European Community; and what support was afforded to CORINE by the United Kingdom.

Mr. Trippier: Following the European Council decision (85/338/EEC), the CORINE experimental project for gathering, co-ordinating and ensuring consistency of information on the state of the environment and natural resources in the Community was set up. The project was due to run for four years, but the Environment Council agreed on 22 March 1990 to extend it for a further two years to consolidate the progress made and to prepare for the transfer of the work to the proposed European Environment Agency. An interim report on the progress of the project was published in 1988.

United Kingdom consultants have played a leading role in developing the project, both in terms of the required computerised system and in individual topic areas. Officials from the Department of the Environment are members of a committee of national experts which oversees and steers the project.

Rainham Marshes

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has concerning the radioactive contamination of Rainham marshes in Essex.

Mr. Trippier: Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution has investigated the suggestion that radioactive waste was disposed of in Rainham marshes in the early 1960s. Any disposals before the Radioactive Substances Act 1960 came into force on 1 December 1963 would not have required authorisation under the Act. There is no record of any subsequent authorised disposals.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Income Support

15. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a further statement on the arrangements for income support payments to persons in residential homes.

Mr. Newton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) earlier today.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to review income support regulations as they affect elderly people seeking to enter nursing or rest homes.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) earlier today.

Residential Homes

16. **Mr. Stern:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a list showing the average proportion of private sector nursing home costs that can be met by his Department in the major cities of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Newton: As I informed the House on 28 March, I accept the need for more and better information about the true costs of running residential care and nursing homes and I hope to approve the commissioning of the necessary research in the near future. Meanwhile, I have to say that the information sought by my hon. Friend is not available.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what specific items in his Department's budget for 1990-91 will be reduced; and what is the saving on each, in order to fund the extra £25 million he has made available to meet increased income support limits for residential and nursing homes.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: No specific new action to make reductions is required. Review of current evidence on actual expenditure, and of the effectiveness of existing control mechanisms, shows that it will be possible to accommodate with the Department's planned total expenditure of £55·6 billion in 1990-91 the £22 million expenditure on increased limits which will not be met from the reserve.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to the reply of 26 March, *Official Report*, column 77, how many of his Department's staff have, since 1979, been given permission exceptionally to hold a financial interest in private residential or nursing homes; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Authority to deal with requests for permission to take up private activities or occupations is delegated to local management. Records are not held centrally.

Benefit Fraud

17. **Mr. Dickens:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the success rate of detecting those making fake claims for benefit and still working within the black economy; how many officers are deployed nationwide on these duties; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We do not record as a separate category the number of successful fraud investigations against claimants working in the black economy. However, I can say that in 1988-89, the total of successful social security benefit fraud investigations was 238,255, the majority of which involved claimants who were concealing their employment. That effort produced estimated benefit savings of £343 million which reflects the commitment of both this Department and the Department of Employment to maintain a vigorous campaign against those who defraud the social security system.

The number of full-time equivalent posts engaged in the investigation of benefit fraud in both Departments in 1988-89 was 4,310.

For 1990-91 DSS has set an overall benefit savings target of £320 million against £280 million for the current year. DE has set an investment return target of £3·00 to £3·40 benefit savings for each £1 expended on fraud investigations.

Over-80s

18. **Mr. Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has received any recent representations about the 25p increase in the state pension for the over-80s; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: In the last 12 months 164 representations have been received on the subject of the age addition to retirement pensions for over-80s.

"The Way Ahead"

19. **Mr. Favell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people will benefit from the proposals set out in "The Way Ahead".

Mr. Scott: The proposals set out in "The Way Ahead" (Cm 917) and the interim measures that we announced in October 1989 will give extra help to an estimated 850,000 people.

Child Benefit

20. **Mr. Rees:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current percentage uptake of child benefit.

24. **Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current percentage uptake of child benefit.

36. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current percentage uptake of child benefit.

62. **Mr. Fisher:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current percentage uptake of child benefit.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Virtually 100 per cent.

23. **Mr. Allen McKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the increase in child benefit since 1987.

46. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the increase in child benefit since 1987.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the increase in child benefit since 1987.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We have, however, since then devoted considerable extra resources totalling some £350 million in real terms to the least well-off families—those on income support and family credit—who do not gain from an increase in child benefit of itself and who are now therefore better off than they would have been if child benefit had been uprated.

26. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations he has received on the uprating of child benefit; and if he will make a statement.

52. **Ms. Short:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations he has received on the uprating of child benefit; and if he will make a statement.

57. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what recent representations he has received on the uprating of child benefit; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I refer the hon. Members to the reply given to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) earlier today.

30. **Mr. Pendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the current value of child benefit if it had been uprated in line with inflation over the last three years.

31. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the current value of child benefit if it had been uprated in line with inflation over the last three years.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I refer the hon. Members to the reply given to the right hon. Member for Salford, East (Mr. Orme) earlier today.

34. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the application of the criteria used to assess potential changes in benefits policy to the decision to freeze child benefit in the last financial year.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The considerations which led my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to his decision not to increase child benefit from April 1990 were fully explained by him in his statement to the House on 25 October 1989 at columns 841-45.

49. **Mr. Allen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the value of child benefit at 1979 prices.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I refer the hon. Member to my reply my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour) on 12 December 1989 at columns *583-84*.

Benefits, Coventry and Warwickshire

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing the latest figures of how many people are dependent on *(a)* income support, *(b)* family credit and *(c)* housing benefit, broken down into claimants, dependants and children in his Department's offices in Coventry and Warwickshire.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 5 March 1990]:* The available information is listed in the table. The figures for income support show the number of claimants on 30 November 1989. Data are derived from a 100 per cent. count of cases in action which include a number where benefit payments have ceased but other action is continuing. The figures for housing benefit show the total number in receipt of housing benefit on 30 November 1989. The family credit figures are based on those living in the areas covered by the local social security offices at the time their award was made on 23 February 1990. All of these figures include those who had made a claim where the award has yet to be made.

No figures are available for dependants or children and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

	Income support	*Family credit*	*Housing benefit*[2]
Coventry	32,830	1,534	37,249
Warwickshire[1]	24,207	1,802	37,155

[1] Excluding the Coventry total.

[2] Source is housing benefit management information system—returns from local authorities.

One-parent Families

21. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the latest figure for the number of lone-parent families in receipt of income support; and how many such families were receiving supplementary benefit five years ago.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The latest date for which information is available is May 1988 when there were 722,000 lone-parent families in receipt of income support. In 1983 the number of lone parents receiving supplementary benefit was 471,000.

Notes:

1. *Source*—Annual Statistical Enquiries for 1983 and 1988.
2. The figures do not include prisoners' partners.

Advertising Costs

63. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the cost of advertising and explaining the community charge rebate.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I refer the hon. Members to my reply to the hon. Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) on 5 March at column *522*. Additionally, a campaign will be launched in the national press shortly to publicise the budget changes to the upper capital limits for all the income-related benefits.

Occupational Pension Schemes

25. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to restrict self-investment by occupational pension schemes.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Social Security Bill contains a power to restrict occupational pensions investing in employer-related investments—a practice which we believe has a potential for conflicts of interest. We are arranging a survey to provide up-to-date information on the extent of self-investment to guide us in the regulations which we hope to introduce as soon as practicable after Royal Assent.

39. **Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what powers the pension ombudsman will have to resolve any grievances held by members of occupational pension schemes.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: It is intended that the pensions ombudsman should have extensive powers to help resolve grievances brought to him by members of occupational personal pension schemes. He will be able to investigate and determine both complaints about alleged maladministration and disputes about fact or law.

The pensions ombudsman will have similar powers to those of the county court in England and Wales; and of the sheriff court in Scotland. He will be able to examine witnesses and require the production of documents, and he will issue a written statement of his determination and the reasons for it to those concerned. His determinations will be binding on the parties involved, and will be enforceable in a county or sheriff court.

Benefits (Long-term Sick and Disabled)

27. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the average annual real increase in spending on benefits for long-term sick and disabled people over the period *(a)* 1974 to 1979 and *(b)* 1979 to date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The average annual real increase, at 1989-90 prices, was as follows:

	£ million
(a) 1974-75 to 1978-79	220
(b) 1978-79 to 1988-89	370

Social Fund

28. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on his review of guidance to local offices concerning budget restrictions on social fund loans.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. and learned Member to my statement of 26 March at columns 21-40. A copy of the revised guidance is in the Library.

35. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications for grants and loans from the social fund are approved on review after initial rejection.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is contained in the national summary statistics which are placed in the Library monthly.

53. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether the repayments of loans to the social fund are available in full for the making of further loans or grants.

Mr. Scott: Yes, but allocations to budgets remain a matter for judgment as appropriate.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was for the Leven, Dunfermline, Cowdenbeath and Kirkcaldy social security offices the proportion of income support claimants repaying social fund budget and crisis loans for each quarter between January and December 1989.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* Information about the local income support caseload is collected on a quarterly basis and the percentage of loans being repaid on the last day of each quarter is shown in the table.

1989	*Budget Loans per cent.*	*Crisis Loans per cent.*
Leven		
February	8·0	1·3
May	9·3	1·6
August	10·0	1·3
November	10·7	1·4
Dunfermline		
February	8·7	2·7
May	10·4	3·9
August	10·4	3·3
November	11·5	3·7
Cowdenbeath		
February	8·8	2·7
May	10·3	3·4
August	10·2	2·9
November	9·8	2·5
Kirkcaldy		
February	8·8	1·0
May	10·3	1·2
August	10·7	1·3
November	11·7	1·4

Pensioners

29. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of pensioners are receiving income from savings or occupational pensions.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: In 1987, 73 per cent. of pensioners received income from savings and 52 per cent. of pensioners had an occupational pension. This compares very favourably with 1979 when the corresponding figures were 62 per cent. and 41 per cent.

Source: Family Expenditure Survey.

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the increase in pensioners' average net incomes for *(a)* 1974 to 1979 and *(b)* 1979 to date.

41. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security by how much pensioners' average net incomes have increased since 1979.

48. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the most recent figures he has for the increase in pensioners' incomes from savings since 1979.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Between 1974 and 1979, pensioners' average total net incomes rose by 3 per cent. in real terms. Recently available figures show a rise between 1979 and 1987 of over 31 per cent. in real terms. The same figures also show that pensioners' average income from savings more than doubled over the same period.

Pensions

32. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to restore the link between the level of pensions and the higher of the increases in the retail prices index and earnings.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We have no plans to do so. The link between retirement pension and increases in earnings is not the key factor in improving pensioners' incomes. What matters most to pensioners is their total income; between 1979 and 1987 pensioners' average total net income increased by more than 31 per cent. in real terms.

47. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will take steps to ensure that the requirement for occupational pensions schemes to revalue pensions in payment is applied in the same way to money purchase schemes and personal pension schemes.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will take steps to ensure that the requirement for occupational pensions schemes to revalue pensions in payment applies in the same way to money purchase schemes and personal pension schemes.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: My right hon. Friend recently announced our further proposals to protect members of occupational pension schemes. Schemes, except those providing a money purchase benefit, will have to pay annual increases to members for their pension rights which they build up after an appointed Day. Rather different considerations apply in the case of money purchase and personal pension schemes. Their members already have the opportunity to use the proceeds of their investments to choose a pension that increases after retirement. We intend to consider the question of requiring members of such schemes to take any annuity providing pension increases as part of the next review of the terms of contracting-out of the state earnings related pension scheme.

61. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has any plans to index-link pensions with earnings.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 7 March at column *679*.

22. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much he estimates has been spent in 1990 on advertising *(a)* personal pensions schemes and *(b)* the state earnings-related pension.

40. **Mr. Morley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the total that has been spent in 1990 on advertising *(a)* personal pensions schemes and *(b)* the state earnings-related pension.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much he estimates has been spent in 1990 on advertising *(a)* personal pension schemes and *(b)* the state earnings-related pension.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Nothing has been spent in 1990 on such advertising by the Department of Social Security.

50. **Mr. Ward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the latest estimate of the number of people who have taken out appropriate personal pensions.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Hayes) earlier today.

Expenditure

33. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total spending in his Department in 1979, 1983 and 1987 and currently in real terms; and what percentage that is of total Government spending.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is in the table.

Year	*Expenditure (cash)*	*Expenditure (1989-90 prices)*	*Difference from 1989-90 expenditure*	*Total Government spending (cash)*	*Percentage of total Government spending*
1979-80	19,416	39,119	13,464	77,600	25·0
1983-84	35,159	48,579	4,004	120,400	29·2
1987-88	48,769	55,968	−3,385	142,500	34·2
1989-90	52,583	52,583	—	161,900	32·5

Note:

Figures for the years 1979-80 and 1983-84 are based on the old planning total: those for 1987-88 and 1989-90 on the new.

42. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total expenditure by his Department in *(a)* 1978-79 and *(b)* 1989-90.

Mr. Scott: Total expenditure in 1978-79 was £16,437 million in cash terms, or £38,677 million at 1989-90 prices. Estimated total expenditure for 1989-90 is £52,583 million.

AIDS

37. **Mr. Alfred Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received concerning the adequacy of income support for people with AIDS; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We have received a number of representations on this topic. Almost without exception they refer to a need for people with AIDS or HIV infection to follow a special diet, said to cost £30 or more each week. Although we understand that people with AIDS are often advised to follow a high protein/calorie diet, there is research in the public domain which indicates that such a diet can be devised for little more than half that cost. The healthy eating plan which people with HIV infection are advised to follow is no more than a normal balanced diet.

Benefits (Disabled People)

38. **Mr. Andrew Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures he is proposing to improve social security benefits for people who become disabled after reaching pensionable age.

Mr. Scott: Measures introduced in October 1989 targeted £200 million of additional help on less well-off, elderly and disabled pensioners. These changes mean that 2·6 million pensioners will gain, by up to £2·50 a week in the case of single people and £3·50 a week for couples. Provision in the current Social Security Bill will enable pensioners who are terminally ill to receive attendance allowance without having to serve the normal 26-week qualifying period.

58. **Dr. Twinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people will gain from the improvements in benefits for disabled people which are being introduced this month.

Mr. Scott: An estimated 452,000 people are expected to gain from the improvements in benefits for disabled people to be introduced this month.

Operational Strategy

43. **Miss Emma Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what progress has been made in implementing his Department's operational strategy.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Department's highly complex £1·7 billion strategy for the computerisation of the social security benefit payment system is proceeding as planned. The pilot exercise in 23 local offices has been completed and the systems are being introduced nationally office by office. By the end of March 1990, 199 offices had received the departmental central index (DCI) system; 198 the retirement pensions system; and 93 the income support system—out of an eventual target of 440 offices.

Maintenance Payments

44. **Mr. Alexander:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what action he is taking to ensure that more maintenance is recovered from absent parents.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a further statement on the Government's progress on ensuring that eligible fathers pay maintenance to their families.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark) earlier today.

Disability Allowance

45. **Mrs. Rosie Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he has any plans to abolish the six-month qualifying period for disability allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The proposed qualifying period for the new disability allowance which will be introduced in 1992 is three months. If the hon. Member has in mind the six-month qualifying period for attendance allowance, the current Social Security Bill includes provision to remove it for terminally ill people. We do not propose to abolish it for other people. Attendance allowance is targeted at people with long-term attendance needs, and the qualifying period ensures that resources are concentrated on that group.

Housing Benefit

51. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will increase housing benefit in real terms in the next financial year.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The uprating of housing benefit and community charge benefit personal allowances and premiums takes effect in April 1990 and will take expenditure on those benefits to more than £6·3 billion in the financial year 1990-91. Expenditure on comparable items in the current financial year is estimated at £5·6 billion. In April certain premiums are being increased above the amount required to maintain their value in real terms; these are the family disability, disabled child and lone parent premiums. In October, the lone parent's earnings disregard is to increase from £15 to £25, and a carer's premium is being introduced.

The recently announced increases in the capital limits, to £16,000 for housing benefit and community charge benefit and to £8,000 for income support and family credit, also take effect from April. The change will benefit up to a quarter of a million people at a new cost for social security benefit estimated at £120 million a year.

Relocation

54. **Mr. Donald Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what progress has been made in relocating his Department's staff away from the London area.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given on 14 November 1989 to my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) at column *170* in which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced that a substantial amount of the Department's work in London was to be relocated to Leeds. A site for the new headquarters building in Leeds has been identified and we expect that the relocation of posts from London will begin from the end of 1991.

Incentives to Work

55. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment has been made by his Department of the impact of changes in recent years in social security benefit payment on financial incentives to work.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The effects of changes which may affect financial incentives to work are monitored constantly. As indicated in the Government's expenditure plans 1990-91 to 1992-93 (Cmnd 1014, chapter 14, paragraph 35), the impact on incentives is one of the criteria used to assess potential changes in social security benefit policy.

The Government have made considerable progress on improving financial incentives by alleviating the unemployment trap and eliminating the worst effects of the poverty trap. Far fewer people are now financially better off not working than only a few years ago. It is estimated that of 14 million working heads of households, only about 15,000 would receive more in benefit than they receive in wages from employment. The Government have virtually eliminated the possibility that a person can experience combined tax and national insurance deduction rates of 100 per cent. or more, which means that virtually no one now suffers a reduction in net income as a result of increased earnings. There have been significant increases in the real value of take-home pay through reductions in income tax, increased tax thresholds and restricting of national insurance contributions. Real take-home pay for a married couple with two children on average earnings has increased by 34 per cent. in real terms since 1978-79.

Public Service

56. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps have been taken to improve his Department's service to the public.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Since the Government reforms were introduced in 1988, the social security system has become simpler for claimants to understand and easier for staff to operate. As a result there have been very real all-round improvements in standards of service to the public. In particular the average 1989-90 times taken to clear income support claims and callers have improved by 25 per cent. and 24 per cent. respectively when compared with pre-reforms' performance.

We are aware that there is still room for further improvement, particularly in certain inner cities. We are tackling this by relocating some work, which requires no face-to-face contact, away from London to areas where we have fewer problems over staff recruitment and retention. In addition between now and 1991, we expect our programme to computerise social security operations in all local offices to make a major impact on the speed and accuracy of the service they provide.

Glasgow Social Security Centre

59. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the working of the Glasgow social security centre; and what plans he has to extend benefit-processing work away from south-east England.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Monitoring and evaluation of performance at Glasgow indicates that claims for income support are being processed faster and more accurately than before relocation of the work from London.

There are currently no plans to extend benefit-processing work away from south-east England beyond the 21 London offices already identified for relocation.

Disabled People (Employment)

60. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a further statement on the measures he is introducing to make it easier for disabled people to take up employment.

Mr. Scott: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to my hon Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) on 26 February at column *59*.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what advice he has given to those issuing information about entitlement to community charge rebates to those in receipt of income support and housing benefit; what reports he has received about couples not receiving the rebate in cases where one partner applied for housing benefit; what action he is taking to ensure both partners receive rebates; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Local authorities have statutory responsibility for the administration of community charge benefit and housing benefit. Advice on providing information about entitlement to community charge benefit is issued to local authorities in circulars and in the housing benefit guidance manual. Transitional arrangements were made for local authorities to treat existing claims for housing benefit as claims for community charge benefit and DSS local offices conducted a take on exercise for income support claimants not in receipt of housing benefit. Where a couple claims community charge benefit, one partner is required to make the claim on behalf of both and community charge benefit is awarded accordingly to both partners.

Information Technology

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will place in the Library a copy of the framework document of the Information Technology Services Agency.

Mr. Newton: I have placed copies of the framework document and business plan for the Information Technology Services Agency, launched today, in the Libraries of both Houses. I am confident that new arrangements outlined in these documents will introduce greater efficiency into my Department's computer and telecommunications operations and through this an improved service to the public.

I will remain accountable to Parliament and the public for all aspects of my Department's work, but within the framework of ministerial policy there will be maximum delegation of responsibility for operational matters to the chief executive of the agency.

War Pensions

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many nuclear test veterans are currently awaiting determinations by his Department.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I regret that the information is not available, as such claims are not separately recorded.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the reasons for the delays being experienced by Mr. John Hall of 35 Shetland avenue, Leicester, in obtaining a war pension.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: A claim was received from Mr. Hall on 8 October 1989. It is necessary to obtain full details of service and medical history before a claim for a war pension can be considered. Unfortunately this often takes some time. The Department's doctors are to examine Mr. Hall's papers this week and he will be contacted about his claim soon afterwards.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average length of time it takes to process a war pension application for a nuclear test veteran.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I regret that the information is not available.

Benefits, Bradford

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many families are in receipt of *(a)* family credit, *(b)* housing benefit and *(c)* income support in the Bradford area.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The available information is listed in the table. The figures for income support show the number of claimants on 30 November 1989. Data are derived from a 100 per cent. count of cases in action which include a number where benefit payment has ceased but other action is continuing. The figures for housing benefit show the total number in receipt of housing benefit on 30 November 1989. The family credit figures are based on those living in the areas covered by the local social security offices at the time their award was made on 23 February 1990. All of these figures exclude those who had made a claim where the award was yet to be made.

No figures are available for dependants or children and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Income support	*Housing benefit*[1]	*Family credit*
44,566	48,763	4,780

[1]Source is housing benefit management information system—returns from local authority.

Cost Savings

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if his Department achieved the target of a 5 per cent. saving in purchasing costs in 1988-89 through use of the central unit on purchasing.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The DHSS secured value for money improvements in purchasing of almost £30 million in 1988-89. This represented 4 per cent. of purchasing spend.

Occupational Pension Rights

Mr. Channon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps are being taken to deal with the question of occupational pension rights on divorce.

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Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he has any plans to bring forward legislation on occupational pension rights on divorce.

Mr. Scott: It is for employers to determine normally following consultation with their employees, what benefits are provided by an occupational pension scheme and to whom they are payable. Except where scheme benefits are payable as a condition for the scheme to be used for contracting out of the state earnings-related benefit scheme there is no requirement on schemes to provide any specific benefit whether on divorce or otherwise.

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how occupational pension rights are transferred on divorce.

Mr. Scott: Transfers of pension rights may take place when a member leaves a pension scheme and wishes to put his or her pension rights into a new scheme. Any member of an occupational pension scheme who has completed two years' pensionable service in the scheme and whose service terminated at least one year before the scheme's normal pension age, has the statutory right to ask the scheme trustees or manager to transfer the cash equivalent of his pension rights, to acquire rights in another occupational scheme or a personal pension scheme, or to purchase one or more annuities from one or more insurance companies. This right exists on divorce or at any other time.

The question of assigning pension rights between former spouses after a divorce is a matter for the individuals concerned, subject to restrictions in social security and income tax legislation.

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received on the issue of occupational pension rights on divorce.

Mr. Scott: We have from time to time received letters from members of the public on the issue.

Complaints

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish in the *Official Report* for each of the last 10 years *(a)* the number of complaints made against his Department to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, *(b)* the number of complaints upheld and *(c)* the action he took on *(b)*.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information required is provided in the table.

Complaints against Department of (Health and) Social Security

	(a) *Complaints made*[1]	*(b)* *Complaints upheld*[1]
1989	[2]—	[2]—
1988	220	33
1987	200	40
1986	242	48
1985	231	42
1984	237	36
1983	223	29
1982	243	26
1981	260	53
1980	278	50

[1] *Source:* Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration Annual Reports 1980-88.

[2] Figures not yet available.

(c) When the PCA upholds a complaint it is departmental practice to provide an appropriate remedy.

Community Care Grants

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many community care grants have been refused on the grounds that a person moving from institutional to residential care did not fall within the terms of his direction 4 to social fund officers.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is not collected. However, community care grants are intended for people moving into the community from institutional or residential care, not for those moving from one form of care to another.

Appeals

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many appeals have been made to *(a)* medical appeals tribunals and *(b)* social security tribunals in each standard planning region in each of the last 10 years; how long on average it has taken to deal with these appeals each year; and what has been the shortest and longest time any appellant has had to wait for a decision in each year.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I regret the Department does not hold the information requested for medical appeals tribunals. However, the office of the president of social security and medical appeal tribunals keeps certain statistics and the hon. Member may care to contact him direct.

Information is also not available in the form requested for social security tribunals prior to 1984. The tables give the required information from 1984 to the quarter ending 30 September 1989 (the latest figures available). Statistics are not kept on the shortest and longest time any appellant has had to wait for a decision.

Social Security appeal tribunal: Statistics all benefits

Period	*New lodgements*	*Average weekly clearance time of appeals heard*
Great Britain		
9 months to 31 December 1984	190,290	13·5
Year to 31 December 1985	290,488	14·8
Year to 31 December 1986	352,535	16·0
Year to 31 December 1987	323,160	21·7
Year to 31 December 1988	261,798	24·7
3 months to 31 March 1989	43,573	27·8
3 months to 30 June 1989	41,221	25·0
3 months to 30 September 1989	38,483	23·7
Scotland		
9 months to 31 December 1984	27,203	11·7
Year to 31 December 1985	45,532	12·3
Year to 31 December 1986	63,056	14·0
Year to 31 December 1987	60,960	23·3
Year to 31 December 1988	52,664	24·9
3 months to 31 March 1989	6,631	32·7
3 months to 30 June 1989	5,444	28·9
3 months to 30 September 1989	4,442	23·8
Wales		
9 months to 31 December 1984	9,808	13·2
Year to 31 December 1985	14,998	15·6
Year to 31 December 1986	20,287	15·5
Year to 31 December 1987	18,567	18·6
Year to 31 December 1988	16,198	19·7
3 months to 31 March 1989	2,875	19·7
3 months to 30 June 1989	2,872	16·8
3 months to 30 September 1989	2,553	19·5
North East		
9 months to 31 December 1984	29,209	10·4
Year to 31 December 1985	45,553	12·6
Year to 31 December 1986	55,589	14·7
Year to 31 December 1987	58,349	21·4
Year to 31 December 1988	48,364	26·1
3 months to 31 March 1989	7,166	26·2
3 months to 30 June 1989	6,420	21·1
3 months to 30 September 1989	5,991	19·9
London North		
9 months to 31 December 1984	26,250	14·5
Year to 31 December 1985	39,861	16·0
Year to 31 December 1986	44,059	17·8
Year to 31 December 1987	34,659	20·6
Year to 31 December 1988	26,550	21·3
3 months to 31 March 1989	5,542	26·0
3 months to 30 June 1989	5,221	22·7
3 months to 30 September 1989	4,750	23·1
London South		
9 months to 31 December 1984	22,540	14·4
Year to 31 December 1985	34,893	17·2
Year to 31 December 1986	39,636	20·0
Year to 31 December 1987	30,663	21·8
Year to 31 December 1988	23,310	23·4
3 months to 31 March 1989	4,614	26·7
3 months to 30 June 1989	5,358	27·4
3 months to 30 September 1989	6,736	28·6
South Western		
9 months to 31 December 1984	12,514	12·7
Year to 31 December 1985	19,710	14·7
Year to 31 December 1986	23,464	15·7
Year to 31 December 1987	18,334	18·1
Year to 31 December 1988	13,891	19·2
3 months to 31 March 1989	2,801	20·2
3 months to 30 June 1989	2,415	18·6
3 months to 30 September	2,305	19·5
Midlands		
9 months to 31 December 1984	32,367	15·5
Year to 31 December 1985	43,666	16·3

Period	New lodgements	Average weekly clearance time of appeals heard
Year to 31 December 1986	55,142	16·2
Year to 31 December 1987	48,961	23·6
Year to 31 December 1988	38,004	26·3
3 months to 31 March 1989	6,662	26·9
3 months to 30 June 1989	6,546	23·3
3 months to 30 September 1989	5,555	24·6
North West		
9 months to 31 December 1984	30,399	15·3
Year to 31 December 1985	46,275	15·1
Year to 31 December 1986	51,302	15·0
Year to 31 December 1987	52,667	21·7
Year to 31 December 1988	42,817	26·9
3 months to 31 March 1989	7,282	30·8
3 months to 30 June 1989	6,945	30·3
3 months to 30 September 1989	6,151	26·7
Wales and South West		
9 months to 31 December 1984	22,322	12·9
Year to 31 December 1985	34,708	15·1
Year to 31 December 1986	43,751	15·6
Year to 31 December 1987	36,901	18·3
Year to 31 December 1988	30,089	19·5
3 months to 31 March 1989	5,676	20·0
3 months to 30 June 1989	5,287	17·6
3 months to 30 September 1989	4,858	19·5

Note:

New lodgements—up to 31 December 1986 the figures reflect "all appeals" which includes appeals outstanding from the previous quarter.

From 1 January 1987 the figures are for new lodgements only.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 3 April 1990

TRANSPORT

Severn Crossing

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will now announce a decision about the awarding of the contract to finance, design, build and operate the second Severn crossing.

Mr. Portillo: I will announce a decision when it has been taken, and will make clear whether we have chosen a private sector or public sector option.

Scottish Airports

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the evidence received in the course of his consultation on Scottish lowland airports policy suggesting that a change in policy would benefit economic investment in Scotland.

Mr. McLoughlin: Many of the responses to my right hon. Friend's consultation addressed in detail the possible economic effects of the policy options, and all the points made were assessed and taken into account. We do not intend to make public the responses which were received, some of which we were asked to regard as private.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many of the submissions to his consultation on Scottish lowland airports policy favoured retaining Prestwick's exclusive gateway status; how many expressed no preference; and how many favoured open skies.

Mr. McLoughlin: In reaching his decision on future policy for the lowland airports, in consultation with his right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, my right hon. Friend was principally concerned with the strength of the arguments mounted in support of the different policy options.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will place copies of the submissions to the consultation on Scottish lowland airports policy in the Library;

(2) if he will publish the submissions to the Scottish lowland airports policy submission.

Mr. McLoughlin: We do not intend to make public the submissions made in response to the consultation. Some respondents asked that their response be regarded as private and it would give an unbalanced picture if only the remainder were to be made public.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out the changes in tariffs for freight and passenger services at Prestwick and Glasgow airports necessitated by his announcement on Scottish lowland airports policy.

Mr. McLoughlin: BAA has said that it will move to a common tariff at Glasgow and Prestwick for long-haul traffic. The hon. Member will wish to seek information on the details of the tariffs from BAA plc direct.

Merchant Shipping Fleet

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he intends to introduce to reverse the decline in numbers of the United Kingdom merchant shipping fleet; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: We have no plans to introduce such measures. We shall continue to keep under review the availability of adequate merchant shipping for defence purposes.

European Railways

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will hold talks with the chairman of British Rail on the European Economic Community proposals for a directive on the development of Community railways.

Mr. Portillo: The Department is keeping in close touch with British Rail on these proposals.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has prepared to improve the compatibility of British rail systems with other European rail systems after 1992.

Mr. Portillo: The first step is to explore at Community level the best way of improving compatibility between the various national rail systems. We are playing a full part in these discussions.

A46-A47 Link Road

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to visit Leicester to discuss the A46 to A47 link road.

Mr. Portillo: No. The A46-A47 link road is a local authority scheme for which statutory orders have recently been made and submitted to the Secretary of State for confirmation. Leicestershire county council will determine the need for a public inquiry if it is unable to resolve any objections which may be made to the orders.

Cycle Accidents

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps the Government is taking following the conclusions of the transport and road research laboratory report on the relative frequency of cycle accidents occurring at road junctions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Data on the numbers of cycle accidents occurring at different kinds of junctions is contained in table 42 of the Department's casualty report "Road Accidents Great Britain 1988", which was published in November 1989. The transport and road research laboratory has reported on issues determining the frequencies and rates of all kinds of traffic accidents at mini-roundabouts. A copy of the report has been placed in the Library.

The Department has a continuing programme of research on cycling, which is guided by information on accident rates. We draw on it in giving day-to-day technical advice to highway authorities and others, and in publishing more general advice on cycling issues. In recent months my hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic has referred the hon. Member to the range of publications issued by the Department, many of which give information on traffic engineering techniques which can be used to improve conditions for cyclists at various kinds of junction.

Heavy Lorries

Mr. Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he will take to ensure that lorries arriving in the United Kingdom via the Channel tunnel are subject to the same weight controls now operating at United Kingdom sea ports.

Mr. Atkins: Discussions are in progress between the Department and Eurotunnel on the provision of a weighbridge at Coquelles in France. In this way we can ensure that lorries arriving in the United Kingdom via the Channel tunnel are subject to the same weight controls as apply at United Kingdom ferry ports.

M40 (Traffic Flow)

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what were the annual average traffic flows recorded for cars, buses, light goods vehicles and heavy goods vehicles on the M40 *(a)* at Gerrards Cross and *(b)* at Beaconsfield for each year from 1979 to 1988, inclusive.

Mr. Portillo: The available information on annual average daily traffic flows is:

Year	*Cars*	*Per cent.*	*Buses*	*Per cent.*	*Light goods vehicles*	*Per cent.*	*Heavy goods vehicles*	*Per cent.*	*Total*
Gerrards Cross									
1979	n.a.		n.a.		n.a.		n.a.		n.a.
1980	27,600	86	300	1	1,800	6	2,400	7	32,500
1981	n.a.		n.a.		n.a.		n.a.		n.a.
1982	n.a.		n.a.		n.a.		n.a.		n.a.
1983			Separate vehicle types not available						32,000
1984	30,100	86	400	1	2,100	6	2,300	7	34,900
1985	41,400	87	500	1	2,500	5	3,500	7	47,900
1986	51,100	85	400	1	4,200	7	4,400	7	60,100
1987	62,300	85	600	1	5,000	7	5,000	7	72,900
1988	63,000	84	600	1	5,400	7	6,000	8	75,000
Beaconsfield									
1983	23,300	84	200	1	1,700	6	2,700	9	27,900
1987	60,800	84	400	1	4,900	6	6,500	9	72,600

n.a. = not available.

A46, Leicester

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when a decision on the report into the A46 Leicester western bypass is to be made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The Secretaries of State for Transport and for the Environment will be issuing a decision letter on 5 April.

Radioactive Waste

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when Her Majesty's Government expect to sign the United Nations convention on the international transport of radioactive wastes and nuclear materials, opened for signature on 1 February.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 2 April 1990]*: We know of no such convention.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Discretionary Grants

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will provide a list of the local education authorities which carry out monitoring of the awarding of discretionary grants by local education authorities for full-time and sandwich courses.

Mr. Jackson: This information is not collected centrally.

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the level of expenditure in 1988-89 by local education authorities on discretionary awards to 16 to 18-year-olds.

Mr. Jackson: The data requested for 1988-89 are not yet available.

History Teaching

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will now publish the report of the history working party; and if he will make a statement on his response to it.

Mr. MacGregor: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I have today published the final report from the national curriculum history working group. Copies have been placed in the Library.

The report has been published without statutory proposals, and I am inviting comment from a wide range of representative bodies with an interest. I am also writing to the chairman of the School Examinations and Assessment Council to seek the council's advice on whether the group's proposals would secure the effective assessment of pupils' mastery of historical knowledge.

PRIME MINISTER

Defence Policy

Q7. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on the progress of the review of Government defence policy in the light of recent developments in eastern Europe.

The Prime Minister: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has told the House, we are examining options for change in the structure and deployment of our armed forces which will enable us to continue to meet those commitments which are of greatest importance towards maintaining our nation's security.

South Africa

Q12. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Prime Minister what representations she has recently made to or received from the state President of South Africa.

The Prime Minister: We have made regular representations to the South African Government on a wide range of issues, most recently during my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary's visit to South Africa.

Tokyo

Q47. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Prime Minister when she next expects to pay an official visit to Tokyo.

The Prime Minister: I have no plans at present to do so.

Chancellor Kohl

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister what matters were discussed during her meetings with Chancellor Kohl in Cambridge on 29 March and in London on 30 March.

The Prime Minister: Chancellor Kohl and I discussed German unification, the future of NATO, Lithuania, South Africa and the European Community. I announced a programme of scholarships and help with English language teaching in the GDR.

Year 2000

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a statement about plans, including any public building projects, to mark the year 2000.

The Prime Minister: Plans to mark the year 2000 will be developed in due course.

Engagements

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 3 April.

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 3 April.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 3 April.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 3 April.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today. This evening I shall attend a state banquet in honour of President Venkataram of India.

THE ARTS

Public Libraries

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister for the Arts how many public libraries have been wholly or partially closed since 1978-79.

Mr. Luce: This information is not held centrally. Returns by local authorities in England to the Chartered institute of Public Finance and Accountancy over the period 1978-79 to 1987-88 are incomplete; statistics from the same 103 authorities in these two years show that the number of libraries within their responsibility fell from 4,124 to 3,922 but that the number of libraries open 10 hours a week or more has risen. The biggest reduction is in the "less than 10 hours a week" category, probably reflecting rationalisation and a conscious effort to make better use of resources. In the same period the total number of service points in these areas rose from 13,163 to 19,264.

Recent research suggests that in the three years to December 1989 more than 75 new library buildings or substantial extensions to existing premises were completed.

British Library

Mr. Simon Coombs: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will consider the retention in public ownership of the five acres of land to the north of the new British library at St. Pancras to ensure the possibility of the library's future expansion.

Mr. Luce: In 1988 when Ministers agreed to authorise the construction of the completion phase of the new British library building at St. Pancras, they also agreed to dispose of that land at the site which may ultimately be surplus to requirements.

The area of land which will be surplus and the optimum timing and method of its disposal are still being examined.

Corporate Sponsorship

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will give a breakdown by *(a)* region and *(b)* art form of current levels of corporate sponsorship for the arts.

Mr. Luce *[holding answer 2 April 1990]:* Figures for overall corporate sponsorship of the arts are not available. The latest regional and art form breakdowns for sponsorship under my business sponsorship incentive scheme are set out in the table.

Artform breakdown—Financial year 1988-89

Artform	*Awards Number*	*BSIS £*	*Sponsorship £*
Music	119	816,129	1,551,174
Theatre	82	509,529	1,029,438
Festivals	54	531,070	856,673
Visual Art	41	376,234	1,071,477
Opera	19	240,657	493,167
Museums	14	111,676	287,175
Dance	11	169,002	588750
Film/Video	7	52,001	96,000

Artform	*Awards Number*	*BSIS £*	*Sponsorship £*
Literature	6	59,477	77,810
Building/Refurbishment	2	39,000	64,000
Photography	1	6,899	20,698
Total	356	2,911,674	6,136,362

Regional breakdown—Financial year 1988-89

Region	*Awards Number*	*BSIS £*	*Sponsorship £*
London	77	969,809	2,446,986
Scotland	42	310,467	543,236
Wales	35	204,030	264,360
Eastern	26	121,620	225,858
South West	24	143,632	238,389
Southern	23	173,293	436,378
Yorkshire	23	122,959	220,423
West Midlands	22	184,436	275,402
Cross-Regional	18	180,885	630,413
Northern	17	69,449	102,257
South East	15	141,000	217,000
North West	12	100,534	280,600
East Midlands	9	78,010	88,010
Merseyside	7	79,500	128,500
Lincolnshire and Humberside	5	7,050	7,050
International	1	25,000	31,500
Total	356	2,911,674	6,136,362

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Auditing Practices Committee

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the content of his letter to the Auditing Practices Committee regarding its policy on the release of information following the Privy Council Office's letter to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby on 11 August 1989.

Mr. Redwood: As foreshadowed in the letter to which the hon. Member refers, my Department has raised with the Auditing Practices Committee its policy on the release of information about its proceedings. The matter is now being considered by the committee.

Auditing

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will introduce legislation requiring social audits to be compulsory for all large companies.

Mr. Redwood: No, but I welcome the increasing recognition by business of its social responsibilities.

Sinking of Marchioness (Compensation)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will investigate co-operation between the insurance companies of both ships involved in the sinking of the Marchioness on payments to relatives ; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: No. The insurers of the Marchioness and Bowbelle have agreed a formula for settlement of claims without either party restricting the right to sue the other. I see no reason for any investigation.

Auditors

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will introduce legislation enabling members of the public to take legal action against auditors who have been criticised by his inspectors, and to cite his inspectors' report as evidence.

Mr. Redwood: Whether a member of the public has a right of action against an auditor depends on whether that person is owed a duty of care by the auditor and has suffered damage as a result of the auditor's negligence, irrespective of whether the auditor's performance has been criticised in an inspectors' report. Section 441 of the Companies Act 1985 provides for an inspectors' report to be admissible in any legal proceedings as evidence of the inspectors' opinion.

Company Accounts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will seek to amend section 363 of the Companies Act 1985 to require the letter of representation issued by the directors of a company to the auditors to be filed with the Registrar of Companies.

Mr. Redwood: No. The Government do not accept that any benefits that might be obtained from imposing such a requirement would outweigh the administrative costs involved.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will bring forward proposals for requiring all large companies to have audit committees.

Mr. Redwood: No. Although we would encourage companies to set up such committees, we believe that the decision as to whether or not to do so is one that is best left to individual companies.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will introduce legislation to require companies separately to identify all holdings gains in their financial statements.

Mr. Redwood: I have no plans to add to the existing legislative requirements.

Car Sales

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will seek to advise car buyers of the legal obligations of garage proprietors who offer 0 per cent. interest to finance the purchase of cars.

Mr. Forth: Under the Consumer Credit Act, it is the function of the Director General of Fair Trading to disseminate such information and advice as it may appear to him expedient to give to the public about the operation of the Act, the credit facilities available to them and other matters within the scope of his functions under the Act. I will draw the hon. Member's question to the director general's attention for consideration.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what steps he will take to increase the monitoring of the practices of garage proprietors who offer 0 per cent. interest to finance the purchase of cars;

(2) whether he will arrange for his officials to meet representatives of the SMMTA to discuss the need to protect motorists from unscrupulous practice arising from offers of 0 per cent. interest to finance the purchase of cars.

Mr. Forth: The Consumer Credit Act 1974 prohibits misleading credit advertisements and the Consumer Credit (Advertisement) Regulations 1989 contain specific provisions on the use of expressions such as "interest free". Enforcement of this legislation is a matter for local authority trading standards departments and for the Director General of Fair Trading. I will ask the director general to write to the hon. Member about this matter.

Scania Saab

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what advice was given by officials in response to inquiries as to whether regional selective assistance would be available if Scania Saab were to locate a new plant in the north of England.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 2 April 1990]:* Officials told the company that the Government would be prepared to consider an application for regional selective assistance. However, any grant would require clearance by the European Commission under the rules of the Community framework on state aids to the motor vehicle industry. In the Department's judgment, the prospects for approval were not good.

Textile and Clothing Industry

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has insisted on any regulatory point to meet the new situation brought about by the changes in central and eastern Europe if regulation of the textile and clothing industry passes to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 2 April 1990]:* The precise arrangements for the return of trade in textiles and clothing to GATT rules and for the necessary transitional period before that happens are still the subject of negotiation. Recent developments in central and eastern Europe will be only one of many factors to be considered by the United Kingdom in trying to influence an EC negotiating position on these matters.

EC Price Determination

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement outlining the procedures of the EC Commission for determining normal prices under their anti-clearing procedures; if the producer firms have any entitlement to be advised of the basis of calculations of the Commission; and if the procedures have been approved by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 2 April 1990]:* In establishing whether dumping is taking place, the Commission assesses whether a product is sold abroad at prices below what is termed the "normal value". In most cases this "normal value" is the price which the foreign supplier charges for comparable sales in his own country. Where there are no such sales, or when they do not permit a proper comparison or are made at a loss, then the normal value may be established, that is to say "constructed", by reference to either the foreign supplier's domestic costs of production or his price to other export markets. The precise procedures are laid down in the Council regulation (EEC) No. 2423/88, which is available in the Library of the House.

Foreign producers involved in anti-dumping proceedings are entitled under the regulation to request to be informed of the essential facts and considerations on which Commission's proposals for definitive anti-dumping duties will be based. The procedures laid down in the regulation for assessing dumping conform with the GATT anti-dumping code.

United Kingdom Japanese-owned Car Firms

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the new Japanese-owned United Kingdom car producers will be producing cars for sale; if these cars will be permitted to be sold in the EC on the same basis as other British-produced cars; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 2 April 1990]:* Nissan has been producing cars in the United Kingdom for sale since 1986. Its cars are sold in the EC on the same basis as other British-made cars. Honda plans to begin producing cars here at the end of 1991, and Toyota in late 1992. The Government are determined to ensure that all cars produced here by Japanese-owned firms should be treated in the EC in exactly the same way as other British-made cars.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Right to Buy

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the policy of the Department of Environment for Northern Ireland on the right to purchase residential property occupied by employees of the Department of Environment for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Residential property is offered to employees when it is no longer needed, at a price which takes account of market circumstances, including the existence of the tenancy.

Fruit of the Loom

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the amount of grant that has been allocated to the Fruit of the Loom company for the development of a new mill at Londonderry.

Mr. Needham: Details cannot be disclosed as this matter falls under the normal arrangement of strict confidentiality which exists between the Industrial Development Board and its client companies.

Donaghadee Ring Road

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the present status and programme for the proposed ring road at Donaghadee, County Down; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: There are no proposals for a ring road at Donaghadee.

Executive Agencies

Mr. Stevens: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in establishing executive agencies in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Brooke: The training and employment agency became an executive agency of the Department of Economic Development yesterday. It will comprise some 1,700 staff. The agency's principal task will be to implement those training and employment service functions of Government which are the responsibility of the Department. Agency status should ensure greater efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of these functions, including an improved standard of service to customers. It will also emphasise to employers and individuals the value of training. The establishment of the agency coincides with the high priority now to be given to training and development of the work force in the interests of a competitive economy. Performance targets have been set against which the agency's effectiveness and efficiency will be measured. The framework document for the agency makes provision for the chief executive to propose additional management flexibilities in the future where these will contribute to better performance. Copies of the framework document have been placed in the Library and the Vote Office.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Grants and Loans, Scotland

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the budgetary totals for offices in *(a)* Greenock and Port Glasgow, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole, for (i) community care grants and (ii) crisis loans from the social fund 1988-89, 1989-90; and what are his estimates for 1990-91.

Mr. Scott: Details of budget allocations and expenditure for loans and grants for each social security region and local office are kept in the Library. These figures are available for each year since 1988. In my statement on the social fund to the House on 26 March at columns 21-40 I announced that the budget allocations for the year 1990-91 had been placed in the Library.

Local Government Finance

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, further to the reply of 28 March, if he will make an estimate of the proportion of the 1,053 items of correspondence concerning the poll tax benefit scheme which related to poll tax rebate in Scotland.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to her on 28 March at columns *204-5*. It is not possible to estimate now many of the 1,053 items of correspondence referred to community charge rebate in Scotland.

Social Fund, Wales

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the final expenditure for each local social fund office in Wales for the latest available year separately for loans and grants, expressed as a proportion of the total annual allocation made to each office.

Mr. Scott: Details of budget allocations and expenditure for loans and grants for each local office are kept in the Library.

Area Computer Centres

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps his Department took to notify British companies about the contract to run the area computer centre at Norcross, Lancashire, and to give them the opportunity to tender.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Three companies were invited to tender for the contract to run ACC1 Livingston. On the basis of the responses to that invitation, and the need to bring ACC2 into operation on schedule, it was decided to invite Electronic Data Systems to run ACC2 on similar terms. No other company was asked to tender.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether any British companies were invited to tender for the contract to run the area computer centre at Livingston; what was the name of the company other than Electronic Data System which tendered; and whether Electronic Data System submitted the lower tender.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: All three companies invited to tender for ACC1 Livingston are incorporated in the United Kingdom. The contract was awarded to Electronic Data Systems on the basis of best value for money, in accordance with normal practice. It is not the practice to give details of unsuccessful tenderers.

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security from what date babies above six months but under two years old in April will receive attendance allowance providing they meet the condition when the new extension of the benefit is made.

Mr. Scott: These babies will qualify for attendance allowance from 9 April.

Income Support

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the latest available data on the number of claimants of income support, together with the number of dependants, in each of the parliamentary constituencies of Liverpool; and if he will give comparable data for 1979.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 22 March 1990]:* Data on the number of dependants are unavailable and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Data of the number of claimants of income support are unavailable by parliamentary constituency. Data for the Department's offices covering Liverpool as a whole are in the table:

Local Office	*Income Support Live Load (1)* *1979*	*1990*
Belle Vale	8,114	10,749
Bootle	11,524	12,908
Breckfield	10,030	15,189
City	7,674	7,571
Edge Hill[1]	7,912	14,918
Garston	8,161	8,688
Huyton	10,396	15,640

Local Office	Income Support Live Load (1) 1979	1990
Kirkby	7,105	15,858
Norris Green	5,740	7,517
Toxteth	6,498	15,651
West Derby	7,361	4,523

[1]previously Wavertree

Notes:

(1) *Source:* 100 per cent. of cases in action. The figures include a small number of cases where benefit has ceased but other action on the case is continuing. Data for 1990 are provisional and subject to amendment.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the latest available data on the number of claimants of income support, together with the number of dependants, in each of the Wirral parliamentary constituencies; and if he will give comparable data for 1979.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 22 March 1990]:* Data on the number of dependants are unavailable and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Data on the number of claimants of income support are unavailable by parliamentary constituency. Data for the Department's offices covering Wirral as a whole are in the table:

Local office	Income support live load[1] 1979	1990
Birkenhead North	10,828	15,057
Birkenhead South	6,479	9,985
Wallasey	7,910	11,359

[1] *Source:* 100 per cent. of the cases in action. These figures include a number of cases where benefit has ceased but other action on the case is continuing. Data for 1990 are provisional and subject to amendment.

ENERGY

Electricity Generation

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Mr. Loyden), of 13 November, *Official Report*, column *98*, if he will consider increasing the size of future tranches of renewable generating capacity; and when he expects to be seeking applications for these tranches.

Mr. Peter Morrison: A total of 600 MW of capacity has been reserved for renewables within future tranches of the non-fossil fuel obligation and this could be increased if necessary. My right hon. Friend expects to announce the arrangements for the first additional tranche later this year.

Electricity Prices

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will give for each area electricity board this year's percentage increase or decrease for the average *(a)* domestic user, *(b)* non-domestic user taking less than 1 MW and *(c)* user taking more than 1 MW.

Mr. Wakeham: Electricity prices are a matter for the industry.

Gas Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to his answer of 13 March, *Official Report*, columns *141-44* about gas privatisation, what was the role of Wood Mackenzie and James Capel in the gas privatisation.

Mr. Wakeham: Wood Mackenzie and James Capel were appointed by Her Majesty's Government to assist the lead brokers Cazenove and Company in the British Gas offer for sale.

Energy Imports and Exports

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what were the total export and import of oil, gas and coal, respectively, in February in tonnes and value on the same basis as his answer of 9 November 1989, *Official Report*, columns *767-68*.

Mr. Wakeham: The equivalent information for exports and imports of oil, gas and coal for February 1990 as set out in my earlier answer of 9 November 1989, *Official Report*, columns *767-68*, is as follows:

Table 1—February 1990

	Thousand tonnes
Exports (f.o.b.)	
Oil[1]	6,004
Coal	181
Imports (c.i.f.)	
Oil	5,292
Gas[2]	1,433
Coal	893

Table 2—February 1990

	£ million at 1985 prices[3]
Exports (f.o.b.)	
Oil[1]	1,027
Coal	7
Imports (c.i.f.)	
Oil	853
Gas	108
Coal	48

[1] Contains a small amount of natural gas exports.

[2] Coal equivalent.

[3] Figures at 1985 constant prices have been derived by applying the unit value for exports in 1985 to the relevant volumes in 1990.

Sizewell B

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the latest estimate of the date of Sizewell B's *(a)* completion, *(b)* commissioning and *(c)* run-up to full power.

Mr. Baldry: The timetable for completion of Sizewell B is a matter for Nuclear Electric plc. The CEGB indicated in its last annual report and accounts that it aimed to achieve full commercial load in May 1994, six months after the start of fuel loading.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will provide additional incentives to renewable energy generators in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Morrison: My Department is already providing substantial incentives. We support a major research and development programme aimed at developing commercially viable and environmentally acceptable renewable technologies to contribute to future energy supply. Over £50 million is earmarked for expenditure on renewable projects during the next three years. Provision for 1990-91 is around £20 million.

Renewables also benefit from the non-fossil fuel obligation.

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his current estimate of the maximum potential for renewable generating capacity on the United Kingdom electricity network.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The most recent estimates of the potential contribution from renewable energy sources were published in energy paper 55, "Renewable Energy in the UK: The Way Forward", copies of which are in the Library of the House.

Magnox

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list each Magnox station's current life expectancy; and when each will next be reviewed.

Mr. Baldry: The maximum life for each Magnox station is an operational matter to be determined by Nuclear Electric subject to continuing compliance with the nuclear site licence issued by the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate.

The current review dates for each Magnox reactor are set out in my answer to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 25 January 1990, at column *819*.

HEALTH

Hepatitis

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish for each of the last five years the number of people who have contracted (i) hepatitis A, (ii) hepatitis B, (iii) hepatitis C, (iv) hepatitis D and (v) hepatitis E in England and Wales, separately distinguishing the figures by health authority areas.

Mr. Freeman: The figures for laboratory reports to the communicable disease surveillance centre of the public health laboratory service are as follows:

Year	*Clinical hepatitis A*	*Acute hepatitis B*
1985	2,254	1,785
1986	2,217	1,329
1987	2,785	785
1988	4,167	644
1989	[1]5,334	[1]605

[1] Provisional figure.

It is not possible to provide the breakdown requested by health authority area, but the percentages of the above reports by area over the five-year period were:

Region	*Percentage of reports*	
	Hepatitis A	*Hepatitis B*
Northern	4	5
Yorkshire	11	11
Trent	7	8
East Anglia	2	3
North West Thames	8	7
North East Thames	7	6
South East Thames	6	8
Wessex	3	4
Oxford	4	4
South Western	8	8
West Midlands	10	8
Mersey	3	6
North Western	12	13
Wales	5	4

Reliable figures for hepatitis C, D and E are not available, because the diagnostic tests for these viruses are at different stages of development and use.

Nursing Homes

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the present number of *(a)* private nursing homes and *(b)* publicly owned nursing homes; and what is the number of inspectors to check the standards of care and facilities in nursing homes.

Mr. Freeman: Centrally collected data do not distinguish between hospitals and nursing homes registered under section 23 of the Registered Homes Act 1984. By deducting the number of premises with operating theatres (that is, hospitals) from the total number of premises registered, a figure of about 3,000 nursing homes can be obtained for the year ending 31 March 1989.

Figures on publicly owned nursing homes are not held centrally. The Government consider continuous nursing care services to be an integral part of NHS provision for those people who require them. However, the actual level of service to be provided by a health authority is a matter for that authority to decide for itself based on local needs and practice.

Figures for the number of inspectors of nursing homes and hospitals are not held centrally. Registration and inspection is delegated to district health authorities. It is for each health authority to decide the number of inspectors required, taking into account local circumstances. Authorities must inspect each home or hospital at least twice a year.

Salmonella

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his assessment of the effect of more invasive salmonellas than salmonella enteritidis and typhimurium on the incidence of food poisoning outbreaks.

Mr. Freeman: Food poisoning due to salmonella is not generally regarded as an invasive disease. However, some salmonella strains are more likely than others to cause septicaemia or meningitis. For example, 28 per cent. of strains of salmonella dublin received by the PHLS division of enteric pathogens during 1981-89 were isolated from blood cultures, compared with only about 2 per cent. for all other serotypes. However, salmonella dublin is rare in humans; it accounted in 1989 for less than 1 per cent. (none in 1988) of outbreaks of food poisoning reported to the PHLS communicable disease surveillance centre. In contrast, salmonella enteritidis and salmonella typhimurium together accounted for 82 per cent. of reported outbreaks in 1989 (76 per cent. in 1988). These two strains therefore represent the greatest burden of human illness.

North West RHA

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by how much National Health Service waiting lists have changed between 1979 and 1989 in each district health authority within the North West regional health authority for *(a)* in-patients and *(b)* out-patients.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information on in-patient waiting lists is given in the table. Data on out-patient waiting lists are not collected centrally.

In-patients waiting lists, North Western Region 31 March 1979 and 31 March 1989

Health Authority	[1]*1979*	[2]*1989*	*Change*	*Change per cent.*
Lancaster	2,099	2,826	727	35
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde	5,038	3,431	−1,607	−32
Preston	n/a	4,897	n/a	n/a
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley	5,512	3,761	−1,751	−32
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	3,850	1,807	−2,043	−53
West Lancashire	2,573	2,852	279	11
Chorley and South Ribble	n/a	636	n/a	n/a
Bolton	4,283	2,936	−1,347	−31
Bury	1,147	373	−774	−67
North Manchester	5,722	2,456	−3,266	−57
Central Manchester	6,924	9,441	2,517	36
South Manchester	8,339	7,483	−856	−10
Oldham	3,210	4,903	1,693	53
Rochdale	2,948	3,280	332	11
Salford	4,873	4,477	−396	−8
Stockport	5,043	4,324	−719	−14
Tameside and Glossop	2,208	1,566	−642	−29
Trafford	2,569	1,469	−1,100	−43
Wigan	4,255	4,310	55	1
Region	77,368	67,228	−10,140	−13

[1] The regional total is not equal to the sum of the districts' figures because districts affected by NHS restructuring in 1982 have been excluded.

[2] Less self deferred cases.

n/a = comparable data not available due to NHS restructuring in 1982.

Source: 1979 SBH203 return.
1989 KH07, KH07a returns.

Eye Tests

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many eye tests have been carried out in the northern region in each year since 1980.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The number of sight tests since 1983-84, paid for by the family practitioner committees which approximate the northern region, are set out in the table. The figures were supplied by the following family practitioner committees:

Cleveland, Cumbria, Durham, Northumberland, Gateshead, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Sunderland.

Number of sight tests in Northern Region 1983-84 to 1988-89

Year	*Number of sight tests*
1983-84	596,216
1984-85	592,048
1985-86	599,981
1986-87	627,573
1987-88	679,969
1988-89	740,424

Information is not held on sight tests paid for before 1983-84. Figures for 1989-90 are not yet available.

Cervical Smear Tests

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cervical smear tests have been carried out on women for each year of the past decade; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The number of cervical smear tests carried out by the NHS in England and Wales in the last decade is shown in the table:

(thousands)

Year	*Number of smears*
1977	2,545
1978	2,587
1979	2,749
1980	2,928
1981	2,999
1982	2,951
1983	3,200
1984	3,417
1985	3,897
1986	3,908
1987-88	4,322

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many health authorities in England and Wales have a computerised recall system for cervical cancer smear tests; and if he will list them;

(2) what measures the Government have undertaken to ensure that women are called and then recalled for cervical smear tests; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: All 190 health authorities in England have computerised call and recall systems for cervical cancer screening. All women aged 20 to 64 are to be invited for screening by March 1993 and recalled at least every five years. Cervical cancer screening in Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average waiting time for results from cervical smear tests, by region; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) on 21 February at column *834*.

Cervical Cancer

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women have died from cervical cancer in each of the past 10 years; if he will give the figures region by region; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is shown in the table:

Number of deaths from malignant neoplasm of the cervix uteri[1]
in England and Wales by regional health authority (RHA) of usual residence, 1979-88

	1979	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*[2]
England and Wales	2,080	2,068	2,017	1,932	1,959	1,899	1,957	2,004	1,903	1,942
RHA of Usual Residence										
Northern	158	157	143	153	155	134	147	145	134	148
Yorkshire	184	194	175	159	168	165	177	150	159	144
Trent	193	209	205	185	177	188	191	204	168	196
East Anglian	59	65	70	64	66	54	59	69	67	68
North West Thames	100	111	90	104	98	119	91	127	88	101
North East Thames	140	113	120	141	136	117	130	141	104	124
South East Thames	144	140	143	122	129	125	123	151	134	131
South West Thames	113	117	98	105	82	82	86	76	91	89
Wessex	93	107	89	82	104	87	92	84	98	107
Oxford	88	62	61	67	59	54	73	71	76	81
South Western	146	109	120	125	129	124	129	121	146	122
West Midlands	185	204	200	189	191	213	185	174	197	206
Mersey	124	145	147	132	134	130	148	131	124	105
North Western	217	206	216	176	187	187	183	214	177	187
Wales	136	125	133	118	136	114	139	139	132	126

[1] Assigned to the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) 9th revision code 180.

[2] Provisional.

Allergy

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on research into allergies and the facilities available under the National Health Service for sufferers.

Mr. Freeman: The Medical Research Council (MRC) is the main agency through which the Government support medical and related research in the United Kingdom. The MRC receives its grant-in-aid from the Department of Education and Science and is currently conducting research into allergies; the total expenditure for these projects is £1 million.

NHS treatment for allergies is widely available. The amount of resources devoted to it is for decision by health authorities in the light of their knowledge of local needs, priorities, and resources.

Disability

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how he plans to use the information gained under section 11 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 to develop good community care services; and if he will make a statement;

(2) on what date he expects section 11 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986 to be fully implemented;

(3) what steps his Department is taking and will be taking to publicise the information collected under section 11 of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Section 11 came into force on 18 December 1989 and the first report was laid before the House on 21 December 1989. The report has been subsequently printed and distributed to health and local authorities. It is hoped that the information in the report, on services for people with a mental illness or mental handicap, will be of assistance to authorities in developing good community care services in line with the Government's policies.

Experimental Drugs

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will introduce statutory regulations controlling payments by pharmaceutical companies and individual consultants in exchange for participation in tests using experimental drugs; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have no powers to make such regulations.

Private Hospitals

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance is issued by his Department to private hospitals and clinics with regard to ensuring that patients who are treated are in a position to pay for such treatment.

Mr. Freeman: No such guidance is issued; payment for private treatment is a matter for the parties concerned.

Advertising Expenditure

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 13 March, *Official Report*, column *183*, what accounts for the shortfall in estimated expenditure for publicity in 1989-90 of £15·876 million, from the budget given in his answer of 13 March 1989, *Official Report*, column *69*.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The £19·586 million budget, quoted in the reply of 13 March 1989, included £4 million which was transferred during 1989-90 to the Health Education Authority to fund additional health promotion campaigns carried out by the authority.

Incontinence

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) from which budget the provision of incontinence pads will come; and which profession will be responsible for the provision of incontinence advice and supplies, following the reorganisation of the National Health Service;

(2) if his Department is carrying out research into the development of minimum standards for incontinence pads, including the microbiological aspect of pads;

(3) what representations he has received on the delivery of incontinence advice and the provision of incontinence pads; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The provision of incontinence services will not be altered by the National Health Service and Community Care Bill. I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my hon. Friend the Minister for Health gave my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) on 8 March 1990 at columns *823-24*.

The Department is funding an evaluation project at St. Pancras hospital, London, including microbiological examination of reusable pads after laundering, which will not be completed until the end of March 1991. The project is looking into all four categories of incontinence pads. One of the aims of the project is to provide basic information which will be used by the British Standards Institution and the International Standards Organisation in the development of standards.

We receive representations on the provision of incontinence pads occasionally, but have received no representations on the delivery of incontinence advice. The Department has funded a number of projects designed to promote awareness of the problems of incontinence.

Traffic Casualties

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many district health authorities make charges under section 155 of the Road Traffic Act 1972 for payment for emergency treatment of traffic casualties;

(2) what is the estimated cost to a district health authority of making a charge under section 155 of the Road Traffic Act 1972;

(3) what is the total income received by the National Health Service under the provisions of the Road Traffic Act 1972.

Mr. Freeman: The total income from emergency treatment fees and charges under sections 157 and 158 for in and out-patient treatment recorded in the accounts of district health authorities was £8·7 million for 1988-89 in England. Income from emergency treatment fees is not separately identified. However, the indications are that most, if not all, district health authorities have collected income from this particular source. No information on the cost to district health authorities of collecting these charges is available centrally.

Aspirin

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether any food or drink offered for sale in the United Kingdom contains aspirin as an additive.

Mr. Maclean: I have been asked to reply.

Aspirin is not listed as a permitted additive to food or drink by regulations made under the Food Act 1984.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Merchant Shipping

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will consider abolishing income tax and social security liabilities in regard to persons employed at sea in United Kingdom shipping companies' merchant ships; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: The Finance Act 1988 relaxed for seafarers the rules for qualification for the 100 per cent. foreign earnings deduction. A total exemption from income tax and social security liabilities would give seafarers an unjustified advantage over other groups of employees.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those years in the period 1974 to 1989 when public expenditure was reduced in real terms; and for each of those years if he will indicate the main services where reductions took place.

Mr. Norman Lamont: General Government expenditure (excluding privatisation proceeds) fell in real terms in 1975-76, 1976-77, 1977-78, 1987-88 and 1988-89 as shown in table 21.2.1 of the 1990 public expenditure White Paper (Cm 1021). The reductions in the mid-1970s covered a broad range of services. The areas in which there were falls in the real level of expenditure in 1987-88 and 1988-89 are shown in table 21.2.11 of Cm 1021, which gives an analysis of general Government expenditure by function in real terms for 1978-79 to 1989-90.

Trade Balance

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for each year from 1970 to 1989, on a balance of payments basis, his estimate of the balance of visible trade with the world and with the European Economic Community Twelve on the basis of (i) 1989 and (ii) 1985 prices; and if he will add figures for visible trade less oil and erratic items;

(2) whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing, for each year from 1970 to 1989, on a balance of payments basis, the balance of trade in manufactures less

erratic items with the European Economic Community and with the rest of the world as a percentage of gross domestic product to two places of decimals.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Information from which United Kingdom world trade balances at constant prices may be derived can be found on the Central Statistical Office database, which may be accessed through the Library of the House. Estimates for trade with the European Community are available only at current prices, and information about manufactures less erratic items on a balance of payments basis is not available by area.

Natural Beauty Products

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions Customs and Excise officials had with the debenture holder immediately before or after their two visits to Natural Beauty Products earlier this year in pursuit of a distraint order; and what other action was taken.

Mr. Ryder: Customs has had no discussions with the debenture holder either before or after its visits to Natural Beauty Products.

The distraint was affected on 1 February 1990 and the administrative receiver was appointed on 2 February. Customs has maintained its distraint and has been in discussion with the administrative receiver about the sale of the business as a going concern.

EC Economic and Finance Council

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the latest meeting of the European Community's Economic and Finance Council.

Mr. Major: The informal ECOFIN met at Ashford castle, County Mayo on 31 March for its first detailed discussion of the later stages of economic and monetary union (EMU). I made it clear that we believed it premature to give detailed consideration to the later stages before stage 1 had begun and that the United Kingdom's position had not changed. I repeated our willingness to participate fully in the inter-governmental conference and in its preparation. I made clear our opposition to binding limits on the level of budget deficits, but said that we were ready to contemplate binding rules against monetary financing of deficits and the bailing out of member states, and providing for procedures for surveillance. These rules would be desirable whatever the eventual form of EMU. Legal conditionality might also attach to any Community support loans. I expressed our reserve on the monetary aspects of EMU including the proposed European system of central banks (ESCB). Preparation for the IGC will continue in the relevant committees and ECOFIN will discuss the issues again at our meeting in June.

The German Minister for Finance outlined the latest developments in the preparations for an economic and monetary union between the Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic. There was a brief discussion about the European bank for reconstruction and development. It was agreed that there should be further examination of the requests from some European countries for association of their currencies with the EMS.

Balance of Payments

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing for each year from 1970 to 1989 on a balance of payments basis the balance of trade with the European Economic Community Twelve and with other countries on *(a)* manufactures and *(b)* invisible trade; and if he will add figures for manufactures less erratic items.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 23 March 1990]:* Estimates on a balance of payments basis for trade in manufactures with the European Community and with non-European Community countries are shown in the table:

United Kingdom Trade Balances with EEC and Non-EEC Countries in Manufactured Goods (SITC 5-8) from 1970-1989

BOP basis £ million
Not Seasonally Adjusted

Year	*EEC*	*Non-EEC*
1970	644	1,899
1971	431	2,578
1972	60	2,086
1973	−360	1,845
1974	−478	2,441
1975	−587	4,326
1976	−490	5,401
1977	−503	6,376
1978	−1,735	6,789
1979	−2,570	5,280
1980	−1,174	6,600
1981	−2,651	7,146
1982	−4,458	6,550
1983	−7352	4,636
1984	−8,313	3,895
1985	−8,999	5,376
1986	−10,392	4,340
1987	−10,670	2,842
1988	−12,538	−2,338
1989	−13,583	−2,552

Information for invisible trade is available for 1973 to 1988 on the Central Statistical Office database, which may be accessed through the Library. The information for 1978 to 1988 is also in table 10.1 of 1989 edition of the "The CSO Pink Book", which is available in the Library of the House.

Comparable data for manufactures less erratic items on a balance of payments basis are not available.

Tax Changes

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update, to take account of the 1990 Budget, the information on tax changes contained in his reply to the hon. Member for Oldham, West of 4 April 1989, *Official Report*, columns *7-8*.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update, to take account of the 1990 Budget, the information on tax changes contained in his reply to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) on 21 October 1986, *Official Report*, columns *812-14*.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answers 28 and 29 March 1990]:* The information is in the tables. For each financial year shown, the tables compare the yield from the tax regime in that year, with the 1978-79 tax regime, both assuming independent taxation. All estimates are based on a provisional 1990-91 income base projected from the 1987-88 survey of personal incomes and all tax regimes have been indexed to 1990-91 levels (using the new independent taxation allowances) by reference to the statutory formula. The comparisons therefore reflect budgetary changes in income tax rates and allowances, but not (i) any changes since 1978-79 in the definition of the income tax base, or (ii) the change to independent taxation from 1989-90 to 1990-91. Information for other years could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

For the purposes of these calculations, the indexed regimes of 1978-79 and later years are applied directly to the income tax base of 1990-91. In practice, retention of these regimes, indexed as appropriate, would have led to changes in the income base.

Average gain per individual[2] *(£ per annum)*

Range of individual's income in 1990-91 (£)	*1979-80*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Under 5,000	50	20	50	60	80	110	110	110
5,000 to 10,000	140	70	120	150	220	320	320	320
10,000 to 15,000	290	230	280	360	500	690	690	690
15,000 to 20,000	420	380	430	550	760	1,030	1,030	1,030
20,000 to 30,000	650	650	710	880	1,220	1,610	1,610	1,590
30,000 to 50,000	1,910	1,770	1,880	2,090	2,480	3,480	3,480	3,270
50,000 to 70,000	5,390	5,570	5,740	5,870	6,090	9,610	9,610	9,390
Over 70,000	18,560	20,880	21,060	21,130	21,310	36,310	36,310	36,060
Total	460	420	480	550	680	990	990	980

Note: All information is in terms of individual taxpayers—that is husband and wife are counted separately.

[1] Excluding child tax allowances which were being phased out in 1978-79.

[2] Average gains and losses are calculated by reference to the estimated number who would be liable to pay tax under the indexed 1978-79 regime assuming Independent Taxation; this number is some 1,800,000 greater than the numbers paying tax in 1990-91, some 1,400,000 in the income range below £5,000 and 400,000 in the range £5,000 to £10,000.

Reduction in income tax compared with 1978-79 indexed regime[1] *(£ million)*

Range of individual's income in 1990-91 (£)	*Number of individuals paying tax in 1990-91 (million)*	*1979-80*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Under 5,000	2·9	230	100	230	270	340	480	480	480
5,000 to 10,000	8·6	1,230	640	1,040	1,360	1,960	2,840	2,850	2,840
10,000 to 15,000	6·4	1,840	1,450	1,800	2,280	3,200	4,390	4,400	4,390
15,000 to 20,000	3·8	1,570	1,410	1,620	2,050	2,870	3,860	3,860	3,860
20,000 to 30,000	2·6	1,710	1,710	1,860	2,320	3,210	4,230	4,230	4,190
30,000 to 50,000	1·0	1,930	1,790	1,900	2,110	2,500	3,510	3,520	3,300
50,000 to 70,000	0·2	1,240	1,280	1,320	1,350	1,400	2,210	2,210	2,160
Over 70,000	0·2	2,970	3,340	3,370	3,380	3,410	5,810	5,810	5,770
TOTAL	25·7	12,720	11,720	13,140	15,120	18,890	27,330	27,360	26,990

Net Earnings

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update to April the information on net earnings provided in his reply to the then hon. Member for Fulham, on 10 February 1987, *Official Report*, columns *177-78*.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 29 March 1990]:* Estimates of the levels of earnings at the top 5 per cent. point of the earnings distribution are not published. The information in the table is based on estimates of those levels derived from published figures in the relevant new earnings surveys. The latest estimates available are for April 1989. Earnings levels are for men or women as appropriate paid at adult rates with pay unaffected by absence. Taxpayers are assumed to have no reliefs or allowances other than the appropriate personal allowances.

Earnings after Tax, National Insurance Contributions[1] *and Child Benefit (£ per week)*

	April 1979[4]	*April 1989*
Single Man		
At current prices	114·20	369·20
At constant April 1989 prices[2]	240·30	369·20
Married Man[3]		
At current prices	118·00	381·50
At constant April 1989 prices[2]	248·30	381·50
Married Man[3] *with two children under 11*		
At current prices	126·00	396·00
At constant April 1989 prices[2]	265·20	396·00
Single Woman		
At current prices	72·20	234·10
At constant April 1989 prices[2]	152·00	234·10

[1] At the contracted in rate for April 1989.

[2] By reference to the retail price index.

[3] Assuming no wife's earnings.

[4] Under the Finance Act 1979 tax regime.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update to 1990-91 the information on real net earnings provided in his reply to the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) on 10 April 1986, *Official Report*, columns *193-94*.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 29 March 1990]:* Information is given in the tables:

Income Tax and Income Tax and NIC as percentages of gross earnings

	Multiples of average male earnings[1]				
	⅔	*1*	*2*	*5*	*10*
Single					
1956-57					
Tax	10·4	16·6	24·8	40·5	55·2

	Multiples of average male earnings[1] $\frac{2}{3}$	1	2	5	10
Tax + NIC	14·0	18·9	26·0	41·0	55·4
1978-79					
Tax	21·0	25·0	29·5	50·5	66·6
Tax + NIC	27·5	31·5	33·7	52·2	67·5
1990-91[2]					
Tax	17·9	20·2	26·4	34·5	37·3
Tax + NIC	25·3	28·2	31·0	36·4	38·2
Married Man					
1956-57					
Tax	5·1	11·2	22·0	38·9	54·2
Tax + NIC	8·6	13·5	23·1	39·4	54·4
1978-79					
Tax	5·4	21·3	27·2	48·8	65·7
Tax + NIC	21·9	27·8	31·4	50·5	66·5
1990-91[2]					
Tax	13·8	17·5	24·2	33·7	36·8
Tax + NIC	21·2	25·5	28·8	35·5	37·8

Changes in real net earnings after Income Tax and NIC (1956-57 = 100)

	Multiples of average male earnings[1] $\frac{2}{3}$	1	2	5	10
Single					
1978-79	124·9	125·3	132·8	120·1	108·3
1990-91[2]	171·9	175·3	184·5	213·3	274·6
Married Man					
1978-79	126·8	123·9	132·4	121·1	109·0
1990-91[2]	170·8	170·7	183·4	210·5	270·4

[1] Average earnings are those for full time males working a full week at adult rates in all occupations. They are £14·40 per week in 1956-57, £92·80 per week in 1978-79 and assumed to be £303·80 in 1990-91, an increase of 9¼ per cent. in average earnings in 1989-90 and an increase of 8½ per cent. in 1990-91 (the increases used by the Government Actuary in assessing the level of the National Insurance Fund as described in paragraph 3.02 of the Autumn Statement 1989).

[2] Income tax rates and allowances used for 1990-91 are those proposed in the 1990 Budget.

Income Tax

Mr. Clay: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much the value of income tax personal allowances has increased in real terms since 1979; and how this amount has been distributed to each band of income taxpayers, both in total and in amount per taxpayer.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 30 March 1990]:* Since 1978-79, the main income tax allowances have increased in real terms by over 24 per cent. If, for 1990-91, the personal, married couple's, and higher age-related allowances were reduced to levels equivalent to the 1978-79 allowances indexed to 1990-91, total income tax liability would be increased by some £4·9 billion, distributed as follows:

Real change in tax allowances since 1978-79
Change in tax liability 1990-91

Individual's income £ per annum	Single people Total £ million	Single people Average per taxpayer[1] £ per annum	Husbands Total £ million	Husbands Average per taxpayer[1] £ per annum	Wives Total £ million	Wives Average per taxpayer[1] £ per annum
Less than £5,000	270	120	30	130	170	90
£5,000–10,000	640	140	490	200	270	140
£10,000–15,000	390	150	760	250	110	140
£15,000–20,000	150	140	550	230	50	140
£20,000–25,000	60	150	280	230	20	130
£25,000–30,000	40	180	160	270	10	230
£30,000–50,000	40	220	270	350	10	220
Over £50,000	10	230	110	360	10	220
TOTAL	1,600	140	2,650	240	650	120

[1] Individual taxpayers liable to tax when personal allowances are reduced to their indexed 1978-79 levels.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the number of married women in the current tax year claiming the transferable element of their husband's personal tax allowance.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 30 March 1990]:* It is estimated that in 1989-90 approximately 500,000 married women, over 10 per cent. of all married women with income greater than the wife's earned income allowance, will receive part or all of their husband's married man's allowance. The estimate is based on a projection of the 1987-88 survey of personal incomes and is provisional.

European Community

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent advice he has had from the EC Commission about the re-assessment of the United Kingdom's contribution to the EC; and what is the effect on the recent net contribution figures.

Mr. Ryder *[holding answer 2 April 1990]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 21 March 1990 at column *610*.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Community Charge

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what plans the Church Commissioners have to meet the full poll tax for those retired clergy renting houses from them on a maintenance charge basis.

Mr. Alison: Retired clergy in the rented arm of the Church's retirement housing scheme, where the accommodation is owned by the Church of England pensions board but largely funded by the Church Commissioners, have had their maintenance charges reduced to reflect the abolition of domestic rates. They will also receive a special addition to their pension for 1990 (£100 for full service) to help ease the changeover to the community charge system.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the right hon. Member for Selby, representing the Church Commissioners, what negotiations the Commissioners have had with the Secretary of State for the Environment over the effect of standard community charge levels on clergy who, while living in tied accommodation in their parishes, are buying, or have bought, a home for their retirement.

Mr. Alison: The Bishop of London, as chairman of the Churches Main Committee representing all the major denominations, has taken this matter up with the Secretary of State as most ministers of religion in this position are being asked to pay the maximum multiplier of twice the standard community charge. This is despite the Secretary of State's advice given to local authorities last October. The Commissioners fully support the bishop's approach.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Lithuania

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contacts Her Majesty's Government have had with the Lithuanian Government of Mr. Landbergis.

Mr. Waldegrave: None. Our criteria for recognition of a state were set out in an answer which I gave to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on 19 March.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations Her Majesty's Ambassador has made to the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics regarding their present policy in Lithuania.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have recently taken a number of opportunities to make our concerns known to the Soviet Union.

We have emphasised that it is vital that progress should be made through dialogue between the Soviet authorities and the Lithuanians, and that a settlement should be reached which is acceptable to both sides and which enables the Lithuanian people to decide their own future. We have stressed the need for restraint on all sides.

Nuclear Testing

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will be sending a representative to the international citizens congress for a nuclear test ban in Alma-Mata and Semipalatinsk, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, in May.

Mr. Waldegrave: No.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations his Department has received in the current year concerning the continuing commitment of Her Majesty's Government to test nuclear weapons.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have received a number of letters and appeals from various organisations and individual members of the public.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what stage negotiations over the convening of meetings of state parties to the partial test ban treaty in preparation for the meeting from 8 to 19 January 1991 in Geneva have now reached; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: Parties to the partial test ban treaty have agreed that a preliminary meeting for the organisation of the conference will be held in New York from 29 May to 8 June 1990. Consultations on the details of the meeting are continuing.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he intends to make it his policy to support the inclusion of talks concerning the cessation of nuclear testing at the conference on disarmament in Geneva.

Mr. Waldegrave: Consultations are under way at the conference on disarmament about possible discussions on the subject of nuclear testing. But we have made it clear that for the foreseeable future there will be a continuing requirement to conduct such tests.

Indonesia

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Indonesian authorities about East Timor independence demonstrations and human rights.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations the Government have made to the Indonesian authorities concerning the use of violence against demonstrations in East Timor for independence and against human rights abuses.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer the hon. Members to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 29 March to the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon).

Hong Kong

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has discussed with the Hong Kong Government the possibility of lowering the minimum voting age in Hong Kong to 18 years.

Mr. Maude: The Hong Kong Government have recently confirmed our decision, announced in the 1988 White Paper on the development of representative government, that the voting age would remain at 21.

Entry Clearance

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the current queues in operation at each of the following posts and the numbers in each queue *(a)* Bombay, *(b)* New Delhi, *(c)* Karachi, *(d)* Islamabad, *(e)* Dacca, *(f)* Nairobi and *(g)* Dar-es-Salaam.

Mr. Sainsbury: Current queues and estimated waiting tims in months at end February 1990 were:

Post	*Queue*	*Estimated*	*Numbers awaiting interviews*
(a) Bombay	1	0	0
	2	6	367
	3	9	449
	4	10	106
(b) New Delhi	1	0	0
	2	3	309
	3	6	214
	4	9	65
(c) Karachi	1	1	2
	2	3	89
	3	3·5	19
	4	6	5
(d) Islamabad	1	3	96
	2	6	2,312
	3	9	486
	4	13	393
(e) Dhaka	1	3	418
	2	3	933
	3	3	119
	4	9	884

Note: Estimated waiting time is the time an applicant applying in February could expect to wait until interview.

Settlement queues are organised as follows:

Q1—Persons with a claim to the right of abode, dependent relatives over 70 years, special compassionate cases.

Q2—All spouses, and all children under 18 years.

Q3—Fiancé(e)s and others applying for the first time for settlement.

Q4—Re-applicants.

Nairobi —No queue. All applicants whether for visit or settlement, are interviewed within one to three days.

Dar-es-Salaam—All applicants requiring full interview are put in one queue with a current waiting time of three weeks.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the length of time taken by each of the posts to prepare an explanatory statement following refusal of entry clearance at *(a)* Bombay, *(b)* New Delhi, *(c)* Karachi, *(d)* Islamabad, *(e)* Dacca, *(f)* Nairobi and *(g)* Dar-es-Salaam; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: Current times taken to despatch explanatory statements from the following posts are (from date of receipt of appeal):

Post	*Type*	*Time*
Bombay	Settlement	4 months
	Visit	2 months
New Delhi	All	6 months
Karachi	Settlement	4 months
	Visit	2 months
Islamabad	Settlement	3 months
	Visit	1 month
Dhaka	All	3 months
Nairobi	All	1 week
Dar-es-Salaam	All	1-2 weeks

High Commission, India

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on when the British deputy high commission in Bombay, India, is to be resited.

Mr. Sainsbury: We hope that current leasing negotiations and subsequent fitting-out works will be completed in time for the deputy high commission to move by May 1991.

Geneva Convention

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what action he intends to take in the international community regarding the observance of article 51 of the fourth Geneva convention by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics;

(2) what representations he has received regarding the position of former Lithuanian Russian army conscripts and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics' observance of article 51 of the fourth Geneva convention.

Mr. Waldegrave: None. The Geneva convention to which the hon. Member refers relates to the protection of civilian persons in time of war.

United States Embassy (Visa Section)

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the United States embassy in London on the burdens imposed on the embassy visa section by travel firms who are charging for visas to visit the United States where these are no longer required.

Mr. Sainsbury: None. The United States visa waiver scheme applies only to visitors travelling by designated carriers. In other cases, visas are still required. We understand that some travel agents charge an administrative fee for obtaining visas.

South Africa

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many applications for British passports have been made by individuals resident in the Republic of South Africa in each month from January 1989 to the recent available date.

Mr. Sainsbury: Figures for applications received per month are not readily available but the numbers of passports issued are as follows:

	Number
1989	
January	1,596
February	1,393
March	1,676
April	2,126
May	1,569
June	3,596
July	2,097
August	2,184
September	1,856
October	1,939
November	2,163
December	1,697
1990	

	Number
January	1,884
February	2,134
March	2,439

These numbers include both first and replacement passports issued.

Mr. Darling: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has on the number of people resident in the republic of South Africa who are eligible to be issued with a British passport for each category of citizenship under the British Nationality Act 1981.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office estimates that between half a million and 1 million British nationals reside in South Africa. There is no means of assessing accurately their categories of citizenship under the British Nationality Act 1981. However, it is likely that the majority are British citizens.

Eastern Europe

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with European counterparts about the proposals for nuclear and conventional force reductions arising out of recent developments in eastern Europe.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has discussed these matters in a number of recent bilateral meetings with European colleagues, including in the margins of the "Open Skies" meeting in Ottawa in February. There is a further meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers in June, and the implications of developments in eastern Europe for our security requirements will again be discussed there.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

Mr. David Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has taken a decision on the question of United Kingdom membership of UNESCO.

Mr. Sainsbury: We have conducted a thorough review of United Kingdom membership of UNESCO as part of which we have consulted a large number of organisations with an interest in UNESCO activities. We have also taken into account the views expressed by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House in its report on UNESCO dated 15 March. We have concluded that although there have been improvements at UNESCO over the past few years these are not sufficient to justify rejoining now.

As recommended by the FAC, we shall continue to keep the situation under review and we shall continue to maintain our observer section at UNESCO. We shall also continue to participate in the UNESCO programmes with which we are now involved.

I have today written to the right hon. Member in his capacity as Chairman of the FAC giving my detailed comments on its report. A copy of this letter has been deposited in the Library of the House.

Ivory

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress Hong Kong is making in introducing legislation to implement the CITES ban on all commercial trade in ivory before the withdrawal of the six-month reservation on 18 July 1990.

Mr. Hurd: The Hong Kong Government are enacting legislation to ensure that the CITES ban on international commercial trade in ivory is in force when we withdraw our reservation on 18 July. A draft enacting Bill was presented to the Executive Council on 20 March and will be introduced into the Legislative Council on 4 April, with a view to enactment in May. The legislation will come into effect when our reservation is withdrawn. In the meantime, the Hong Kong Government will continue to enforce strict licensing and monitoring arrangements to prevent any illegal trading in ivory. There has been an absolute ban on ivory imports into Hong Kong since the CITES conference last year.

SCOTLAND

Health Boards

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many health boards in Scotland were in deficit at the end of the previous financial year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The overall cash limit for health boards was underspent by £6,678,000 or 0·36 per cent.

Eye Tests

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details on the numbers of eye tests in Scotland in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information concerning the total number of eye tests in Scotland is not available centrally. The results of a survey on the total number of sight tests carried out in Sco[illegible]d in the first quarter of 1990 compared with earlier periods should be available by the early summer.

NHS Inflation

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the level of inflation in the Scottish Health Service in 1990; and what funding he will make available for extra costs to the Scottish health boards.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: No separate index has been constructed which relates to the movement of pay and prices within the Health Service in Scotland. Health boards will be provided with £2,061·498 million for their recurrent expenditure commitments on hospital and community health services in 1990-91, an increase of £158 million or 8·3 per cent. on the equivalent 1989-90 provision.

Nursing Homes

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to stop elderly patients being evicted from private nursing homes because they cannot meet the extra charges imposed by the owners of the private homes.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Responsibility for the board and lodging limits under income support lies with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security who announced on 28 March new limits for both residential and nursing homes which will mean £45 million of additional payments being made to residents this year. My right hon. Friend is also currently reviewing the general structure and level of these limits.

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last visited a private nursing home in Scotland to meet elderly patients; whether he discussed the shortfall in charges between the Government's set limit and the extra charge imposed by the private home for their accommodation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: My right hon. and learned Friend visited Newark Lodge nursing home for the elderly in Glasgow on 26 February 1990. During his visit he took the opportunity to discuss a range of topics with both staff and residents.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current number of *(a)* private nursing homes and *(b)* public nursing homes in (i) Inverclyde, (ii) Strathclyde and (iii) Scotland as a whole; and what is the number of inspectors to check the standards of care and facilities in nursing homes in (i), (ii) and (iii).

Mr. Michael Forsyth: There are no public nursing homes in Scotland. The information on private nursing homes, as at 31 March 1989, is as follows:

	Number
Inverclyde	3
Strathclyde	125
Scotland	270

The registration and inspection of private nursing homes are the responsibility of health boards and information on the number of staff engaged on these functions is not held centrally.

Dogs

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* those organisations which responded to the consultation paper on Action on Dogs.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: One hundred and six organisations responded to the consultation paper. I am writing to the hon. Member with the details.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what direction his Department has given to the working group discussing Action on Dogs; and whether any representatives of the British Veterinary Association are to be invited to give evidence.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The working group's remit will be discussed at its first meeting which we hope will be held later this month. The remit will be broad and will cover not only advice on the implementation of our Action on Dogs proposals but also the investigation of other measures which could strengthen the existing legislation on dogs, including measures which could help reduce the risk of dog attacks. The British Veterinary Association has been asked to nominate a representative to serve on the group.

Dentistry

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland by what date he will need to take a decision in order to ensure that the new Edinburgh dental hospital and postgraduate institute can be operative by the time of the closure of the present dental school.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This depends upon the outcome of Lothian health board's forthcoming appraisal of possible sites.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what assessment he has made of the effect of the present financial situation of the Lothian health board on the programme for the establishment of the new Edinburgh dental hospital and postgraduate institute.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I have already made it clear that the Government will meet the capital cost of providing the new dental hospital and institute. The running costs will be considered once we have the results of the Lothian health board's option appraisal. By that time I expect to have the health board's proposals for bringing their income and expenditure into balance.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what factors he takes into account in determining the number of dental school places.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This is a matter for the Universities Funding Council and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what will be the numerical decline in the number of treatment consultations available from the Edinburgh dental hospital from their present annual level for each of the years of the rundown leading up to the closure of the present Edinburgh dental school.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Detailed predictions about the level of treatment consultations up to the closure of Edinburgh dental school is a matter for discussion between Lothian health board and the university of Edinburgh as part of their overall closure programme.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when his Department announced its decision to rebuild the Edinburgh dental hospital.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: When the McCallum working party report, "Review of Dental Provision in Scotland", was published in June 1989, we welcomed the recommendation that a replacement dental hospital should be built in Edinburgh. I have already made it clear that the Government will meet the capital cost but progress depends upon the outcome of Lothian health board's forthcoming appraisal of possible sites.

Prisons

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many baths and shower-baths there are and how often each prisoner has use of these facilities in each of Her Majesty's prisons in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The number of baths and shower-baths and how often each prisoner has use of these facilities, in each of Her Majesty's prisons is set out in the table:

Establishment	*Number of baths*	*Number of shower-baths*	*Access by prisoners*
Aberdeen	2	19	At least once per week
Barlinnie	5	74	Unlimited access
Castle Huntly	—	18	Unlimited access during recreation
Cornton Vale	33	39	Unlimited access
Dumfries	5	34	Daily at specified times
Dungavel	2	19	Unlimited access outwith working hours
Edinburgh	3	43	Unlimited access during recreation
Friarton	1	6	Prisoners shower daily
Glenochil:			
Adult	1	41	Unlimited access
Young offenders	—	30	Daily following PT or work
Greenock	1	26	Unlimited access
Inverness	2	14	Unlimited access
Longriggend	1	29	Three times per week
Low Moss	—	25	Unlimited access
Noranside	4	18	Unlimited access
Penninghame	1	11	Unlimited access outwith working hours
Perth	3	69	Daily at specified times
Peterhead	4	55	At least once per week

Establishment	*Number of baths*	*Number of shower-baths*	*Access by prisoners*
Polmont	—	43	At least twice per week
Shotts	26	51	Unlimited access during association
Total	94	664	

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many prisoners are currently imprisoned in each of Her Majesty's prisons in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information is as follows:

Her Majesty's prison	*Population at 23 March 1990*
Aberdeen	133
Barlinnie	848
Barlinnie special unit	8
Castle Huntly[1]	109
Cornton Vale[2]	162
Dumfries[1]	137
Dungavel	123
Edinburgh	544
Friarton	54
Glenochil[2]	480
Greenock	167
Inverness	92
Longriggend[3]	224
Low Moss	313
Noranside	90
Penninghame	58
Perth	424
Peterhead	122
Polmont[1]	387
Shotts	429
Total	4,904

[1] Young offenders institution.

[2] Prison and young offenders institution combined.

[3] Remand institution.

Agency Nurses

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the number of agency nurses employed in the National Health Service in Scotland in each of the past five years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information about agency nurses is collected twice yearly and the average whole-time equivalent for the quarter ending 30 September in each of the last five years is as follows:

Year	*Whole-time equivalent*
1985	79·8
1986	144·7
1987	193·0
1988	237·7
1989	128·4

Information is collected centrally only on the whole time equivalent of agency nurses employed in the National Health Service.

Children with Learning Difficulties

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many children with learning difficulties are now being integrated into mainstream schools who would formerly have been placed in special schools with trained teaching staff, in total and on a regional basis; and if he will give details of how the progress of such children is monitored.

Mr. Lang: The table shows the latest statistics of children with records of needs based in mainstream schools. It is not possible to say how many of these children might, in previous years, have been placed at special schools. Progress of recorded pupils is monitored through reviews carried out under the terms of section 65A of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980.

Recorde pupils based in mainstream schools

	Primary	*Secondary*
Borders	10	35
Central	67	31
Dumfries and Galloway	111	74
Fife	1	15
Grampian	53	45
Highland	81	82
Lothian	27	14
Strathclyde	328	223
Tayside	9	21
Orkney	6	4
Shetland	6	7
Western Isles	4	8
Total	703	559
Argyll and Bute	24	15
Ayr	118	69
Dumbarton	27	17
Glasgow	41	12
Lanark	31	59
Renfrew	87	51

Mr. Andrew Welsh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what specialist assistance is being provided for children with learning difficulties who have been or are being integrated into mainstream schools; and what is their position regarding testing at the ages of eight and 11 years old.

Mr. Lang: Education authorities are responsible for ensuring sufficient specialist assistance is provided for children with learning difficulties. This will vary according to the needs of each individual child.

So far as the testing of children with learning difficulty is concerned, the Government recognise that there are pupils whose records of needs may suggest that their inclusion within the arrangements for national testing would be inappropriate. It will, therefore, be left to the discretion of the education authority, in consultation with parents, to decide in such cases whether or not a child should participate in the tests.

Lafferty Group

Mr. Ron Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many projects involving the failed Lafferty Group were funded by the Scottish Development Agency;

what was the total amount of public money paid to the firm; whether any legal action has been taken over uncompleted contracts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: Three projects involving F. Lafferty (Civil Engineering) Company Ltd., and two projects involving Lafferty Construction Ltd. were funded by the Scottish Development Agency. The amount of money paid is a commercial matter between the agency and the companies involved. The five projects carried out by F. Lafferty (Civil Engineering) Company Ltd. and Lafferty Construction Ltd. have all been completed.

Schools and Colleges (Finance)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on what information he bases his decision about the level of capital financing for Scottish schools and colleges.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* The amount of the resources made available for distribution to local authorities for capital expenditure on schools and colleges is determined after taking account of the financial plans and representations submitted by the authorities and of information obtained during school and college inspections. The amount provided for grant aided colleges takes account of their institutional plans and of professional advice.

Fishing Industry

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye of 21 March, *Official Report*, column *647*, when he expects to be able to reply to the specific questions raised with him by the Federation of Highlands and Islands Fishermen in their original letter of 3 May 1989 with regard to the grounds on which the claim for compensation by the Ullapool Boat Owners Association has been classed as an application for operating aid and as to why the claim for compensation conflicts with community law; and when he expects to be able to supply the documents requested by the federation in their letter of 3 May 1989.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 2 April 1990]:* Any assistance provided to industry to compensate for changes in circumstances is regarded by the European Commission as an operating aid. This ruling derives from the Commission's interpretation of sections 92 and 93 of the treaty of Rome. The Commission has made it clear that any derogation by them in favour of such an aid would only be given where the aid had a structural purpose. This would not apply in the case submitted by the Ullapool Boat Owners Association. A formal reply was sent to the Federation of Highlands and Islands Fishermen on 13 March 1990.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will explain the criteria for the distribution of non-HRA allocations for 1990-91, with specific reference to the sums allocated to Orkney Islands council and Shetland Islands council.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 2 April 1990]:* Non-HRA capital allocations for 1990-91 were determined on the basis of relative housing needs taking account of the authorities' own plans and priorities for tackling these needs. On this basis, Orkney Islands council has received an allocation of £1·15 million and Shetland Islands council has received £0·45 million, the latter meeting the council's request for resources virtually in full.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Sir John Farr: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if all the research into bovine spongiform encephalopathy is being concentrated under the consultative committee run by Dr. David Tyrrell; and if he will list where the £12 million for research over the next three years is to be spent;

(2) if it is the intention of the consultative committee under Dr. David Tyrrell to publish at least annual reports into their activities in the future.

Mr. Gummer: A research consultative committee of scientific experts chaired by Dr. Tyrrell was asked by my predecessor and the Secretary of State for Health to advise on the research work in progress, and additional work required into the disease bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) and to set out priorities for further work. I announced the Government's response on 9 January.

My Department has committed £6·1 million over the next three years to spongiform encephalopathy research at the Central Veterinary Laboratory, at the Institute for Animal Health, AFRC/MRC Neuropathogenesis Unit, Edinburgh; and at the Royal Veterinary College, North Mymms. In the same period, the Department of Education and Science has provided for expenditure of £6·3 million on similar research through the Agriculture and Food Research Council at the neuropathogenesis unit and other research establishments.

The Secretary of State for Health and I have decided to reconstitute the research consultative committee as the spongiform encephalopathy advisory committee. Dr. Tyrrell has agreed to continue as chairman. The other members are Professor F. Brown, former deputy director (scientific) of the Animal Virus Research Institute, Pirbright, Dr. R. J. Will, consultant neurologist at the Western general hospital, Edinburgh, Dr. R. H. Kimberlin, an independent consultant, and Dr. W. A. Watson, former director of the Central Veterinary Laboratory. Mr. R. Bradley of the Central Veterinary Laboratory will act as an observer and observers from the Medical Research Council and the Agriculture and Food Research Council will participate as necessary.

The new committee will be asked to advise my Department and the Department of Health on matters related to spongiform encephalopathies. Its work and reporting will therefore be on an ad hoc basis.

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the estimate of the Southwood committee of the level of reporting of bovine spongiform encephalopathy; what is the current level of reporting; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The Southwood working party did not predict the level of reporting of suspect BSE cases. At present, around 380 new suspected cases of BSE are being subjected to restrictions each week.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what significance he attaches to the rising incidence of confirmed bovine spongiform encephalopathy cases; when he expects the number of confirmed cases to stop rising; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: All available evidence on BSE point to a common source epidemic, through feed infected with scrapie, which has been cut off since July 1988. Although the number of suspect cases being notified is continuing to rise at present it is still expected that, provided cattle to cattle transmission does not occur, the incidence of disease will fall after 1993 as the proportion of animals which will have been fed ruminant protein diminishes.

Pesticides

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, what use he has made of his powers to ban the export of toxic pesticides which are already banned from use on agricultural products in the United Kingdom; and if he will consider taking powers to ban the import of any food that has been treated with a pesticide, the use of which has been banned in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclean: The United Kingdom participates in the United Nations environment programme's (UNEP) notification scheme under which we notify the importing country of any exports of pesticides which are banned or severely restricted here. A pesticide which is not approved in the country may legitimately be permitted in other countries, since usage, climatic conditions and soil types all have an important influence on safety. In the United Kingdom statutory maximum residue levels have been set for some pesticides which are not approved for use here.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the regulatory process by which pesticides are approved.

Mr. Gummer: Following is the answer:

1. The statutory framework for the approval of pesticides is laid down in Part III of the Food and Environmental Protection Act 1985 and under the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986. A system of Departmental and independent assessment of data ensures that only pesticides found to be safe are approved for use. The independent Advisory Committee on Pesticides, supported by the scientific subcommittee, take account of risks to humans, animals and the environment in making recommendations to Ministers on approvals.

2. The introduction of statutory controls on pesticides under FEPA has led to a significant increase in the volume of work in MAFF's and HSE's Evaluation Units. Although the waiting time for applications to extend uses of approved products has been halved over the past year, two key tasks remain: to review to current standards those products approved some time ago, and to speed up the consideration of applications for new pesticides. These are objectives to which consumer, environmental and industry interests attach great importance.

3. To meet these challenges my colleagues and I are providing for further substantial increases in resources in order to improve the effectiveness of the evaluation process. Within the MAFF Evaluation Unit the numbers of scientific staff in post have risen from 25 in April 1986 to 54 currently. In the coming 12 months we shall increase these by a further 60 per cent. to 86. We have introduced special pay scales to recruit and retain the specialised scientific staff required.

4. The physical resources available to the Unit are also being enhanced. New accommodation is being acquired, which will bring the Unit together on a single site, at the AFRC's Harpenden complex. This will be the first MAFF office to be equipped in 1991 with computerised office systems, costing about £1 million, to enhance efficiency.

5. In addition to recruiting extra scientists, we are planning to contract out discrete blocks of work in order to increase throughput. Several independent laboratories have been approached and specimen contracts will be issued shortly as a pilot exercise. The contract work will of course be subject to close monitoring for quality assurance. The internal resources saved will be switched to the highly demanding emergency reviews.

6. Because of the high standards of safety which we apply, and the complexity of modern regulatory work, the training of the new staff will be given high priority. Although this will absorb significant resources we nevertheless aim to increase threefold the capacity to process new pesticides, from eight in 1990-91, to 12 in 1991-92, 20 in 1992-93, and 25 per year thereafter. This is a realistic plan and these targets are stretching but achievable.

7. Similarly the number of reviews of older pesticides, full and partial, will rise from 12 in 1990-91 to 29 in 1991-92, and 37 in 1992-93. The total number of pesticides registered in the United Kingdom before 1981 is over 250 and all these will be reviewed, subject to a priority ranking exercise which is being established, with the advice of the Advisory Committee on Pesticides. For agricultural pesticides, we intend this work to form part of a co-ordinated 10-year European Community programme for the review of older pesticides. Indeed, what we have proposed will more than match our likely share of the Community programme. We always of course check as a matter of urgency any approved pesticides against which doubts have been cast. On non-agricultural pesticides the United Kingdom Government has taken the lead in pressing the EC for a harmonised approach similar to that proposed for agricultural pesticides.

8. We have already approached all approval holders to alert them to the review programme and to ask whether or not they hold data packages for their products which are capable of meeting modern standards. Those who have not replied will shortly have their approvals withdrawn.

9. To ensure that such a large review programme does not recur we have decided that in future all approvals will be time-limited, so that regular reviews will be required automatically if re-approval is sought.

10. Inevitably the increase in resources will give rise to an increase in fees for the approval of a new active ingredient. The increase from £7,000 to £30,000 has taken effect from yesterday. The pesticides industry as a whole has made public its willingness to pay for the additional resources necessary to provide a better service.

11. A key element in maintaining public confidence in the safety of approved pesticides is the advice from the Advisory Committee on Pesticides which is impartial and of the highest level of expertise. My colleagues and I have decided that all evaluations prepared by the Committee and the data underlying them will be made available for public scrutiny in as open a way as anywhere in the world.

12. Although our data indicates that our food generally contains very low levels of pesticide residues I have been examining how we might obtain further reassurance on the safety of our food. The Government already carries out an extensive programme of testing food, feedingstuffs, human tissues and wildlife, costing £1·5 million per year. We have approached representatives of food manufacturers, retailers, and local authorities who also perform a significant number of tests and they have in principle agreed to make their results available to the Government. This will greatly enlarge the data available on residues. For example, we know already that the number of samples of wheat available to us will be multiplied at least ten times.

13. In relation to non-agricultural pesticides there is also a good story to tell. Since April 1987 the numbers of HSE scientists dealing with pesticide approval have increased from 6·6 to 18·5. This will further increase to 25·5 in April 1990, and it is intended to reach the complement of 31·5 by April 1991. However, as with MAFF, this will require that the training of staff is given a high priority and there is no significant loss of staff to outside organisations.

14. Thus it is envisaged that by 1994 evaluation work of new active ingredients will start immediately an application for approval is received.

15. HSE plans to have completed its review programme of older non-agricultural pesticides within the next 10 years. Reviews have already been initiated on a number of active ingredients on which there has been public concern, and a review programme drawn up for the rest.

Salmonella

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has on the pasteurisation of eggs from salmonella enteritidis infected flocks in the United States of America; and whether he has any information on the incidence of food poisoning from pasteurised eggs from salmonella enteritidis infected flocks in the United States of America.

Mr. Maclean: Very little information has been published on either pasteurisation of eggs from infected flocks or the incidence of food poisoning from pasteurised egg produced from eggs from infected flocks in the United States of America.

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will describe the procedure through which pasteurisation of eggs from infected flocks can encourage cross-contamination in circumstances where raw liquid egg is commonly contaminated by salmonella.

Mr. Maclean: The risk of cross-contamination exists in any food processing plant and therefore the use of contaminated raw materials should be avoided as far as possible. The possible routes of contamination will depend on several factors, including plant design, hygiene procedures etc.

Irradiated Potatoes

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what will be the effect on the production and identification of solanin in potatoes exposed to irradiation.

Mr. Maclean: In 1986 the Advisory Committee on Irradiated and Novel Foods assessed extensive data relating to the irradiation of potatoes and found no evidence of adverse effects.

Nitrates

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the book, "Nitrates: The Threat to Food and Water", by Nigel Dudley, published by Green Print.

Mr. Curry: We have already done so.

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the pilot nitrate scheme.

Mr. Gummer: Following extensive consultations on the pilot nitrate scheme, I have decided, subject to Commission clearance under article 93,3 of the treaty of Rome, to confirm that 10 areas should be designated as nitrate sensitive areas (NSAs), and that intensive advisory campaigns should be conducted in a further nine areas.

This important new pilot scheme is aimed at tackling the problem, experienced throughout Europe and elsewhere, of unacceptable levels of nitrate leaching from farmland into water sources. It will provide valuable insights into a problem which is not scientifically fully understood, and point the way for future policy. I hope the scheme will be a major success and that it will receive the high level of support which it deserves.

As indicated in earlier announcements, payments will be made to those farmers in nitrate sensitive areas who voluntarily undertake to observe restrictions on their agricultural practices. I hope that as many farmers as possible will enter our basic scheme under which payments will be made for restrictions on all their NSA land which, while substantial, will enable them broadly to maintain current farming patterns. These payments will vary depending on the nitrate sensitive area in line with overall differences in the costs of compliance between different areas.

Farmers who participate in the basic scheme will in addition be able to enter the premium scheme, by converting some or all of their arable land to various forms of grassland. Payments will vary depending on the nitrate sensitive area (since overall assessments of the costs of compliance differ), the option chosen, and the proportion of a farmer's land affected, (since the latter affects the fixed cost savings). The premium scheme requirements will help to protect the environment generally and promote conservation.

The areas, basic rates of payment, and premium rates for conversion of arable to unfertilised ungrazed grassland are as follows, (£/ha):

Nitrate sensitive areas (NSAs)

	Basic	Premium [percentage of total holding] 0-25	25-75	75-100
1. Sleaford (Lincolnshire)	85	380	290	200
2. Branston Booths (Lincolnshire)	95	380	290	200
3. Ogbourne St. George (Wiltshire)	55	380	290	200
4. Old Chalford (Oxfordshire)	55	330	265	200
5. Egford (Somerset)	55	380	290	200
6. Boughton (Nottinghamshire)	75	280	240	200
7. Wildmoor (Hereford and Worcestershire)	70	280	240	200
8. Wellings (Staffordshire and Shropshire)	65	280	240	200
9. Tom Hill (Staffordshire)	70	280	240	200
10. Kilham (Humberside)	55	330	265	200

Premium rates (which are paid in addition to basic rates) will be adjusted, in relation to those shown above, as follows:

	£
For unfertilised grazed grass	30/ha less
For grass with up to 150 kg N/ha	110/ha less
For grass and woodland	100/ha less

Though for the latter, payments under the farm woodland scheme should also apply.

Intensive pig and poultry farmers will receive individually assessed payments towards the cost of additional storage (pig farmers only) and/or transport requirements calculated against number of livestock.

The advisory areas will be as follows:

1. The Swells (Gloucestershire)
2. Bircham and Fring (Norfolk)
3. Hillington, Gayton and Congham (Norfolk)
4. Sedgeford (Norfolk)
5. Fowlmere (Cambridgeshire)
6. Far Baulker (Nottinghamshire)
7. Dotton and Colaton (Devon)
8. Cringle Brook (Lincolnshire and Leicestershire)
9. Bourne Brook (Warwickshire)

All farms in the advisory areas will be visited by an ADAS officer and encouraged voluntarily to follow practices designed to reduce the risk of nitrate leaching at little or no cost to themselves or even a small benefit.

Full details of the measures and payment rates have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The Secretary of State for the Environment and I shall be laying before the House in due course a statutory instrument designating the NSAs and setting out the measures and payment rates under the basic and premium schemes. Our intention is for the order to come into effect by 1 June.

Bass

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he proposes to introduce his proposals for nursery areas for the conservation of bass.

Mr. Curry: I hope to make an announcement shortly.

Sea Fisheries Committees

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will list the membership of each sea fisheries committee; how many vacancies there are in each committee; and what organisation each member of the committee represents.

Mr. Curry: The membership of sea fisheries committees is made up of persons separately appointed by county or metropolitan district councils, the National Rivers Authority and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food or the Secretary of State for Wales. The relevant numbers appointed to each committee are currently as follows:

Committee	*Councils*	*NRA*	*Ministers*	*Total*
Cornwall	13	1	12	26
Cumbria	7	1	6	14
Devon	10	1	8	19
Eastern	10	1	9	20
Isles of Scilly	4	0	4	8
Kent and Essex	10	1	7	18
North Eastern	18	1	15	34
Northumberland	10	1	9	20
North Western and North Wales	18	1	16	35
Southern	10	1	8	19
Sussex	10	1	9	20
South Wales	10	1	9	20

The Sea Fisheries Regulation Act 1966 requires that those persons appointed by Ministers must be acquainted with the needs and opinions of the fishing interests of the district. Persons are not appointed, however, on the basis of their representing particular organisations. At the present time there are no vacancies amongst the Ministers' appointees.

Agricultural Workers

Mr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the average number of hours worked weekly by agricultural workers in each year since 1979.

Mr. Gummer: The information requested, based upon continuous surveys of the earnings and hours of hired agriculture workers conducted by the agricultural departments, is shown in the table.

Average weekly hours of regular whole-time hired male workers, 20 years and over, in agriculture, United Kingdom 1979–89

Year	*Average weekly hours*
1979	46·2
1980	45·7
1981	46·3
1982	46·1
1983	46·5
1984	46·2
1985	46·9
1986	46·7
1987	46·5
1988	46·6
[1]1989	46·5

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[1] Forecast.

Sources: Agriculture in the United Kingdom, 1989 White Papers on the Annual Review of Agriculture 1984 to 1988.

Mr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the average level of gross weekly earnings for agricultural workers in each year since 1979 in cash, constant prices and as a proportion of national average manual earnings.

Mr. Gummer: The information requested, based upon continuous surveys of the earnings and hours of hired agricultural workers conducted by the agriculture departments, is shown in the table.

Average weekly earnings of regular whole-time hired male workers, 20 years and over, in agriculture, United Kingdom, 1979 to 1989

	Average earnings of agricultural workers		
	£/week	*Index in real terms (a)*	*As a proportion of average manual earnings (b)*
1979	71·8	89·3	78
1980	86·0	90·7	78
1981	96·3	90·8	80
1982	105·4	91·5	80
1983	116·6	96·8	82
1984	122·6	96·9	80
1985	134·1	100·0	82
1986	140·8	101·5	81
1987	148·0	102·5	80
1988	155·4	102·6	77
[1]1989	166·0	101·6	76

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[1] forecast.

Notes: *(a)* Deflated by the retail prices index (1985 = 100).

(b) Based on the average earnings in April of each year of full-time manual male employee on adult rates of pay, earnings not affected by absence, from the new earnings survey.

Sources: Agriculture in the United Kingdom, 1989.

White Papers on the Annual Review of Agriculture, 1984.

Land Drainage

Mr. Soley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will indicate the arrangements which will need to be applied, following the introduction of the community charge, to precept drainage rates for those internal drainage boards which are not properly constituted under the Land Drainage Act 1976.

Mr. Gummer: The Internal Drainage Boards (Finance) Regulations 1990 which were laid before Parliament on 23 January, modify the powers of internal drainage boards to make and levy drainage rates under and in accordance with provisions of the Land Drainage Act 1976 or the provisions of any local Act. They apply to the raising of expenses for financial years commencing 1 April 1990.

Mr. Soley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what arrangements currently exist to ensure that internal drainage boards do not levy precepts on domestic dwellings that would otherwise be disproportionate to the resources devoted to agricultural land drainage; and whether any new arrangements will apply following the introduction of the community charge.

Mr. Gummer: The arrangements for financing internal drainage boards have been modified in the light of the new system of local government finance operative from 1 April: the changes, including the proportions of a board's expenses to be raised by drainage rates on the agricultural sector and special levies on the non-agricultural sector via charging authorities, are set out in the Internal Drainage Boards (Finance) Regulations 1990 which were laid before Parliament on 23 January. Provision has been made for boards to continue to be able to levy differential amounts in respect of areas (sub districts) considered to benefit less from their operations. Also charging authorities will be entitled to appoint members to the boards to which they contribute by virtue of special levies.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police (Allocations)

Sir Anthony Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria he applies in determining the allocation of police to each county in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. and learned Friend considers applications for increases in police establishments on the basis of the demonstrated needs of forces and in the light of advice from Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary. The general criteria which govern assessment of applications for increases are set out in Home Office circulars 114/1983 and 106/1988, copies of which are available in the Library.

Imprisoned Mothers

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will consider allowing imprisoned mothers to have day parole to visit their children.

Mr. Mellor: Powers already exist for the temporary release of sentenced prisoners for this purpose and they are used in appropriate circumstances.

Marchioness

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to make all police and Government reports and associated papers available to the coroner's inquest into the deaths of those aboard the Marchioness.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Secretary of State does not have power to direct the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis or other Government Departments to disclose reports to a coroner's inquest, but in this particular case I am not aware that the coroner is experiencing any difficulties in obtaining the information that he needs.

Deportation

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been served with the notice of the intention to make deportation orders against them on the grounds that this would be conducive to the public good for reasons of national security in the past 12 months; and if he will provide a breakdown of their countries of citizenship.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Since 28 March 1989, 14 Iranians and one Iraqi have been served with notice of intention to make deportation orders against them on these grounds.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the reply to the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington on 6 March, *Official Report*, column *560*, at which institutes of education the 15 deported Iranian citizens involved in education were studying.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Seven were studying at the university of Manchester institute of science and technology, two at South Bank polytechnic, one each at Brunel university, the polytechnic of Central London, the City of London polytechnic, the university of Bradford and Middlesex polytechnic. The remaining student had previously studied at Hatfield polytechnic.

Asylum

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many of the Turkish Kurdish asylum seekers who sought entry in May and June 1989 whom he was minded to refuse have since been granted refugee status;

(2) how many of the Turkish Kurdish asylum seekers who sought entry in May and June 1989 and who were initially granted one year exceptional leave to remain have since been recognised as refugees.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: A total of 240 of the Turkish nationals who sought asylum on arrival in April, May and June 1989 have been recognised as refugees. Central records do not distinguish at what stage of the procedure applicants were granted refugee status and this could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what inquiries are made into the political affiliations and background of interpreters before they are used in asylum cases.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: All prospective interpreters are interviewed by a chief immigration officer or more senior officer to assess their linguistic qualifications and personal suitability. Other checks may be made if necessary.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will make a statement on the length of time it is taking to process applications to vary one year exceptional leave to remain permits to refugee status under the 1951 convention on refugees.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: These applications are dealt with as quickly as possible by the refugee section of the immigration and nationality department. Priority is however being given to resolving outstanding applications for asylum made by some 3,700 Turkish nationals on arrival in April, May and June 1989.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will make a statement on the length of time it is taking for decisions to be reached on whether to grant entry clearance to the dependents of Turkish Kurdish asylum seekers who have been granted one year exceptional leave to remain.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There is no provision in the immigration rules for this purpose. Dependents are normally admitted to join a person granted exceptional leave if he is still in the United Kingdom after four years. However, all applications for entry clearance in these cases are referred to the Home Office to consider whether there are special circumstances which would justify earlier admission. Decisions on these applications are reached as soon as possible.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will place in the Library a copy of *(a)* the training manual for immigration officers who interview asylum seekers and *(b)* any written instructions that are given to interpreters.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There is no single comprehensive training manual for immigration officers who interview asylum seekers. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given in reply to a question by him on 14 November 1989 at column *205*. On the question of instructions for interpreters, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given in reply to a question by him on 14 November 1989 at column *203*.

Interpreters

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the immigration service is still utilising the interpreting skills of Mr. Gurdenez.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Yes.

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether there has been any change in selection and training procedures for interpreters following the case of Mr. Gurdenez.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No, but an interpreter employed for the first time is now required to give a written undertaking that he will translate faithfully and to the best of his ability.

Suicide

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a month by month breakdown of the information given in the table in his answer of 12 March, *Official Report*, columns *18-21*, in respect of inmates in Armley prison, Leeds, for suicides and attempted suicides in 1989.

Mr. Mellor: The table gives the number of inmates who were found at an inquest to have committed suicide, and who attempted suicide, at Leeds prison in each month during 1989.

Suicides and attempted suicides at HM prison Leeds in 1989

Month	*Suicides*	*Attempted suicides*
January	—	5
February	1	13
March	—	4

Month	*Suicides*	*Attempted suicides*
April	—	18
May	—	4
June	—	—
July	—	5
August	—	5
September	—	2
October	—	—
November	1	—
December	—	2
Total	2	58

Sir Charles Irving: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many suicides and how many attempted suicides have taken place in penal establishments in each of the last 10 years; and how many of these were *(a)* remand prisoners, *(b)* female prisoners, *(c)* prisoners under 21 and *(d)* prisoners from ethnic minorities;

(2) how many suicides and how many attempted suicides have taken place in each individual penal establishment in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Mellor *[pursuant to his reply of 12 March at column 18]:* I now understand that the figure of 64 given for the number of attempted suicides at Leeds prison during 1989 was incorrect. The correct figure is 58. The table is an amended version of table A in my earlier answer.

*Table A

Suicides at prison establishments 1980 to 1989 and attempted suicides 1985 to 1989

Establishment	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	[1] [2]	*1989*
Acklington	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	(—)
Albany	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(2)
Ashford	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	(1)
Ashwell	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(1)
Askham Grange	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(—)
Aylesbury	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(1)
Bedford	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	(—)
Birmingham	—	1	—	—	—	2	—	1	1	—	(24)
Blundeston	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(1)
Bristol	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	(3)
Brixton	5	3	1	4	5	2	2	3	1	1	(21)
Brockhill	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(1)
Camp Hill	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	(2)
Campsfield House	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(—)
Canterbury	1	—	2	—	—	—	1	3	—	2	(7)
Cardiff	—	1	2	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	(5)
Castingdon	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(—)
Channings Wood	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	(4)
Chelmsford	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(5)
Coldingley	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	(1)
Cookham Wood	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(3)
Dartmoor	—	1	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	1	(3)
Deerbolt	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(2)
Dorchester	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	(2)
Drake Hall	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(1)
Durham	—	—	1	—	1	2	—	3	1	2	(15)
Eastwood Park	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(—)
Erlestoke	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(—)
Everthorpe	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(1)
Exeter	—	1	—	—	2	1	1	1	1	1	(19)
Featherstone	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(1)
Feltham	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(9)
Ford	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(1)
Frankland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	(4)
Full Sutton	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(2)
Garth	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	(3)
Gartree	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(1)
Glen Parva	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	(6)
Gloucester	—	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	—	—	(1)
Grendon	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	(6)
Guys Marsh	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(1)
Haslar	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(1)
Hatfield	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(1)
Haverigg	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(2)
Hewell Grange	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(1)
Highpoint	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	(5)
Hindley	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	(23)
Holloway	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(12)
Hull	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	(28)	
Kingston	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	(—)
Kirkham	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(—)
Kirklevington	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(—)
Lancaster	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	(3)
Latchmere House	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(7)
Leeds	2	—	1	1	1	2	—	2	4	2	(58)
Leicester	—	—	—	—	1	2	—	—	—	—	(2)
Lewes	—	—	2	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	(7)
Leyhill	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	(—)

Establishment	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	[1] [2] *1989*
Lincoln	—	1	—	—	—	1	1	2	1	— (2)
Lindholme	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	— (6)
Littlehey	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1 (11)
Liverpool	1	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	— (19)
Long Lartin	—	2	1	—	—	—	—	1	—	— (4)
Low Newton	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	— (16)
Maidstone	1	—	—	1	—	1	—	—	1	— (—)
Manchester	—	1	—	1	—	1	2	3	—	3 (26)
Mount	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	— (3)
New Hall	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	— (2)
North Sea Camp	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	— (1)
Northallerton	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	— (3)
Norwich	—	—	—	1	2	—	1	1	—	— (12)
Nottingham	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	— (3)
Onley	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	— (2)
Oxford	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	— (1)
Parkhurst	—	—	2	—	2	—	—	—	—	— (—)
Pentonville	1	—	—	1	1	2	—	2	1	— (4)
Portland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	— (3)
Preston	—	—	—	—	1	1	2	—	1	— (12)
Pucklechurch	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	— (6)
Ranby	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	— (2)
Reading	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	— (2)
Risley	1	—	—	—	—	1	1	3	4	— (9)
Rochester	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	1 (—)
Rudgate	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	— (—)
Shepton Mallet	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	— (4)
Shrewsbury	1	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	1	— (15)
Spring Hill	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	— (1)
Stafford	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	1 (6)
Stoke Heath	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	2	—	— (2)
Styal	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	— (—)
Sudbury	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	— (1)
Swaleside	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	— (4)
Swansea	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	1	— (6)
Swinfen Hall	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	— (2)
Usk	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	— (—)
The Verne	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	— (1)
Thorn Cross	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	— (—)
Thorp Arch	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	— (—)
Wakefield	1	2	1	—	1	—	1	1	1	— (2)
Wandsworth	1	—	—	—	1	2	—	3	1	1 (2)
Wayland	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	— (3)
Wellingborough	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	— (—)
Werrington	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	— (—)
Wetherby	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	— (2)
Winchester	—	2	—	2	—	—	—	1	—	2 (10)
Wormwood Scrubs	1	—	—	—	—	2	1	2	2	1 (4)
Wymott	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	— (3)
Total	21	16	17	21	23	23	17	40	30	28

Notes:

[1] Figures in brackets are for attempted suicides.

[2] Inquests have yet to be held on seven inmates who died in 1989 and whose deaths are thought to have been suicides. These deaths occurred at Her Majesty's prisons Brixton, Cardiff, Long Lartin, Manchester, Rochester and Swansea and at Her Majesty's remand centre Risley.

Firearms

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether the presently proposed fees for *(a)* firearms certificates and *(b)* shotgun certificates cover the administration of both the 1968 and 1988 Firearms Acts;

(2) what proportion, or amounts of the presently proposed fees increase for *(a)* firearms certificates and *(b)* shotgun certificates are related to the Firearms Act 1988.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The proposed fees do not include any costs arising from the administration of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988. These will be assessed during the course of the multi-force scrutiny being undertaken by the Association of Chief Police Officers.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he consulted the Firearms Consultative Committee before proposing increases in fees for firearms and shotgun certificates and their renewal or variation.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. It is for the Government to decide the level at which firearms fees should be set based on its policy of full recovery of the costs of administering the firearms licensing system. However, any views that the Firearms Consultative Committee may wish to put to the Home Secretary about the way in which firearms controls are administered will be carefully taken into account.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will place in the Library a copy of the views of the Firearms Consultative Committee on his proposals to increase fees for the issue, renewal or variation of firearms and shotgun licences.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Firearms Consultative Committee is an independent statutory body. It is for the committee itself to decide whether any views which it may have on the proposed fees increase should be included in the annual report which it is required to make to my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and which, once made, will be laid before Parliament.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he intends to introduce further increases in the fees for *(a)* firearms certificates and *(b)* shot gun certificates this year.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We propose to adjust the fees for both firearm and shot gun certificates in the light of the findings of a multi-force scrutiny of the firearms licensing system being undertaken by the Association of Chief Police Officers. The results of the scrutiny should be known later this year, though it is not possible at this stage to say whether any further increases in fees will be introduced in 1990.

Tape Recorded Evidence

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what level of charges has been set, and on what basis, for the supply of copies of tape recordings made in the course of police investigation of criminal matters; and on what date such charges were introduced.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Whether charges are made and the level of those charges are matters for individual chief officers to determine.

Mr. Bermingham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he proposes to take to ensure that those representing defendants in contested criminal matters are supplied with copies of tape recordings made during investigations; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Home Office circular 76/1988, which gives guidance to the police about tape recording interviews with suspects, gives the suspect and his legal representative a right of access to a copy of the master tape if he is to be prosecuted. In practice he will either receive a copy of the tape or be afforded facilities to listen to one at a police station.

Consultancies

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1989 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1989, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment; and what is the total amount that his Department has budgeted to spend in the current year.

Mr. Waddington *[holding answer 28 March 1990]:* The Home Office spent approximately £3,404,000 on management and computer consultancies, excluding hardware and software purchases, in 1989. The Home Office has budgeted to spend approximately £3,729,000 in the current year. The following contracts were awarded to management and computer consultants in 1989:

ABT Books Inc.	Provision of Seminar
Admiral	Accounting and Financial Management Information System
Admiral	Computerised Course Control Project
Admiral	Technical Assurance
Barton	Fee for Membership of PNC Board
Batalas	Quality Assurance
BBN	Drugs Unit Experiment System
BIS	Government Network Security
BIS	Magistrates Court Contingency Planning
BIS	LAFIS—Local Authority Financial Information System
BIS	Structured Cabling
BIS Applied Systems	BASIS Stores System
Bransom	Development of Batch Retrieval Programs
British Print Federation	Review of Production Control Procedures
CACI	Household Occupancy re. Public Protection
Captain Hannant	Standard System for Control of Police Aviation
Clark, Neville	Consultancy on Quality Systems
Claymore Services Ltd.	Provision of INFOMAP (Police Mapping Package) tutorial days
Clayton, J. K.	Review of Voluntary Effort in Civil Defence
Cogitaire	Review of Information Desk Computer Network Systems Requirement
Computer Sciences (CSC)	Network Design
Computer Sciences (CSC)	PNC2—Interim network
Cooper and Lybrand	Review of the Suitability and Performance of PIMIS in the Glasgow and Liverpool Passport Offices
Data Logic	Improved Man/Machine Interface For the Holmes (major enquiry) Project
Data Logic	Local Area Network Strategy
Datasolve	Technical Support for PNC2
Daton Systems	Help Desk Consultancy
DBI Associates	General Consultancy Support
Deloitte Haskins and Sells	Warehousing and Distribution Study

DLP Consultancy	Feasibility Study into Capacity Building and Networking of Voluntary Organisations
Dowty	Fire Brigade Mobilisation Communications
Eosys	Police National Network
Ernst and Young	Automatic Fingerprint Recognition Requirement
Ernst and Young	A Review of the Management and Funding of the Community Transport's Central Administration Unit
Ewbank Reece	Microwave Communications
Grafton	Provision of Staff for Application Development Team
Iliffe, A. Esq.	Production of Selection Test Item Block
ISL	Finance Information System
JSB Computer Systems	POLINDEX—Animal Experiment Index
Kermon Associates	HOUSE—Strategic UNIX Project
Kermon Associates	Procurement Workshop
Kermon Associates	Project Management
Lawrence and Lawrence	PNC Board Member/Attendance at Committees
Leicester Polytechnic	Criminal Statistics Profiling
Logica	Fire Brigade Mobilisation and Control
Logica	Suspect Index
Management Exchange, The	Project Management Course for PRSU Police Officers
McDonald Associates	Design of Counselling Training Modules
National Centre for Information Technology	Production of an Advisory Booklet to Police Forces
Oracle	Commissioning and Configuration of SRDB's Oracle Accounting System
Oracle	Further Tailoring work of SRDB's Accounting Software
Oracle	Magistrate's Courts' Standard Specification
PA	Police National Computer Replacement Project
PA	Project Management
PA Consulting	Data flows in the CJS
PA Consulting	Management Review of Forensic Science Service
PA Consulting	Prison Service Organisation Review
PA Consulting	Provision of Project Support Office Staff
Paradis	Fingerprint Imagery
PE Inbucon	Issue of TV Licenses and Saving Stamps by the Post Office
Philo, G. Esq.	Drafting Management Selection Exercise
Price Waterhouse	Options for the privatisation of the Terrestrial Transmission Service in the United Kingdom
REDE	Quality Assurance Programme
Recognition Research	Recognition Research
St. George's Medical School	TICTAC—Pill Identification
S D Europe	Study into Police Use of Aircraft
Skills with People	Overview of Four Race Relations Projects
Smith Associates	Study into the Evaluation of Maintenance Options
Smith Associates	Evaluation of Tender Responses
Software AG	Technical Management
Software Services	Immigration Service Intelligence Unit
Sopwell House	Subsidiary fees for ABT Books
Sudbury Consultants	Leadership Training
System Assurance	Security Review
Touche Ross	Financial and Management Accountancy System
Touche Ross	Police National Computer Replacement Project
Touche Ross	Management Accounting System
Touche Ross	Management Information Strategy
Touche Ross	Professional Advice in Project Management
Touche Ross	Strategy Study
TSC Limited	Software Support for Operational Development
University of Aberdeen	EFIT—Face Recognition
Watts, Reginald	Marketing of Fire Service College
Yale Data	HOUSE—Strategic UNIX Project
Yale Data	Feasibility Study

Overseas Travel

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people travelled overseas for the years ended September 1988 and September 1989.

Mr. Nicholls: I have been asked to reply.

It is estimated that United Kingdom residents made 28·1 million trips abroad in the year ending September 1988 and 30·8 million trips in the year ending September 1989.

ENVIRONMENT

Coventry City Council

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will establish an investigation into the conduct of the Coventry city council housing committee; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. Friend has no powers to intervene.

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will take steps to ensure that there is no use of undue or illegal pressure on tenants of Coventry city council in relation to their right to determine whether to transfer to alternative landlords.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. Friend has no powers to intervene.

Mr. John Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received concerning the conduct of Coventry city council in relation to its tenants and the prospective establishment of housing associations; what response he has made; and if he will bring forward proposals for legislative powers to allow investigation of alleged malpractice in respect of the provisions for enabling local authority tenants to transfer to other landlords.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 30 January 1990]:* It has been suggested to me that Coventry city council is opposed to its tenants exercising tenants' choice. Alternative landlords under tenants' choice are approved by the Housing Corporation in many areas of the country, including Coventry.

Chlorofluorocarbons

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress Britain is making towards implementing the Montreal protocol on chlorofluorocarbon reductions.

Mr. Trippier *[pursuant to his reply, 21 March 1990, c. 667]:* I regret that my earlier reply incorrectly stated that the United Kingdom had reduced production and consumption of CFCs by 50 per cent. when the statement was true only in respect of consumption. Production has been significantly cut since 1986 but not yet by that much. The difference between reductions in production and consumption is largely accounted for by United Kingdom exports of CFCs and the fact that our trading partners have not been able to match our performance in the reduction of CFC consumption.

Planning Policy Guidance Notes

Mr. Allason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will publish the new planning policy guidance notes to replace the existing PPG3, "Land for Housing".

Mr. Moynihan: In the late spring or early summer.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list each criterion used to assess the standard spending assessment for Kirklees council for the year 1990-91; how the appropriate level of Government grant is then calculated for each individual criterion; and what is the total amount of Government grant actually awarded to Kirklees council for each individual criterion.

Mr. Chope: The standard spending assessment (SSA) for Kirklees is calculated according to the formulae set out in the Revenue Support Grant Distribution Report (England) approved by this House on 18 January. Revenue support grant is distributed so that all authorities, including Kirklees, could set a community charge of £278 (before the safety net and special grants) in 1990-91 if they and the authorities' precepting on the collection fund in their area spent at the level of their standard spending assessments. In addition to revenue support grant for 1990-91 Kirklees will receive £37 million or £132 per adult from the combined effect of the safety net and the special grant for low rateable value areas.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether there are any community charge havens around the coast apart from Caldey Island.

Mr. Chope: No. The Caldey Island Bill, about to come before Parliament, would make residents of Caldey Island subject to the community charge.

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total amount of financial support towards revenue expenditure to be provided by central Government for the first year of the new local government finance system in England.

Mr. David Hunt: Central Government are providing over £15 billion of financial support towards revenue expenditure for the first year of the new system.

In 1990-91 aggregate external finance of £23·1 billion will be provided to local government to finance local authority services in England. The redistributed proceeds of the new business rate pool will be £10·43 billion, while central Government are providing approximately £12·7 billion in financial support, made up of £9·4 billion of revenue support grant and £3·2 billion in specific grants.

Central Government are also providing around £2 billion for community charge benefit in England, which is in addition to the £0·4 billion cost (estimated on an England only basis) of the once-for-all uprating of income support in April 1989 to provide help towards the remaining portion of the charge. Local authorities are to be reimbursed in full for the cost of transitional relief, which in England in 1990-91 will be £350 million (part of the £810 million the Government will provide in the first three years of the new system).

Help will be provided towards councils' administrative costs for the transitional relief scheme amounting in 1990-91 to £21 million.

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has yet made regulations relating to the use of new economic development power for local authorities in section 33 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

Mr. David Hunt: I recognise the important role that local authorities have to play in this area. Local authorities have been invaluable in supporting start-up businesses where venture capital from the private sector could be less readily obtainable.

I know of many examples of existing good practice in economic development by local authorities, in many cases working with central Government or European Commission programmes. Regulations will ensure that local authorities' proposals are well-targeted and used in an effective and sensible way.

I have now laid before Parliament the Local Government (Promotion of Economic Development) Regulations 1990. The power for local authorities to take steps for the promotion of economic development came into force on 1 April 1990. Where local authorities choose to use their existing powers to promote economic development the regulations will not apply until 1 July 1990. Transitional provisions are also included for commitments entered into before 1 April 1990.

Section 33 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 provides a general power for local authorities to take steps for promoting the economic development of their area. It specifies a wide range of activities that a local authority can undertake for that purpose, but without prejudice to the generality of the power. The power also will enable local authorities to make grants to voluntary bodies to assist in the task of promoting economic development. However, there are certain activities that the Government consider are not appropriate for local authorities:

Local authorities will not, subject to certain important exceptions, themselves be able to undertake banking, investment business, insurance, estate agency, auditing, conveyancing, valuations, manufacturing or trading (regulation 5). They will, however, be able to assist others to do so.

There is no geographical restriction other than that on the power to give grants, loans and financial guarantees to undertakings conducted with a view to a profit, but only where that assistance exceeds £10,000 per annum to any one business (regulation 7). Where it does exceed that level the power to give such assistance is limited to those authorities in parts of the country which already receive some form of central Government priority, or where they form part of a travel-to-work-area with above average unemployment.

The regulations contain no restrictions on the giving of grants or subsidies to trainees or to the providers of training. However, with effect from 1 April 1991, the provision of training or education services by local authorities that are not education authorities, other than for their own members or employees, must be in line with a broad programme of such services agreed with the education authorities (regulation 8(2)). This will prevent conflict or unnecessary duplication of effort between authorities.

Direct wage subsidies to commercial undertakings are not permitted (regulation 6(2)) but there are specific exemptions. These cover grants towards the cost of employing persons who have been unemployed immediately before becoming employed by the grant recipient and grants towards the cost of employing trainees and those with particular skills. The regulations do not restrict such grants given as part of a central Government or European Commission scheme.

The regulations do not, otherwise, prevent the doing of anything connected with the provision of training facilities, the construction or maintenance of buildings or the management of any land in which the authority has an interest, the promotion of tourism or the provision of information to the public (regulation 5(2)).

Separate regulations will be made covering the procedures for the notification to the European Commission of local authority aid to industry under articles 92-94 of the treaty of Rome. Those regulations will not come into force before 1 July 1990.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a further statement on community charge liability for seafarers and offshore workers.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 2 April 1990]:* I have nothing to add to the answer that I gave my hon. Friend on 21 March 1990 at column *660*.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what is the total budgeted local government expenditure in England and Wales for 1990-91; and how much of this will be raised by *(a)* the community charge, *(b)* the uniform business rate and *(c)* Government grant;

(2) what was the total budgeted local government expenditure in 1989-90 for England and Wales; and how much of this was raised by *(a)* domestic rates, *(b)* non-domestic rates and *(c)* rate support grant.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 2 April 1990]:* Total budgeted local government expenditure in 1989-90 for England is £29,564 million. Domestic rate income, non-domestic rate income, and rate support grant are £9,679 million, £9,680 million, and £9,577 million, respectively. Total budgeted expenditure for all English authorities in 1990-91 is not yet available. Information relating to Welsh local authorities is a matter for the Secretary of State for Wales.

Residuary Body, London

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many buildings have been in the ownership of the London residuary body since the abolition of the Greater London council; how many of these have been sold to sitting tenants; how many have been transferred to the local borough council; how many have been transferred to Bromley borough council for onward sale; and what has happened to each of the remaining buildings.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Around 7,000 properties or managed units were vested in the London residuary body on abolition of the Greater London council. Without a case-by-case examination of all transactions, the number of sales to sitting tenants cannot be estimated. Some 550 properties have been transferred to borough councils and a further 50 to other public authorities. Schedule 2 to the London Residuary Body (Transfer of Property etc.) Order 1990 lists properties to be vested in the London borough of Bromley provided they had not already been disposed of when the order came into force on 29 March, and schedule 3 to the same order lists properties that have not otherwise been disposed of to be retained by the London residuary body.

Sewerage

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many short sea outfalls known to his Department discharge untreated sewage into the sea around the coast of England.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: There are 344 short outfalls—those less than 500m in length—in England which discharge to coastal or estuarial waters. At most of these sewage is discharged either with no treatment or with screening of gross solids only.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will be publishing the results of his research into the survival of viruses in sewage-polluted bathing waters.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The research project by WRC on rotaviruses in sewage discharges is proceeding satisfactorily and we expect to receive the final report of the study shortly.

Complaints

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* for each of the last 10 years *(a)* the number of complaints made against his Department to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, *(b)* the number of complaints upheld and *(c)* the action he took on *(b)*.

Mr. Chris Patten: The number of complaints *(a)* made and *(b)* upheld for the last 10 years is as follows:

	(a) *Complaints made*	*(b)* *Complaints upheld*
1989-90	[1]	[1]
1988-89	51	11
1987-88	64	1
1986-87	57	2
1985-86	47	1
1984-85	53	1
1983-84	44	4
1982-83	63	3
1981-82	57	4
1980-81	70	5

[1] Figures not yet available.

When the PCA upholds a complaint it is departmental practice to provide an appropriate remedy.

EPOCH

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on progress made in the European Communities climatology and natural hazards research programme; and how many institutions from the United Kingdom currently participate in EPOCH.

Mr. Trippier: The European Communities climatology and natural hazards research programme EPOCH runs for four years from its adoption on 20 November 1989. The European Commission has invited research proposals which are still undergoing selection with the advice of member states; it is not yet possible to say how many United Kingdom institutions will participate.

Association of London Authorities

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent meetings he has had with the chairman of the environment committee of the Association of London Authorities; and if he has any plans for a meeting.

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had no such meetings recently and has no plans for any. However, he is always willing to consider any representations the association may wish to put forward about environmental issues.

Low-level Waste, Warrington

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the reasons notified to him as to why certain low-level radioactive wastes are being deposited at Arpley meadows, Warrington, rather than at Drigg.

Mr. Trippier: The proposals made comply with the criteria published in "Radioactive Substances Act 1960, A Guide to the Administration of the Act", as suitable for disposal at landfill sites other than Drigg. I remain satisfied that such disposals are safe.

Fisons

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is taking over the agrochemicals company Fisons in respect of damage to *(a)* over 60 acres of peat bog at Thorne moors and Hatfield moor near Doncaster and *(b)* 62 acres on the north-west of Thorne moors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: I am advised by the Nature Conservancy Council that:

(a) The incident of damage to some 62 acres of peat bog occurred some two years ago. Contrary to recent media reports, the NCC has resolved the issue by discussion with Fisons plc. Negotiations to establish a nature reserve agreement over an area of land with the required potential for restoration are under way.

(b) Fisons plc is operating on Thorne moors with the benefit of planning consent. The NCC and Fisons plc have made considerable progress towards an agreed plan of working and restoration methods to be used. It would be a matter of considerable regret if precipitate action by either party should jeopardise this dialogue.

Ivory

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what applications for import licences have been received in respect of ivory exported from Zaire in June 1988 by Mr. Shiraz Virji of Ealing.

Mr. Trippier: The Department has received no such applications.

European Environment Agency

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on progress made in setting up the European Communities European Environment Agency; and what communications he has received from the chairman of the European Parliament's Environment Committee on the scope of the agency.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Amendments put forward by the European Parliament to the draft regulation on setting up the European Environment Agency were to a large extent agreed at the Environment Council on 22 March 1990, including a proposal to review the future scope of the agency in two years. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment met the chairman of the European Parliament's Environment Committee on 20 February and the scope of the agency was fully discussed. It is hoped that the regulation will be formally adopted at the next Environment Council this June.

Most member states have offered to host the agency's headquarters. The United Kingdom has nominated Cambridge as an ideal site but a decision on location has yet to be made.

Water Pollution Reports

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in his departmental library copies of research reports 1 to 11 in the water pollution report series of the European Commission's environment research programme within Directorate-General XII.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: These reports contain proceedings of a number of technical workshops organised by the European Commission under its environmental protection research programme and have been placed in the Library of the House.

Environment Research

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what financial or other resource commitment the United Kingdom has made towards the newly founded European environmental research organisation.

Mr. Trippier: None. It is our view that the European Environmental Research Organisation, which has very broad aims, should work within the framework of existing national and international bodies.

MIRAGE

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what role is played by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* United Kingdom scientists in the European Communities MIRAGE programme on the migration of radionuclides in the environment; and what benefits are expected to accrue from this programme for the United Kingdom.

Mr. Trippier: My Department contributes to United Kingdom participation in the MIRAGE programme. United Kingdom scientists carry out research as part of this programme leading to an improved understanding of the mechanism and processes that control the migration of radionuclides in the geosphere.

EC Director-General (Environment)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the Director-General for the Environment (DG-XI) of the European Commission; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Trippier: The Director-General for the Environment (DG-XI) was present at the meeting of the Environment Council which my right hon. Friend attended on 22 March. The outcome of the discussions was reported in my right hon. Friend's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) on 27 March.

Council House Sales, Norwich

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what further information he has on the determinations of the district valuer on council house sales in Norwich and the prices quoted by Norwich city council to update the information given in his written answer to the hon. Member for Norwich, North of 13 February, *Official Report,* column *186.*

Mr. Chope: In the three months to 31 March, the district valuer made 36 determinations of value under section 128 of the Housing Act 1985 on the application of tenants of Norwich city council. The value determined was lower than the council's opinion of value in 33 cases by an average of £4,204 or 8 per cent. and the same in three cases.

Asbestos

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the implementation of European Council directive 87/217/EEC on asbestos in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Trippier: As regards emissions to air, the Control of Asbestos in the Air Regulations 1990, which come into force on 5 April, give statutory force to the emission limit contained in the directive and impose a general duty not to cause significant environmental pollution by asbestos. All industrial plants involving the use of asbestos, as defined in the directive, are already subject to control by the relevant national air pollution inspectorates.

The statutory powers necessary to secure compliance with the directive's requirements on discharges of asbestos to water are contained in the effluent discharge requirements of the Control of Pollution Act 1974 and the Trade Effluent (Prescribed Processes and Substances) Regulations 1989.

The disposal of waste containing asbestos is controlled according to the directive's requirements by the site licence system under the Control of Pollution Act 1974, the Collection and Disposal of Waste Regulations 1988 and the Control of Pollution (Special Wastes) Regulations 1980, and by the containment and labelling requirements of the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 1987.

The directive is being implemented through parallel legislation in Northern Ireland.

Council of Environment Ministers

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the outcome of the meeting of the European Council of Environment Ministers on 22 March.

Mr. Trippier: I refer the hon. Member to the reply which my right hon. Friend gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) on 27 March at columns *117-18.*

Rent Arrears

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the latest figures on the arrears of rent outstanding to each local housing authority in England.

Mr. Chope: I have today arranged for this information to be placed in the Library.

Waste Damage (Civil Liability)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he received a copy of the European Commission proposal for a Council directive on civil liability for damage caused by waste, COM (89) 282 Final Syn 217; and what consideration has been given to the proposals.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 2 April 1990]:* The Secretary of State received a copy of the draft European Commission proposal in late September 1989. The Government's initial consideration was incorporated in an explanatory memorandum put before Parliament on 27 October 1989.

Environmental Education

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what contribution his Department makes to the Foundation for Environmental Education in Europe.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 2 April 1990]:* The Foundation for Environmental Education in Europe (FEE Europe) is a voluntary organisation based in Holland. As a result my Department does not contribute to it.

Toxic Waste

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has received any notification from Leigh Environmental Ltd. for the development of a toxic waste disposal facility at Todmorden in the Pennines.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 2 April 1990]:* The Secretary of State has received no such notification. It is initially for the appropriate local planning authority to consider any application for the development of a waste disposal facility.

College Green (Demonstration)

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment to whom, for what purpose and for how long he has granted permission to people to mount a demonstration on College Green.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 2 April 1990]:* Permission was given to four people to hold a protest against the community charge on Abingdon street gardens during park opening hours (5 am until midnight) from 9 am on 26 March until noon on 31 March.

EC Environmental Programme

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the European Council of Environment Ministers last discussed progress in implementation of the fourth environmental action programme; and what matters remain outstanding in the programme.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 30 March 1990]:* On 19 October 1987 the Council of Ministers agreed a resolution on the European Community's fourth environmental action programme, which emphasised the importance of concentrating on certain priority areas. Since then Ministers have not specifically discussed the action programme, but all the priority areas have been addressed in meetings of the Environment Council.

Tourist Information

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what reviews his Department is undertaking in respect of privatising local authorities' tourist information points; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: I have been asked to reply.

My Department is not undertaking any such reviews.

Property Services Agency and Crown Suppliers

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the transitional arrangements for occupational pensions of employees of the Property Services Agency and the Crown Suppliers which will apply between the date of sale and the provision to be made by the new employers.

Mr. Chope: Occupational pension schemes will be effective from the date of sale or the start of trading as a wholly-owned Government company, as appropriate. The staff will be asked whether they wish to join the relevant scheme, and if so, whether they wish to transfer to it any benefits they have accrued in the principal civil service pension scheme.

Water Privatistion

Mr. Gerald Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the administrative costs of the sale of the 10 water public limited companies.

Mr. Trippier: The costs to the Government in 1989-90 of the water share offers are estimated to be as follows:

	£ million
United Kingdom offers	
Underwriting	33·2
Selling and broking commission	6·7
Marketing	17·5
Share information office	7·2
Prospectus production and distribution	11·5
Receiving banks	17·7
Advisers' fees	18·7
Total (United Kingdom offers)	112·5
Overseas offers	15·4
Total (United Kingdom and overseas offers)	127·9

These costs represent about 2·5 per cent. of the proceeds from the sale of shares in the water share offers, which are estimated at £5,113 million. The costs exclude stamp duty and VAT on services provided to the Government which are not net costs to the Exchequer.

The figures above also exclude the overall net capital injection into the plcs of £1,499 million, as explained by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) in reply to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) on 26 October 1989 and the costs incurred in earlier years which totalled £6 million (excluding VAT) as provided by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in reply to the question from the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on 12 March 1990, *Official Report*, column *103*.

WALES

Advertising Expenditure

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total publicity and advertising expenditure, including for privatisation, of his Department and public bodies for which his Department has responsibility in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1989.

Mr. Peter Walker: My Department's records show expenditure on its own promotional material in 1979-80 as £85,000. The estimated expenditure in 1989-90 is £2,169,000.

Planned expenditure on publicity by public bodies for which my Department is responsible was about £8 million in 1989-90. Comparable figures for 1979-80 are not available.

The Department contributed to the cost of the sale of the 10 water authorities in 1989. The overall costs of this sale have been outlined in a response to my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden) by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what were the figures for the spending by his Department on *(a)* television advertising, *(b)* radio advertising, *(c)* newspaper advertising and *(d)* other promotional material in 1979-80 and in each following year; and what is his latest estimate for the current year and budget for 1990-91.

Mr. Peter Walker *[pursuant to his reply, 12 March 1990, c. 14-16]:* The table sets out corrected information:

Promotional expenditure by the Welsh Office

Year	*Radio advertising*	*Television advertising* £	*Newspaper advertising* £	*Other* £
1979-80	Nil		61,000	24,000
1980-81	Nil		62,000	22,000
1981-82	Nil		100,000	44,000
1982-83	Nil		99,000	28,000
1983-84	Nil		108,000	34,000
1984-85	Nil		66,000	100,000
1985-86	Nil	Nil	31,000	92,000
1986-87	Nil	27,000	49,000	331,000
1987-88	Nil	39,000	191,000	615,000
1988-89	Nil	64,000	112,000	1,105,000
1989-90	Nil	57,000	354,000	1,758,000

The total provision for promotional expenditure in 1990-91 is £2,772,000.

HIV Infection

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* for each of the last five years by health authority *(a)* the total number of people who are HIV positive as the result of contaminated blood transfusions and *(b)* the number of haemophiliacs who are HIV positive as the result of contaminated blood transfusions.

Mr. Grist: No. For reasons of confidentiality, the AIDS (Control) Act 1987 requires health authorities to report cases numbering between one and nine (inclusive) as "less than 10". In Wales, the number of those infected by contaminated blood transfusion is small and to publish in the form requested could lead to the identification of individuals.

Drinking Water

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether any patients in Wales have become ill as a result of drinking water containing nitrates at levels above that specified in EEC directives.

Mr. Grist: No information is collected either by the Department or by district health authorities which would identify whether patients in Wales have become ill as a result of drinking water containing nitrates. The Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989 (SI 1989 No. 1147) incorporate the EC limits relating to nitrates and I am not aware of any case of excess being reported.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether there has been any cases in Wales whereby hepatitis E has been contracted from faecally-infected drinking water.

Mr. Grist: No.

Cardiac Technicians

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will meet representatives of cardiac technicians to discuss their role in health provision in Wales;

(2) what information he has on the relative pay levels of cardiac technicians in each district health authority in Wales;

(3) what representations he has received concerning the pay of cardiac technicians; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: An agreement was reached last year in the professional and technical "B" Whitley council for the introduction by 1 April 1990 of a single pay and grading system for a number of technician groups including cardiac technicians. As an interim measure, from 1 September 1989 cardiac technicians will have been automatically transferred, on the basis of their existing grades and pay codes to a new common pay spine ranging from £4,743 to £14,223. Employing authorities are currently reviewing the posts of all staff concerned in order to assign them to grades in the new structure by 1 April 1990. This review enables management to take account of the individual requirements of the different technician groups with the result that pay levels within each district authority will vary according to the needs of their own services. No representations have been received by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in this connection and I have no information about grading decisions taken by health authorities in Wales. I would consider that a meeting with representatives of cardiac technicians would be of relatively little value at the present time.

Hospices

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many hospices there are in Wales; and what plans he has to increase the number of hospices in Wales.

Mr. Grist: There is one voluntary hospice in Wales providing in-patient care and one joint NHS-charitable trust continuing care unit for the terminally ill. Additionally, there are four organisations providing services in the community for terminally ill people and their families. Plans for expansion of this type of care are for individual health authorities and the voluntary sector.

Council Houses

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many council houses have been sold to sitting tenants in Wales in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: The information requested is given in the table:

Sales of Local Authority and New Town dwellings to sitting tenants Wales

	Number
1980	2,080
1981	8,810
1982	16,361
1983	9,337
1984	5,815
1985	5,711
1986	5,455
1987	5,710
1988	9,623
1989	12,793

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will update the figures given in his reply of 16 November 1989, *Official Report*, column *462*, on council house stocks and sales, to the latest available date.

Mr. Grist: The information requested is shown in the table:

	Sales of local authority dwellings May 1979 to December 1989	*Estimates of local authority stock April 1989*[1]
Aberconwy	1,614	2,826
Alyn and Deeside	1,682	5,213
Arfon	1,295	5,015
Blaenau Gwent	2,119	10,422
Brecknock	1,360	2,834
Cardiff	7,366	20,168
Carmarthen	1,185	3,554
Ceredigion	1,371	3,475
Colwyn	839	2,631
Cynon Valley	1,346	5,351
Delyn	1,719	4,750
Dinefwr	785	2,590
Dwyfor	339	1,461
Glyndwr	1,172	2,984
Islwyn	3,532	6,128
Llanelli	3,131	6,946
Lliw Valley	1,655	5,203
Meirionnydd	846	2,080
Merthyr Tydfil	2,117	6,863
Monmouth	2,183	4,963
Montgomeryshire[2]	1,353	2,973
Neath	2,234	5,653
Newport	4,044	13,253
Ogwr	4,274	9,756
Port Talbot (Afan)	3,308	6,110
Preseli	2,112	5,829
Radnorshire	536	1,171
Rhondda	636	4,995
Rhuddlan	844	2,722
Rhymney Valley	3,363	10,117
South Pembrokeshire	897	2,873
Swansea	3,618	17,382
Taff-Ely	3,609	7,535
Torfaen[3]	6,112	13,724
Vale of Glamorgan	3,266	6,209
Wrexham Maelor	3,022	16,096
Ynys Mon	1,471	5,732
Wales	82,355	237,587

[1] Revised. District stock estimates are only available at 1 April

[2] Excludes dwellings in Newtown

[3] Includes dwellings in Cwmbran. Records of sales in Cwmbran are only available since 31 March 1980.

Self-employed Persons

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his latest estimate of the number of self-employed persons in Wales; what were the corresponding figures for 1980 and 1985; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: In September 1989 there were estimated to be 192,000 self-employed persons in Wales. The corresponding figures for September 1980 and September 1985 were 118,000 and 148,000 respectively.

Housing Associations

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the impact of Government funding methods which involve housing associations finding a portion of their cash in the private sector on the median rents in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: The rent levels of housing provided under mixed funding is a matter for individual housing associations. Mixed funding, which was pioneered in Wales, has enabled Welsh housing associations to provide a record number of additional homes for people in need this year.

European Commissioner for Regional Development

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many times he has met the European Commissioner for Regional Development.

Mr. Peter Walker: I met Commissioner Millan as part of the discussions on the eligibility for EC aid of industrial areas. My officials regularly visit the regional policy directorate in Brussels.

Dampness (Housing)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he is taking to tackle dampness in houses in Wales.

Mr. Grist: Dampness which is prejudicial to health could render a house unfit. The current home improvement grant arrangements provide help towards the cost of dealing with severe dampness. Under the new renovation grant arrangements which replace this system on 1 July mandatory grant will be available to enable properties to meet the fitness standard. The new arrangements will ensure that maximum assistance goes to those in greatest need.

Teachers

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what were the number of head teachers and deputy head teachers in Wales resigning or opting for early retirement in each year from 1985 to 1989;

(2) what were the numbers of mid-career school teachers resigning in each year from 1985 to 1989.

Mr. Roberts: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he proposes to meet teachers from Wales to discuss their salary levels.

Mr. Peter Walker: Responsibility for teachers' pay rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science, who is currently undertaking consultation on the recommendation of the interim advisory committee report on school teachers' pay and conditions for 1990-91.

A55 Expressway

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the estimated completion dates on each of the sections of the A55 expressway currently under construction; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Roberts: The contract completion dates on each of the sections of the A55 north Wales coast road currently under construction are:

	Date
A55 Travellers Inn improvement	October 1990
A55 Conwy crossing	August 1991
A55 Pen-y-Clip	November 1993

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the earliest date for the completion of the Conwy A55 expressway tunnel; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Roberts: As stated in reply to a question by the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) on 2 April 1990 the contractual date for the completion of the A55 Conwy crossing is August 1991. Progress to date has been good with five of the six tunnel units in place. The bypassing of Llandudno junction is expected later this year.

Examinations

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people sat *(a)* GCSE and *(b)* A level examinations in (i) politics, (ii) British constitution and (iii) political history in 1989.

Mr. Roberts: A total of 332 candidates sat GCSE and 279 sat A-level WJEC examinations in politics and government in 1989. The WJEC does not offer separate examinations in British constitution or political history. No information is available centrally on other candidates in Wales who sat examinations set by other examination boards.

School Closures

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which *(a)* infants schools, *(b)* primary schools and *(c)* secondary schools have closed in Wales in each of the last 10 years in each local education authority.

Mr. Roberts: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Art Colleges

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the art colleges of Wales; and what is the cost to the Exchequer and local government of educating a student at art college who completes the course.

Mr. Roberts: There are no monotechnic art colleges in Wales. Courses in art are available at the following institutions:

South Glamorgan Institute of Higher Education
Gwent College of Higher Education
West Glamorgan Institute of Higher Education
North East Wales Institute of Higher Education
Carmarthenshire College of Technology and Art
Llandrillo Technical College
Gwynedd Technical College
Coleg Powys
Pembrokeshire College of Further Education
Crosskeys Tertiary College
Pontypool Tertiary College
Ebbw Vale Further Education College
Newport Further Education College
Pontypridd Technical College
Bridgend College of Technology
Ystrad Mynach College of Further Education
Merthyr Technical College
Coleg Glan Hafren
Barry College of Further Education
Afan Tertiary College
Gorseinon Tertiary College
Neath Tertiary College
Swansea Tertiary College

Information on the cost of individual art courses is not available centrally.

High Schools

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the high schools he has visited in Wales.

Mr. Roberts: Since September 1988 my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State or I have visited 11 maintained secondary schools in Wales.

I hope to visit a further three maintained secondary schools during this school year.

Parent-governors

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the number of parent-governors of local education authority schools he has met.

Mr. Roberts: Welsh Office Ministers regularly meet parent-governors during official and constituency engagements.

Porthcawl Town Council

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish any recent correspondence he has received from Porthcawl town council about Dunraven Court flats.

Mr. Grist: I shall write to the hon. Gentleman and place a copy of my reply in the Library of the House.

Flood Damage

Sir Anthony Meyer: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if expenditure on financial assistance to farmers whose land has been affected by sea water will require access to the Contingencies Fund.

Mr. Peter Walker: Yes. As I announced on 14 March, parliamentary approval for this exceptional measure will be sought in a revised estimate for the agricultural services, etc. Wales vote (class XVI, vote 2). Pending that approval, urgent expenditure estimated at £150,000 will be met by repayable advances from the Contingencies Fund.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what spending increases Welsh local authorities have budgeted for 1990-91; whether he intends to use his powers to limit the charges set by any Welsh authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has today made a statement about charge limitation in England. He indicated the criteria used to decide whether to designate authorities. Similar criteria have been adopted for Wales; under those criteria, no Welsh authorities are selected for designation.

I have today placed in the Library of the House tables showing the spending decisions of each county and district council, its community charge and associated information. Collectively Welsh local government has in this first year of the new system decided to set budgets which exceed the settlement by over £100 million. The result is that the community charge will average £232, rather than the £173 which I consider would have been necessary to maintain existing service levels and meet unavoidable new pressures.

There is a considerable variation in the position of individual authorities. While some have had the good sense to moderate their spending increases, to the great advantage of their charge payers, a number have decided on spending increases which are unnecessarily high and impose significant extra burdens on their charge payers. Councils which have imposed unnecessarily high charges will now have to account to their charge payers for their decisions. It is for Welsh charge payers to seek explanations for these high spending increases: it is for them to judge whether the explanations they are given are acceptable.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate the number of people in Wales who will become eligible for a community charge rebate following the rise in the capital disregard to £16,000.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is not available. Sufficient data are not available to provide a reliable estimate for Wales only.

Consultancies

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1989 on management and computer consultancy contracts, excluding hardware and software purchases; if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1989, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment; and what is the total amount his Department has budgeted to spend in the current year.

Mr. Peter Walker *[holding answer 28 March 1990]:* We estimate that our expenditure on management and computer consultancies in the financial year 1989-90 will be £434,650. Details of those consultancies awarded in that year are as follows:

Firm	*Subject of Assignment*
South Glamorgan Institute of Higher Education	Review of Mudiad yr Meithrin (MYM)
Price Waterhouse	Management arrangements at the Polytechnic of Wales Training Needs Analysis Option appraisal of arrangements for the provision of nurse education in Wales
Peat, Marwick and McLintock	Review of the Valuation and Community Charge Tribunal
Ernst and Young	Setting up and launch of Welsh Health Planning Forum Final Performance Test on new finance computer
Leslie Hayes Consultancies Ltd.[1]	Evaluation of Regional Enterprise Grant (REG)
Deloittes	Review of cancer treatment service in North Wales
Touche Ross	Management Review of NHS Directorate
Wales and South West Regional Research Laboratories	IT strategy for the Department's Social Services Inspectorate
BIS Ltd.	Feasibility study into IT strategy for Welsh Office Agriculture Department

Budgets for 1990-91 have yet to be finalised.

[1] Jointly commissioned by DTI, Scottish Office and Welsh Office.

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Force Survey

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give, from Labour Force survey evidence for the years 1984 to 1989, by male, married female and non-married female, the number of people in Great Britain classed as economically inactive according to ILO/OECD definitions in each of the categories (i) student, (ii) long-term sick or disabled, (iii) looking after family/home, (iv) retired from paid work, (v) believes no jobs available, and (vi) any other reason, by whether they stated they would like a regular paid job at the moment and were free to start work within two weeks, would like a regular paid job but were not free to start work within two weeks and would not like a regular paid job at the moment.

Mr. Nicholls: Estimates from labour force surveys, as requested, are shown in the following table:

Economically inactive (ILO definition) persons aged 16 or over—time series[1]
Great Britain, Spring each year

Thousands

	1984			1985			1986		
	Men	*Married women*[3]	*Non-married women*[4]	*Men*	*Married women*[3]	*Non-married women*[4]	*Men*	*Married women*[3]	*Non-married women*[4]
Would like work, available to start within 2 weeks, of which:	427	605	273	402	621	236	457	623	240
Student	38	[6]—	34	35	[6]—	29	38	[6]—	33
Long-term sick or disabled	65	25	18	58	19	17	68	[illegible]	20
Looking after family/home	[6]—	419	78	10	448	88	13	441	90
Retired from paid work	82	25	23	92	36	22	100	38	21
Believes no jobs available	114	64	37	122	50	38	140	42	29
Other inactive[5]	120	68	94	84	67	43	96	77	46
Would like work, not available to start within 2 weeks, of which:	374	472	273	356	402	254	361	388	251
Student	114	[6]—	97	129	[6]—	103	106	[6]—	96
Long-term sick or disabled	138	59	35	105	43	28	119	38	28
Looking after family/home	15	325	84	12	267	71	16	254	80
Retired from paid work	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—	16	[6]—	[6]—	11	[6]—	[6]—
Believes no jobs available	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—
Other inactive[5]	94	75	53	89	77	45	105	84	41
Would not like work, of which:	4,140	5,489	4,140	4,238	5,521	4,214	4,337	5,477	4,213
Student	544	18	443	461	22	385	488	28	346
Long-term sick or disabled	532	239	158	527	233	155	528	224	168
Looking after family/home	33	2,513	287	37	2,342	273	39	2,290	279
Retired from paid work	920	390	229	985	454	234	1,013	451	228
Believes no jobs available	32	18	18	34	17	12	49	14	12
Other inactive[5]	2,080	2,310	3,004	2,195	2,452	3,155	2,221	2,470	3,181

Thousands

	1987			1988			[2]1989		
	Men	*Married women*[3]	*Non-married women*[4]	*Men*	*Married women*[3]	*Non-married women*[4]	*Men*	*Married women*[3]	*Non-married women*[4]
Would like work, available to start within 2 weeks, of which:	362	568	231	370	544	224	362	495	233
Student	41	[6]—	32	43	[6]—	30	31	[6]—	24
Long-term sick or disabled	68	27	16	66	34	20	78	28	26
Looking after family/home	13	400	100	15	394	100	12	349	105
Retired from paid work	92	34	26	92	34	20	106	34	26
Believes no jobs available	84	35	20	71	20	18	61	22	17
Other inactive[5]	94	69	38	85	59	36	72	52	33
Would like work, not available to start within 2 weeks, of which:	389	382	231	392	406	251	443	458	325
Student	117	[6]—	85	108	[6]—	77	122	[6]—	88
Long-term sick or disabled	116	42	30	161	60	30	164	71	46
Looking after family/home	16	250	76	22	253	90	21	279	114
Retired from paid work	16	[6]—	[6]—	12	[6]—	[6]—	15	11	[6]—
Believes no jobs available	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—	[6]—
Other inactive[5]	116	77	35	87	82	46	119	90	68
Would not like work, of which:	4,445	5,411	4,263	4,406	5,298	4,247	4,335	4,952	4,198
Student	480	27	361	447	30	347	430	31	355
Long-term sick or disabled	607	243	173	515	272	168	634	254	175
Looking after family/home	39	2,125	279	52	2,014	281	46	1,797	300
Retired from paid work	1,044	456	232	1,080	467	228	1,059	469	218
Believes no jobs available	29	15	11	27	13	[6]—	23	[6]—	[6]—
Other inactive[5]	2,246	2,545	5,206	2,185	2,501	3,214	2,143	2,395	3,143

[1] Time series estimates, adjusted for cases where some information was not known.

[2] Preliminary estimates (1989 only).

[3] Includes those legally married and those who consider themselves to be married (1989 only). In earlier years marital status was based on self-assessment.

[4] Single, widowed, divorced or legally separated.

[5] Includes those on TOPS not working or seeking work, men aged 70 or over and women aged 65 or over, those who did not want/need employment, not yet started looking, other reasons and no reason given for not looking for work.

[6] Sample size too small for reliable estimate.

Tourism

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if his Department has conducted on assessment of the likely impact on the tourist trade of displaying danger signs on beaches where the water fails the European Economic Community pollution levels for safe bathing.

Mr. Nicholls: My Department has not conducted any such assessment.

Health and Safety Executive

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many basic inspection visits were paid by the Health and Safety Executive in each of the last five years to Shell Stanlow; and what precise qualifications the inspecting inspectors possessed.

Mr. Nicholls: The following table shows the number of preventive inspection visits paid by Health and Safety Executive inspectors to Shell Stanlow in each of the last five years.

Year 1 January to 31 December	*Number of inspection visits*
1985	6
1986	9
1987	6
1988	9
1989	17

The formal qualifications held by the inspectors who carried out the inspections are: honours degrees in chemistry, special chemistry, applied chemistry and geology; master's degree in combustion and explosion, PhDs in kinetics, and polymer chemistry; post-graduate diplomas in occupational safety and health.

In addition, during the same period, a total of 156 visits were paid to the site for other purposes, for example, to give advice, to check specific issues of compliance and to investigate accidents.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many fully trained and qualified inspectors the Health and Safety Executive Bootle area office chemicals group currently has; and if he intends increasing their number in the fiscal year 1990-91.

Mr. Nicholls: There are seven trained inspectors with inspection responsibility for the chemical industry based in the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) Merseyside area office. There are no immediate plans to increase this number, but HSE keeps the allocation of inspectors to area offices and industry groups under review.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many improvement and prohibition notices have been issued to Shell Chemicals at Stanlow, whole site, in the last five years by the Health and Safety Executive; and if any prosecutions for non-compliance with health and safety legislation have been initiated.

Mr. Nicholls: The Health and Safety Executive has not issued any improvement or prohibition notices or initiated any prosecution against Shell Chemicals, Stanlow, in the last five years.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when Shell United Kingdom Ltd., Stanlow, submitted to the Health and Safety Executive the safety case required under the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazard Regulations 1984.

Mr. Nicholls: Shell, Stanlow, which includes Shell United Kingdom Ltd, submitted the first part of the Safety Report required under the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazards Regulations to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) on 3 March 1989. The fourth and final part was received by HSE on 7 July 1989.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when the Health and Safety Executive began examining the safety case submitted by Shell Stanlow; and when the Health and Safety Executive expects to complete its vetting and approval of the safety case.

Mr. Nicholls: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) began examining the safety report submitted by Shell, Stanlow, in March 1989. This examination is continuing.

HSE does not approve safety reports. They are used as working documents to aid future inspection.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a table showing by standard category the unemployment levels in Greater Manchester at the latest available date and at the same period five and 10 years ago.

Mr. Nicholls: The information contained in the following table is available from the Library.

Unadjusted unemployment in Greater Manchester metropolitan county

February	*Unemployed claimants*
1990	94,368
1985	180,525
1980	73,558

Note: Direct comparisons over time are affected by various changes to the count and in particular the change in October 1982 from a count of registrants at jobcentres to one of claimants at unemployment benefit offices.

Hotels and Guest Houses

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list by tourist board area the latest information he has on the mean percentage change in charges by *(a)* hotel and *(b)* guest house owners following the introduction of the uniform business rate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: The information requested is not available.

Wages Inspectors

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 26 March, *Official Report*,, column *59*, what was the number of wages inspectorate officers in the divisional offices with responsibility for Wales, by grade, for each year since 1979.

Mr. Nicholls: The information requested is given in the following table.

Until 1987, wages inspection in Wales was administered from a divisional office in Cardiff and the table shows the number of staff based there.

The Cardiff office closed in that year as part of a nationwide rationalisation of inspectorate offices. Responsibility for wages inspection in Wales transferred to Manchester and Bristol, but it is not administered separately from the other areas covered by those offices. The figures for 1987 to 1989 are, therefore, the totals employed at Manchester and Bristol in those years.

Grade	*1979*	*1980*	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
Senior executive officer	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2
Higher executive officer	3	3	2	2	1	2	2	1	5	5	5
Executive officer	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	16	18	18
Administrative officer	4	4	5	3	2	3	3	3	10·5	9·5	7
Administrative assistant	1	1	—	—	1	1	1	1	3	1	1
Typist	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0·5	0·5
TOTALS	14	13	12	10	9	11	11	10	36·5	36	33·5

Employment Training

Mr. Ray Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many filled employment training places there are in the borough of Ogwr; and what percentage this represents of the original departmental projections.

Mr. Nicholls: On 9 March, the latest date for which information is available, there were 370 people on employment training in the borough of Ogwr. Departmental projections are for internal management purposes only.

Mr. Ray Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total expenditure on the £10 employment training trainee allowance in December 1989 for the borough of Ogwr.

Mr. Nicholls: The information is not available.

Mr. Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total number of unemployed receiving enterprise training within employment training between September 1988 and December 1989 for the borough of Ogwr.

Mr. Nicholls: The information requested is not available for the borough of Ogwr and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Youth Training

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is to be the face value of the credits he announced for the pilots in youth training; and in which geographical areas the pilots will take place.

Mr. Eggar: On 27 March, I published a prospectus inviting training and enterprise councils to bid to run pilot schemes of training credits for young people. It will be for the councils in their bids to propose the face value of credits in their area. At this stage, however, I think it is unlikely that any credit would carry a value of less than £1,000.

I will be looking for a geographical spread of pilots throughout Great Britain. The actual range will depend on the quality of bids received.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he has any plans to increase the level of expenditure on youth training.

Mr. Nicholls: Planned expenditure on YTS is set out in the Public Expenditure White Paper, a copy of which can be found in the House of Commons Library.

In addition, my right hon. and learned Friend announced in a statement in the House on 27 March increases in expenditure for training and enterprise councils in England and Wales and local enterprise companies in Scotland to run pilot training credit schemes from April 1991 (*Official Report*, column *211*).

Second Languages

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether his Department has undertaken any recent research into the demand by employers for British employees to have a command of a second language.

Mr. Eggar: My Department has not undertaken any such recent research.

Skill Centres

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will explain how rule 8 of the rules governing acceptance of outside appointments by Crown servants was applied from autumn 1988 to the three civil servants who are directors of Astra Training Services Ltd.; and if he will make a statement;

(2) whether the rules on acceptance of outside appointments by Crown servants applied to the three civil servants who are also directors of Astra Training Services Ltd.; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Members of the management buyout team did not form a company and become directors of it until May 1989. This was after my right hon. Friend's statement to the House of 13 March 1989 about the privatisation of STA, in which he announced the existence of a management buyout team.

The rules on acceptance of outside appointments by Crown servants do not cover the particular circumstances of a management buyout; nevertheless—as I explained in my reply to the hon. Member on 27 March—measures were taken in April 1989 to remove the three officers concerned from direct responsibility for sensitive decisions, well before they formed a company.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 27 March, why he is unable to provide the honourable Member for Bradford, South with the amount of fees and expenses paid to Deloittes and other advisers until summer 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: I have nothing to add to my answer to the hon. Member on 27 March at column *158*. Total fees and expenses paid to all advisers from the start of the feasibility study in December 1988 up to 26 March 1990 were £514,850. This figure excludes VAT.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the grades and range of duties of the three civil servants forming Astra Training Services Ltd.

Mr. Eggar: The duties and grades of the three civil servants are: head of skill centre operations grade 5, head of finance and accounting service grade 6, head of product development grade 6.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the investment in plant and machinery allowed for in the next financial year to each skill centre being purchased by Astra Training Services Ltd.; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The plans made by Astra Training Services Limited for those parts of the Skills Training Agency they will purchase include investment of over £11 million in the first three years of operation. The precise details of their intended investment is a matter for Astra.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the price to be paid by Astra Training Services Ltd. for the training college at Letchworth; why it is to be relocated at Milton Keynes; what is to happen to the existing premises; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: I have agreed terms of sale with Astra Training Services Limited covering 46 skillcentres, together with the Skills Training Agency's head office, mobile training service, sales teams and colleges, and involving a payment from the Government to Astra of some £11 million. Any value Astra may have ascribed within the sale package to individual units such as the training college at Letchworth is a matter for them. It is Astra's decision to relocate the business to Milton Keynes. The existing premises at Letchworth will be offered for sale by the Government in due course.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment who were the official advisers to the three civil servants who became directors of Astra Training Services Ltd. from autumn 1988; and who paid the fees involved.

Mr. Eggar: The three members of the management buyout (MBO) team who formed Astra Training Services Limited, appointed Coopers and Lybrand to advise on their bid for the Skills Training Agency and Irwin Mitchell to provide legal advice. As envisaged in the statement by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) on 13 March last year (*Official Report*, column 23), the Government offered the MBO team financial assistance to make a bid. That assistance will be repayable to the Government when the sale is concluded, leaving Astra to finance the full cost of advisers' fees as part of the costs of the acquisition.

Earnings

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the average level of gross weekly earnings for *(a)* agricultural workers and *(b)* manual workers in the manufacturing industries in each year since 1979 in cash, constant prices and as a proportion of national average manual earnings.

Mr. Nicholls: Information for Great Britain, on the average gross weekly earnings of full-time manual male adult employees by industry in April of each year, is published in table 4 of part A of the annual new earnings survey reports, copies of which are in the Library. Information on the retail price index (all items) to deflate the cash figures to constant prices is published for April of each year in table 26 of the annual supplement to *Economic Trends*.

Working Hours

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the average number of hours worked weekly by *(a)* agricultural workers and *(b)* manual workers in the manufacturing industries in each year since 1979.

Mr. Nicholls: Information for Great Britain on average weekly hours worked in April of each year by full-time manual male adult employees, by industry, is published in table 4 of part A of the annual new earnings survey reports, copies of which are in the Library.

Child Care Allowance

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many single parents are on each Government training scheme; how many single parents on those schemes take up the child care allowance available; what is the total annual cost of the child care allowances scheme; and what is the estimated cost of providing child care allowance on training schemes for all married women who could potentially enter those schemes.

Mr. Nicholls: Information about the number of single parents on training schemes run by the Training Agency is not available. Only single parents on employment training may claim child care allowances. At the end of December 1989, the latest date for which information is available, about 3 per cent. of all trainees on employment training were receiving child care allowances at an estimated annual cost for 1989-90 of £15 million. An estimate of the cost of providing child care allowances for all married women on training schemes could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Disabled People (Employment Review)

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when his Department originally commissioned the ministerial review on employment services for people with disabilities; when his Department originally intended to publish the review; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 2 April 1990]:* The review of services provided by my Department for the employment of people with disabilities was commissioned in March

1988. It was always intended that the results would only be published after a thorough consideration of all the issues concerned.

As announced in my reply to the right hon. Member for Stoke on Trent, South (Mr. Ashley) on 12 March 1990 (*Official Report*, column *135*], the preparation of the consultative document which will give the results of the review is almost complete. It will be published as soon as account can be taken in it of the results of the survey of people with disabilities in the labour market which my Department has commissioned. We currently anticipate that this will be during the course of June 1990.

DEFENCE

Weapons Projects

14. **Mr. Norman Hogg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many weapons development procurement projects have exceeded their original estimates by more than 10 per cent.; and what is the total amount of overspend involved.

81. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many weapons development procurement projects have exceeded their original estimates by more than 10 per cent.; and what is the total amount of overspend involved.

84. **Mr. Graham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many weapons development procurement projects have exceeded their original estimates by more than 10 per cent.; and what is the total amount of overspend involved.

100. **Mr. Fatchett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many weapons development procurement projects have exceeded their original estimates by more than 10 per cent.; and what is the total amount of overspend involved.

Mr. Alan Clark: Three major weapons projects currently in development or production have, in real terms, exceeded their original estimate by more than 10 per cent.; the total amount involved, in current prices, is £383 million.

Czechoslovakia

15. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for United Kingdom defence policy of the proposed pull-out of Soviet forces from Czechoslovakia.

36. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for United Kingdom defence policy of the proposed pull-out of Soviet forces from Czechoslovakia.

75. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for United Kingdom defence policy of the proposed pull-out of Soviet forces from Czechoslovakia.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for United Kingdom defence policy of the proposed pull-out of Soviet forces from Czechoslovakia.

Mr. Tom King: We warmly welcome the planned withdrawal of Soviet forces from Czechoslovakia, in keeping with the wishes of the Czechoslovak people, and hope that this will contribute to enhanced security for all European nations. The United Kingdom remains firmly committed to the NATO Alliance which offers the best guarantee of maintaining peace and security in Europe.

Nuclear Submarine Bases

16. **Mr. Sillars:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received from the Labour party in Scotland on nuclear submarine bases on the Clyde.

56. **Mrs. Margaret Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has had from the Labour party in Scotland on the removal of nuclear submarine bases on the Clyde.

58. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received from the Labour party in Scotland on nuclear submarine bases on the Clyde.

66. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received from the Labour party in Scotland on nuclear submarine bases on the Clyde.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I am not aware of any.

Arms Conversion

17. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will consider establishing an arms conversion agency.

26. **Mr. Patchett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will consider establishing an arms conversion agency.

55. **Mr. Litherland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will consider establishing an arms conversion agency.

78. **Ms. Walley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will consider establishing an arms conversion agency.

Mr. Alan Clark: No. As I informed the hon. Member for Leeds, West on 6 March, British industry is responsible for determining its product ranges, not the Government.

Mr. Colin Wallace

18. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set up a meeting between officials in his Department and Mr. Peter Broderick to consider the case of Colin Wallace.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No. I understand that Mr. Calcutt is in touch with Mr. Broderick about matters relevant to Mr. Wallace's appearance before the civil service appeal board. If Mr. Broderick has other information about Mr. Wallace's case which he believes should be considered by the authorities, he should submit it to the authorities.

Short-range Nuclear Weapons

19. **Mr. Terry Fields:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is NATO's current policy on the modernisation of short-range nuclear weapons.

27. **Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is NATO's current policy on the modernisation of short-range nuclear weapons.

59. **Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is NATO's current policy on the modernisation of short-range nuclear weapons.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is NATO's current policy on the modernisation of short-range nuclear weapons.

Mr. Tom King: NATO allies are agreed that our peace and security will continue to depend on nuclear deterrence; for this policy to be effective, nuclear systems will need to be kept up to date where necessary.

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent consultations he has had with his European counterparts in NATO about the deployment of short-range nuclear weapons in Europe; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend meets my NATO counterparts on a regular basis to discuss matters of mutual interest, including nuclear issues. They will next meet at the nuclear planning group meeting in Canada in May.

West Germany

20. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met his West German counterpart; and what was discussed.

80. **Mr. David Young:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met his West German counterpart; and what was discussed.

88. **Mr. Henderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met his West German counterpart; and what was discussed.

104. **Ms. Short:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met his West German counterpart; and what was discussed.

Mr. Tom King: I last met Dr. Stoltenberg during the Anglo-German summit on 30 March. We discussed a range of current defence issues, including the security implications of German unification.

37. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next intends to meet the Defence Minister of the Federal Republic of Germany; and what subjects he proposes to discuss.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next intends to meet the West German Defence Minister; and what matters he proposes to discuss.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Following their discussions during the Anglo-German summit last week, my right hon. Friend next expects to meet Dr. Stoltenberg at the nuclear planning group meeting on 9 to 10 May.

Strategic Defence Initiative

21. **Mr. Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next proposes to meet his United States counterpart to discuss the strategic defence initiative.

Mr. Tom King: I expect to see Secretary Cheney at NATO ministerial meetings in May when we will be discussing a wide range of defence issues.

Low Flying

22. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received in respect of low-flying aircraft.

Mr. Neubert: During February 1990 the Ministry of Defence received 389 inquiries and complaints about military low-flying training in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he expects any change in the need for low-flying exercises over the United Kingdom due to changes in the role of NATO.

Mr. Neubert: For the United Kingdom to maintain a modern and effective air force, there will be a continuing need for low-flying exercises in the United Kingdom. Future training requirements will, however, naturally reflect force structures which, as my right hon. Friend has made clear, will need to take account of international developments and progress in arms control negotiations.

50. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representation he has received about the extent of low-flying training in northern England and the Borders.

Mr. Neubert: Between 1 January and 28 February 1990 the Ministry of Defence received 225 inquiries and complaints from northern England and the Borders about military low flying.

Central Europe

23. **Mr. Wilshire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent assessment his Department has made concerning the Soviet Union's ability to launch suprise, large-scale offensives in central Europe.

60. **Mr. Trotter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent assessment his Department has made concerning the Soviet Union's ability to launch suprise, large-scale offensives in central Europe.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) on 2 March 1990, *Official Report*, column *382*.

Radiation

24. **Mr. Buckley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he has taken following studies on radiation exposure in the Ministry of Defence work force since 1978.

72. **Mr. John Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he has taken following studies on radiation exposure in the Ministry of Defence work force since 1978.

74. **Mr. Frank Cook:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he has taken following studies on radiation exposure in the Ministry of Defence work force since 1978.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he has taken following studies on radiation exposure in the Ministry of Defence work force since 1978.

Mr. Neubert: In the 11 years since 1978 radiation exposures have been kept under continuous review to ensure exposures are authorised only on the basis that they are justified, comply with statutory limits, and are

"as low as reasonably practicable"

(ALARP). This review is MOD policy and will continue.

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department has considered any recent studies on the effects of radiation upon individuals and their children; and what implications these may have for armed service personnel and defence workers involved in nuclear defence.

39. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department has considered any recent studies on the effects of radiation upon individuals and their children; and what implications these may have for armed service personnel and defence workers involved in nuclear defence.

63. **Mr. Ray Powell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department has considered any recent studies on the effects of radiation upon individuals and their children; and what implications these may have for armed service personnel and defence workers involved in nuclear defence.

103. **Ms. Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department has considered any recent studies on the effects of radiation upon individuals and their children; and what implications these may have for armed service personnel and defence workers involved in nuclear defence.

Mr. Neubert: We have noted the preliminary advice on the Gardner study given to the Department of Health by the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE). We accept COMARE's view that it is not possible for it to make specific recommendations on reducing risks until the results of other studies are known and there is further information on possible causal mechanisms.

The Ministry of Defence will, therefore, continue its current policy of authorising exposures to armed service personnel and defence workers only on the basis that they are justified, comply with MOD and statutory limits, and are

"as low as reasonably practicable"

(ALARP).

Dr. Owen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people in the royal dockyards in *(a)* Plymouth and *(b)* Rosyth have had more than a 100 milliSieverts lifetime dose since 1979.

Mr. Neubert: There are currently 96 employees at Devonport and 136 at Rosyth who have radiation dose records maintained by the approved dosimetry service (the defence radiological protection service), showing cumulative or lifetime radiation exposures in excess of 100 milliSieverts since the date of first starting radiation work.

Greenham Common

25. **Mr. Benn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received concerning the future of RAF Greenham Common.

42. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received concerning the future of RAF Greenham Common.

73. **Mr. Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representations he has received concerning the future of RAF Greenham Common.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the right hon. and hon. Members to the answer given to the hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing), at column *615* of *Hansard* dated 6 March.

Foxhunter Radar

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Foxhunter radar is currently performing according to its original specifications.

28. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the Foxhunter radar is currently performing according to its original specifications.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes).

Nuclear Test Veterans

29. **Mr. Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on compensation paid to nuclear test veterans in other countries.

35. **Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on compensation paid to nuclear test veterans in other countries.

91. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on compensation paid to nuclear test veterans in other countries.

94. **Mr. Clay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information he has on compensation paid to nuclear test veterans in other countries.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We are aware that procedures exist in certain other countries by which compensation may be paid to nuclear test veterans in accordance with the laws and benefits systems in force in those countries.

Royal Army Veterinary Corps

30. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he is now in a position to announce the outcome of his review of the Royal Army Veterinary Corps, Melton Mowbray.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We hope to be in a position to make an announcement shortly.

Procurement

31. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for the organisation of his procurement services of the activities of the defence contractors' lobbyists.

67. **Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for the organisation of his procurement services of the activities of the defence contractors' lobbyists.

98. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for the organisation of his procurement services of the activities of the defence contractors' lobbyists.

99. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for the organisation of his procurement services of the activities of the defence contractors' lobbyists.

Mr. Alan Clark: None. I would regard the representations of the defence contractors' lobbyists as being of a lower level of importance than those of right hon. and hon. Members with a constituency interest.

77. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on programmes for joint procurement for equipment within NATO.

Mr. Alan Clark: There are many programmes for joint procurement of defence equipment between NATO nations. The conference of national armaments directors (CNAD) and the independent European programme group (IEPG) have an important role to play. In addition, groups of NATO nations may decide on a joint programme outside these formal structures. A current list of joint procurements in which the United Kingdom participates is published annually in the statement on the Defence Estimates.

East Germany

32. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for United Kingdom defence policy of the result of the East German election.

53. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for United Kingdom defence policy of the result of the East German election.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the implications for United Kingdom defence policy of the result of the East German election.

Mr. Tom King: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg).

Defence Review

33. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the additional resources required to undertake a defence review.

46. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the additional resources required to undertake a defence review.

Mr. Tom King: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson).

NATO Nuclear Planning Group

34. **Mr. Heffer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what matters he expects to discuss at the next NATO nuclear planning group meeting.

49. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what matters he expects to discuss at the next NATO nuclear planning group meeting.

68. **Ms. Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what matters he expects to discuss at the next NATO nuclear planning group meeting.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) on 2 April, *Official Report*, column *445*.

Argentina

38. **Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contacts there have been between British and Argentine naval officers in the last five years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: British and Argentine naval officers have met under official auspices on one occasion in the last five years. This took place on 22 February 1990 when HMS Endurance made a good will visit to the Argentine Antarctic base Jubany during her routine deployment to the Antarctic treaty area.

Military Doctrine

40. **Mr. Irvine:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contribution his Department made to the military doctrine seminar held in Vienna under the confidence and security-building measures negotiations.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The British representatives made a substantial and well-received contribution to the military doctrine seminar in Vienna, including several presentations on United Kingdom military doctrine and defence policy.

NATO Secretary General

41. **Mr. Geraint Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met the Secretary General of NATO; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) on 6 March at column *620*.

48. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next intends to meet the Secretary General of NATO; and what subjects he proposes to discuss.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend regularly meets the Secretary General of NATO. Their next scheduled meeting is at the NATO nuclear planning group in Canada on 9 to 10 May when a range of defence issues will be discussed.

Comprehensive Concept (NATO)

43. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department is still working within NATO's comprehensive concept.

64. **Mr. Hayes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department is still working within NATO's comprehensive concept.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Yes.

Arms Control

44. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contribution his Department is making to the process of verification within the arms control process.

101. **Mr. David Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contribution his Department is making to the process of verification within the arms control process.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence plays a part, as the United Kingdom is the host nation, in the reception of inspections of the United States facilities at RAF Greenham Common and RAF Molesworth conducted by the Soviet Union under the intermediate nuclear forces (INF) treaty; and conducts and receives inspections of activities under the Stockholm document. The Department is also making a full contribution both nationally and within NATO to the development of proposals for the verification requirements of a conventional forces in Europe (CFE) treaty and a chemical weapons convention; and for the further development of confidence and security building measures (CSBMs) and related initiatives such as the proposed open skies treaty. The steps being taken to establish the joint arms control implementation group (JACIG) were described in my answer of 7 March 1990 to the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), column *622*.

Training Exercises

45. **Mr. Foulkes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what major training exercises are planned for the next 12 months; and if he will give details of their timing and location.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is as follows:

Planned United Kingdom participation in major NATO exercises 1990-91

Name	*Dates*	*Location*	*Remarks*
1990			
1. Open Gate	2 to 12 May	West approaches to Mediterranean	Maritime exercise
2. Dragon Hammer	3 to 16 May	West Mediterranean	Maritime exercise including amphibious operations
3. Central Enterprise	3 to 7 June	Central region	Live air exercise
4. Teamwork 90	6 to 23 September	North Atlantic	Major Tri-MNC amphibious operations
5. Bold Guard 90	24 September to 5 October	Jutland	Major reinforcement exercise in BALTAP
6. Elder Joust 90	2 to 4 October	United Kingdom	United Kingdom air defence exercise
1991			
7. Battle Griffin	25 February to 27 March	North Norway	Reinforcement exercise in Norway
8. Alert Express	Spring	Southern region	AMF(L) contingency exercise

Planned United Kingdom national exercises in 1990-91

Name	*Dates*	*Location*	*Remarks*
1990			
Jolly Roger	17 to 26 April	Gibraltar sea areas and Mediterranean	Submarine training exercise
Stone Warrior	4 to 26 May	Salisbury Plain training area	5 AB Brigade
JMC 902	15 June to 2 July	North Sea. Waters around Scotland	Joint maritime exercise
Panthers Punch	20 July to 8 August	Salisbury Plain training area	19 Brigade field exercise
Keystone	1 to 25 September	BAOR	2 Infantry Division reinforcement exercise
Quarter Final	5 to 28 October	BAOR	4 Armoured Division field exercise
JMC 903	2 to 19 November	North Sea. Waters around Scotland	Joint maritime exercise
1991			
JMC 911	14 to 25 January	North Sea. Waters around Scotland	Joint maritime exercise
Hard Fall	January to March	Norway	Training of United Kingdom element of AMF

Planned United Kingdom participation in out of area exercises

Name	*Dates*	*Location*	*Remarks*
1990			
Suman Warrior	October	Malaysia	Five power defence arrangements (FPDA) command post exercise

Atomic Weapons Establishments

47. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a further statement on the proposed contractorisation of atomic weapons establishments.

Mr. Neubert: Since the announcement on 5 December 1989 by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, further progress has been made towards the contractorisation of the atomic weapons establishment.

An implementation support group has been formed at AWE. Its first task is preparation for the initial phase, in which a contractor will be appointed to strengthen the management of AWE by bringing in a small number of experienced managers from the private sector. Invitations to tender will be issued shortly.

Conventional Forces in Europe

51. **Mr. Clelland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what studies have been made of the effect on British military forces of a successful agreement at the CFE talks.

79. **Mr. Harry Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what studies have been made of the effect on British military forces of a successful agreement at the CFE talks.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Members to my right hon. Friend's answer of 6 March to the hon. Member for Woolwich (Mr. Cartwright), *Official Report*, column *712*.

Service Personnel

52. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures his Department is taking to retain trained service personnel.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss).

Maritime Measures

54. **Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has considered any proposals on maritime confidence-building measures.

102. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has considered any proposals on maritime confidence-building measures.

Mr. Allen McKay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has considered any proposals on maritime confidence-building measures.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe).

Disarmament Conference

57. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contribution his Department is making to the conference on disarmament.

Mr. Archie Hamilton The Ministry of Defence contributes in a number of ways to the conference on disarmament, particularly through the provision of military, technical and scientific staff and advice to the United Kingdom delegation in Geneva.

Warsaw Pact

61. **Mr. William Powell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent contacts members of his Department have had with Warsaw pact countries.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, North-West (Mr. Bellingham) on 29 March, *Official Report*, column *283*.

Threat Assessment

62. **Mr. Wood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department has altered its threat assessment.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) on 6 February 1990, *Official Report*, column *600*.

Military Assistance

69. **Mr. Donald Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what military assistance his Department has provided to overseas Governments in the past year.

82. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what military assistance his Department has provided to overseas Governments in the past year.

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what military assistance his Department has provided to overseas Governments in the past year.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) on 6 March 1990, *Official Report*, column *619*.

F15E Aircraft

70. **Ms. Primarolo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what decisions have been taken on basing the F15E aircraft in the United Kingdom.

76. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what decisions have been taken on basing the F15E aircraft in the United Kingdom.

95. **Mr. Livingstone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what decisions have been taken on basing the F15E aircraft in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery).

United States Defence Secretary

71. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next plans to meet the United States Defence Secretary; and what issues he expects to discuss.

87. **Mr. Alex Carlile:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next intends to meet the United States Defence Secretary; and what matters he proposes to discuss.

89. **Mr. John P. Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, when he next plans to meet the United States of America Defence Secretary; and what issues he expects to discuss.

90. **Ms. Gordon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next plans to meet the United States of America Defence Secretary; and what issues he expects to discuss.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) on 6 February 1990 at column *597*.

Nerve Agents

83. **Dr. Moonie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on the deployment of United States binary nerve agents on British soil.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman) to the hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) on 24 July 1986 at column *490*, to which I have nothing to add.

Lance Missile

85. **Mr. Redmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether there are any plans for a replacement for the Lance missile to be deployed.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether there are any plans for a replacement for the Lance missile to be deployed.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The NATO Alliance has agreed to leave a decision on a replacement for the Lance missile until 1992.

Conventional Weapons

86. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made concerning Soviet production of conventional weapons over the past 12 months.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Soviet Union continued to produce large numbers of conventional weapons in 1989, although in certain categories, especially tanks and fighter aircraft, we believe there were significant reductions in output.

Vickers Factory, Leeds

92. **Mr. Batiste:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement concerning his visit to Vickers plc tank factory in Barnbow, Leeds, on Friday 16 March.

Mr. Alan Clark: My right hon. Friend visited Vickers Defence Systems factory at Barnbow, Leeds, at the company's invitation as part of his series of visits to major defence contractors.

Defence Expenditure

93. **Mr. Ashton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes in defence expenditure he has now planned for the financial year 1992-93.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to Cm. 1001, "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1990-91 to 1992-93," chapter 1, where the information requested appears in table 1.1.

Soviet Navy

96. **Mr. Hague:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of the modernisation programme for the Soviet navy.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Modernisation of the Soviet Navy continues in all key areas and its capability continues to improve with the acquisition of new and more up-to-date warships and submarines with modern, technologically advanced weapons systems.

Eastern Europe

97. **Mr. Robert B. Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the degree to which recent developments in eastern Europe have affected the requirements for the defence of the United Kingdom home base.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We welcome the recent developments in eastern Europe which have in large part been brought about by NATO's policy of dialogue and deterrence. We continue to believe that defence of the United Kingdom home base is best achieved by maintaining our commitment to the NATO alliance, which provides the best guarantee of peace and security in Europe.

European Fighter Aircraft

Mr. Hind: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the European fighter aircraft.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, North-West (Mr. Stern).

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last discussed the future of the European fighter aircraft with his German and Italian counterparts.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met the Defence Ministers of Britain's partners in the European fighter aircraft programme; what was discussed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: My right hon. Friend met both his German and Italian counterparts during March. Useful discussions were held on a number of topics, including the European fighter aircraft.

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to announce his decision on the choice of radar for the European fighter aircraft by oral statement to the House.

Mr. Alan Clark: The manner of such an announcement will be decided at the time that a decision on the radar is reached.

Mr Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what year it is planned to bring the European fighter aircraft into service; and what is the current planned production offtake.

Mr. Alan Clark: I have nothing to add to the answers I gave to the hon. Member on 15 January, columns *125-26*, on 28 February, column 354, and on 26 March, column *24*.

Trident

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the progress of the Trident programme.

65. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the latest progress on the Trident nuclear missile programme.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Trident programme continues to progress to time and budget towards its in-service date of the mid-1990s.

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many representations he has received over the past 12 months about the Trident nuclear programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has received a number of letters from individuals and organisations over the past year about the Trident programme.

British Aerospace (Strike)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the effect on deliveries to the services of the recent British Aerospace strike; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: The strike at British Aerospace has disrupted the delivery schedules of the Tornado and Harrier aircraft with seven Tornados and six Harriers delayed so far.

Action is in hand to recover the situation on Tornado which is produced at the company's Lancashire sites, where normal working was resumed earlier this month. But industrial action at the Kingston plant continues to affect the production of the Harrier.

There is as yet no impact on our operational capability.

Submarines

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he now expects to put proposals for the extremely low-frequency transmitter at Glengarry forest to the Highland regional council planning authority.

Mr. Neubert: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes) on 19 February, column *573*.

Brawdy

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the proposed relocatable over-the-horizon radar at Brawdy, Wales, will be assigned to NATO.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what links are proposed between the projected relocatable over-the-horizon radar at Brawdy and the United Kingdom regional air operations centre.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what links are proposed between the relocatable over-the-horizon radar at Brawdy and the United Kingdom national joint ocean surveillance information centre.

Mr. Alan Clark: It would be premature to consider the possible operational assignment of an over-the-horizon radar in the United Kingdom before the results of its planned two-year trial have been fully assessed.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date agreement was reached with the United States authorities on the sharing of costs for construction of a relocatable over-the-horizon radar at Brawdy, Wales; what is the agreed apportionment of costs; and what will be the total cost to the United Kingdom defence budget of the construction of the facility.

Mr. Alan Clark: The arrangements agreed with the United States authorities to cover the two-year trial of an over-the-horizon radar in the United Kingdom are that the United States Government will supply the radar; the United Kingdom Government will provide and prepare the operational sites; and the running costs of the trial will be shared. These arrangements are encapsulated in a memorandum of understanding to be signed shortly. The total cost to the United Kingdom defence budget of the installation of the radar and the running costs of the trial will be about £15·5 million over the entire period.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date the decision was taken to select Brawdy as the site for the United States Navy relocatable over-the-horizon radar.

Mr. Alan Clark: The locations selected for the two-year trial of an over-the-horizon radar in the United Kingdom are St. David's airfield, Pembrokeshire, as the transmitter site, and Blakehill radio station, Wiltshire, as the receiver site. A formal decision to select these two locations for the trial was taken recently, following a survey of possible sites which began in 1987.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are his plans for conducting an environmental impact assessment on the proposed construction of an over-the-horizon radar facility in Wales.

Mr. Alan Clark: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) on 30 March 1990 at column *328-29*.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the proposed location of *(a)* the transmitter facility, *(b)* the receiver facility and *(c)* the operations control centre for the relocatable over-the-horizon radar proposed for construction in Wales; what is the total land area required for each site; and what proportion of the required land is already owned or leased by his Department.

Mr. Alan Clark: The locations selected for the two-year trial of an over-the-horizon radar in the United Kingdom are St. David's airfield, Pembrokeshire, as the transmitter site, and Blakehill radio station, Wiltshire, as the receiver site. The trial operations will be conducted from Blakehill. Both sites are owned by the Ministry of Defence. St. David's airfield is more than sufficiently large for the installation of the transmitter; at Blakehill, we will need to acquire some additional land adjacent to the present MOD boundary to accommodate the receiver.

Procurement Executive (Relocation)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the reasons for dispersal from London of the headquarters of his Department's procurement executive; and how his Department's policy has altered on this matter since 1979.

Mr. Neubert: The reasons for the relocation of procurement executive staff were set out in my reply of 27 March, col. *101*, to the hon. Member for Wansdyke (Mr. Thompson).

As in 1979, efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and affordability are key factors in our decisions on such projects. A wide range of other considerations, including regional issues, are also given due weight.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will review the decision to disperse the procurement executive headquarters of his Department to Keynsham, near Bristol.

Mr. Neubert: No. The conclusion of the studies into the relocation of procurement executive staff were subject of comprehensive review before the decision I announced on 27 March, column *101*.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the dispersal of his Department's procurement executive headquarters from London to Keynsham, near Bristol, refers to the same block of employees as were to be dispersed to St. Mellou's, near Cardiff, in 1978, pursuant to the Hardman report of 1975; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neubert: The 1978 proposal included moving the procurement executive's land and air systems controllerates to Cardiff. These controllerates form the bulk of the staff that it has now been decided to relocate to Keynsham; however, the ordnance board and London-based defence contracts staff are now also included.

Select Committee on Defence

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on the provision of information to the Select Committee of Defence.

Mr. Tom King: It is my policy to respond as helpfully as possible to requests from Select Committees.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 4 April 1990

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Marchioness

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Attorney-General whether the Director of Public Prosecutions has now received the results of the police investigation into the sinking of the Marchioness; and when he expects to reach a decision on whether to prosecute.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Attorney-General whether it is proposed to bring any criminal prosecutions in relation to the sinking of the Marchioness; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The results of the police investigation of the sinking of the MV Marchioness have been submitted to the Director of Public Prosecutions, the final report having been received on 22 March 1990.

The evidence has been submitted to Treasury counsel for advice. Consideration of the case is proceeding with all proper expedition.

Mortgage Lenders

Mr. Speed: To ask the Attorney-General if he intends to prohibit mortgage lenders from offering loans to their customers on exceptionally favourable terms if more than one service is offered as part of the loan package.

The Attorney-General: The Courts and Legal Services Bill contains proposals to prevent the tying-in to the mortgage of any other service in the domestic property market. The Government believe, however, that packages can be in the interests of the consumer and propose that they will be permitted under the legislation.

THE ARTS

"The Three Graces"

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister for the Arts what proposals he has for the allocation of funds towards the purchase of "The Three Graces."

Mr. Luce: Purchase of works of art is a matter for the trustees of individual museums and galleries, who may apply to the national heritage memorial fund, which acts as a fund of last resort.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Taxation

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the proportion of gross income paid in income tax, national insurance contributions and value added tax by *(a)* a married man with a non-earning wife and two children and *(b)* a married man with an earning wife and two chilren at one half, one and a half, two, three, five and 10 times national average earnings in 1990-91; and what were the comparable figures in 1978-79.

Mr. Lilley: The information requested is set out in the table:

(a) Payments of income tax (less child benefit), NICs and VAT by a married couple with non-earning wife as a percentage of gross earnings.
Multiples of average male earnings.

	½	*1*	*1½*	*2*	*3*	*5*	*10*
1978-79							
Income Tax less Child Benefit	−4·1	14·4	20·6	23·6	32·0	47·1	64·7
NICs	6·5	6·5	5·6	4·2	2·8	1·7	0·8
VAT	—	2·7	2·7	—	—	—	—
1990-91							
Income Tax less Child Benefit	0·5	12·7	16·8	21·8	27·9	32·7	36·4
NICs	6·9	7·9	6·2	4·7	3·1	1·9	0·9
VAT	—	5·0	5·6	—	—	—	—

(b) Payments of income tax (less child benefit) and NICs by a married couple with wife working as a percentage of gross earnings.
Multiples of average male earnings.

	½	*1*	*1½*	*2*	*3*	*5*	*10*
1978-79							
Income Tax less Child Benefit	1·1	6·4	15·2	19·7	25·9	32·9	50·6
NICs	6·5	6·5	6·5	6·5	5·4	3·4	1·7
1990-91							
Income Tax less Child Benefit	−9·0	8·0	13·6	16·5	20·3	27·3	33·6
NICs	4·8	6·9	7·6	7·7	6·2	3·7	1·9

Notes:

1. Average male earnings in 1990-91 are assumed to be £303·80 per week, 8¼ per cent. higher than in 1989-90. This represents a real increase of 33 per cent. since 1978-79.
2. NICs are assumed to be paid at the class I contracted-in rate.
3. A married man's payment of income tax do not now depend on whether he has any children. But in order to provide comparability with 1978-79 when support for children was given partly through child tax allowances, the figures show income tax less child benefit.

4. From 1990-91 husbands and wives in two-earner couples will be taxed independently. Previously the tax liability of two-earner couples depended on their joint income. To permit comparisons between 1978-79 and 1990-91 the table therefore shows income tax (less child benefit) and national insurance contributions paid by a married couple as a proportion of their joint income, assuming that the husband and wife share the relevant multiple of earnings in the ratio 60:40.
5. Estimates of VAT payments depend on a family's income and its pattern of expenditure. Such estimates are subject to a substantial margin of error and cannot reliably be made outside a range of 75 per cent. to 150 per cent. of average male earnings. Estimates for a single earner couple with two children are set out above. Corresponding figures for a two earner couple with two children are not available. Estimates are based on 1985 Family Expenditure Survey and assume that 10 per cent. of disposable income is saved.

Retail Prices Index

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer why no account is to be taken of transitional relief when the community charge is introduced into the retail prices index in April.

Mr. Lilley: For purposes of the retail price index transitional relief will not be treated as reducing the prices charged. This conforms to a general principle governing the treatment of subsidies and discounts, which was laid down by the retail price index advisory committee in a report submitted to and accepted by Ministers in 1986 (Cmnd 9848). The principle is that reductions in the amount charged are treated as price effects if they are equally available to all consumers facing the charge in question or if they are financed by the supplier of the goods or services concerned. Transitional relief does not qualify on either ground as it is available only to consumers fulfilling certain criteria and is funded not by the local authority making the charge but by a transfer from central Government. The community charges taken for the retail price index will be those made by authorities after allowing for the "safety net" since this affects all charge payers in any one area.

Correspondence (MEPs)

Mr. David Young: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer since 18 June 1989, how many communications he has received from Members of the European Parliament that concern local or United Kingdom matters; and if he will make it his practice where such matters are involved to provide the hon. Member for the local constituency with a copy of the correspondence and the reply for information.

Mr. Major: Since 18 June 1989 Treasury Ministers have received 40 communications from Members of the European Parliament concerning local or United Kingdom matters. Where Members of the European Parliament raise matters in correspondence which are exclusively of local interest, the practice is to reply suggesting that the MEP should refer the matter to the hon. Member for the constituency concerned. As with other correspondence, replies to such communications would normally be copied to the hon. Member concerned only if the MEP had himself copied his letter in this way.

Central Office of Information

Mr. Neil Hamilton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made towards establishing the Central Office of Information as an executive agency.

Mr. Major: I am pleased to announce that the Central Office of Information (COI) will become an executive agency tomorrow. I have set demanding targets against which performance will be measured. These will ensure that the steady improvement in COI's efficiency over recent years continues into the future. Copies of the framework document will be placed in the Library of the House.

Government Data Network

Mr. Neil Hamilton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will report the outcome of the price variation negotiations with Racal Data Networks Ltd. for the Government data network.

Mr. Ryder: Negotiations are still in progress and scheduled for completion by 30 June 1990. These negotiations are taking into account marketplace movements since the GDN contract was let and are reviewing general administrative arrangements in the contract associated with the GDN tariff.

Further consideration of the contract has shown that, contrary to earlier interpretations reflected in my right hon. Friend, the then Paymaster-General's answer of 22 June 1988, *Official Report,* col. 599-600, the contract does not necessarily prevent the cost of the GDN service from exceeding that of comparable public services. The Treasury and Racal Data Networks Ltd. are seeking to negotiate revisions to the contract which would incorporate a satisfactory basis for value-for-money comparison with available public services.

I will announce the outcome of these negotiations when they have been completed.

Civil Service Catering Organisation

Mr. Neil Hamilton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans the Government have for the future of the Civil Service Catering Organisation.

Mr. Major: I have commissioned a study of future options for the Civil Service Catering Organisation (CISCO).

The aim of the study will be to examine how CISCO might be placed on a more commercial footing for the future in an increasingly competitive environment for the provision of staff catering.

The study will centre on possibilities for the transfer of CISCO to the private sector. Operation in the private sector might provide a better basis and greater range of opportunities for building upon the success that CISCO has achieved to date. The options will include the possibility of management and employee participation in the privatisation of CISCO's business.

If this approach is found not to be feasible or desirable, the study will consider whether CISCO should be retained within the civil service as a "next steps" agency or whether the delivery of catering services is best devolved fully to Government Departments.

The study will involve discussions with Government Department clients of CISCO and consultation with relevant bodies in the catering trade. Consultation will also take place with the Council of Civil Service Unions and the joint co-ordinating committee for Government industrial establishments.

A decision will be made later in the year.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Creche

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Lord President of the Council, pursuant to his answer of 26 March, *Official Report*, column *24*, concerning child care facilities at the House of Commons, what arrangements are being made for consultation with and the full participation of each of the staff unions and the creche committee established by staff.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The Select Committee on House of Commons (Services) has asked for an urgent feasibility study to be undertaken into the cost and accommodation implications of providing child care facilities for the children of Members and staff employed in the House. A decision on whether a survey of potential demand is needed will be taken once the results of the feasibility study are known.

TRANSPORT

Traffic Director for London

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, pursuant to his intention to appoint a traffic director for London, he will list the terms of reference for that post, the bodies and resources attached or available to it; and to whom the director will be responsible.

Mr. Portillo: Proposals concerning the traffic director are set out in paragraphs 7.34 to 7.38 of the discussion document "Traffic in London". We are considering the powers and duties of the post in more detail, and will consult local authorities and other interested bodies further.

Motorway Repairs

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what motorway repair works are scheduled for the M6 and M1 between April and October; and if he will publish full details of these in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Portillo: Capital maintenance schemes which have been given approval and are programmed[1] to be carried out at various times between April and October 1990 are as follows:

M1

Major schemes (over £0·5 million)
  Junction 8 to junction 9 (resurfacing)
  Junction 26 to junction 27 (reconstruction)
  Junction 29 to junction 30 (reconstruction)
  Junction 43 to M62[1] (reconstruction)

Non-major schemes
  Junction 2 slip roads (earthworks)
  Junction with A42 (part of national improvement scheme)
  Junction with M1-A1 Link (part of national improvement scheme)
  Junction 34 to junction 35 (earthworks)

M6

Major schemes (over £0·5 million)
  Junction 3 (reconstruction)
  Junction 8 to junction 9 (resurfacing)
  Junction 13 to junction 14 (resurfacing)
  Junction 17 to junction 29 (reconstruction)
  Junction 28 to junction 29 (resurfacing)
  Junction 41 to junction 42 (resurfacing)

Non-major schemes
  Junction 5 slip roads (safety fences)
  Junction 5 to junction 6 (resurfacing)
  Junction 6 slip roads (safety fences)
  Junction 6 to junction 7 (safety fences)
  Junction 7 slip roads (resurfacing)
  Junction 7 to junction 8 (resurfacing)
  Junction 22 to junction 27 (cable laying)
  Junction 27 slip roads (resurfacing and safety fences)
  Junction 29 slip roads (safety fences)
  Junction 36 to junction 38 (safety fences)

[1] Programme may be subject to alteration due to local considerations.

There will also be other urgent and routine works necessary on these roads during this time.

The Department will announce further details of schemes in due course.

Road Congestion

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on road congestion in the 1990s and the cost to the economy.

Mr. Portillo: I refer the hon. Member to my hon. Friend's reply of 6 March, volume 65, columns *545-46*. We are concerned about the economic effects of congestion, and about the consequences for the environment and road safety. We have doubled the road programme to increase capacity on existing motorways and other strategic routes.

MOT Tests

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the public service vehicle failure rates of vehicles undergoing their annual MOT test in Government-controlled testing stations, in each year since the scheme's inception, listing regional variations.

Mr. Portillo: Statutory annual testing for PSVs was introduced in January 1982. Between 1982 and 1987 the results were collated by traffic areas. Since 1987 they have been collated by sub-regions of the vehicle inspectorate. The fail rates, not including vehicles with minor defects rectified at the time of test, are:

Per cent.

Traffic Area	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*
Northern	21·24	16·86	16·22	14·93	18·14
Yorkshire	21·96	20·32	18·66	19·46	20·37
North West	24·85	22·03	22·57	19·99	20·52
West Midland	27·25	23·12	18·66	17·32	16·69
East Midland	18·00	16·45	14·49	14·87	17·93
Eastern	21·37	18·80	20·26	22·24	24·20
South Wales	31·06	23·06	19·97	21·06	24·97

Traffic Area	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*
Western	26·52	24·14	20·81	19·96	23·71
South Eastern	28·97	23·81	18·96	21·40	22·23
Metropolitan	23·41	19·16	13·10	12·15	11·29
Scottish	27·69	25·50	25·98	28·09	25·45
National	24·70	21·40	19·20	19·10	19·90

Per cent.

Vehicles Inspectorate Sub-Region	*1987-88*	*1988-89*
Metropolitan	18·13	17·75
South-Eastern	20·44	17·69
Eastern	19·32	20·95
Western	24·33	23·29
West Midland	23·47	24·37
North-Western	23·15	22·14
North-Eastern	24·12	23·23
Scottish	23·90	23·54
National	22·20	21·60

UK-US Air Routes

Mr. Tom Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what timetable he envisages for further talks with the appropriate American authorities on the future of air routes from the United Kingdom to the United States of America.

Mr. McLoughlin: No specific timetable has been established, but my right hon. Friend is in direct touch with his US counterpart.

Noise Insulation

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will provide additional resources to local highway authorities specifically to enable them to deal with properties which qualify for insulation from traffic noise under the revised interpretation of the 1973 Noise Insulation Regulations.

Mr. Portillo: No. There is no revised interpretation of the Noise Insulation Regulation. The hon. Member may, however, be referring to the greater exercise of discretionary powers in connection with the proposed motorway widening programme, as announced in the recent roads report, which refers to motorways and other major trunk roads. It is a wider application of the existing discretionary power by the Secretary of State in relation to his trunk road programme, for which of course local authorities are not responsible.

Correspondence (MEPs)

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, since 18 June 1989, how many communications he has received from Members of the European Parliament that concern local or United Kingdom matters; and if he will make it his practice, where such matters are involved, to provide the hon. Member for the local constituency with a copy of the correspondence and the reply for information.

Mr. Portillo: Ministers at the Department of Transport have received 54 written communications from Members of the European Parliament since 18 June 1989 that concern local or United Kingdom matters.

If there is no Community content at all in the MEP's letter and a constituency interest predominates, it is our general practice to suggest that the MEP should refer the case to the hon. Member for the constituency concerned. As with other correspondence, replies to MEPs' letters would normally be copied to the hon. Member concerned only if the MEP had himself copied his letter in this way.

Stop Notices

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce legislation to confer upon highway authorities the power to issue stop notices in respect of development projects where public rights of way have been rendered unusable as a consequence of works being started in the absence of lawful authority being secured either to stop up or divert the right of way.

Mr. Portillo: This is not necessary. Highway authorities already have powers under section 143 of the Highways Act 1980 to secure the removal of unauthorised structures from highways. A grant of planning permission for such a structure is not of itself such an authorisation.

Wales (Official Visits)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the dates on which he has made an official visit to Wales since his appointment to his present post.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend made an official visit to Wales on 2 April when he launched the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency in Swansea.

Roads (Private Financing)

Mr. Neale: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what further developments there have been in private financing for roads since the publication of the Green Paper, "New Roads by New Means"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Parkinson: The Green Paper set out proposals for new legislation and procedures to authorise privately financed roads. We invited comments from the private sector and from a wide range of other organisations concerned with roads and transport.

The response was encouraging, with over 160 interested parties commenting. A number of potential problems were exposed and debated, but the overall message was one of wide support for the Government's aims.

Today the Government have published their response to the consultation.

We are making some additions to the proposals in "New Roads by New Means". Their purpose is to enhance the attraction of major road schemes for private sector funding by reducing some of the uncertainties. The details are in the published response which I have placed in the Library of the House.

I am pleased to be able to announce a number of other developments and initiatives. Last year the Government set up a competition for the Birmingham northern relief road. The response to this challenge has been good. Three pre-qualifying bids were received from consortia which have assembled a wide range of expertise. Today I have issued final tender invitations to all three bidders. This means that we should receive, this autumn, firm indications of how the road can be built and operated in the private sector.

I am also inviting the private sector to come forward with preliminary proposals for a new privately funded road between Birmingham and Manchester, as foreshadowed in the Green Paper. We have recently announced a public scheme to widen much of the existing M6 motorway. This will relieve congestion on the route of the motorway, but there will be a further need for extra capacity between the two cities in the longer term. We are looking to the private sector to consider innovative ways of meeting this longer-term need well into the 21st century.

I am inviting views about the suitability of six other schemes for private finance. The schemes I have in mind are:

a lower Thames crossing, east of the M25,
a new crossing of the River Tamar,
a new Mersey crossing serving Liverpool airport,
a link between the M25 and Chelmsford,
a new route parallel to the A127 from the M25 to Rayleigh in Essex, and
a short link between the A1 and M1 at Scratchwood in north London.

The list is not a closed one. We are willing to consider proposals for the private financing of any scheme in the roads programme. We shall also welcome proposals for schemes not in the programme, since the Government do not have a monopoly of good ideas.

All roads financed by the private sector will be subject to the same form of environmental assessment as public schemes. The Government will insist that they are designed and built to the highest standards. We shall want to ensure also that road investment provides best value for money for taxpayers and users.

The response to the Green Paper shows that our proposals for the further development of private funding financing of transport projects enjoys widespread support. My new proposals will provide additional opportunities for the private sector to add to Britain's transport network.

Second Severn Bridge

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will announce the successful tenderer in the competition to provide a second Severn bridge.

Mr. Parkinson: I intend to accept the proposal from the John Laing/GTM Entrepose consortium to design, build, finance and operate the second Severn bridge, in conjunction with taking over the financing and operation of the existing bridge. This privately funded proposal offers the best overall value for money of all those submitted; it will be the most effective means of securing completion of the second crossing at the earliest practicable date. The final decision was between two very strong contenders with good designs, and I am grateful to all the groups which participated.

The consortium's proposal is for a concession to collect tolls on the crossings for up to 30 years, depending on traffic levels. On current forecasts, tolls would be needed for only about 21 years. The consortium's proposal would minimise the impact on traffic by charging tolls in only one direction—westbound—on each crossing. Some increase in tolls would be necessary to cover the cost—some £270 million—of this major improvement in this part of the road network. These rises would be phased in gradually. For car users the initial increase in equivalent single journey tolls in 1992 would be about 20p in 1989 prices, rising ultimately to about 40p from 1995.

The new crossing—which I know is most eagerly awaited on both sides of the Severn—would more than double the road capacity across the estuary. It would relieve for the foreseeable future the traffic congestion already starting to be faced at peak times at the existing bridge. It would also include windshielding to minimise the need for traffic restrictions or closure.

This decision is subject to confirmation of the provision of finance and to a satisfactory conclusion to detailed negotiations on the terms of the concession. I shall make a further announcement when the necessary arrangements are confirmed.

I hope to introduce legislation at the earliest opportunity to seek the necessary powers for the provision of the new bridge and its approach roads. Subject to the necessary parliamentary approvals, construction could start at the beginning of 1992 and be completed in 1995.

This announcement on the Severn bridges demonstrates that the skill and initiative of the private sector can be employed to provide new infrastructure at good value for the public.

London Regional Transport

Mr. Tracey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to be able to set financial objectives for London Regional Transport.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend expects to be able to set these objectives when the House reconvenes following the Easter recess.

EC Transport Council

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the meeting of the European Community Transport Council yesterday.

Mr. Parkinson *[holding answer 30 March 1990]:* I attended the meeting of the European Council of Transport Ministers which was held in Brussels on 29 March.

A 40 per cent. increase in road haulage quotas was agreed for 1990. The Council also gave a commitment to take simultaneous decisions on the quotas for 1991 and 1992, and on the safeguard measures in the event of a crisis in the road haulage industry, at its next meeting in June.

The Council made further advances towards agreement of the second phase of aviation liberalisation. In particular it agreed on a zone scheme for fares, and on the treatment of region-to-region and hub-to-region services for capacity sharing purposes. Progress was also made on other aspects of the liberalisation package and several reservations were withdrawn. The Commission confirmed its intention of coming forward with proposals for dealing with anti-competitive practices in the context of the second package. The Council will return to the subject at its June meeting. There were also useful discussions on air traffic control and personnal licences in aviation. The Council agreed in principle that negotiations should get under way on a package of civil aviation measures with the European Free Trade Association, and further work will now be undertaken on the negotiating mandate.

I am glad to say that a debate on shipping cabotage enabled the presidency to conclude that a proposal should be prepared for positive debate in June.

In a short discussion on the establishment of a transport infrastructure fund, the United Kingdom and the Federal Republic of Germany maintained their unequivocal view that, although the Community could assist in planning, there was no need for a fund as such since member states were best able to decide their own funding priorities. Again, the Council agreed to return to the subject in June.

The June meeting of the Council will also consider again the issue of harmonisation, on which some helpful developments at the Council meeting were offset by the announcement by the Federal Republic of Germany that it intended to introduce, with effect from 1 July, a tax on foreign lorries travelling through Germany.

The Commission reported on the progress of negotiations with Austria, Switzerland and Yugoslavia on third country transit. There were discussions, but no conclusions, on the length of road trains, and on the hire of vehicles without drivers. The following topics were raised under other business: developments in East Germany and elsewhere in eastern Europe; the liberalisation of bus and coach transport; marine pollution; the revision of AETR (the European agreement concerning the work of crews of vehicles engaged in international road transport); the width of vehicles; rail policy; drivers' hours; noise reduction around airports; and concerns about delays caused by customs staff at some borders.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Exchange Programmes

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what exchange and collaborative research and educational development programmes exist between the United Kingdom and Belgium.

Mr. Jackson: The Department, through the central bureau, provides funds to support and encourage exchange activity in the following areas:

(i) A school links programme: there are currently some 11 schools known to have links with Belgian schools.

(ii) A foreign language assistants programme: in the current academic year there are 10 British language assistants working in Belgium and eight Belgian language assistants working in the United Kingdom.

(iii) Vocational and technical education links: there are five colleges of further education with links with establishments in Belgium. In addition, under the auspices of IAESTE (the International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience) there is a small-scale annual programme of course-related practical training placements for higher education students.

(iv) Teacher exchange programme: it is hoped that the 1990-91 academic year will see the first post-to-post teacher exchanges with Belgium.

In addition, there are arrangements for exchange and collaborative activity with Belgium under European Community programmes such as COMETT, ERASMUS and ARION.

United Kingdom scientific research collaboration and exchanges with Belgium occur mainly through common membership of a range of multilateral schemes. These include the European Science Foundation, the European Space Agency, CERN (the European particle physics organisation), the NATO science programme, and the European science exchange programme, as well as the various programmes within the European Communities research and development framework.

In addition, the British Council, under the cultural convention with Belgium, promotes exchanges and collaborative research in scientific and educational fields. Activities are agreed at biennial meetings of the mixed commission, the most recent of which, the 26th meeting, was held in December 1989. All activity with Belgium is fragmented, in that the Flemish and francophone communities function completely separately. Formal statistics of links are not kept because activity is agreed rather in terms of particular projects and budgets.

Professional visits between Britain and Belgium are arranged to study developments in education at all levels. These have led, for example, to the Belgian Ministry of Education seeking council assistance in the introduction of computers in schools, and to a project in drama education with the Brussels circus school. The Flemish universities and the Open university have collaborated to set up a Flemish open university with British inputs and materials. Long-term joint projects at university level are also encouraged in fields such as science parks, engineering, medicine and criminology.

In 1989, new Government funding enabled a programme of academic and professional exchanges to be established. For example, groups of British engineers and environmental scientists visited both Flemish and francophone universities. The links between the university of Gent and the university of Newcastle in linguistics and English literature, and the Vrije universiteit Brussel and Huddersfield polytechnic, in human ecology, have been particularly successful. The latter will now receive funding as part of the mixed commission cultural agreement. A double degree awarded jointly by the university of Liège and Cranfield institute of technology has also been established as part of a major link. All links have attracted matching funding from the Belgians.

In March 1990 two senior British academics headed a mission to Belgium, and the Netherlands to initiate further collaborative programmes. This follows a recent pattern in Europe, where programmes have been established with Spain, Portugal, France, Germany and the Republic of Ireland.

Disabled Students

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if the recent changes announced in funding disabled students' extra educational costs will apply to disabled students with central Government awards pursuing postgraduate degrees.

Mr. Jackson: The rates of postgraduate awards made by the Department for 1990-91 will be announced in due course. My right hon. Friend expects to make appropriate provision for the disabled students' and other allowances, on lines broadly similar to that for mandatory undergraduate awards but allowing for any relevant differences in the postgraduate awards arrangements.

Other postgraduate award-making bodies determine the rates for their subjects within the resources available to them.

School Buildings (Repairs)

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the total expenditure for each education authority on repairs to school buildings.

Mrs. Rumbold: The latest available information is for 1987-88 and is given in the table.

Expenditure by local authorities
Repairs and maintenance of buildings, nursery, primary and secondary schools

Local Education Authority	*£'000*
Barking	1,717
Barnet	2,150
Bexley	1,998
Brent	2,112
Bromley	3,434
Croydon	3,679
Ealing	n/a
Enfield	28
Haringey	n/a
Harrow	876
Havering	1,954
Hillingdon	44
Hounslow	1,173
Kingston-upon-Thames	733
Merton	672
Newham	1,540
Redbridge	1,849
Richmond-upon-Thames	658
Sutton	800
Waltham Forest	2,293
ILEA	24,400
Birmingham	8,225
Coventry	1,923
Dudley	1,642
Sandwell	4,076
Solihull	1,609
Walsall	1,492
Wolverhampton	2,027
Knowsley	1,001
Liverpool	6,047
St. Helens	1,272
Sefton	2,111
Wirral	1,885
Bolton	1,288
Bury	1,458
Manchester	3,958
Oldham	1,510
Rochdale	1,388
Salford	803
Stockport	2,377
Tameside	1,842
Trafford	1,188
Wigan	2,104
Barnsley	2,509
Doncaster	2,756
Rotherham	2,015
Sheffield	n/a
Bradford	3,143
Calderdale	1,357
Kirklees	2,425
Leeds	600
Wakefield	2,061
Gateshead	1,359
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	1,675
North Tyneside	933
South Tyneside	1,259
Sunderland	2,189
Isles of Scilly	23
Avon	8,012
Bedfordshire	4,024
Berkshire	n/a
Buckinghamshire	4,193
Cambridgeshire	5,201
Cheshire	496
Cleveland	7,773
Cornwall	3,338
Cumbria	4,647
Derbyshire	6,389
Devon	7,003
Dorset	4,893
Durham	6,887
East Sussex	2,810
Essex	17,830
Gloucestershire	3,100
Hampshire	8,149
Hereford	4,249
Hertfordshire and Worcester	5,908
Humberside	10,211
Isle of Wight	272
Kent	4,365
Lancashire	10,449
Leicestershire	7,363
Lincolnshire	3,344
Norfolk	4,386
North Yorkshire	5,162
Northamptonshire	3,842
Northumberland	1,730
Nottinghamshire	7,569
Oxfordshire	4,421
Salop	4,240
Somerset	3,243
Staffordshire	8,559
Suffolk	3,865
Surrey	4,973
Warwickshire	3,368
West Sussex	5,486
Wiltshire	3,776

Notes:

1. The figures are based on LEA recurrent expenditure returns to the Department of the Environment.
2. They do not include any items of expenditure that were capitalised.
3. Expenditure returns were not received from those authorities marked n/a.

Examinations

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement about trends in examination results in Greater Manchester since 1975.

Mrs. Rumbold: The table gives the percentage of leavers from the Greater Manchester area and for England obtaining five or more grades at A to C in the GCSE (or its equivalent at O-level and CSE) and one or more A-level passes, since 1974-75.

Examination attainments of leavers from maintained schools
Percentage of leavers

	5+ graded results at GCSE, O-level and CSE (A to C)[1]		*1+ A-level passes*[2]	
	Greater Manchester	*England*	*Greater Manchester*	*England*
1987-88	24·0	26·6	13·6	15·2
1986-87	22·7	23·2	13·8	13·9
1985-86	22·9	23·6	13·6	13·6
1984-85	22·7	23·7	12·3	13·9
1983-84	23·1	23·8	12·3	14·3
1982-83	21·6	23·3	13·3	14·4
1981-82	20·6	23·0	11·3	14·1
1980-81	19·3	21·8	11·0	13·5
1979-80	19·0	20·9	11·1	12·6
1978-79	19·6	20·6	11·5	12·6
1977-78	18·8	20·5	11·4	12·7
1976-77	17·7	20·3	10·3	12·8
1975-76	16·4	19·5	10·0	12·8
1974-75	17·1	19·1	10·4	12·5

[1] GCSE grades A to C; O-level grades A to C; CSE grade 1.

[2] Grades A to E.

Notes:

1. The School Leavers Survey, from which the figures in the table are derived, is based on a 10 per cent. sample of pupils at each school. Sampling error may lead to distortion in the trends.
2. The figures do not provide the overall picture. There has been a growing tendency among 16-year-olds in particular to leave school for GCSE/O-level/A-level study in full-time further education.
3. All figures exclude leavers from direct grant schools. Such leavers were included in an answer to a similar question to Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South) on 21 March 1990 for the earliest three years given.

Reorganisation (Bath)

Ms. Primarolo: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what decision he has made on the application of Beechen Cliff school, Bath, for grant-maintained status; and what response he is making to Avon county council's application for the reorganisation of schools in Bath following the recent court judgment.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend has reconsidered these proposals, as required by the High Court judgment given on 23 February, which set aside his earlier decisions on them. On 30 March he announced his decisions to approve the proposals for grant-maintained status published by the governors of Beechen Cliff school and to reject those for the reorganisation of secondary education in Bath published by Avon local education authority and the governors of St. Mark's Church of England aided school.

Student Grants

Mr. Hind: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will announce the rates of supplementary allowances payable within the mandatory student award in 1990-91.

Mr. MacGregor: Subject to Parliament's approval of the necessary regulations, supplementary allowances payable within the mandatory student award by local education authorities in England and Wales will be increased in the academic year 1990-91. I announced substantial improvements in the disabled students' allowance on 19 March at columns *417-18*. Other allowances will be raised broadly in line with the main grant increases which I announced on 19 December 1989 at columns *220-222*. I am placing details in the Library.

Dyslexia

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will introduce legislation to include in the local education authority training grants scheme dyslexia as a national priority area.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Legislation would not be needed to designate the training of teachers of dyslexic children as a national priority area under the local education authority training grants scheme (LEATGS).

The possibility of including a wider range of training within the national priority areas was raised in the recent report of the efficiency scrutiny of education support grants and LEATGS. My right hon. Friend is reflecting carefully upon this recommendation.

Research

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the value of research undertaken for commercial concerns by universities and polytechnics in the last financial year.

Mr. Jackson: Provisional figures indicate that, in the academic year 1988-89, universities in Great Britain received £92 million from industry in the form of research grants and contracts. Comparable information for polytechnics is not currently available.

Ancillaries

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish for each local authority area the number of ancillaries employed in *(a)* 1970-71, *(b)* 1979-80 and *(c)* 1988-89 in (i) the primary and (ii) the secondary sector, and the ratio of ancillaries to teachers and pupils in each case.

Mrs. Rumbold: I regret that the information requested is not held centrally.

History Teaching

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what steps he intends to take to introduce study of the Nazi holocaust into state schools as a core part of the national curriculum;

(2) when he intends to publish the final report of the working group on history in the national curriculum; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The final report of the history working group was published yesterday. Because history is an important and a controversial subject we are consulting a wide variety of interested bodies on its recommendations. In the light of this consultation, and his own further examination of the group's recommendations, my right hon. Friend will in due course publish his proposals on attainment targets and programmes of study for history for pupils aged five to 16 in schools in England. They will then be sent to the National Curriculum Council for the statutory consultation required by the Education Reform Act. I shall not try to anticipate the nature of my right hon. Friend's proposals.

Correspondence (MEPs)

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many communications he has received from Members of the European Parliament since 18 June 1989 that concern local or United Kingdom matters; and if he will make it his practice where such matters are involved to provide the honourable Member for the local constituency with a copy of the correspondence and the reply for information.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The information is not readily available in the form requested. Members of the European Parliament who raise matters in correspondence which are exclusively of local interest are advised to refer the matter to the hon. Member for the constituency concerned. As with other correspondence, ministerial replies to MEPs are normally copied to the hon. Member concerned only if the MEP had copied his original letter to the hon. Member.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Company Accounts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will take steps to require the supervisory bodies seeking recognition under the Companies Act 1989 to inform their members and the public of the voting of *(a)* their councils and *(b)* their major committees.

Mr. Redwood: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave him on 2 April 1990, *Official Report,* column *399.*

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any plans to investigate and identify the companies which operate off-balance-sheet financing schemes in their financial statements.

Mr. Redwood: No. The Companies Act 1989 has extended the definition of a subsidiary undertaking, which will bring on to the balance sheet a number of schemes which would previously have been off-balance sheet. The issue of off-balance sheet financing is also being addressed by the profession.

Works of Art

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will outline the conditions under which a work of art, subject to an export licence, may be acquired by private individual.

Mr. Ridley: The acquisition of works of art is not a matter for me; I am concerned solely with export licensing. Works of art which might be subject to an export licence (whether or not an application for an export licence has been made) may be acquired by a private individual through a private sale at any time, if the owner so agrees.

On 2 March I announced that, in considering an application for a licence to export a work of art which meets the Waverley criteria, I proposed to take into account the existence of private offers, as well as offers by public institutions, to purchase the item, and said that I would be ready to consider any representations by persons affected by this refinement of policy.

I have received a number of representations in this connection which I am considering with my right hon. Friend the Minister for Arts and Libraries.

Financial Services Act

Mr. Janman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he proposes to address the concerns expressed about the uncertainty of how the statutory regulations made under the Financial Services Act 1986, and the rules made by the self-regulating organisations and professional bodies recognised under that Act, interact with the common law duties of those carrying on investment business.

Mr. Redwood: I recognise the concerns which have been expressed on this matter and the complexity of the issues involved. I have therefore made a reference to each of the Law Commission and the Scottish Law Commission in the following terms:

> "Certain professional and business activities are subject to public law regulation by statutory or self-regulatory control. The Law Commission/Scottish Law Commission is to consider the principles which should govern the effect of such controls on the fiduciary and analogous duties of those carrying on such activities, and to make recommendations. The inquiry will consider examples from differing areas of activity but will be with particular reference to financial services".

The general issue of the inter-relationship of fiduciary duties arising under the common law on the one hand, and statutory and self-regulatory rules on the other, arises in relation to a variety of activities. Fiduciary duties relating to matters such as disclosure of information to clients, liability to account, for example, for commissions, and conflicts of interest, can apply in areas such as estate agency and insurance brokerage as well as in the financial services area.

I have therefore asked the two Law Commissions not to restrict themselves to examining the financial services area, but to consider the issue, and make whatever recommendations they feel appropriate, in the wider context.

European Single Market

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the latest position on the implementation by member states into national legislation of single market measures.

Mr. Redwood: I am very pleased to announce that the Commission's fifth progress report on the single market shows that the UK as recorded by the EC is now in the lead in the Community for the implementation into national legislation of single market measures. Member states' figures for non-implementation are as follows:

	Number
United Kingdom	9
Denmark	10
Germany	12
Ireland	18
France	19
Netherlands	24
Luxembourg	27
Spain	30
Greece	35
Belgium	34
Portugal	44
Italy	50

It is also satisfactory to note a considerable improvement in implementation across the Community. The number of measures implemented in all member states has risen from seven in September 1989 to 21 by the end of February 1990.

Fireworks

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will consider amending the law to raise the age at which an individual can purchase fireworks from 16 years to 18 years.

Mr. Forth: No. A person of 16 is considered old enough to work full time and at 17 to drive a car. It would not therefore be practical to raise the minimum age for purchasing fireworks from 16 to 18.

Visas (United States)

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had with members of the travel industry about the practice of charging holidaymakers for visas to the United States of America in cases where visas are not required.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 3 April 1990]:* I have had no discussions with the industry on this issue.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce legislation to prohibit the practice of charging holidaymakers for visas to the United States of America in cases where visas are not required.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 3 April 1990]:* There are no plans to introduce legislation in this area and I have received no representations to indicate that this is a problem which needs to be addressed. There are certain circumstances where the United States visa waiver scheme does not apply to holidaymakers travelling to the USA, and in some cases travellers may desire a visa for reasons of convenience. These holidaymakers would be able to obtain a visa free of charge from the United States embassy or, if they prefer, to pay any adminstrative charge which their travel agent may levy where they provide this service.

Environmental Technology Network

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the contribution made by his Department to the European Communities' network of environmental technology transfer programme.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 2 April 1990]:* The network of environmental technology transfer (NETT) was established in 1988 and aims to facilitate the exchange of information on a range of techniques, equipment and markets in the areas of clean and low waste technology. NETT is jointly funded by the European Commission and by its membership and services, with the Commission support reducing over the next few years as membership is expected to build up. The president of NETT is Mr. A. J. Fairclough, formerly of the Department of the Environment and the European Commission.

My Department's environmental agency, Warren Spring Laboratory, is a founder member of NETT and its Dr. Schofield is a member of the international board of management. My Department is therefore playing an active role in the further development of NETT.

At present, there are 170 European members, including 27 United Kingdom organisations. Membership is expected to grow as more services come on line. The NETT secretariat has dealt with 30 inquiries from United Kingdom organisations.

Unlisted Securities Market

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the steps his Department has taken to protect investors in the unlisted securities market since June 1987.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 29 March 1990]:* Throughout the period since June 1987, the issue of shares other than those to be included on the official list of the stock exchange has been regulated under part III of the Companies Act 1985. Shares may be offered only by public limited companies, and there must be a prospectus which complies with the requirements set out in schedule 3 of the Act.

The stock exchange, of which the unlisted securities market is part, has been a recognised investment exchange (RIE) within the terms of the Financial Services Act 1986 since the main provisions of that Act came into force in April 1988. Prior to this, the stock exchange was a recognised stock exchange under the terms of the Prevention of Fraud (Investments) Act 1958. Responsibility for RIEs has been transferred to the Securities and Investments Board, including ensuring their compliance with schedule 4 to the 1986 Act, which sets out the safeguards for investors which RIEs must provide.

Since April 1988, those carrying on investment business in the United Kingdom, including advising and dealing or arranging deals in securities for them, have had to be authorised or exempt under the terms of the Financial Services Act.

Faulty Goods

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many letters concerning the problems consumers have experienced with faulty goods he has *(a)* received directly, or *(b)* had forwarded to him since 11 March.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 28 March 1990]:* Since 11 March I have directly received approximately 300 letters about consumer problems with faulty goods and approximately a further 140 letters have been forwarded to me.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Yeast

Sir Richard Body: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what reply he has sent to representations from the director of Consumer Watch about the need to provide consumers with information about products made with genetically engineered yeast.

Mr. Maclean: I will send my hon. Friend, in his capacity as chairman of Consumer Watch, a copy of the reply which the Minister will shortly be sending to the director of Consumer Watch on this matter.

Dairy Farming

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the amount payable each year to United Kingdom dairy farmers in co-responsibility levy.

Mr. Curry: United Kingdom dairy farmers paid an estimated £35·1 million in co-responsibility levy in the financial year 1989-90. Co-responsibility levy receipts are used for a number of purposes, including the promotion of milk products and the funding of milk sector subsidies. It is estimated that levy receipts contributed some £42 million towards such measures in the United Kingdom in 1989-90, but this figure is expected to fall in 1990-91 as a result of the cuts in the rate of levy agreed by the Council of Ministers in 1989 and hence the reduction in available levy receipts.

Bristol Channel (Dumping)

Mr. Speller: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many permits have been issued for the piping or dumping of waste materials into the Bristol channel; how many of these are for industrial, chemical or nuclear waste; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: There are 14 current licences for the dumping of waste materials from vessels into the Bristol channel including the Severn estuary. Two of these involve sewage sludge and the rest dredged spoil.

Authorisations issued by my Department jointly with the Department of the Environment permitting the pipeline discharge of liquid radioactive wastes currently exist for nuclear power stations at Berkeley and Oldbury, which discharge into the Severn estuary, and at Hinkley Point, which discharges into the Bristol channel.

Other discharges of radioactive wastes are a matter for the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Secretary of State for Wales. Pipeline discharges of non-radioactive waste are a matter for the National Rivers Authority.

National Farmers Union

Mr. Cox: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met the president of the National Farmers Union; and what subjects were discussed.

Mr. Curry: The Minister is meeting the president of the National Farmers Union and others today to discuss how United Kingdom industry can best respond to the recent developments in eastern Europe.

Mink

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many mink farmers have been prosecuted for allowing mink to escape into the wild since 1979 under *(a)* the Destructive Imported Animals Act 1932 and *(b)* the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Mr. Maclean: No prosecutions have been taken by the Ministry under the Destructive Imported Animals Act 1932 since 1983, the first year for which records exist.

Enforcement of the provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 is the responsibility of the police. Details are not held centrally, but I am not aware of any recent prosecutions.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many mink farms in the United Kingdom have closed in 1988-89; and what measures his Department is taking to dicourage the breeding of mink.

Mr. Maclean: The number of licensed mink farms in the United Kingdom has varied in recent years, as follows:

	Number
31 March 1988	54
31 March 1989	61
20 February 1990	50

The Government do not encourage or discourage mink farms, but seek to ensure that they keep mink securely and humanely.

Arctic Fox Farms

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has on the number of arctic fox farms in the United Kingdom and where they are situated.

Mr. Maclean: In 1987, the last year for which statistics are available, arctic foxes were farmed at three establishments, two in England and one in Scotland.

Exports

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which are the volumes and values of the top five agricultural products exported from England and Wales in the last financial year.

Mr. Curry: The following table, based on provisional data, shows the five main agricultural products, by value, exported from the United Kingdom during the calendar year 1989. Data for financial years are not readily available and information for England and Wales cannot be separately identified.

	Value (£'000)	*Volume (000s tonnes)*
Alcoholic beverages	1,767,980	745
Meat (other than from bovine animals) and edible meat offal for human consumption; fresh, chilled or frozen	358,025	227
Cereal preparations and preparations of flour or starch of fruits or vegetables	343,027	514
Wheat (including spelt) and meslin, unmilled	326,247	3,278
Meat of bovine animals; fresh, chilled or frozen	303,698	138

Source: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

Environment Conference

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his Department has received an invitation to be represented at the environmental biotechnology conference in Braunsweig on 23 to 27 April, organised by the GFB and the European Environmental Research Foundation.

Mr. Maclean: No such invitation can be traced.

Correspondence (MEPs)

Mr. David Young: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, since 18 June 1989, how many communications he has received from Members of the European Parliament that concern local or United Kingdom matters; and if he will make it his practice, where such matters are involved, to provide the hon. Member for the local constituency with a copy of the correspondence and the reply for information.

Mr. Curry: We have received a number of inquiries during the period. Where Members of the European Parliament raise matters in correspondence which are exclusively of local interest, the practice is to reply suggesting that the MEP should refer the matter to the hon. Member for the constituency concerned. As with other correspondence, replies to such communications would normally be copied to the hon. Member concerned only if the MEP had himself copied his letter in this way.

Offal

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether those offals specified in the Bovine Offal (Prohibition) Regulations 1989 are permitted for use in *(a)* animal feedstuffs for pigs and poultry and *(b)* pet food; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Yes. There is no scientific justification for prohibiting the use of any ruminant-based protein in food for pigs, poultry or domestic pets.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the updated total figures for confirmed cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy in England and Wales since records were first kept.

Mr. Gummer: Since November 1986, when BSE was first identified, until 23 March 1990, the latest date for which figures are available, 10,409 cases have been confirmed in England and 764 cases in Wales.

Research

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the criteria under which he funds research projects under the open contracting and strategic fund 1990-91; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The open contracting and strategic fund 1990-91 was used, as in previous years, to meet urgent needs for research and development in line with MAFF's policy requirements. In doing this, we have sought also to widen the range of contractors beyond MAFF's own in-house laboratories and those of the research councils. Proposals made far exceed the sums of money available and decisions are made in favour of those proposals which best meet MAFF's needs, give good balance to wider programmes, have the best scientific and technical quality and represent value for money.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the projects he is funding on bovine spongiform encephalopathy under the open contracting and strategic fund 1990-91, giving the name of the relevant body and amount of money to be paid for each project.

Mr. Gummer: A £6·1 million programme of research on BSE being funded by my Department was announced on 9 January in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), *Official Report*, column *572*.

In addition, under the open contracting and strategic fund 1990-91, one project on BSE was approved which will be funded subject to contract:

Title	*Duration*	*Total cost £000*
Population genetics of BSE: evidence for the inheritance of susceptibility to BSE	3 years	155

It would be inappropriate to provide more detailed contractual information at this stage.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about his reasons for refusing grant aid under the open contracting and strategic fund 1990-91 for a project for the development of a routine diagnostic test for bovine spongiform encephalopathy as an alternative to histopathology.

Mr. Gummer: Research to find a diagnostic test in the live animal was considered a high priority by the Tyrrell committee and funds have already been made available for this work. A proposal was made under the open contracting and strategy fund for a post-mortem test. A technique for post-mortem confirmation of bovine spongiform encephalopathy already exists and, while the project was examined carefully, when compared with other project applications under the fund, it was not considered to be of sufficient merit to warrant funding on this occasion.

Potatoes

Mr. Moss: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has determined the market support prices for potatoes to apply in Great Britain for the 1990-91 crop year beginning 1 July.

Mr. Gummer: Agriculture Ministers have consulted the farmers' unions about the market support arrangements to apply for the 1990-91 crop year. Ministers have decided that the guaranteed price should remain £53 per tonne. They have authorised the board to decide whether it wishes to support the market by entering into pre-season contracts with producers or by intervening directly, provided that total purchases do not exceed 500,000 tonnes. The target area for potato plantings by registered producers in Great Britain was fixed last July at 154,500 hectares.

ENERGY

Correspondence (MEPs)

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many communications he has received from Members of the European Parliament since 18 June 1989 that concern local or United Kingdom matters; and if he will make it his practice, where such matters are involved, to provide the hon. Member for the local constituency with a copy of the correspondence and the reply for information.

Mr. Wakeham: Information on the number of communications from Members of the European Parliament is not identifiable except at disproportionate cost. However, it is the practice, where an MEP raises a matter in correspondence which is exclusively of local interest, to reply suggesting that the MEP should refer the matter to the hon. Member for the constituency concerned. As with other correspondence, the reply to such a communication would normally be copied to the hon. Member concerned only if the MEP had himself copied his letter in this way.

Flue Gas Desulphurisation

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he is reviewing his policy on the fitting of flue gas desulphurisation to 12GW of coal-burning electricity generating capacity;

(2) if he will make it his policy to deal with coal-burning power station emission problems by means of combustion process controls as distinct from importing low-sulphur content coal;

(3) what effect he envisages on the make-up of British Coal, after the current three-year contract with the principal generators, if flue gas desulphurisation proceeds only at the 4GW Drax project.

Mr. Wakeham *[pursuant to his reply, 1 March 1990, c. 274]:* Subject to scrutiny of their detailed plans, I expect National Power and PowerGen to meet the SO_2 emissions reductions required by the EC large combustion plants directive in 1998 by each undertaking 4GW of FGD retrofits and by adopting supplementary measures such as the burning of low-sulphur fuels.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police (Vacancies)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many current vacancies there are at chief officer rank in each constabulary in England and Wales.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There is only one force, Derbyshire, where the post of chief constable remains unfilled until the police authority makes an appointment.

Prisoners (Malaysian Diet)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements are made for providing a Malaysian diet to remand prisoners who may request such a diet; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Remand prisoners receive the same meals as convicted inmates. Although a Malaysian diet is not provided, dietary variations are supplied on grounds of religion, and any inmate may request a vegetarian or vegan diet. Rice is issued in lieu of potatoes if it is a basic part of the diet in the inmate's country, and establishments use a wide variety of spices in preparing meals.

Pentonville Prison (Unconvicted Prisoners)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what educational facilities and opportunities for association there are for unconvicted prisoners in Pentonville prison; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: There are education classes for two hours each morning and afternoon from Monday to Friday for those who wish to attend. In addition to recreational association for two hours once a week, each prisoner may associate with others in the course of routine activities, which include one hour's exercise in the open air each day (weather permitting), social visits for at least 15 minutes each weekday, physical education sessions lasting one and a half hours twice a week, visits to the prison canteen twice a week and attendance at religious services on Sundays. The regime will be considerably improved when these prisoners move to a completely refurbished wing in about six weeks' time.

Life Imprisonment

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average term of imprisonment served by offenders sentenced to life imprisonment and the minimum periods served by those offenders sentenced to life imprisonment and released from custody during each of the years 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987 and 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Information on the average time served under sentence was published in table 8.5 of the prison statistics England and Wales 1988 (Cm 825), a copy of which is in the Library.

Details of the shortest time served are given in the table. All these prisoners were released on licence following a favourable recommendation by the Parole Board and after consultation with the judiciary as required by section 61 of the Criminal Justice Act 1967.

Information for 1989 is not yet complete.

Shortest period spent under sentence in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales by life sentence prisoners[1] first released on licence in each of the years 1984 to 1988.

Year of release	*Years under sentence*[2]
1984	4·4
1985	4·2
1986	4·2
1987	2·2
1988	5·0

[1] Including detention for life or during Her Majesty's pleasure under s.53 Children and Young Persons Act 1933 and custody for life.

[2] Excluding any time spent on remand in custody, in non-prison service establishments or following any subsequent recall.

Fraud Squad

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will publish for each police force in England and Wales the percentage of officers assigned to fraud squad duties for each of the last five years;

(2) if he will publish for each police force in England and Wales for each of the last five years *(a)* the number of officers assigned to fraud squad duties, *(b)* the number of prosecutions brought and *(c)* the number of convictions secured.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The figures for the last five years for which records are available are set out in the table. Offences of fraud and forgery are recorded together; the figures for prosecutions and convictions in 1989 are not yet available. Statistics on the strength of fraud squads before 1987 are not readily available; the figures for 1985 come from those published in the Roskill report.

Fraud and Forgery

1984

	Proceeded against	*Found guilty*
Avon and Somerset	654	597
Bedfordshire	256	195
Cambridgeshire	374	344
Cheshire	465	458
Cleveland	365	341
Cumbria	196	182
Derbyshire	406	361
Devon and Cornwall	673	605
Dorset	391	350
Durham	243	217
Dyfed Powys	220	184
Essex	542	466
Gloucestershire	287	286
Greater Manchester	1,864	1,761
Gwent	293	249
Hampshire	906	818
Hertfordshire	342	308
Humberside	448	413
Kent	535	535
Lancashire	1,102	1,028
Leicestershire	302	281
Lincolnshire	287	251
Merseyside	1,058	901
Norfolk	303	274
Northamptonshire	267	246
Northumbria	647	556
North Wales	319	305
North Yorkshire	293	265
Nottinghamshire	503	450
South Wales	947	814
South Yorkshire	612	552
Staffordshire	449	423
Suffolk	264	236
Surrey	324	300
Sussex	632	617
Thames Valley	651	617
Warwickshire	158	148
West Mercia	403	395
West Midlands	1,504	1,306
West Yorkshire	1,337	1,126
Wiltshire	176	174
City of London	138	90
Metropolitan	6,516	5,696
Total	28,652	25,721

1985

	Proceeded Against	*Found Guilty*
Avon and Somerset	709	613
Bedfordshire	306	267
Cambridgeshire	351	310
Cheshire	483	465
Cleveland	359	326
Cumbria	237	204
Derbyshire	540	439
Devon and Cornwall	662	591
Dorset	340	315
Durham	226	203
Dyfed Powys	171	166
Essex	541	501
Gloucestershire	267	256
Greater Manchester	1,998	1,864
Gwent	230	230
Hampshire	894	780
Hertfordshire	365	321
Humberside	380	342
Kent	514	517
Lancashire	1,065	989
Leicestershire	415	360
Lincolnshire	277	247
Merseyside	1,024	851
Norfolk	322	284
Northamptonshire	250	225
Northumbria	674	613
North Wales	284	273
North Yorkshire	276	255
Nottinghamshire	601	583
South Wales	918	791
South Yorkshire	640	586
Staffordshire	421	393
Suffolk	223	210
Surrey	269	230
Sussex	568	547
Thames Valley	598	588
Warwickshire	184	174
West Mercia	445	422
West Midlands	1,490	1,341
West Yorkshire	1,179	1,003
Wiltshire	184	170
City of London	119	86
Metropolitan	6,307	5,573
Total	28,306	25,504

1986

	Proceeded against	*Found guilty*
Avon and Somerset	725	603
Bedfordshire	224	179
Cambridgeshire	333	301
Cheshire	403	391
Cleveland	410	392
Cumbria	256	211

	Proceeded against	*Found guilty*
Derbyshire	351	283
Devon and Cornwall	613	548
Dorset	270	252
Durham	269	230
Dyfed Powys	177	142
Essex	465	422
Gloucestershire	224	186
Greater Manchester	1,535	1,456
Gwent	268	205
Hampshire	866	751
Hertfordshire	322	326
Humberside	364	320
Kent	532	518
Lancashire	956	828
Leicestershire	394	369
Lincolnshire	264	217
Merseyside	1,044	817
Norfolk	296	273
Northamptonshire	272	255
Northumbria	697	609
North Wales	286	265
North Yorkshire	282	238
Nottinghamshire	512	471
South Wales	842	674
South Yorkshire	686	538
Staffordshire	405	329
Suffolk	287	239
Surrey	256	243
Sussex	579	527
Thames Valley	634	589
Warwickshire	151	137
West Mercia	442	382
West Midlands	1,322	1,107
West Yorkshire	1,017	864
Wiltshire	181	151
City of London	133	108
Metropolitan	5,340	4,899
Total	25,885	22,845

1987

	Proceeded against	*Found guilty*
Avon and Somerset	595	486
Bedfordshire	334	228
Cambridgeshire	317	257
Cheshire	408	353
Cleveland	419	355
Cumbria	265	224
Derbyshire	372	336
Devon and Cornwall	615	553
Dorset	250	195
Durham	233	199
Dyfed Powys	214	172
Essex	601	468
Gloucestershire	310	258
Greater Manchester	1,605	1,378
Gwent	394	291
Hampshire	830	719
Hertfordshire	366	322
Humberside	379	321
Kent	598	540
Lancashire	1,015	820
Leicestershire	338	295
Lincolnshire	310	268
Merseyside	933	687
Norfolk	363	323
Northamptonshire	248	201
Northumbria	698	631
North Wales	281	255
North Yorkshire	334	277
Nottinghamshire	627	579
South Wales	871	687
South Yorkshire	664	534
Staffordshire	438	359
Suffolk	243	214
Surrey	240	203
Sussex	613	598
Thames Valley	581	548
Warwickshire	159	156
West Mercia	478	393
West Midlands	1,379	1,131
West Yorkshire	970	819
Wiltshire	167	169
City of London	192	99
Metropolitan	5,124	4,572
Total	26,371	22,473

1988

	Proceeded against	*Found guilty*
Avon and Somerset	727	556
Bedfordshire	291	209
Cambridgeshire	273	251
Cheshire	456	391
Cleveland	347	278
Cumbria	254	205
Derbyshire	453	381
Devon and Cornwall	642	571
Dorset	306	243
Durham	275	199
Dyfed Powys	197	161
Essex	591	446
Gloucestershire	311	292
Greater Manchester	1,591	1,501
Gwent	324	267
Hampshire	1,018	811
Hertfordshire	332	283
Humberside	468	404
Kent	552	504
Lancashire	1,070	869
Leicestershire	394	324
Lincolnshire	286	263
Merseyside	998	713
Norfolk	372	309
Northamptonshire	258	202
Northumbria	646	531
North Wales	323	282
North Yorkshire	339	271
Nottinghamshire	546	503
South Wales	966	738
South Yorkshire	703	564
Staffordshire	444	372
Suffolk	258	210
Surrey	306	242
Sussex	740	579
Thames Valley	621	523
Warwickshire	194	152
West Mercia	514	414
West Midlands	1,364	1,155
West Yorkshire	1,189	945
Wiltshire	219	184
City of London	134	107
Metropolitan	4,860	4,285
Total	27,152	22,690

Fraud Squad Strengths
1985

	Strength	*Per cent.*
Avon and Somerset	10	0·34
Bedfordshire	6	0·61
Cambridgeshire	5	0·44
Cheshire	4	0·22
Cleveland	9	0·62
Cumbria	4	0·36
Derbyshire	8	0·45
Devon and Cornwall	10	0·36

	Strength	*Per cent.*
Dorset	5	0·42
Durham	8	0·62
Dyfed Powys	2	0·22
Essex	11	0·41
Gloucestershire	5	0·43
Greater Manchester	19	0·28
Gwent	4	0·41
Hampshire	21	0·68
Hertfordshire	7	0·44
Humberside	12	0·62
Kent	12	0·42
Lancashire	11	0·37
Leicestershire	7	0·40
Lincolnshire	6	0·53
Merseyside	16	0·35
Norfolk	6	0·48
Northamptonshire	3	0·29
Northumbria	12	0·36
North Wales	4	0·32
North Yorkshire	4	0·30
Nottinghamshire	11	0·50
South Wales	13	0·42
South Staffordshire	9	0·32
Staffordshire	7	0·33
Suffolk	6	0·53
Surrey	2	0·12
Sussex	10	0·36
Thames Valley	11	0·34
Warwickshire	7	0·75
West Mercia	8	0·42
West Midlands	34	0·52
West Yorkshire	26	0·551
Wiltshire	4	0·39
City of London	62	7·93
Metropolitan	147	0·55
Total	588	0·49

1987

	Strength	*Percentage*
Avon and Somerset	15	0·50
Bedfordshire	6	0·60
Cambridgeshire	5	0·43
Cheshire	4	0·22
Cleveland	10	0·68
Cumbria	3	0·26
Derbyshire	15	0·84
Devon and Cornwall	10	0·36
Dorset	5	0·40
Durham	5	0·37
Dyfed Powys	3	0·32
Essex	13	0·48
Gloucestershire	5	0·43
Greater Manchester	28	0·40
Gwent	4	0·41
Hampshire	21	0·67
Hertfordshire	7	0·44
Humberside	11	0·56
Kent	11	0·38
Lancashire	10	0·32
Leicestershire	6	0·34
Lincolnshire	6	0·51
Merseyside	18	0·39
Norfolk	6	0·46
Northamptonshire	4	0·37
Northumbria	12	0·35
North Wales	4	0·31
North Yorkshire	4	0·29
Nottinghamshire	13	0·58
South Wales	16	0·51
South Yorkshire	11	0·37
Staffordshire	7	0·33
Suffolk	4	0·34
Surrey	1	0·06
Sussex	8	0·28
Thames Valley	10	0·29
Warwickshire	11	1·13
West Mercia	9	0·46
West Midlands	49	0·74
West Yorkshire	35	0·67
Wiltshire	4	0·36
City of London	52	6·66
Metropolitan	143	0·52
Total	624	0·51

1988

	Strength	*Percentage*
Avon and Somerset	23	0·77
Bedfordshire	8	0·78
Cambridgeshire	5	0·42
Cheshire	6	0·32
Cleveland	8	0·54
Cumbria	3	0·26
Derbyshire	17	0·95
Devon and Cornwall	10	0·36
Dorset	5	0·41
Durham	5	0·37
Dyfed Powys	3	0·32
Essex	14	0·51
Gloucestershire	5	0·43
Greater Manchester	28	0·41
Gwent	5	0·51
Hampshire	20	0·65
Hertfordshire	7	0·43
Humberside	11	0·56
Kent	16	0·54
Lancashire	10	0·32
Leicestershire	6	0·34
Lincolnshire	6	0·50
Merseyside	35	0·75
Norfolk	6	0·45
Northamptonshire	7	0·64
Northumbria	12	0·35
North Wales	4	0·31
North Yorkshire	4	0·29
Nottinghamshire	13	0·57
South Wales	16	0·51
South Yorkshire	12	0·41
Staffordshire	7	0·33
Suffolk	5	0·42
Surrey	3	0·18
Sussex	10	0·35
Thames Valley	12	0·34
Warwickshire	7	0·72
West Mercia	8	0·41
West Midlands	44	0·65
West Yorkshire	36	0·69
Wiltshire	5	0·46
City of London	64	8·02
Metropolitan	135	0·48
Total	666	0·54

1989

	Strength	*Percentage*
Avon and Somerset	27	0·88
Bedfordshire	6	0·66
Cambridgeshire	6	0·50
Cheshire	6	0·32
Cleveland	8	0·54
Cumbria	4	0·35
Derbyshire	15	0·84
Devon and Cornwall	10	0·35
Dorset	12	0·95
Durham	6	0·44
Dyfed Powys	3	0·32
Essex	14	0·50
Gloucestershire	6	0·52
Greater Manchester	31	0·45
Gwent	6	0·60

	Strength	Percentage
Hampshire	22	0·71
Hertfordshire	7	0·43
Humberside	10	0·50
Kent	16	0·54
Lancashire	10	0·32
Leicestershire	9	0·51
Lincolnshire	11	0·93
Merseyside	29	0·62
Norfolk	6	0·44
Northamptonshire	7	0·63
Northumbria	12	0·34
North Wales	4	0·30
North Yorkshire	4	0·29
Nottinghamshire	13	0·56
South Wales	16	0·51
South Yorkshire	14	0·48
Staffordshire	7	0·32
Suffolk	6	0·51
Surrey	4	0·24
Sussex	12	0·41
Thames Valley	12	0·33
Warwickshire	8	0·82
West Mercia	8	0·41
West Midlands	54	0·79
West Yorkshire	39	0·75
Wiltshire	6	0·54
City of London	63	8·03
Metropolitan	143	0·51
Total	712	0·57

Race Relations Act

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prosecutions have been made by the police since 1980 under section 70 of the Race Relations Act 1976 in respect of written material likely to incite racial hatred;

(2) how many requests have been made to the police since 1980 under section 70 of the Race Relations Act 1976 in respect of written material likely to incite racial hatred but where the police have taken no notice concerning the request.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Prosecutions in respect of written material likely to incite racial hatred are brought by or with the consent of the Attorney-General. Since 1980 there have been 60 such prosecutions. These have been under section 5A of the Public Order Act 1936 introduced by section 70 of the Race Relations Act 1976, section 19 of the Public Order Act 1986, which replaced section 5A of the Public Order Act 1936 with regard to the publication or distribution of written material, or section 1 of the Criminal Law Act 1977, which relates to conspiracy to commit offences.

Information on the number of complaints that have been made to the police since 1980 about material likely to incite racial hatred or the ensuing prosecutions is not centrally available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Asylum

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many of the Turkish Kurdish asylum seekers who sought entry in May and June 1989 *(a)* are still to be interviewed and *(b)* have been interviewed but no decision has yet been made;

(2) whether he will make a statement on the length of time it is taking for initial decisions to be reached in the case of the Turkish Kurdish asylum seekers who came to the United Kingdom in May and June 1989.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Of the 3,700 Turkish nationals who claimed asylum on arrival in April, May and June 1989, some 1,900 claimed asylum in their own right and their dependants will have their cases decided accordingly. A special unit has been established which is conducting 40 interviews each week. Some 1,500 applicants have now been interviewed and initial decisions taken in the majority of cases. On 30 March 1990, in 134 cases interviews had been conducted but no decision reached.

We expect to complete most of the remaining interviews and to reach initial decisions on their cases by the end of May. The timetable for interviews has been agreed with solicitors representing the applicants.

Correspondence (MEPs)

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many communications he has received from Members of the European Parliament since 18 June 1989 that concern local or United Kingdom matters; and if he will make it his practice, where such matters are involved, to provide the honourable Member for the local constituency with a copy of the correspondence and the reply for information.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Since 18 June 1989, I have received 44 communications from Members of the European Parliament concerning local or United Kingdom matters. Where members of the European Parliament raise matters which are exclusively of local interest, the practice is to reply suggesting that the MEP should refer the matter to the hon. Member for the constituency concerned. As to other correspondence, replies to such communications would normally be copied to the hon. Member concerned only if the MEP had himself copied his letter in this way.

Wales (Official Visits)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the dates on which he has made an official visit to Wales since his appointment to his present post.

Mr. Waddington: I visited Wales on 19 February 1990 when I addressed a conference on alcohol and disorder in Newport. I also met organisers and members of the Gwent victims support group on that day.

Serious Disorder, London

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis giving details of the intelligence information available to the Metropolitan police prior to the protest march on Saturday 31 March in London against the poll tax; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. The Commissioner will consider any relevant information as part of his review of the events on 31 March.

Voluntary Sector Funding

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish the report of the efficiency scrutiny of Government funding of the voluntary sector; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: The report has been published today. The Government value highly the great contribution made by voluntary bodies to individuals, the communities in which they live and work, and their environment. Effective voluntary organisations channel the energies of individuals to help themselves and others. They meet people's needs imaginatively. They encourage individual and community responsibility.

The Government already support the voluntary sector on a very large scale. In 1988-89 Government grants exceeded £2 billion. This money must be used for good purposes; and it must be used efficiently. The report of the efficiency scrutiny of Government funding of the voluntary sector provides a basis for improving arrangements to secure this.

The Government will continue to provide funds for efficiently managed voluntary organisations which provide worthwhile services, yield practical benefits and meet other valuable objectives. Support for the voluntary organisations involves a partnership between the public sector, the corporate sector and individual donors. We have made tax concessions to encourage this. Voluntary bodies should be encouraged to raise more money from private and corporate donations: it would, clearly, be damaging to the whole nature of voluntary effort if voluntary bodies were to become over-dependent on public funding.

Government funding for voluntary bodies will be governed by a number of principles:

They will support organisations which can achieve a direct practical effect: for example, assisting disabled people; improving the environment; providing skills for the unemployed.

Projects and bodies receiving Government money must uphold accepted ethical standards: for example to support family life.

Government financial support for voluntary bodies should help to achieve the overall policies of Departments: they must carefully determine how this should be done.

The opportunity which voluntary bodies give ordinary people to make an active contribution to the life of the community is one of their important strengths. One of the factors to be taken into account in Goverment support to voluntary bodies should therefore be the extent to which they use or encourage volunteers.

Any campaigning in which voluntary bodies engage must be ancillary to their objectives as required by charity law. Government grant conditions will, therefore, take this fully into account.

Government funding will normally be for specific services or for projects limited to a particular period. It will be subject to review as policies evolve with changing circumstances; though where a body has a continuing role in achieving particular policy goals or provides services for other voluntary organisations Goverment funding for the body's administrative core costs may in certain circumstances be appropriate.

Departments funding voluntary bodies will monitor the results obtained from their funding and have regard to the efficiency with which the body is administered and the costs of its administration.

In the light of these principles Departments will take action to review their funding programmes. They will prepare action plans which will be considered in July by the ministerial group on the voluntary sector chaired by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State.

Mr. John Stalker

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has completed his consideration of the document handed to his private secretary on 25 January by Mr. John Stalker; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: I have now completed my study of this document, which is a typed copy of manuscript notes from the diary of Sir John Hermon, then Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, relating to the period 16 May 1986 to 2 June 1986. I have also further examined the statement which Mr. Stalker issued to the press at the same time.

Mr. Stalker drew particular attention to two entries in Sir John Hermon's diary. The first, under the heading "18 May 1986—Sunday", records a telephone call to Sir John from Sir Philip Myers, Her Majesty's inspector of constabulary. At the end the following words appear: "Mentioned a CC seeing BS RA TK and that DH was au fait with developments". Sir John Hermon has confirmed that the persons referred to by their initials were Sir Barry Shaw, then Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland, Sir Robert Andrew, then Permanent Under-Secretary at the Northern Ireland Office, my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Defence, then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, then Secretary of State for the Home Department. Sir John has also confirmed that "a CC" meant a chief constable and that he did not, at that time, know the identity of that chief constable. He was, however, in no doubt that Sir Philip was talking about future contacts between a chief constable and the persons identified by their initials.

Sir Philip Myers has confirmed that the chief constable, to whom he referred but did not name in the conversation recorded by Sir John Hermon, was in fact Mr. Colin Sampson, then Chief Constable of the West Yorkshire police who was subsequently to replace Mr. Stalker as leader of the inquiry in Northern Ireland. Mr. Sampson has confirmed that he knew nothing about the possibility that Mr. Stalker might be the subject of an investigation before he attended a meeting at Scarborough on 19 May chaired by the then chief inspector of constabulary, Sir Lawrence Byford. The other persons present at that meeting were Sir Philip Myers, Mr. James Anderton, Chief Constable of the Greater Manchester Police, Mr. Ralph Lees, Assistant Chief Constable of Greater Manchester police, and a staff officer. That was the meeting at which Mr. Anderton decided to refer certain information relating to Mr. Stalker to his police authority.

Against this background, it is a matter for regret that, in his published statement of 25 January, Mr. Stalker misquoted Sir John Hermon's diary entry so as to make it refer to Sir Philip Myers telling him that "a Chief Constable *has* seen BS RA and TK and that DH was au fait with developments", with a clear implication that the entry referred to events that had already taken place. In fact, Mr. Sampson had at that time seen none of the persons to whom Sir John was referring.

As regards the words "DH was au fait with developments", it would have been perfectly natural for Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary to have informed the Home Secretary that problems were arising in relation to Mr. Stalker's position, but there is now no other record to show whether he did so before 19 May. My right hon. Friend's recollection is that he was first informed after 19 May.

The second diary entry to which Mr. Stalker has drawn special attention appears under the heading "May 30. 1986—Friday". It contains the following words "Expressed concern regarding structure of enquiry. Clearly collusion between PM/RA/CS and DPP. I must hold the line". By the time this entry was made, Mr. Stalker had already been placed on extended leave. Sir John Hermon has confirmed that this was a reference to the arrangements for the appointment of a replacement for Mr. Stalker and to arrangements for the continuance of the inquiry, about which he felt, at that time, that he was not being adequately consulted. He has also said publicly that nothing sinister should be read into the "collusion" in this context and that he regrets both its use and the subsequent publication of what were intended to be purely personal notes. I am entirely satisfied that, contrary to the assertion made by Mr. Stalker in his statement of 25 January, Sir John Hermon's diary entry for 30 May 1986 had nothing whatever to do with Mr. Stalker's removal from the inquiry in Northern Ireland.

The facts leading to the removal of Mr. Stalker from the Royal Ulster Constabulary investigation are straightforward. During the course of a criminal investigation in Greater Manchester unconnected with the inquiry in Northern Ireland, information came to light which cast doubt on Mr. Stalker's conduct. The information was referred to the Greater Manchester police authority, which decided that there should be an investigation into the conduct of Mr. Stalker and placed him on leave of absence. They were the disciplinary authority for Mr. Stalker, and the decision was entirely a matter for them. An officer who is under investigation himself cannot continue an investigation into the actions of officers in another force, since doubts about his probity must cast doubt on any work which he does. Mr. Stalker therefore had to be replaced as leader of the investigation in Northern Ireland.

Computer Fraud

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the amount of money stolen by computer fraud in 1989; and what measures are being taken to combat this type of crime.

Mr. Forth: I have been asked to reply.

Information on computer fraud is not collected centrally, and an estimate cannot therefore be made with any degree of accuracy. However, it is clear from anecdotal evidence that computer fraud and the broader problem of computer misuse are sufficiently widespread to be of concern.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Waterside (Mr. Colvin) is sponsoring a private Member's Bill to strengthen the criminal law to deal with these issues. The Bill is currently before Parliament, and my Department is giving Mr. Colvin all the support it properly can. We have also launched a three-year awareness programme to emphasise the importance of good computer security.

Criminal Justice

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list all the organisations and individuals that have made submissions to him since the publication and on the subject of "Crime, Justice and Protecting the Public", the Government's proposal for legislation.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 30 March 1990]:* We invited comments by 30 April and we have already had an encouraging response. As soon as possible after that date, I shall let the hon. and learned Gentleman know which organisations have commented.

WALES

Sewage Outfalls

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many short sea outfalls known to his Department discharge untreated sewage into the sea around the Welsh coast.

Mr. Grist: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) on 8 November 1989, Vol. 159, column 649.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information his Department holds on the future plans by Welsh Water plc for constructing long sea outfalls around the Welsh coast; and if he will give the Ordnance Survey grid references for each such site.

Mr. Grist: The future plans of Welsh Water plc are a matter for that company.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will indicate the other participants in the research into sea waters contaminated by sewage, referred to in his reply of 31 October 1988, *Official Report,* column *550*; and what progress has been made in the research.

Mr. Grist: The working group advising on the conducting of the research include officials from the Department of the Environment, Department of Health, Scottish Development Department, Welsh Office and HMIP and representatives from the public health laboratory service, Water Services Association, Water Research Centre, Communicable Diseases Surveillance Centre, the Robens Institute, the university of Wales, Altwell Ltd. and the National Rivers Authority. The first report is due to be presented soon.

Council of Ministers

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to attend any meetings of the European Council of Ministers.

Mr. Peter Walker: It has not been the normal practice of Welsh Office Ministers to attend meetings of the European Council of Ministers. I have, of course, met members of the European Commission to discuss issues of importance to Wales, and I am in close touch with developments.

Bathing Waters

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to require Welsh Water plc to erect signs on those bathing beaches that have failed to comply with the 1976 EEC bathing waters directive.

Mr. Grist: No.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to ensure that all bathing waters in Wales comply with the 1976 EEC bathing waters directive by the summer of 1992.

Mr. Grist: The £96·8 million investment programme which has been agreed with Dwr Cymru should ensure that all bathing waters in Wales listed under the directive comply with its bacteriological standards by 1995. A list of the individual schemes has been placed in the Library.

Water Prices

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will estimate the percentage increase above the retail prices index that the price of water will rise in the year 1991-92 within the area served by Welsh Water plc.

Mr. Grist: Dwr Cymru will be allowed to increase the average of its principal charges by the percentage change in the retail price index plus an adjustment factor of 6·5 per cent. in 1991-92.

Alzheimer's Disease

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he is taking to inform general practitioners of the eligibility for community charge exemption of people suffering from Alzheimer's disease and senile dementia.

Mr. Grist: The acting chief medical officer wrote to all doctors in Wales on 10 November 1989 to give them information and guidance about the certification procedure for exemptions from the personal community charge on grounds of severe mental impairment. The ACMO's letter, a copy of which I am placing in the Library, included guidance on the criteria according to which severe mental impairment is to be judged.

Viruses

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what financial contribution his Department has made to the study into the survival rates of viruses in sea water.

Mr. Grist: The Department contributed £27,757 towards a study, funded jointly with the Welsh water authority, by Dr. J. M. Tyler concerning viruses in sea and fresh water.

Motor Neurone Disease

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if *(a)* L-Threonine and *(b)* branch chain amino acids are available for the treatment of motor neurone disease in the National Health Service; and how many people in Wales suffer from motor neurone disease.

Mr. Grist: Under National Health Service regulations medical practitioners have freedom to prescribe whatever drugs are considered to be clinically necessary for the treatment of their patients except those items which are included under the selected list scheme. Foods and food supplements are not normally prescribable and branch chain amino acids, which include L-Threonine, are more properly classified as foods. Doctors can, however, prescribe food supplements where these are, in their clinical judgment, necessary for the treatment of patients, but they may be required to justify their prescribing to the district medical committee.

Exact information on how many people suffer from motor neurone disease is not held centrally.

British Steel

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will visit British Steel, Shotton.

Mr. Peter Walker: I have no immediate plans to do so.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to meet the chairman of British Steel.

Mr. Peter Walker: I met him on 19 March.

Toxic Waste

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to visit toxic waste tips in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: Members of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution visit licensed waste disposal sites in the course of their duties as necessary.

Aberystwyth-Machynlleth Road

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to improve the trunk road from Aberystwyth to Machynlleth during the next five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Roberts: The A487 Furnace Bridge-Eglwys Fach improvement scheme is programmed to start after April 1994, as indicated in table 6 of "Roads in Wales—Progress and Plans for the 1990s".

Local Government Finance

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has as to how many extra staff have been employed by local authorities in Dyfed and Powys for the administration of the poll tax system; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: This information is not held centrally.

Aberystwyth (Bypass)

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to build a bypass in Aberystwyth, Cardiganshire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Roberts: No. One hundred per cent. principal road grant assistance has been approved for improvements to the A4120, a local authority road, which helps to remove through traffic from Aberystwyth. A study of the road network in the Aberystwyth area is also being undertaken in conjunction with Dyfed county council.

Queensferry High School

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will visit Queensferry high school consequent upon Clwyd county council's decision to close Queensferry high school.

Mr. Roberts: I have no plans to do so.

Flooding, North Wales

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what extra subvention he will pay to the borough councils of north Wales whose territory was affected by the March 1990 sea inundation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my answer to him on 14 March—Volume 169, columns *243-44*—and am keeping the situation under review.

Workers Educational Association

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has completed his review of the funding of the Workers Educational Association in Wales.

Mr. Roberts: The Workers Educational Association has played an important role in the provision of adult liberal education in Wales for many years. There continues to be a need for this type of provision and I have concluded that in the context of the educational scene in Wales, Welsh Office support for Workers Educational Association activity in Wales should continue. Discussions will be held with the Workers Educational Association however on establishing a new funding regime which reflects more directly the level of course provision and student participation in Wales.

Parent Teachers Associations

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many times he has met the parent teacher associations of Wales.

Mr. Roberts *[holding answer 3 April 1990]*: I addressed the annual general meeting of the parent teacher associations of Wales in November 1987.

EMPLOYMENT

Tourism

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment which professional bodies within the hotel and catering industry he consults when matters relating to tourism are under consideration.

Mr. Nicholls: My right hon. and learned Friend consults those organisations which are appropriate for the issue under consideration.

Young People (Earnings)

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the most recent figures derived from the 1989 New Earnings Survey, showing the average weekly gross earnings not affected by absence, full-time, for 16-year-olds and for 17-year-olds.

Mr. Nicholls: The information requested is provided in the following table:

Average gross weekly earnings April 1989

[1]*Age*	*All employees*
16	£85·9
17	£98·9

[1] As at 1 January 1989.

Note: Full-time employees, earnings not affected by absence.

Training Courses

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what system of quality control he envisages for training courses run by private training organisations or by employers under his announced system of training credits.

Mr. Nicholls: The operation of training credit schemes will be the responsibility of training and enterprise councils (TECs) which are invited to submit bids for approval to run pilot schemes against the criteria set out in "Training Credits for Young People: A Prospectus". In all cases training will have to be to approved standards and skill levels.

In particular, the schemes will have to ensure training that leads at a minimum to qualifications at or equivalent to the second level of the framework established by the National Council for Vocational Qualifications. Employers and others who provide training under the credit scheme will have to meet the same quality criteria which apply more generally under youth training. The schemes will be aimed at demanding targets for participation by young people, levels of skills attainment and jobs with training.

There will be vigorous, regular monitoring and evaluation of the schemes including visits by the training standards and advisory service, and follow-up of all young people when they leave the credit schemes.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secetary of State for Employment whether any members of staff of the Health and Safety Executive have examined the accident books from the Channel tunnel sites; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: Regulation 7 of the Reporting of Injuries Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985 places duties on employers and others to keep records of every event which is required to be reported under the regulations to the appropriate enforcing authority. Inspectors from the Health and Safety Executive have examined samples of the record kept by the Channel tunnel contractors and are satisfied that the contractors have complied with the requirements of the regulations.

Training Vouchers

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what recent representations he has received regarding his training vouchers scheme.

Mr. Nicholls: My right hon. and learned Friend has received a considerable number of representations from a range of interested organisations, all of which have expressed support for the scheme of training credits for young people.

Unemployed People (Advice)

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to improve the help and advice given to unemployed people by the employment service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: I have today agreed with the employment service a number of changes which extend and improve the present system of offering counselling and advice to unemployed people. These changes will be of particular benefit to those who have been unemployed for over six months.

The changes are aimed at those unemployed people who are prepared to get back to work but have not been able to do so and also at making sure that the recent legislative changes which require those in receipt of benefit to be actively seeking work are properly enforced.

The main points where improvements to the present system will be made are:

a back to work plan agreed with the adviser which gives individual guidance for each unemployed person on how best to find work. This will be reviewed and revised at regular intervals. Accompanying it will be a new booklet emphasising that the need to look for work is a fundamental responsibility of everyone who expects to receive unemployment benefits and giving general guidance on how best to go about it;

a new advisory interview after 13 weeks of unemployment with a check on activity in looking for a job and subsequent help for those who have been unable to get work even though their skills are in demand in the local labour market;

a unified advisory service which will abolish the increasingly artificial distinction between restart counsellors and claimant advisers and enhance the support that the employment service can give to unemployed people. In particular, the employment service will aim to ensure that each unemployed person after the fresh claims stage is seen by the same adviser during any period of unemployment;

a more systematic follow-up of those who do not take up places on employment training, in job clubs or on restart courses even though they have agreed to do so. Advisers will be given a caseload of unemployed people whom they will re-interview if necessary so that the reasons behind individual decisions can be checked and further advice and action considered;

extra intensive counselling and advice for those who have been unemployed for two years.

Taken together, these measures will improve the effectiveness of the help that the employment service is able to give to unemployed people in getting them away from dependency on benefit and into work or other opportunities that will improve their chances of getting a job.

Skill Centres

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the skill centres to be sold and the purchasers in each case; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 3 April 1990]:* The following list includes details placed in the Vote Office on 13 February concerning the successful bids by Astra Training Services Ltd and Merseyside Education Training Enterprise Ltd, together with information provided in answers to my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Mr. Stewart) *(Official Report,* 28 February 1990, column *249),* and my hon. Friends the Members for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Franks) *(Official Report,* 7 March 1990, column *672)* and for Hexham (Mr. Amos) *(Official Report,* 13 March 1990, column *216)* concerning the successful bids by Mr. J. James, a consortium headed by Mr. Christopher Lakin, and Training Business Ltd. It lists skill centres, and other units within the Skills Training Agency, which are to be sold and the successful bidder in each case. There will be no more sales of training businesses.

To Astra Training Services Limited Management Buy-out Team

Head Office—Sheffield
Anglesey Outreach
Barking Skillcentre
Basildon Skillcentre
Bellshill Skillcentre
Billingham Skillcentre
Birmingham Skillcentre
Bradford Skillcentre
Bristol Skillcentre
Cardiff Skillcentre
Cardiff Bay Outreach
Catrine Outreach
Cheshire Skillcentre (Runcorn)
Chesterfield Skillcentre
Coventry Skillcentre
Deptford Skillcentre
Derby Outreach
Dundee Skillcentre
Dunfermline Skillcentre
Durham Skillcentre
Edinburgh Skillcentre
Enfield Skillcentre (Business only, transferring to site of former Annexe)
Gloucester Skillcentre
Gwent Skillcentre (Newport)
Hillington Skillcentre (and Instructor Training College)
Hull Skillcentre
Irvine Skillcentre
Leeds Skillcentre
Leicester Skillcentre
Letchworth Training College (not Skillcentre)
Manchester Skillcentre
Medway Skillcentre (Gillingham)
Milton Keynes Skillcentre
North Staffs Skillcentre (Stoke-on-Trent)
Norwich Skillcentre
Nottingham Skillcentre
Peterborough Skillcentre
Plymouth Skillcentre
Preston Skillcentre
Redruth Skillcentre
Rochdale Skillcentre
Salisbury Outreach
Scunthorpe Training Centre
Sheffield Skillcentre
Slough Skillcentre
Sneinton Outreach
Somerset Training Centre (Bridgewater)
Southampton Skillcentre (not Millbrook Skillcentre)
Stafford Outreach
Swindon Skillcentre
Telford Outreach
Tyneside Skillcentre (Newcastle)
Wakefield Skillcentre
West Glamorgan Skillcentre (Port Talbot)
West Sussex Skillcentre (Lancing)
Wigan Skillcentre
Wolverhampton Skillcentre
Wrexhan Skillcentre

Mobile Training Service

Sales Teams

To METEL (Merseyside Education Training Enterprise Ltd)
Liverpool Skillcentre

To Mr. James

Gas and Water Safety Training business presently located at Letchworth Skillcentre

To Consortium headed by Mr. C. Lakin
Cumbria Skillcentre (Maryport)
East Lancs Skillcentre (Accrington)
Ipswich Skillcentre
St. Helens Skillcentre

To the Training Business
Lambeth Skillcentre

Skills Training Agency

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what response the Minister of State has had about his offer to meet representatives of the trade unions about position papers prepared by bidders for the Skills Training Agency, together with assessments by the Government Actuary's Department of the successful bidders' pension proposals.

Mr. Eggar *[Pursuant to his reply, 20 March, Official Report, c. 573]:* I met representatives of the STA trade unions on 16 March.

Education Building Projects

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list all the major capital building projects carried out by the Department of Education for Northern Ireland in each year since 1980; and if he will list those capital projects currently scheduled to start over the next five years.

Dr. Mawhinney: Major capital building projects are not carried out by the Department of Education. However, I am sending to the hon. Gentleman and copying to the Library details of major capital building projects carried out by various bodies which were approved for grant aid by the Department of Education in the financial years 1980-81 to 1989-90. Information on capital projects currently scheduled to start in the 1990-91 financial year is also included; projects starting in the next four years are not known at this stage.

Culture

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of expenditure incurred to date related to the cultural traditions programme in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney: Since the cultural traditions programme was introduced the Department of Education and the central community relations unit have incurred the following expenditure:

Department of Education	*£000*
Arts Council	
Various drama, music, dance and story-telling projects and local arts festivals	140
Ulster Museum	
"Kings in Conflict" Exhibition and production of associated work-packs for schools	95
Ulster Folk and Transport Museum	
(i) Completion and conversion of Cluan Place Terrace to schools residential accommodation	
(ii) Initial work towards the production of an Ulster Dialect Dictionary	105
Ulster-American Folk Park	
(i) Secondment of teacher to develop classroom materials on the emigration theme	
(ii) Feasibility study relating to possible establishment of schools residential accommodation	
(iii) Fees for guide/lecturers.	50
Institute of Irish Studies	
Part publication of Ordnance Survey Memoirs and support for salary of part-time researcher and assistant in this field	11
BBC	
"Today and Yesterday" Festival for primary schools at Ulster Folk and Transport Museum	9
Old Museum Building	
Contribution towards refurbishment costs to enable building to open for local community arts activities	30
Education for Mutual Understanding Programme	
Production of materials for use in the classroom, by Stranmillis Training College and others	80
Central Community Relations Unit:	
Publications Subsidy Scheme	
Support for cultural traditions publications	100
Media Support	
Local history programmes, cross-community drama	81
Ulster Local History Trust Fund	
Support for publications by local history groups	125
Irish Language Support	
Ultach Trust and adult education programmes	86

Cars

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the purpose of the annual inspection of cars aged five years and over; and what are the statutory responsibilities of car owners.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The annual visual inspection of vehicles by officers of the Department of the Environment is to ensure that on the date of inspection the requirements of the Construction and Use Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1976 are complied with.

This does not absolve the owner/user from his obligation, under article 29 of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1981, to ensure that the vehicle complies at all times in all respects with the Construction and Use Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1976.

The issue of a vehicle test certificate should not be relied upon as indicating the condition of particular test items of the vehicle other than at the moment of issue.

HEALTH

Mental Hospitals

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will update information given in the answer to the hon. Member for Dagenham on 20 March 1987, *Official Report*, column *669*.

Mr. Freeman: The tables list mental illness hospitals with over 200 beds which we are aware were approved for closure in 1988, hospitals which were closed between 1987 and 1989 inclusive and those mental illness hospitals which health authorities plan to close by about 1995. No mental illness hospitals with over 200 beds were approved for closure in 1989.

Table 1—mental illness hospitals with over 200 beds, approved for closure, following public consultation.

	Number of beds	*Date closure approved*
Yorkshire		
Clifton Hospital	303	March 1988

Table 2—Mental illness hospitals closed between 1987 and 1989.

	Number of beds
Yorkshire	
Naburn Hospital, Near York	—
Trent	
Saxondale Hospital	—
St John's Hospital, Lincolnshire	—
South Western	
Horton Road Hospital	—
Digby Hospital, Exeter	—
West Midlands	
Powick Hospital, Worcester	—
Middlewood Hospital, Sheffield	606
Towers Hospital, Leicestershire	394
Kingsway Hospital, Southern Derbyshire	363
East Anglian	
St Audry's Hospital, Woodbridge	372
St Nicholas' Hospital, Great Yarmouth and Waverney	131
St Andrews, Norwich	335
North East Thames	
Friern Hospital[1]	673
Claybury Hospital	722
South East Thames	
Cane Hill Hospital	343
Tooting Bec Hospital	420
Hellingly Hospital	154
St Augustines Hospital	235
South West Thames	
Long Grove Hospital, Epsom	404
Brookwood Hospital	489
Wessex	
Whitecroft Hospital	75
Herrison Hospital, Dorchester	263
Old Manor Hospital[1]	216
Oxford	
St John's Hospital, Aylesbury	282
St Crispin's Hospital, Northampton	263
Littlemore Hospital, Oxford	226
West Midlands	
Barnsley Hall Hospital, Bromsgrove and Redditch	169
Rubery Hill Hospital, South Birmingham	211
Central Hospital, South Warwickshire	298
Hollymoor Hospital, Solihull	279
Mersey	
Rainhill Hospital	487
Parkside Hospital	485
Winwick Hospital	815
North Western	
North Manchester (Springfield) Hospital[1]	145
Northern	
St Mary's, Stannington	495
South Western	
Mendip Hospital	96
Moorhaven Hospital	157

[1] With some facilities remaining on site.

HIV

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people there are in the northen region who are HIV positive because of contaminated blood transfusions.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: At the end of 1989, the latest date for which figures are available, the number of people in Northern region who had been reported to the communicable disease surveillance centre as being HIV positive as a result of contaminated blood transfusions was greater than zero but less than 10. In line with the procedure followed in reports under the AIDS (Control) Act, to safeguard confidentiality, the actual figures in this range are not published.

Drugs

Mr. Michael Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) of 26 March, *Official Report*, column *46*, whose forecast increase in the cost of drugs will be used in deciding the factor to set indicative drug budgets for general practitioners.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department will give annual guidance on the allowance to be made for the forecast increase in the cost of drugs when setting indicative drug budgets for the following year.

Wales (Official Visits)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the dates on which he has made an official visit to Wales since his appointment to his present post.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Responsibility for the health services in Wales lies with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales. I have therefore made no official visits to Wales as Secretary of State for Health.

Family Planning

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial support is being given by his Department to the Family Planning Association and Brook Advisory Centre.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Section 64 grants to both organisations are being renewed for the three-years ending 31 March 1993. The Family Planning Association will receive £165,000 in 1990-91, £130,000 in 1991-92 and £100,000 in 1992-93 from the Department of Health towards their headquarters administrative expenditure and regional activities. Financial support will also be provided by the health departments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The equivalent grant for the last three-year period was £130,000 per annum.

For the period 1990-1993 the grant to Brook will be maintained at the existing level of £45,000 per annum. This funding goes towards its headquarters administrative costs, including the education and information activities designed to encourage responsible attitudes to personal relationships among young people under 25 and the co-ordination of the local Brook centres working directly with young people. In addition to the core grant a further award of £20,000 per annum for each of three years is being made to fund a new development officer post.

The conditions attaching to these organisations' grants, in relation to expenditure, activities and liaison with Government Departments, will continue to apply.

Occupational Therapy

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the manpower planning advisory group on the future supply of occupational therapists has reported; if he will make it his policy to place its report in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The manpower planning advisory group expects to report on occupational therapy skill mix and supply issues shortly. When the report is ready, I shall arrange for a copy of it to be placed in the Library.

Pesticide Exposure

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the ability of doctors within the National Health Service to diagnose pesticide exposure.

Mr. Freeman: All doctors receive training during their undergraduate and postgraduate years in the diagnosis of acute poisoning, for instance by pesticides. In addition all general practitioners and hospital accident and emergency departments were issued with a copy of the book, "Pesticide Poisoning". This gives guidance on the diagnosis and treatment if acute poisoning from pesticides is suspected. If a doctor requires further advice on poisoning he can contact any of the five national poisons information centres, which offer a 24-hour service.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence is available to his Department of any connection between pesticides and Parkinson's disease.

Mr. Freeman: We have no conclusive evidence of any connection between pesticides and Parkinson's disease. Some recent preliminary research has shown that in individuals with an inherited tendency to metabolise in a restricted way certain classes of biochemical compounds, including some pesticides, there could be a link with degenerative nervous diseases like Parkinson's disease. The results are inconclusive and work continues.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what independent research has been carried out in the United Kingdom on the health effects of pesticide exposure.

Mr. Freeman: The Department of Health does not hold comprehensive information centrally about independent research carried out in the United Kingdom on the health effects of pesticide exposure. Nevertheless, medical staff in this Department keep abreast of developments published in relevant scientific journals.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department has of a connection between pesticides and cot deaths.

Mr. Freeman: We are not aware of any evidence suggesting a connection between cot deaths and pesticides. A diagnosis of cot death, or more specifically sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), is made when, after careful inquiry and through pathological examination, no specific cause of death can be found. In such circumstances it is not, of course, possible to be certain that some unidentified toxic agent has not contributed to a premature death. However, the epidemiological characteristics of SIDS, as a whole, are not consistent with a direct connection with pesticides.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what routine blood tests are available to determine levels of pesticide within an individual's blood.

Mr. Freeman: There is no evidence that blood tests for pesticide levels would be of benefit to symptomless individuals. Where patients present with symptoms which could be due to poisoning, for instance by pesticide, clinicians have access to local and supra-regional pathology laboratories. Laboratory staff carry out blood tests necessary to aid diagnosis and treatment.

Correspondence (MEPs)

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many communications he has received from Members of the European Parliament since 18 June 1989 that concern local or United Kingdom matters; and if he will make it his practice where such matters are involved to provide the hon. Member for the local constituency with a copy of the correspondence and the reply for information.

Mr. Freeman: We have had 30 such letters. Where Members of the European Parliament raise matters in correspondence which are exclusively of local interest, the practice should be to reply suggesting that the MEP should refer the matter to the hon. Member for the constituency concerned. As with other correspondence, replies to such communications would normally be copied to the hon. Member concerned only if the MEP had himself copied his letter in this way.

NHS Buildings

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the proportion of National Health Service buildings constructed *(a)* before 1890, *(b)* before 1918, *(c)*between 1919 and 1939, *(d)* between 1940 and 1964 and *(e)* after 1965.

Mr. Freeman: Up-to-date information on the age profile of the estate is not held centrally.

Agency Staff

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the amount spent on (a) agency nurses and (b) agency clerical and administrative staff for 1987-88 for each district health authority, special health authority and regional health authority and England as a whole.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information derived from annual accounts submitted to the Department for 1987-88 is shown in a table which has been placed in the Library.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave him on 29 March at columns *318-20*.

NHS Consultants

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the date and details of the last occasion on which the breach of contract by a National Health Service consultant was reported to him.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Allegations of breach of contract by an NHS consultant are a matter for the employing authority, and are not necessarily reported to the Department. Any such information affecting particular individuals is treated in confidence.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he will take to ensure that hospital consultants honour their National Health Service contracts.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This is primarily a matter for employing authorities. "Working for Patients" and its associated working paper 7 announced the Government's proposal to introduce fuller job descriptions for all hospital consultants to improve their accountability. Discussions with the profession are not yet completed. We intend to issue guidance to health authorities advising them to define more clearly the scope of consultants' duties, which will help to ensure that all consultants fulfil their NHS commitments.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether any districts have taken action to deal with consultants who may have breached their National Health Service contract in the last year.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally. Questions about consultants' fulfilment of their NHS contracts are a matter for resolution by employing authorities.

Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total sum paid out in fees to outside organisations in the furtherance of privatisation by his Department in 1979-80 and in each subsequent year; and what is his estimate for 1990-91.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *[holding answer 12 March 1990]:* No expenditure prior to 1986-87 has been identified. Expenditure in 1986-87 and subsequent years has been incurred for work by professional advisors on the sale of the General Practice Finance Corporation. The expenditure for each year is as follows:

	£
1986-87	23,000
1987-88	37,800
1988-89	174,621
1989-90	414,000

The figure for 1989-90 is estimated.

All expenditure up to and including 1988-89 has been from a joint Health and Social Security budget.

There are no plans for any expenditure in 1990-91.

SCOTLAND

Firearm Licences

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many firearm licences have been revoked in Scotland in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Sections 30 and 52 of the Firearms Act 1968 as amended by section 12 of the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988 provide powers to revoke firearm and shotgun certificates. The number of revocations in Scotland, since 1980, the earliest year for which figures are readily available, are as follows:

Year	*Firearm*	*Shotgun*
1980	27	59
1981	20	52
1982	23	66
1983	16	54
1984	25	67
1985	39	99
1986	25	69
1987	31	101
1988	39	142
1989	36	124

Local Government Finance

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many Scottish pensioners have written to him since the Budget supporting the community charge; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. and learned Friend has received a number of representations from pensioners about different aspects of the community charge since the Budget statement.

Violent Crime

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give details of the numbers of violent crimes where firearms have been involved in each year since 1979.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the annual bulletins published by the Scottish Home and Health Department under the title "Recorded Crimes and Offences Involving Firearms, Scotland", which give a comprehensive analysis of offences involving firearms including information on categories of firearms used, type of offence committed, and so on. The latest bulletin, which gives the figures for 1988, was published as SHHD statistical bulletin No. 4/1989. A copy is in the Library.

Departmental Employees

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total number of people employed by his Department, including full-time and part-time employees and consultants.

Mr. Rifkind: The March 1990 figures for staff employed in the Scottish Office, Scottish prison service and the four minor Departments for which I am responsible (Scottish Record Office, General Register Office (Scotland), Department of the Registers of Scotland and the Scottish Courts Administration) are as follows:

Department	*Full-Time*	*Part-Time*	*Total*
Scottish Office	6,173	228	6,401
Scottish Prison Service	3,855	34	3,889
Scottish Record Office	108	11	119
General Register Office	289	28	317
Department of Registers	987	20	1,007
Scottish Courts Administration	899	61	960
Total	12,311	382	12,693

In addition, the Scottish Office has current contracts with 144 individual consultants or with consultancy firms. The Scottish prison service similarly has 29 such arrangements.

Hepatitis B

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has regarding newly reported cases of persons infected by the hepatitis B virus in each health board area in Scotland in each of the last five years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The number of reported cases of persons infected by the hepatitis B virus in each of the last five years is set out in the table:

Health Board	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
Argyll and Clyde	29	27	9	2	8
Ayrshire and Arran	18	12	4	7	4
Borders	1	1	0	1	0
Dumfries and Galloway	1	1	0	0	0
Fife	2	1	3	3	5
Forth Valley	24	12	3	4	5
Grampian	69	32	34	24	14
Greater Glasgow	371	231	151	174	180
Highland	9	7	3	2	3
Lanarkshire	26	24	8	5	6
Lothian	101	72	53	35	35
Orkney	0	0	0	0	1
Shetland	0	1	0	1	1
Tayside	53	33	41	55	24
Western Isles	3	0	0	0	0
Other[1]	2	15	13	4	12
Total	709	469	322	317	298

[1] Cases which cannot be attributed to a specific Health Board.

These figures show a welcome decline in the incidence of the disease.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has regarding the level of take-up of the hepatitis vaccine in each health board area in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This information is not routinely recorded by health boards.

Schools

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the capital expenditure on local authority schools in each Scottish regional and island council in each of the past 10 years in cash and constant prices.

Mr. Rifkind: The information is given in the following table, which has been compiled from local authority financial returns. The reduction in expenditure in real terms during the period reflects a substantial and progressive decline in pupil numbers which in turn reduced the requirement for new school building.

Capital Expenditure by Local Authorities on Schools

1979-80

Region/Islands Council Area	*At outturn prices*	*At 1988-89 prices*
Borders	552	1,039
Central	3,264	6,143
Dumfries and Galloway	1,509	2,840
Fife	2,292	4,313
Grampian	6,844	12,880
Highland	2,326	4,377
Lothian	7,745	14,576
Strathclyde	17,292	32,542
Tayside	2,228	4,193
Orkney	155	292
Shetland	2,906	5,469
Western Isles	485	913

1980-81

Region/Islands Council Area	*At outturn prices*	*At 1988-89 prices*
Borders	1,046	1,663
Central	2,716	4,319
Dumfries and Galloway	1,572	2,500
Fife	2,503	3,980
Grampian	8,658	13,678
Highland	2,624	4,173
Lothian	8,722	13,870
Strathclyde	19,013	30,235
Tayside	1,723	2,740
Orkney	95	151
Shetland	3,093	4,919
Western Isles	626	995

1981-82

Region/Islands Council Area	*At outturn prices*	*At 1988-89 prices*
Borders	921	1,334
Central	2,419	3,504
Dumfries and Galloway	1,668	2,416
Fife	2,471	3,579
Grampian	11,803	17,095
Highland	3,203	4,639
Lothian	7,073	10,244
Scrathclyde	23,468	33,990
Tayside	1,799	2,606
Orkney	602	872
Shetland	3,555	5,149
Western Isles	1,422	2,060

1982-83

Region/Islands Council Area	*At outturn prices*	*At 1988-89 prices*
Borders	643	869
Central	1,388	1,875
Dumfries and Galloway	2,042	2,758
Fife	2,330	3,147
Grampian	8,583	11,594
Highland	2,813	3,800
Lothian	8,003	10,811
Scrathclyde	19,013	25,684
Tayside	2,003	2,706
Orkney	1,212	1,637
Shetland	2,710	3,661
Western Isles	1,638	2,213

1983-84

Region/Islands Council Area	*At outturn prices*	*At 1988-89 prices*
Borders	703	907
Central	1,068	1,378
Dumfries and Galloway	2,400	3,097
Fife	1,705	2,200

Region/Islands Council Area	*At outturn prices*	*At 1988-89 prices*
Grampian	6,499	8,388
Highland	1,649	2,128
Lothian	5,898	7,612
Scrathclyde	19,724	25,456
Tayside	1,449	1,870
Orkney	897	1,158
Shetland	2,507	3,236
Western Isles	917	1,183

1984-85

Region/Islands Council Area	*At outturn prices*	*At 1988-89 prices*
Borders	913	1,123
Central	1,083	1,332
Dumfries and Galloway	2,376	2,921
Fife	2,881	3,542
Grampian	5,805	7,137
Highland	817	1,005
Lothian	5,941	7,305
Strathclyde	19,969	24,552
Tayside	2,114	2,599
Orkney	1,253	1,541
Shetland	1,829	2,249
Western isles	964	1,185

1985-86

Region/Islands Council Area	*At outturn prices*	*At 1988-89 prices*
Borders	1,064	1,242
Central	1,407	1,642
Dumfries and Galloway	2,463	2,874
Fife	4,284	4,999
Grampian	8,247	9,624
Highland	1,320	1,540
Lothian	6,132	7,156
Strathclyde	20,072	23,424
Tayside	2,751	3,210
Orkney	1,211	1,413
Shetland	1,055	1,231
Western Isles	1,188	1,305

1986-87

Region/Islands Council Area	*At out-turn prices*	*At 1988-89 prices*
Borders	876	989
Central	2,378	2,684
Dumfries and Galloway	2,102	2,372
Fife	4,589	5,179
Grampian	7,931	8,951
Highland	1,125	1,270
Lothian	3,732	4,212
Strathclyde	17,290	19,514
Tayside	2,012	2,271
Orkney	913	1,030
Shetland	502	567
Western Isles	3,244	3,661

1986-87

Region/Islands Council Area	*At out-turn prices*	*At 1988-89 prices*
Borders	951	1,019
Central	2,798	2,997
Dumfries and Galloway	656	703
Fife	2,077	2,225
Grampian	2,262	2,423
Highland	2,521	2,701
Lothian	8,108	8,685
Strathclyde	19,714	21,118
Tayside	3,267	3,500
Orkney	979	1,049
Shetland	537	575
Western Isles	3,872	4,148

1988-89

Region/Islands Council Area	*At out-turn prices*
Borders	1,060
Central	4,372
Dumfries and Galloway	1,661
Fife	4,753
Grampian	3,409
Highland	3,655
Lothian	7,828
Strathclyde	24,897
Tayside	3,605
Orkney	1,027
Shetland	929
Western Isles	2,196

The figures include expenditure on nursery, primary, secondary and special schools.

Out-turn figures have been converted to 1988-89 prices using the GDP deflator.

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what measures he has taken, and proposes to take, to ensure that schools meet an acceptable level of first aid provision by *(a)* meeting the Government's own guidelines and *(b)* matching the health and safety requirements required of factories and offices; and what time limit he has set for the attainment of such standards.

Mr. Rifkind: Education authorities are responsible for the operational management of schools and are responsible for the safety of pupils attending schools under their management. Health and safety legislation applies to schools as it does to other workplaces. Health and Safety Commission guidance on first aid in educational establishments recommends that the total number of people on site, not just the number of employees, be considered in assessing first aid needs.

Regulations, which also provide for playground supervision in Scottish schools, came into force on 1 April this year putting a statutory duty on education authorities to take reasonable care for the safety of all pupils attending schools under their management. In addition, my Department is currently preparing guidance on first aid provision in schools and colleges which will be issued to education authorities.

Trunk Roads

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about progress on trunk road schemes during 1989-90 and about the progress expected in 1990-91.

Mr. Rifkind: Details of the major scheme starts made and expected to be made are as follows:

Schemes with an estimated cost of over £1 million started since 1 April 1989

M80 Stepps Bypass
A82 Luss Bypass
A7 Dalkeith Bypass
A68 Newton St. Boswells Bypass
A76 Cumnock and Auchinleck Bypass
A87 Dornie Bypass
A701 Ae Bridge
A94 Stracathro Junction

These schemes had a total value of £66 million.

Schemes with an estimated cost of over £1 million expected to start by 31 March 1991

M74 Millbank-Nether Abington	A74 Upgrading schemes
M74 Kirkpatrick Fleming-Gretna	A74 Upgrading schemes
M74 Elvanfoot-Paddy's Rickle Bridge	A74 Upgrading schemes
M74 Maryville-W. of Fullarton Road (Advance Works)	
A1 Tower-Dunglass	
A96 Nairn Railway Bridge Replacement	
A9 Greenloaning-Blackford	
A929 Tarbrax-Forfar	
A75 Carrutherstown-Hetland	
A77 Bennane Hill	

These schemes have a total value of £130 million, reflecting the 28 per cent. increase in trunk road funds for this year and the still further increase for the following year. I will be making a more detailed announcement on A74 upgrading schemes later this month. As to completions of major schemes, in 1989-90 eight major schemes were completed and in 1990-91 another 10 schemes are expected to be completed.

Motorway Service Areas

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the Government's policy and practice for providing new motorway service areas in respect of development of the motorway network in Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Development Department is currently progressing a massive motorway building programme in Scotland and schemes valued at over £650 million are now coming on stream. An integral part of the development of the motorway network will be ensuring the provision of adequate services in strategic locations, such as network focal points. The general policy will be to secure new service areas spaced roughly 20 to 30 miles apart on existing motorways where there is a gap in provision and on new motorways.

The general policy as to the siting, planning, design and operation of motorway service areas (MSAs) is to ensure:

(a) the development of an adequate network of service facilities;

(b) genuine competition for service provision through competitive tendering for provision of services;

(c) road safety, by restricting and controlling access to the motorways, and by preventing inappropriate activities at service areas (such as the sale of alcohol);

(d) the maintenance of the necessary range of services for 24 hours a day, seven days a week, including facilities for the disabled and provision for heavy goods vehicles.

The Department's policy will therefore be to ensure that the consumer is provided with an adequate range of choice and good value for money, while upholding the highest standards of road safety. This depends among other things on promoting fair competition among firms seeking to provide services. Normally competitive tenders are sought from the private sector for the development and a long lease of the site, in return for an appropriate rent which reflects the market value of the site as developed. In implementing its policy the Department will, of course, remain flexible to the specific needs and circumstances of particular routes, areas and local communities.

To achieve the control over the planning, development and future use of MSAs it is intended that the Secretary of State should, except in very exceptional circumstances, own the sites which are identified as suitable for the provision of MSAs and that the Department should obtain the appropriate planning clearance. If an identified site is not already in the Secretary of State's possession it will be acquired either voluntarily or, if necessary, by using compulsory purchase powers. The site would then be open to competition and thereafter leased to a firm which would provide the services with the necessary control over the site being exercised through appropriate conditions in the lease. Other things being equal, leases for adjacent sites would not be awarded to the same firm. The lease control would not entail intervening in the detailed management of sites, which is best left to the firm providing the services, but would ensure that basic requirements—for example, round-the-clock provision of certain facilities—continue to be met and that basic restrictions, for example, on the sale of alcohol, continue to be observed.

As part of the route studies for the M74 and M80 motorways consultants will be advising on suitable sites for service areas. Once these have been identified and they are in the Secretary of State's ownership they will then be the subject of an application for planning clearance before making the necessary arrangements for leasing the site.

Where proposals are brought forward for service areas which are designed to meet the needs of motorway users but which would not actually be sited on the motorway itself—that is, off a road or roundabout giving access to it—the relevant planning applications will fall to be considered by the local planning authority. In such cases planning authorities will no doubt take into consideration not only the road safety and traffic implications of the proposals but existing and proposed service areas on the motorway itself.

I hope that I shall be able to make a further statement about our preferred locations for service areas in the near future.

Electricity

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he proposes to exercise his powers under section 97 and schedule 12 of the Electricity Act 1989.

Mr. Rifkind: I have today placed in the Library a copy of an agreement under section 97 and schedule 12 of the Electricity Act 1989 entered into with Scottish Nuclear Ltd. to provide assistance towards qualifying expenditure in respect of certain back-end costs of the nuclear cycle. The agreement relieves SNL of some of its inherited liabilities in relation to the generation of electricity by Magnox stations of up to £716 million by 1994. The qualifying expenditure to which the agreement relates will be incurred by the company over a period which is likely to exceed 100 years from the present. It is not therefore expected that payment of grant under the agreement will be made for some years.

Student Allowances

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will publish full details of student allowances for session 1990-91.

Mr. Lang: I announced the main rates of student grant for the 1990-91 academic year on 19 December 1989 at columns *147-48* and I announced the new provisions for disabled students on 19 March at columns *450-51*.

I am publishing today the remaining supplementary grant rates for 1990-91 and full details have been placed in the Library. The increases in these rates are broadly in line with the 5 per cent. increase in the main rates, previously announced.

Consultancies

Mr. Tim Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total amount spent by his Department in 1989 on management and computer consultancy contracts; excluding hardware and software purchases; if he will list each management or computer consultancy contract awarded by his Department in 1989, giving in each case the name of the consultancy firm and the subject of the assignment; and what is the total amount that his Department has budgeted to spend in the current year.

Mr. Rifkind *[holding answer 28 March 1990]:* Estimated expenditure on management consultancies and computer consultancies in the 1989-90 and 1990-91 financial years is, in rounded terms, as follows:

£'000	*Management*	*Computer*
1989-90	300	675
1990-91	400	725

The contracts awarded by my Department in 1989-90 are as follows:

Management Consultancies and Subject of Assignment

A Fegent—HBM Procurement.
Touche Ross—Health Education Review.
Peat, Marwick McLintock—Lothian Health Board.
Coopers and Lybrand—HBM Executive Agency proposals.
A Fegent—Overview of Scottish Office Purchasing.
Price Warehouse—Creche facilities.
British Institute of Management—Network analysis on probation court services and parole.
Peat, Marwick McLintock—Further Education development planning.
Edinburgh University—Interpretation of a new statistical method.
CSL Group Ltd—Financial Regulations for School Boards.
Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte—Education Finance.

Computer Consultancies—Subject of Assignment

Gimms Ltd—Feasibility study on digital boundary conversion.
DWH Associates—Advice on survey of geographical data.
Know Edge Ltd—Feasibility study on incorporating environmental data into roads database.
North West Regional Research Laboratory—Feasibility study on mapping application.
BIS Applied Systems Ltd—Quality management workshops.
Logica UK Ltd—Production of Scottish aspects for the National Response Plan (RIMNET).
BIS Applied Systems Ltd—To review aspects of Scottish Criminal Record Office computer system.
PA Consulting Group Computers and Telecommunications—Automatic Fingerprint Recognition System.
Gimms (GIS) Ltd (2 contracts)—Digital mapping.
Purchasing and Supply Consultants—Purchasing Operating and Information Systems.
Edinburgh University Computing Service—Digital mapping.
Dunsmore Data—Preparation and implementation of financial spreadsheet.
CS Consultants—Programming various data systems. Preparation of roads database.
Taylor Woodrow Management and Engineering Ltd—Specification for and running of Scottish Office Emergency Exercise.
Napier Polytechnic—Computing requirements and staff training.
Price Waterhouse—Management information systems in grant-aided colleges.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will calculate the amount payable by a man on average earnings living in a house valued at £60,000 under a system of local government finance based on capital values rates with a local income tax element based on Kirklees council's projected spending in 1989-90 and 1990-91; and what the figures would have been for a woman on average earnings in similar circumstances.

Mr. Chope: The amount payable would depend on the precise detail of how such a system would operate and on the taxable income of the individuals.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secetary of State for the Environment what is the Government's estimate of the number of households who pay the full rate who would gain under the poll tax; and what is their estimate of the average gain in such cases.

Mr. Chope: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 29 March 1990, *Official Report*, Vol. 170, column *247*.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will publish a table in the *Official Report* showing the estimated numbers in each sample category of people paying more poll tax than rates, together with the Government's estimate of their contribution under the present system and the amount which the Government considered they ought to pay.

Mr. Chope: The Government have not prescribed an amount that people ought to pay.

An analysis of the distributional impact of the introduction of the community charge was placed in the Library on 15 February.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will publish in the *Official Report* a table showing in each case the assumed underlying long-run community charge per adult as a percentage of average earnings in the northern region and the south-east for full-time adult male manual workers in the year to April 1989, together with an explanation for the difference.

Mr. Chope: The assumed long-run community charge used for 1990-91 revenue support grant purposes, expressed as an amount per week, represents 2·9 per cent. of average full-time earnings at April 1989 for male manual employees on adult rates of pay in the Northern region and 2·2 per cent. of the equivalent figure in the south-east including Greater London.

The assumed personal community charge, which reflects the transitional arrangements for 1990-91, expressed as an amount per week, represents 2·4 per cent. of average full-time earnings at April 1989 for male manual employees on adult rates of pay in the Northern region and 2·3 per cent. of the equivalent figure in the south-east including Greater London.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he has received from members of the public *(a)* supporting and *(b)* opposing the poll tax.

Mr. Chope: I have received and continue to receive many representations on the community charge reflecting a wide range of views.

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of state for the Environment if he will update the figures put in the Library on 6 November 1989 showing, for each local authority area, what level of (i) capital value rates and (ii) local income tax would be required in order to raise the same amount of revenue as with the 1990-91 community charge.

Mr. David Hunt: I have today placed in the Library a table showing the information requested.

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will place in the Library a table showing for each rating or charging authority *(a)* his estimate of the average rate bill per domestic ratepayer in 1989-90, *(b)* the information he has on the average personal community charge actually set in each area in 1990-91, *(c)* the percentage domestic rate increase which would have taken place in 1990-91 if the same amount of revenue had been raised in each area as is being raised in community charges and *(d)* the rate bill per domestic ratepayer in each area consequent upon that increase in domestic rates.

Mr. David Hunt: I have today placed in the Library a table showing the information requested.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those local authorities now known to him which have announced their intention to levy a standard community charge at less than twice the personal community charge.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 3 April 1990]:* I have not yet gathered the information requested except on an informal basis from a few authorities on a basis which did not imply that it would be published.

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration was given in calculating standard spending assessment and grant to Westminster city council to the daily population figure; and if he will set out the sum thereby arrived at.

Mr. Chris Patten *[holding answer 2 April 1990]:* Standard spending assessments and revenue support grant entitlements are calculated in the same way for all local authorities. The basis of calculation is set out in the revenue support grant distribution report approved by this House on 18 January. Resident population, adjusted for visitors and for the net inflow of commuters, features in the SSA element for all other services; resident population features in the SSA for fire and civil defence; and resident population adjusted for the net inflow of commuters features in the SSA for highway maintenance. There is thus no single daily population figure used in the calculation for Westminster city council.

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will reconsider the standard spending assessment for Brighton and other holiday and conference resorts.

Mr. Chris Patten *[holding answer 2 April 1990]:* I have made it clear that I am willing to consider any new evidence on standard spending assessments with a view to making changes for 1991-92 if that should prove necessary.

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* setting out for each council the impact on its standard spending assessment arising from new duties under the Environmental Protection Bill and the Food Safety Bill *[Lords].*

Mr. Chris Patten *[holding answer 2 April 1990]:* Duties under these bills will not affect local authority spending in 1990-91. New duties will be taken into account in setting standard spending assessments for 1991-92.

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the authorities which benefited in their standard spending assessment and revenue grant allocation from a consideration of the impact of daily population increases.

Mr. Chris Patten *[holding answer 2 April 1990]:* The basis of calculation of standard spending assessments and revenue support grant entitlements is set out in the revenue support grant distribution report (England). Resident population adjusted for daily visitors and for the net inflow of commuters features in the assessment for all other services. All authorities receive a positive contribution to their SSAs from the allowance for visitors. The authorities listed in the table receive a positive contribution to their SSAs from the allowance for net inflow of commuters. The latter also features in the SSA element for highway maintenance.

Authorities with positive day time net inflow

Alnwick
Ashfield
Avon CC
Barking and Dagenham
Barrow in Furness
Bassetlaw
Bath
Birmingham
Blackburn
Boston
Bournemouth
Brighton
Bristol
Burnley
Cambridge
Cambridgeshire CC
Camden
Carlisle
Carrick
Cheltenham
Chester
Chesterfield
Christchurch
City of London
Cleveland CC
Colchester
Copeland
Coventry
Crawley
Crewe and Nantwich
Darlington
Derby
Devon CC
Dover
Durham
East Staffordshire
Eastbourne
Ellesmere Port and Neston
Exeter
Forest Heath
Fylde
Gloucester
Great Grimsby
Great Yarmouth

Hackney
Hammersmith and Fulham
Hartlepool
Hastings
Hereford
Hillingdon
Hounslow
Ipswich
Isles of Scilly
Islington
Kensington and Chelsea
Kingston upon Hull
Knowsley
Lambeth
Leeds
Leicester
Leicestershire CC
Lincoln
Liverpool
Luton
Manchester
Medina
Middlesbrough
Milton Keynes
Newcastle upon Tyne
North Bedfordshire
Northampton
Northavon
Norwich
Nottingham
Nottinghamshire CC
Oxford
Peterborough
Plymouth
Poole
Portsmouth
Preston
Reading
Restormel
Rochester upon Medway
Rugby
Rushmoor
Salford
Salisbury
Sandwell
Scunthorpe
Selby
Sheffield
Shrewsbury and Atcham
Slough
South Somerset
Southampton
Southwark
St Edmundsbury
Stafford
Stockton-on-Tees
Stoke-on-Trent
Taunton Deane
Thamesdown
Tower Hamlets
Trafford
Wakefield
Walsall
Warrington
Watford
Welwyn Hatfield
West Dorset
West Somerset
Westminster
Winchester
Wolverhampton
Worcester
Worthing
York

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce regulations to require YTS trainees to pay only 20 per cent. of the community charge.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 29 March 1990]:* No. From May, 18-year-old YTS trainees will receive £35 per week plus top-up payments which can be substantial. Their liability for the community charge will depend upon their net income, but it is likely that most will be eligible for community charge benefit.

Mobility

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many applications for rehousing under the national mobility scheme there have been in each year since its inception.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The number of nominations made by authorities on behalf of applicants for rehousing in another authority were as follows for each year:

	Number
1981-82	16,401
1982-83	25,322
1983-84	27,776
1984-85	33,877
1985-86	26,796
1986-87	33,407
1987-88	27,224
1988-89	[1]20,369

[1] Interim figure.

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list those local authorities which have rehoused applicants under the national mobility scheme by authority, number accepted and year accepted, and in total;

(2) if he will list those local authorities which have unsuccessfully asked for rehousing of their residents to another local authority under the national mobility scheme by authority, number rejected, year applied and total.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The information is not held centrally.

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of applications for rehousing under the national mobility scheme have been successful.

Mr. Michael Spicer: During the period from 1981, when the scheme started, to the end of 1988-89, 26 per cent. of all those who were nominated by their local authority for rehousing elsewhere were successful in moving to their area of choice; a further 7 per cent. are still on waiting lists.

Bellwin Scheme

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his Department's proposals for making a scheme under section 155 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

Mr. David Hunt: It will be necessary to make a scheme under this section only following an emergency and a decision by the Government to provide financial help for local authorities. The details of the scheme will reflect the nature of the emergency. My Department has recently written to local authorities in England outlining the changes envisaged in the Bellwin scheme following the reform of local government finance. I have placed a copy in the Library. It is proposed to pay grant at the rate of 85 per cent. of eligible expenditure over a threshold equivalent to £2 per adult.

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will review the uniform business rate for small rural village business concerns to include turnover and profit in its calculation.

Mr. Chope: Rateable values reflect the rent that might reasonably be expected to be paid from year to year for each property, on the assumption that the tenant pays the cost of repairs and insurance. In the 1990 revaluation, the level of value relates to 1 April 1988 but reflects the physical state of the property on 1 April 1990. To the extent that generally profit margins may be smaller in rural areas, these could be expected to be reflected in rents, which would in turn be reflected in rateable values.

House Renovation Grants

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about changes in the system of house renovation grants.

Mr. Chope: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) on 22 February, *Official Report*, Vol. 167, column *888*.

Groundwater Contamination (Oxfordshire)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has received any information from the National Rivers Authority concerning the contamination of groundwater at the Blewbury borehole in south Oxfordshire.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The National Rivers Authority and Thames Water Utilities have kept the Department informed of recent observations and developments concerning groundwater quality in the Blewbury area of south Oxfordshire. Carbon tetrachloride has been detected in water supplied at about half the concentration prescribed in the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989. There is no cause for concern. Work is in hand to ascertain the source of the solvent and any corrective measures required.

Merchant Seamen

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he is taking following the recent ruling of the Humberside valuation and community charge tribunal concerning the liability of merchant seamen to the community charge; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The Humberside valuation and community charge tribunal found that the individual circumstances of some merchant seamen whose employment required them to be absent from home for substantial periods meant they should not be registered as liable for the community charge. It is not for my right. hon. Friend to comment on the decisions of an independent tribunal.

Correspondence (MEPs)

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many communications he has received from Members of the European Parliament since 18 June 1989 that concern local or United Kingdom matters; and if he will make it his practice, where such matters are involved, to provide the honourable Member for the local constituency with a copy of the correspondence and the reply for information.

Mr. Trippier: This Department has received approximately 100 communications from Members of the European Parliament since 18 June 1989.

Where the correspondence raises questions of exclusively local interest, the practice is to recommend the MEP to refer the matter to the hon. Member for the constituency concerned. As with other correspondence, replies to such communications would normally be copied to the hon. Member concerned only if the MEP had himself copied his letter in this way.

Drinking Water, Northumbria

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the location and staffing by grade and size of the drinking water inspectorate for the Northumbrian water authority area.

Mr. Trippier: The drinking water inspectorate is located in central London and recruitment is in progress. There are currently 12 staff in post: a chief inspector; deputy chief inspector; a further four professional staff; and six administrative and support staff. At present, staff are not allocated to any specific region or area.

Caravan Sites

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how long he intends to allow Kirklees and Calderdale local authorities to have to make suitable caravan site provision before he decides to issue directions to those authorities to make such provision; what is his assessment of how many sites each local authority should provide; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: My Department is in discussion with both authorities. The statutory requirement on metropolitan districts is to provide for 15 caravans. We will continue to monitor the situation closely and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will give a direction to either or both authorities if he considers it necessary to do so.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to delay the granting of designation of caravan sites in Bradford until he is satisfied that adjacent authorities have made suitable site provision.

Mr. Chope: No. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already decided to designate Bradford on the grounds that it is not expedient for that authority to make adequate provision for the gipsies residing in or resorting to the area. We are continuing to monitor closely action being taken in respect of the provision of sites by neighbouring authorities.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he took account of in considering an application from Bradford council to designate caravan sites in Bradford about *(a)* the cost and location of existing and proposed private caravan sites and *(b)* improvements Bradford council intends to make to council-owned caravan sites in Bradford.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State took account of all relevant factors before deciding to designate Bradford, including those relating both to private site provision, and to the improvements which the council proposes to local authority sites.

Housing Association Tenants

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when his Department's research report on new housing association tenants is to be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: I welcome the report's findings. These demonstrate that housing associations are targeting their lettings at lower-income groups in housing need. They vindicate our policy of making housing associations the main providers of new subsidised housing for rent.

The research, published today, was carried out for the Department of the Environment by Research Surveys of Great Britain after a census of new lettings in 1988 by the National Federation of Housing Associations. Interviews were sought with all households in the census where there was someone in employment or receiving an occupational pension, in order to collect detailed information about household characteristics and incomes.

The findings confirm that the incomes of new housing association tenants, even those in work, are low. The average gross income of households with an income from employment was £153 per week and average net weekly household earnings were £115.

Occupational pensions averaged £29.10 per week with the state pension and other benefits bringing average total income for these households to £91·70 per week.

Nearly nine out of 10 of the households with someone in work had savings of less than £1,500. Households receiving an occupational pension had higher savings but only one third of these had savings of more than £3,000.

Among households with an earned income, over half were in manual jobs and a third were in unskilled manual work. About half the respondents in the survey had been on a council waiting list. Most people had applied direct to the housing association for accommodation, but about a fifth had been nominated by their local council.

Action for Cities

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he can now give *(a)* the final cost of the action for cities anniversary events on 28 February and *(b)* the costs of the publication "People in Cities".

Mr. David Hunt: *(a)* The final cost of the launch in Bradford and the television link-up on 28 February averaged under £15,000 for each of the seven centres involved, and locally incurred costs amounted in addition to an average of £5,000 for each centre.

(b) 50,000 "People in Cities" booklets and wallets—£74,542.

Greenhouse Effect

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Government expect to respond to the report by the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology on the greenhouse effect.

Mr. Chris Patten: We have today laid before the House the Government's response to this report. The Committee produced a detailed and thorough report and we broadly welcome its conclusions. The report stressed the need for continued research into the science of climate change, we have already responded to this need by announcing significant increases in our funding for climate-related research in the coming year. The report also emphasised the importance of seeking a global solution to this global problem and we will continue to play an active and constructive role in the work of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change and in promoting an international framework convention on climate change.

Valuation Disputes

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has completed his consideration of the response to the consultation paper on valuation disputes under the Leasehold Reform Act 1967.

Mr. Chope: We and the Welsh Office have now completed a full analysis of the response to the consultation paper. The consultation was undertaken in the light of suggestions that the existing statutory procedure—under which valuation disputes can be referred to the local leasehold valuation tribunal with a subsequent right of appeal to the Lands Tribunal—was in practice working to the disadvantage of leaseholders, in that some freeholders were using the threat of an appeal, and the consequent risk of substantial costs, to deter leaseholders from having recourse to the procedure. Views were sought as to whether such allegations could be substantiated and, if so, whether there was a case for withdrawing or curtailing the right of appeal.

The consultation yielded no firm evidence that the alleged effect is occurring in practice. We have concluded, therefore, that there is at present no case for making changes to the statutory procedure. We will, however, keep matters under review and will not hesitate to take action if evidence comes to light that the procedure is failing to maintain an equitable balance between the interests of freeholders and leaseholders.

Homelessness

Mr. Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will review the Housing Act 1985 as far as it affects homeless people, in view of the recent comments made by Lord Justice Watkins in the High Court about the lack of clarity in the Act.

Mr. Michael Spicer *[holding answer 3 April 1990]*: The Government completed a major review of the homelessness legislation only last November. It concluded that the Act provided an adequate safety net for those in genuine need, homeless through no fault of their own. It recognised, however, that there was a need for local authorities to adopt more consistent procedures and criteria. A revised code of guidance is being prepared to help them to achieve this and we will look carefully at Lord Justice Watkin's comments in preparing the revised code.

Dangerous Substances

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the implementation in the United Kingdom of European Commission directives 76/769/EEC, 79/663/EEC, 82/806/EEC, 82/828/EEC, 83/264/EEC, 83/478/EEC, 85/467/EEC and 85/610/EEC, on the marketing and use of dangerous substances.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 2 April 1990]:* The Control of Pollution (Supply and Use of Injurious Substances) Regulations 1980 (SI 1980 No. 638) restricted the use of polychlorinated biphenyls and terphenyls in the manner specified in directive 76/769, as amended by directive 82/828.

The Dangerous Substances and Preparations (Safety) Regulations 1980 (SI 1980 No. 136) implemented directive 76/769 as respects vinyl chloride monomer (chloroethylene) in aerosols, and also implemented directive 79/663 in respect of ornamental objects and Tris in certain textile products.

The Benzene and Toys (Safety) (Regulations) 1987 (SI 1987 No. 2116) implemented directive 82/806.

The Novelties (Safety) (Amendment) Regulations 1985 (SI 1985 No. 128) implemented directive 83/264.

The Asbestos Product (Safety) Regulations 1985 (SI 1985 No. 2042) and the Asbestos (Prohibitions) Regulations 1985 (SI 1985 No. 910) implemented directive 83/478.

The Control of Pollution (Supply and Use of Injurious Substances) Regulations 1986 (SI 1986 No. 902) implemented directive 85/467.

The Asbestos Products (Safety) (Amendment) Regulations 1987 (SI 1987 No. 1979) and the Asbestos (Prohibitions) (Amendment) Regulations 1988 (SI 1988 No. 711) implemented directive 85/610.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the authorities which he designated on 3 April for community charge limitation and the maximum amounts which he is proposing.

Mr Chris Patten: The list is as follows:

	Budget £ million	Proposed cap	Reduction £ million	Reduction £ per adult
Avon	533.7	507.1	26.6	37
Barnsley	142.0	132.0	10.0	59
Basildon	27.9	23.7	4.2	35
Brent	249.3	241.7	7.6	39
Bristol	64.2	56.6	7.6	26
Calderdale	132.9	125.4	7.5	52
Camden	181.4	177.0	4.4	34
Derbyshire	560.6	520.6	40.0	56
Doncaster	190.1	178.5	11.6	53
Greenwich	213.0	203.0	10.0	65
Hammersmith and Fulham	167.5	155.8	11.7	99
Haringey	216.5	206.5	10.0	71
Hillingdon	151.0	141.7	9.3	53
Islington	189.5	185.8	3.7	30
North Tyneside	129.7	122.9	6.8	45
Rochdale	152.0	144.0	8.0	51
Rotherham	165.4	157.5	7.9	39
St Helens	126.7	122.8	3.9	29
Southwark	241.0	226.9	14.1	86
Wigan	200.6	190.6	10.0	43

Note: Reductions shown as £ per head of relevant population.

DEFENCE

Eastern Europe

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the fall in defence expenditure in eastern Europe over the last year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr Allen) on 2 February, *Official Report*, column *406*.

Armed Forces (Welsh Speakers)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many fluent Welsh speakers are currently serving in each of Her Majesty's armed forces.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Rescue Helicopters

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many land-based Royal Navy helicopters are available on a 24-hour, 365 day a year basis for rescue operations around the British coast.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Two Royal Navy air stations are on call 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, for search and rescue (SAR) duties. At each of these there are two helicopters available for SAR. More helicopters can be made available at longer notice.

Oil Tankers

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has any plans to add to the current number of Royal Fleet Auxiliary oil tankers serving the British Navy.

Mr. Neubert: There are currently two of the new class of auxiliary oiler replenishment vessels (AORs) on order for the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. Further orders are planned but no decisions have yet been made on their size or timing.

Natural Disasters

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish a list of those activities in which Her Majesty's armed forces have assisted civilian populations during periods of natural disasters over the past 20 years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The armed forces have supported civilian authorities during periods of natural disaster both at home and overseas on numerous occasions over the past 20 years. An exhaustive list of those activities could be provided only at disproportionate cost, but the following list compiled from the readily available records, gives an indication of the frequency with which the services' help is provided.

Date	*Country*	
1970	Bangladesh (East Pakistan)	Floods
1970	Tunisia	Floods
1970	Turkey	Earthquake
1972	Hong Kong	Landslide
1972	Fiji	Hurricane
1972	Rodriguez	Cyclone
1972	Philippines	Floods
1973	Pakistan	Floods
1973	West Africa	Famine
1973	Nepal	Famine
1974	Belize	Hurricane
1974	United Kingdom	Floods
1974	Ethiopia	Famine
1974	Honduras	Hurricane
1974	West Africa	Famine
1976	United Kingdom	Drought/Fires
1978	United Kingdom	Bad Weather
1979	United Kingdom	Floods
1979	Jamaica	Floods
1979-80	West Indies	Hurricane
1980	Nepal	Famine
1980	United Kingdom	Bad Weather
1980-81	Italy	Earthquake
1980-81	West Indies	Hurricane
1981	United Kingdom	Bad Weather
1981-82	United Kingdom	Bad Weather
1984	Mexico	Earthquake
1985	Ethiopia	Famine
1986	Jamaica	Bad Weather
1986	Solomon Islands	Hurricane
1986	West Indies	Floods
1986	El Salvador	Earthquake
1986-87	United Kingdom	Bad Weather
1987	Cook Islands	Cyclone
1987	Bermuda	Hurricane
1987	Vanuatu	Cyclone
1987-88	United Kingdom	Bad Weather
1988	West Indies	Hurricane
1988	Nepal	Earthquake
1989	West Indies	Hurricane
1990	United Kingdom	Bad Weather
1990	Western Samoa	Cyclone

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish for each of the past 10 years the number of civilians rescued at sea by Royal Navy helicopters.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Information for the years before 1983 is not held in the form requested. Since 1983 Royal Navy helicopters have rescued the following number of civilians at sea:

Year	*Number Rescued*
1983	133
1984	88
1985	102
1986	74
1987	85
1988	80
1989	161

Complaints

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish in the *Official Report* for each of the last 10 years (a) the number of complaints made against his Department to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, (b) the number of complaints upheld and (c) the action he took on (b).

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The number of complaints (a) made and (b) upheld for the last 10 years is as follows:

	(a) complaints made	*(b) complaints upheld*
1989-90	[1]—	[1]—
1988-89	22	Nil
1987-88	11	Nil
1986-87	16	Nil
1985-86	17	1
1984-85	21	Nil
1983-84	20	Nil
1982-83	23	1
1981-82	28	1
1980-81	27	Nil

[1] Figures not yet available.

When the PCA upholds a complaint it is departmental practice to provide an appropriate remedy.

Trident

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the first submarine capable of carrying Trident missiles to commence her sea trials.

Mr. Neubert: Vanguard will undertake a series of sea trials, the precise dates of which are classified. However, I can say that the first of these will commence about two years before the UK Trident deterrent going into service in the mid-1990s.

Military Personnel

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the practice of his Department on releasing the names of military personnel who are witnesses to an event which is the subject of a criminal prosecution.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence seeks to be as helpful as possible in answering requests from the police, prosecuting authorities and legal representatives of defendants in criminal proceedings for the names of service personnel who would be in a position to give evidence as witnesses. The Department needs in each case to be satisfied as to the purpose and validity of the request before providing such information. Personal security considerations may also need to be taken into account.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence why the names of witnesses who are alleged to be service personnel have been witheld in the case of a criminal prosecution of three people for an incident which took place involving a convoy of military vehicles near the Clyde submarine base on 15 August 1989.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I assume that the hon. Member is referring to the recent request from one of those charged as a result of this incident to be given the name of the driver of one of the military vehicles involved. The Department declined to provide this information, as it is not the practice to release details of individual members of military convoy crews in response to requests of this sort.

Correspondence

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Easington dated 5 February concerning living conditions of service men's families in Germany.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The hon. Member should by now have received a reply from my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces.

RAF Brawdy

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the amounts of money spent on construction and equipment for joint United Kingdom-United States of America projects at Brawdy, Wales, in each of the past five years; and which votes and sections of the defence accounts have borne these expenditures.

Mr. Alan Clarke: The United Kingdom has spent no money on construction and equipment for joint United Kingdom-United States projects at RAF Brawdy in the past five years.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the operating cost of the United Kingdom national joint ocean surveillance information centre in each of the last five years; and what proportion of these costs is borne by the United States of America.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I assume the hon. Member is referring to the United States Navy's oceanographic research facility at RAF Brawdy. Running costs of the facility are borne by the United States, although United Kingdom provides five Royal Navy and three Royal Air Force personnel to assist in operating the facility.

Vacant Properties

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total number of vacant houses classified for the use of service personnel.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As at 30 November 1989, the latest date for which complete figures are available, the total number of vacant properties in the United Kingdom, both houses and flats, classified as service married quarters was 12,423. Many of these properties were either undergoing or awaiting major maintenance work or modernisation, some were already allotted to service families who were due to move in shortly and others were in the process of disposal.

Royal Arsenal West

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department presented its proposals for the development of the Royal Arsenal West site to the London borough of Greenwich; and what response it has received.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Our development proposals for the Royal Arsenal West site were presented to the London borough of Greenwich on 19 December 1989. The council is generally supportive of our ideas.

Correspondence (MEPs)

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many communications he has received from Members of the European Parliament since 18 June 1989 that concern local or United Kingdom matters; and if he will make it his practice, where such matters are involved, to provide the honourable Member for the local constituency with a copy of the correspondence and the reply for information.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Some 15 letters covering a variety of topics have been received from members of the European Parliament in the period in question.

Where Members of the European Parliament raise matters in correspondence which are exclusively of local interest, the practice is to reply suggesting that the MEP should refer the matter to the hon. Member for the constituency concerned. As with other correspondence, replies to such communications would normally be copied to the hon. Member concerned only if the MEPs had themselves copied their letter in this way.

Cambridge House, Woolwich

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the flats at Cambridge house, Artillery place, Woolwich, were first offered for sale; and when he now expects the sale to be completed.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The flats at Cambridge house, Artillery place, Woolwich were first offered for sale on 8 February 1990. The sale was completed on 30 March 1990.

Main Battle Tanks

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many United Kingdom main battle tanks are held in storage.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is not our practice to disclose detailed information on equipment held in storage. For information on total holdings of main battle tanks I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) on 15 March, *Official Report*, column *328*.

Wales (Official Visits)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the dates on which he has made an official visit to Wales since his appointment to his present post.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has made no official visits to Wales while Secretary of State for

Defence. My right hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger) paid an official visit to several service establishments in Wales in July 1988. I visited RAF Brawdy on 17 July 1989.

Eastern Europe (Soviet Troops)

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the effect on threat assessments of the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The complete withdrawal of Soviet troops from Czechoslovakia and Hungary is currently due to be completed by mid-1991, and we shall monitor this process with interest. When completed, these withdrawals will obviously have a significant effect on Soviet military capability in the central region.

German Unification

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the implications of German unification for the strategy of forward defence.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We expect forward defence to remain a central feature of NATO's strategy for deterrence. However, German unification may have implications for how it is implemented, which will need to be considered in the light of the defence and security arrangements that emerge from the two plus four negotiations. We welcome the opportunity for a fresh look at this aspect of our defence posture, to ensure that it is well fitted for the new security setting.

Afghanistan

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the influence that the team of Royal Engineers currently teaching Afghan refugees in Pakistan will have on the conflict in Afghanistan.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Royal Engineer teams have been taking part in a UN programme designed to train Afghan refugees currently in Pakistan in techniques of mine clearance and mine awareness. This programme has been set up purely for the humanitarian purpose of reducing the danger to refugees when they return to their homes.

Nuclear Test Ban Treaty

Mr O'Neill: To ask the Secretay of State for Defence what assessment he has made of procedures for monitoring and verifying a complete nuclear test ban treaty.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Mellor) on 27 June 1988, *Official Report*, Vol. 136, column *61*, and to the working paper on seismic monitoring tabled in the conference on disarmament in 1985 (CD 610), a copy of which is held in the Library. Scientists at the MOD's research establishment at Blacknest near Aldermaston continue to undertake seismological research which might support a verification regime for further constraints on nuclear testing.

Atomic Weapons Establishments

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what documents he has sent to the firms that have expressed an interest in bidding for the initial management contract at the atomic weapons establishment.

Mr. Neubert: Potential contractors have been sent copies of the statement made in the House by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 5 December, and of the consultative document to which that statement referred. They will shortly receive the invitation to tender.

Mr. Martin O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the shortfalls of staff were at each of the four atomic weapons establishments at the end of each year between 1980 and 1987.

Mr. Neubert: AWE shortfalls at the end of 1987 will equate to those given for 1 January 1988 in the answer which I provided to the hon. Member on 17 January 1990 at column *300*. Details of staff shortfalls before the amalgamation of AWRE and the nuclear royal ordnance factories on 1 September 1987 are not readily available.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make a decision about the detailed relationship between the existing safety division and the proposed compliance office at the atomic weapons establishment.

Mr. Neubert: The detailed relationship between the compliance office and the existing safety division at AWE will be finalised before the commencement of the initial management contract, planned for later this year.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will make a decision about what financial criteria will be used to monitor the performance of the management contractors to be appointed at the atomic weapons establishment.

Mr. Neubert: The criteria against which the management contractor's performance is to be assesed will be included in the invitation to tender, which is now being finalised for issue shortly.

Soviet Navy

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current assessment of levels of Soviet naval activity.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Levels of Soviet naval activity out of area have been falling since 1985. There has been an increase, however, in training activity close to all the main naval bases in the Soviet Union. It should be noted that although the number of Soviet units deployed out of area has reduced, a presence has been maintained in all traditional areas of Soviet interest.

Soviet Army

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current assessment of Soviet levels of production of military equipment for the Soviet army.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We believe that in 1989 Soviet production of tanks fell markedly from the levels of recent years to around half the previous total. Production of light armoured fighting vehicles and artillery also declined but far less dramatically. However, such cuts were from high historic levels and current production volumes remain high, with the Soviet Union out-producing the whole of NATO in all categories of land arms equipment.

Naval Disarmament

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what studies he has undertaken regarding the feasibility of negotiations on *(a)* naval confidence-building measures and *(b)* naval disarmament treaties.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The greatest threat to stability in Europe comes from land-based forces, and United Kingdom and NATO efforts have therefore concentrated on those. The importance of sea lines of communication to NATO remains very great, and no proposals on maritime confidence-building measures or naval arms control have been formulated by the United Kingdom.

United Nations Military Operations

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he expects the extent of military operations carried out under the auspices of the United Nations to increase over the next 10 years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The extent of the future contribution of British service men to such operations will depend on the number and nature of any requests for assistance we receive from the United Nations, and how we are able to respond to them.

Nuclear Non-proliferation

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of technical methods of improving the non-proliferation measures available to the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Mr. Baldry: I have been asked to reply:

The assessment of technical methods to ensure the capability of the timely detection of diversion of significant quantities of nuclear material from peaceful nuclear activities is a continuing activity for the IAEA and its member states. The United Kingdom, along with a number of other member states carries out a safeguards research and development programme in support of the IAEA. Our technical programme, carried out by AEA Technology on behalf of my Department, involves the provision of technical reports to the IAEA on many areas of interest identified by them. The IAEA has expressed satisfaction with the programme.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Nursing Homes

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what evidence is available to him on the extent to which claimants in private and voluntary residential and nursing homes throughout the country are able to meet the fees in full from available income support;

(2) what is the source of his independent research on costs and charges in private and voluntary nursing and residential care homes which he takes into account when setting income support limits; and if he will place copies of such evidence in the Library.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Many interested individuals and organisations make representations and submit evidence on costs and charges in homes. The authors are free to publish this if they wish. The Department has commissioned a number of studies, the best known of which was by Ernst and Whinney, published in 1986. Statistical information from the Department's own local offices is also used and this is published where practicable in aggregated form in response to questions from hon. Members.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the total number of persons living in residential and nursing homes and currently receiving income support.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: At August 1989, the latest date for which figures are available, it is estimated that there were around 117,000 people in independent residential care homes and around 56,000 in nursing homes receiving income support.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many and what proportion of the residents of nursing homes and residential care homes in receipt of income support *(a)* receive the full cost charged by their home and *(b)* receive income support payments below the charge levied by their home.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 6 March 1990]:* The most reliable estimates are available only in respect of all claimants in homes. The proportion of claimants whose fees were at or below the income support limits for the year ended August 1989, the latest period for which figures are available, was just over half. The average number of claimants during that period was 166,000, rounded to the nearest 1,000.

State Retirement Pension

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security at what ages state retirement pensions are made available to *(a)* men and *(b)* women in (i) Germany and (ii) France; and what is the estimated increase in public expenditure if these age criteria were applied in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: There is no single state pension scheme in either the Federal Republic of Germany or France.

The principal requirement for the award of a pension in the main state schemes in both the Federal Republic and France is that the claimant should have completed a certain number of years of contributions. Provided that this condition is met the minimum age at which the full pension is payable is 63 for the Federal Republic and 60 for France. Women in Germany can claim a pension at 60 if they have worked for at least 15 years, but as pensions in Germany are related to earnings level and length of working life, a woman in this position would be likely to receive only a small pension. There are no separate retirement ages in France for men and women.

The cost of a common retirement age for both men and women at 63 in the United Kingdom at 1985-86 benefit rates is estimated at £800 million and at £3,000 million for age 60.

Chief Adjudication Officer (Report)

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he will publish the fifth annual report of the chief adjudication officer.

Mr. Newton: The report is being published today. It reflects considerable variation in standards of adjudication. While the report is critical of the Department of Social Security local office standards it recognises that initiatives such as the creation of social security centres should lead to improvement through greater specialisation. I am pleased that the report highlights the high standard achieved by Newcastle central office and a marked improvement in most benefits administered by North Fylde central office. While adjudication in the Department of Employment remains unsatisfactory, it is recognised that the monitoring initiatives introduced since the previous report have not yet had a chance to take effect, and these, together with changes this year in staffing and training, are noted as offering hope for future improvements. We shall respond formally to the chief adjudication officer's specific recommendations in due course.

Occupational Pensions

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the average increase in real terms since 1979 in the amount received by people in respect of occupational pensions.

Mr. Newton: For all pensioners, the average amount of occupational pension received, in 1987 prices, was £13·20 in 1979 and £23·30 in 1987—an increase of 77 per cent.

For those pensioners actually receiving an occupational pension (52 per cent. of all pensioners in 1987) the average amount of such pension, in 1987 prices, was £32·10 in 1979 and £44·80 in 1987—an increase of 40 per cent.

I regret that in a supplementary answer to my hon. Friend on Monday 2 April at column 883, I inadvertently related the percentage increase for the average pensioner to the 1987 amount for the average occupational pensioner. I am glad to have this opportunity to clarify the position.

Income Support

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to the reply to the hon. Member for Oxford, East of 19 February, *Official Report*, columns *548–49*, if he will consider the case for a special exemption from the process of signing on in respect of recently bereaved income support claimants signing on for the first time.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Title to benefit is decided on the facts of each individual case. We have given careful consideration to the case for exempting recently bereaved people from signing on in order to receive income support. We have no plans to make such an exemption.

Correspondence (MEPs)

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security since 18 June 1989, how many communications he has received from Members of the European Parliament that concern local or United Kingdom matters; and if he will make it his practice where such matters are involved to provide the hon. Member for the local constituency with a copy of the correspondence and the reply for information.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We have received 47 letters from MEPs since June 1989. Although MEPs have no locus in respect of exclusively domestic United Kingdom matters, our practice is to reply in full to the MEP, to avoid delay for the constituent concerned. We do not copy correspondence to third parties unless the recipient has specifically requested that we do so.

Unemployment-related Benefit

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list all the grounds for disallowance of unemployment-related benefits and the number of claims disallowed for each such reason in 1989.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information in relation to national insurance unemployment benefit is in the tables. Similar information for other unemployment-related benefits is not available.

Decisions of adjudication officers on doubtful claims for unemployment benefit period 1 January 1989 to 31 December 1989

	Fresh or renewal claims disallowed	*Reviewed claims revised adversely to claimant*
Capability	2,633	209
Employment not terminated	98	62
Engaged in employment	12,175	7,263
Employed to full normal extent	12,583	239
Normal idle day	1,559	202
Payment in lieu of notice or wages etc.	114,836	22,025
Recognised or customary holiday	4,609	387
Whether unemployed	31,243	5,804
Share fishermen:		
Work as	176	26
No work available	123	24
Dependant's benefit:		
Child	32	34
Adult	912	597
Delayed claim	94,819	158
Failure to attend for interview	225	25
Failure to keep to signing time	13	5
Occupational pensioners	131	154
Availability	41,361	4,526
Restricted availability	16,326	4,178
Share fishermen—neglect to avail	197	4
Trade dispute (including R.A.O. decisions)	302	11
Seasonal workers	1,611	27
Leaving voluntarily	201,633	695
Misconduct	65,151	344
Employment:		
Neglect to avail	2,923	18
Refusal of	2,780	19
Refusal or premature termination of training	863	18
Refusal to carry out written recommendations	95	6
Restart	492	66
Other questions	24,552	24,365
All questions	634,453	71,491

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the average number of claimants to unemployment-related benefits for each year since 1979; and what was the cost of such benefits in each year.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information is in the following table:

Estimated numbers of unemployed people receiving unemployment-related benefits 1979-80 to 1988-89

Thousands

	1970-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*
Unemployment benefit only	470	785	985	815	405	810	740	795	660	475
Unemployment benefit plus income support/supplementary benefit	80	175	235	275	215	210	215	210	155	125
Income support/supplementary benefit only	486	675	1,085	1,395	1,645	1,745	1,815	1,895	1,775	1,255

Total benefit expenditure on unemployed beneficiaries Outturn 1979-80 to 1988-89

£ millions

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*
Total benefit expenditure on unemployed beneficiaries	1,470	2,530	4,020	5,010	5,440	6,320	6,940	7,290	6,670	5,390

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the number of people referred to adjudication officers by employment service staff because of doubts about their availability for work and restricted availability; and how many were disqualified from receiving benefit on grounds of non-availability for work and restricted availability for the years 1988 and 1989.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information requested is in the table:

	Availability		*Restricted Availability*	
	Referrals	*Disallowances*	*Referrals*	*Disallowances*
1988	150,889	78,436	90,463	23,940
1989	83,400	45,887	64,080	20,504

Disability

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if his Department has yet agreed on criteria which will prescribe the circumstances in which deaf-blind people will be treated as being unable to walk or virtually unable to walk to enable them to become entitled to mobility allowance this April.

Mr. Scott: The Mobility Allowance Amendment Regulations 1990, which prescribe the circumstances in which deaf-blind people will be able to qualify for the allowance, were laid before the House on 20 March. Officials have met representatives of the Mobility Allowance Campaign to discuss the regulations.

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if invalid care allowance will be payable to carers of the recipients of all three rates of the new disability allowance.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) on 12 February at col *83*.

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if recipients of mobility or attendance allowance can be put on either of the two lowest rates of disability allowance, should their benefits be reviewed after April 1992.

Mr. Scott: The qualifying criteria for the two upper levels of the care component of the disability allowance and the upper level of the mobility component will be on lines similar to those currently employed for attendance allowance and mobility allowance. The intention is that people now receiving attendance allowance and mobility allowance will continue to receive help at the same rates as under current arrangements if their condition is unchanged. In addition, in common with other disabled people, current attendance allowance recipients will also be eligible to claim the new lower rate of the mobility component of the disability and current mobility allowance recipients will be eligible to claim the new lower rate of the care component.

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether mobility allowance will be payable to claimants who are terminally ill with a life expectancy of less than 12 months if they satisfy the other criteria for receiving mobility allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Yes. Possible life expectancy is not taken into account in deciding how long a person is likely to continue to meet the medical eligibility criteria for the allowance.

Hillsborough Disaster Fund

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information he has on how many claimants have had benefits stopped or reduced as a result of receiving payments from the Hillsborough disaster fund.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: On the information currently available, the trustees for the Hillsborough disaster appeal fund have made payments to 647 people and five claimants have had their benefits affected.

Industrial Diseases

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security which industrial diseases his Department recognises as rendering sufferers incapable of following their regular occupation.

Mr. Scott: Whether a claimant is capable of following his regular occupation is decided on the evidence in each individual case.

Family Benefits

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people claimed both family credit and housing benefit in 1989-90; and how many he estimates will do so in 1990-91.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information is not available.

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will amend the family credit regulations to treat mortgage interest relief on a basis similar to the treatment of rents in the housing benefit regulations.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We have no plans to do so. Family credit makes no provision related to the actual cost of any outgoings in the individual case. To do so, whether for mortgage interest or any other form of outgoings, would fundamentally change the nature of the scheme.

Housing Benefit (Students)

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make an estimate of the cost to public funds of maintaining eligibility for housing benefit for students.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The most recent housing benefit statistical returns available are from May 1988 and indicate that 78,000 students were in receipt of benefit at that time. On the assumption that the numbers claiming remain at that level and taking the proposed top-up loan into account as income, the net cost of maintaining students' eligibility for housing benefit is estimated to be £35 million in a full year. Nevertheless, with the introduction of top-up loans and access funds the Government expect to be spending over £100 million more on student support even after the withdrawal of entitlement to income support, unemployment benefit and housing benefit for the majority of full-time students.

Income Statistics

Sir George Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish tables showing percentage changes in real income between 1981 and 1985 before and after housing costs by *(a)* the midpoint of each decile group for the whole of the income distribution, *(b)* decile group means for the whole of the income distribution and *(c)* cumulative decile group means for the bottom half of the income distribution and the percentage increase for the total population, in each case using assumptions contained in households below average income; and if he will make a statement on which methodology is statistically more reliable.

Mr. Newton: The information is set out in the tables.

a. Percentage changes in real income by decile group midpoint (medians of decile groups)

Midpoint of decile group	Percentage change in income before housing costs	after housing costs
1	5	4
2	6	2
3	5	3
4	6	2
5	5	4
6	7	7
7	7	7
8	8	7
9	8	8
10	9	9

b. Percentage changes in real income by decile group mean: 1981-85

Decile	Percentage changes in income before housing costs	after housing costs
1	9	3
2	6	2
3	5	3
4	5	3
5	6	4
6	7	6
7	7	7
8	8	7
9	8	8
10	7	5
Total	7	5

c. Percentage changes in real income by cumulative decile group mean: 1981-85

	Below 10 per cent.	Below 20 per cent.	Below 30 per cent.	Below 40 per cent.	Below 50 per cent.	Total population
Percentage change in real income						
Before housing costs	8·7	6·9	6·2	5·9	5·8	6·9
After housing costs	2·6	2·6	2·5	2·6	3·0	5·4

Figures at *(a)* and *(b)* are rounded to the nearest whole number.

The information at *(c)* corrects figures, particularly after housing costs, contained in the current edition of "Households Below Average Income", following the discovery of errors in the treatment of housing costs in the assessment of family income in 1981 which came to light as a result of detailed work carried out by researchers from the Institute of Fiscal Studies with the co-operation of DSS officials. Corrected full details of the 1981 analysis will be included in the next edition of "Households Below Average Incomes".

As explained in paragraph 7 of the Technical Annex to the current edition of "Households Below Average Income" the figures contained in these tables are subject to sampling error. These sampling errors, and other peculiarities in the Family Income Survey data, increase the risk of distortion at the extremes of the income distribution where the number of sample cases available is quite limited. The Government, on the advice of statisticians, have therefore concluded that measuring changes in real income by reference to decile midpoints (the median of each decile group) provides a statistically more reliable picture of living standards and propose to adopt this approach in future. However, to ensure continuity the next edition of "Households Below Average Income" will also contain figures from 1981 based on decile group means.

Pensioners (Incomes)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) pursuant to his statement on 27 November 1989, *Official Report*, column 525, on what basis he calculated that average incomes of pensioners had risen by about 23 per cent. since 1979; if he will set out the percentage increase in incomes of pensioners over this period from (i) the basic state pension, (ii) SERPS, (iii) occupational pension schemes (iv) dividends and interest and (v) other sources of income; if he will set out this information by deciles; and if he will indicate what weighting he gives to each of these sources of income in calculating the overall increase in pensioner incomes;

(2) if he will indicate the level of total incomes of each decade of pensioners, at constant prices, in 1979 and 1989, and the percentage increase in each case or whatever data most closely approximate to this;

(3) pursuant to his answer of 12 January, *Official Report*, column *782*, what was the cumulative increase above inflation on the basic national insurance pension in the periods *(a)* 1974 to November 1979 and *(b)* November 1979 to April 1990;

(4) what has been the percentage increase in the total incomes in real terms of each income decile of pensioners since 1979; and, in the case of each decile, what has been the real increase over the same period in income from (i) SERPS, (ii) occupational pension schemes, (iii) interest and dividends and (iv) other sources of income;

(5) what was the net income at 1986 prices of those pensioner tax units who obtained all their income from state benefits in each year since 1979; whether he will show separately the amount of income from *(a)* national insurance pension, *(b)* the amount in *(a)* represented by the state earnings-related pension, *(c)* supplementary benefit or income support, *(d)* housing benefit, *(e)* disability benefits and *(f)* other; and whether he will show data separately for single and married tax units.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answers 8 January, 22 January, 26 February 1990]:* The figure of a 23 per cent. increase in pensioners' average total net incomes to which the hon. Member's question refers relates to the increase from 1979 to 1986, and has therefore now been superseded by the analysis drawn from the 1987 family expenditure survey which has recently become available, showing an increase of over 31 per cent. in such incomes between 1979 and 1987. The table is therefore based on this more up-to-date information, and gives figures for both 1974-79 and for 1979-87.

Table 1

Pensioners' incomes	*1974*	*1979*	*1987*	*Real terms increase 1974-79 per cent.*	*Real terms increase 1979-87 per cent.*
Total Social Security benefits	45·00	50·50	59·20	12	17
Occupational Pensions	11·80	13·20	23·30	12	77
Savings Income	10·70	9·10	20·90	−16	130
Earnings	13·60	9·90	7·90	−27	−20
Total Gross Income	81·10	82·80	111·20	2	34
Total Net Income	73·80	75·90	99·90	3	31

Notes:

1. *Source:* Family Expenditure Survey.
2. £s per week at 1987 prices.

The more detailed information sought about the breakdown of pensioners' incomes is not available in precisely the form requested, since (for example) the FES does not separately identify the basic state pension and the earnings-related SERPS element, but the table gives the available information broken down by deciles.

Table 2

Percentage increase: Components of pensioners' income 1974-79 and 1979-87

	RP and related benefits		*Other benefits*		*Occupational pensions*		*INV income*		*Earnings*		*Total net*	
Decile	*1974-79*	*1979-87*	*1974-79*	*1979-87*	*1974-79*	*1979-87*	*1974-79*	*1979-87*	*1974-79*	*1979-87*	*1974-79*	*1979-87*
Lowest	19	19	−35	−42	−13	65	−3	119	25	−70	14	18
2	16	11	−29	51	−10	408	1	109	−82	125	12	20
3	13	21	−77	2	131	54	−3	71	−44	−1	10	23
4	9	23	157	−33	5	89	−24	64	−86	231	7	24
5	3	21	140	63	13	76	−11	36	−12	−51	5	24
6	5	18	138	54	3	85	10	37	−39	−36	5	24
7	17	9	100	250	−29	116	−17	52	−50	−42	4	25
8	1	12	81	42	16	71	−32	234	7	−44	4	27
9	10	6	7	116	35	56	−20	131	−25	−10	5	29
Highest	28	14	27	30	10	78	−16	152	−29	−17	−6	53
Overall	11	15	39	60	12	76	−16	131	−27	−21	3	31

Note:

This table breaks down the available sample survey information into too detailed an analysis for the results to be statistically significant and it is not possible to draw meaningful conclusions from it.

Table 3

Pensioners' total net income at constant prices 1974, 1979 and 1987

	1974 £	*1979* £	*1987* £	*Increase percentage* *1974-79*	*1979-87*
Decile:					
Lowest	31·10	35·50	41·80	14	18
2	38·40	43·00	51·50	12	20
3	43·60	48·20	59·10	10	23
4	49·20	52·70	65·60	7	24
5	56·00	58·60	72·40	5	24
6	63·80	66·70	83·00	5	24
7	72·90	75·80	95·00	4	25
8	84·40	87·50	111·50	4	27
9	103·90	109·10	141·50	5	29
Highest	194·30	182·20	277·90	−6	53
Overall	73·80	75·90	99·90	3	31

Source: Family Expenditure Survey.

For similar reasons it is also not possible to give precisely the information requested about pensioner tax units wholly dependent upon state benefits, but the table gives the available information for the years 1979 to 1987.

Table 4

Incomes of pensioner tax units with all income in state benefits 1979 to 1987

	Average total net income	*Retirement pension + supplementary benefit/income supplement + housing benefit*	*Other benefits (including disability benefits)*
Single			
1979	46·30	43·50	2·80
1980	47·80	45·40	2·40
1981	51·10	47·40	3·60
1982	53·50	50·70	2·80
1983	55·80	53·60	2·20
1984	57·10	53·50	3·60
1985	57·70	54·00	3·70
1986	57·00	53·60	3·40
1987	58·60	54·70	3·90
Married			
1979	72·80	69·50	3·50
1980	71·70	68·50	3·20
1981	78·50	75·80	2·70
1982	79·70	73·90	5·80
1983	82·30	78·20	4·10
1984	87·90	80·20	7·70
1985	84·20	77·10	7·10
1986	90·50	78·50	12·00
1987	88·40	78·60	9·90
All			
1979	50·60	47·70	2·90
1980	52·80	50·20	2·50
1981	56·00	52·60	3·50
1982	59·00	55·50	3·40
1983	61·10	58·50	2·50
1984	62·80	58·50	4·30
1985	62·10	57·80	4·20
1986	63·40	58·40	5·00
1987	64·40	59·30	5·00

Notes to tables 2, 3, and 4:

1. All cash figures are £ per week at 1987 prices.
2. All figures refer to pensioner tax units.
3. Retirement pension and related benefits includes basic retirement pension, additional pension, income support and housing benefit.
4. See note 5.
5. In common with all other surveys, the Family Expenditure Survey draws information from a random sample of the population. This means that the FES will occasionally include some individuals whose weekly income are considerably higher or lower than those of the remainder of their group. The unrepresentative income of such individuals, when averaged, may give wide swings in year-to-year comparisons. In general, when viewed over the longer term, the data provides a more reliable overall indication of the movement in average weekly incomes. We are considering whether the use of decile medians for tables involving deciles would enhance their statistical reliability.

Comparisons of changes in the basic national insurance pension over the periods requested, and between those periods, are complicated by a number of changes in uprating requirements and dates, including both those mentioned in my reply to the hon. Member on 20 December 1989 at column *299-302* and the earlier change, in 1976, from uprating based on known movements in indices of prices-earnings to uprating based on forecasts. This change had the practical effect that the change in prices or earnings over the period March 1975 to November 1975 was never taken into account for any uprating.

The table therefore gives the figures requested on the same basis as in my reply of 20 December 1989, giving comparisons both for November 1978 and for November 1979 (when long-term benefit rates were increased by 2 per cent. more than inflation to make up for an under-forecast in 1978), and for changes in the average real value of benefits in the relevant uprating periods as a whole. Figures for April 1990, and therefore for the uprating year April 1989-90, are not yet available.

Table 5

	Per cent.
Uprating dates	
July 1974-November 1978	5·6
November 1978-April 1989	0·4
July 1974-November 1979	7·5
November 1979-April 1989	−1·4
Uprating periods (average value)	
July 1974-April 1975—November 1978-November 1979	3·9
November 1978-79-April 1988-89	7·1

Training Schemes

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what is the effect on the income support of participants in training courses run by local authorities or funded by the European social fund who receive financial help or help in kind towards their travel to training and meal costs; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what is the position of income support claimants who are participating in training courses funded by the European social fund or local authorities who receive equivalent payments as enjoyed by participants in employment training; what is the effect on their benefit entitlement if they receive *(a)* a training premium of £10 a week, *(b)* a cash payment equal to the person's earnings disregard in each week, *(c)* a cash payout equal to the person's earnings disregard for work done outside the training each week, *(d)* a training bonus of up to £200 at the end of training, *(e)* a charitable payment or training bonus at the end of their training or *(f)* their travelling expenses; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 1 March 1990]:* For income support purposes, the treatment of payments made to trainees who are not participating in arrangements for training made under section 2 of the Employment and Training Act 1973 will depend on whether they are made on a contractual basis. Payments made on a contractual basis in respect of a weekly training premium, a weekly cash payment which is not a payment of earnings, and regular payments for meals and travel expenses will be taken fully into account as income. However, where these payments are made on a voluntary basis, the first £5 a week of the total amount is currently disregarded. From 9 April, this disregard will be increased to £10 a week, and voluntary payments which are intended and used for travel costs will be completely ignored. In addition, a payment of earnings from employment which is equal to the person's earnings disregard is ignored. Any charitable payment or training bonus (of whatever amount) paid on completion of a training course is treated as capital in the normal way and will not affect income support unless the payment brings the claimant's total capital to more than £3,000. Regular payments in kind are ignored.

Income Support

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide the income support (supplementary benefit) earnings equivalents, and the assumptions underlying the calculations, for 1989, or the latest available year, 1987 and 1979 for *(a)* a two adult household, single earner, with two children aged between 11 and 15 years, *(b)* a single person aged over 25 years and *(c)* a single parent with one child aged between 11 and 15 years.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 8 March 1990]:* Figures for 1987 and 1989 are given in the table. Figures for 1979 could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Levels of gross earnings at which net income after housing costs in work becomes equal to that when unemployed and in receipt of Supplementary Benefit/Income Support

Family Type	*Supplementary Benefit April 1987 £ (gross)*	*Income Support October 1989 £ (gross)*
Couple, 2 children aged 11, 15	35·06	27·50
Single person	32·10	34·90
Single parent 1 child aged 14	9·35	6·40

1. April 1987 figures exclude fares to work.
2. All other assumptions are the same as the Tax Benefit Model Tables (TBM) for April 1987 and October 1989. Copies available in the Library.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what savings in social security payments would have accrued in each of the last two years if unemployment benefit were paid for *(a)* two years and *(b)* three years;

(2) what would have been the annual cost of extending payment of unemployment benefit to *(a)* two years and *(b)* three years in each of the last two years.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 23 March 1990]:* Estimated costs and savings are set out in the table.

	1988-89 £ million	*1989-90 £ million*
Extending UB duration to 2 years:		
UB cost	340	260
IS/HB saving	210	170
Extending UB duration to 3 years:		
UB cost	540	400
IS/HB saving	330	260

Social Fund

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the number of income support applicants, by lone parents, disabled, pensioners and unemployed, who were receiving social fund budget and crisis loans for each month in 1989 for the Leven, Dunfermline, Cowdenbeath and Kirkcaldy social security offices.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 26 March 1990]:* The information given in the table represents the number of awards made each month. An individual applicant can make more than one application in each accounting period.

Leven

	Lone parents	*Disabled*	*Pensioners*	*Unemployed*
Budgeting Loans 1989				
January	23	2	0	13
February	52	1	1	45
March	29	6	1	27
April	39	3	0	19
May	34	5	0	32
June	36	2	2	24
July	36	7	2	27
August	40	4	1	16
September	25	2	1	22
October	37	6	1	24
November	66	9	7	43
December	30	2	2	28
Crisis Loans 1989				
January	3	0	1	15
February	6	1	0	12
March	10	1	0	20
April	10	0	0	13
May	9	0	0	5
June	9	0	0	12
July	7	1	0	11
August	9	0	0	20
September	25	2	1	22
October	6	0	0	9
November	9	0	0	5
December	13	3	0	13

Dunfermline

	Lone parents	*Disabled*	*Pensioners*	*Unemployed*
Budgeting Loans 1989				
January	27	4	3	24
February	63	7	2	46
March	56	4	2	54
April	34	2	5	38
May	60	6	3	28
June	35	6	1	28
July	35	0	2	30
August	42	4	3	36
September	40	3	2	24
October	49	10	3	33
November	69	10	2	36
December	57	4	3	44

	Lone parents	*Disabled*	*Pensioners*	*Unemployed*
Crisis Loans 1989				
January	23	0	0	64
February	20	1	1	54
March	29	0	3	99
April	32	0	0	60
May	23	3	1	46
June	15	6	0	44
July	32	0	1	40
August	27	2	1	36
September	28	0	1	50
October	24	1	0	61
November	29	0	2	62
December	24	0	1	54

Cowdenbeath

	Lone parents	*Disabled*	*Pensioners*	*Unemployed*
Budgeting Loans 1989				
January	19	14	4	21
February	41	5	2	40
March	28	2	0	26
April	30	4	3	27
May	18	8	4	29
June	20	12	2	34
July	16	8	4	33
August	21	5	2	28
September	21	3	1	34
October	35	3	0	21
November	34	4	2	31
December	42	7	3	30
Crisis Loans 1989				
January	21	5	0	39
February	15	3	0	31
March	11	2	0	52
April	20	3	0	45
May	16	2	1	37
June	21	2	0	50
July	10	0	1	43
August	11	3	1	45
September	21	1	1	25
October	21	1	0	54
November	17	1	1	59
December	23	5	0	42

Kirkcaldy

	Lone parents	*Disabled*	*Pensioners*	*Unemployed*
Budgeting Loans 1989				
January	49	9	8	77
February	73	8	7	107
March	79	14	7	134
April	53	4	9	63
May	75	10	8	64
June	72	6	7	82
July	87	6	5	106
August	93	16	5	81
September	68	3	6	72
October	48	5	11	47
November	73	4	13	94
December	33	4	0	39
Crisis Loans 1989				
January	20	2	1	38
February	19	0	0	24
March	22	1	1	58
April	27	0	1	41
May	21	0	1	44
June	28	3	1	61
July	30	1	0	60
August	21	3	2	82
September	16	0	0	52
October	17	2	1	55
November	19	0	0	49
December	8	1	0	42

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the total amounts of social fund budgeting and crisis loans outstanding for each month in 1989 for the Leven, Dunfermline, Cowdenbeath and Kirkcaldy Social Security office.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 26 March 1990]*: The information given in the table represents the provisional amounts outstanding on the last day of each calendar month.

1989	*Budget loans (£)*	*Crisis loans (£)*
Leven		
January	52,563·52	6,297·83
February	63,544·73	6,258·66
March	68,537·83	6,726·50
April	71,611·65	6,955·27
May	73,977·50	7,122·63
June	73,017·27	7,017·27
July	78,216·31	6,951·29
August	79,517·10	7,655·51
September	75,753·29	8,097·69
October	76,736·58	7,654·35
November	86,429·02	8,750·99
December	86,973·78	8,644·66
Dunfermline		
January	67,246·52	11,537·70
February	83,566·82	12,367·44
March	97,512·92	15,107·08
April	101,245·75	18,349·62
May	103,645·04	19,611·94
June	98,957·80	20,305·59
July	101,249·86	21,211·71
August	99,349·26	21,267·69
September	93,082·53	21,681·80
October	99,147·63	21,892·93
November	105,879·19	22,775·03
December	104,953·74	22,377·97
Cowdenbeath		
January	49,392·03	7,168·26
February	53,251·22	7,038·70
March	54,467·45	7,057·49
April	53,759·24	7,448·10
May	59,750·70	9,043·62
June	58,617·41	9,333·20
July	56,545·92	9,374·68
August	57,175·58	9,891·57
September	54,927·22	9,405·62
October	55,617·72	10,583·48
November	55,925·95	10,831·85
December	59,162·71	10,655·93
Kirkcaldy		
January	140,197·49	7,189·66
February	157,793·09	9,977·93
March	176,368·69	13,905·46
April	185,456·24	16,897·26
May	194,855·49	18,563·63
June	197,111·36	19,673·15
July	203,872·02	19,649·12
August	216,603·23	20,937·19
September	218,780·52	20,117·60
October	214,305·20	19,793·41
November	217,396·08	22,343·70
December	203,458·70	21,563·54

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Namibia

11. **Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on Namibian independence.

41. **Mr. Boyes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations with the independent Namibia.

50. **Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations with the independent Namibia.

82. **Mr. Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement on relations with Namibia.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations with independent Namibia.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs represented the Government at the Namibian independence celebrations on 21 March, and met President Nujoma and other Ministers. We strongly supported Namibia's entry into the Commonwealth. My right hon. Friend opened the new British high commission in Windhoek on 21 March and announced £10 million in bilateral aid over the next three years. We are also helping Namibia with military and police training, at President Nujoma's request.

21. **Sir David Steel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent talks he has had with the Government of Namibia about the status of Walvis bay.

Mr. Hurd: Walvis bay was one of a number of subjects discussed during my meeting with President Nujoma in Windhoek on 21 March.

22. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what requests he has received from Namibia for assistance in negotiations for the future of Walvis bay.

Mr. Waldegrave: The future of Walvis bay is a matter for discussion between the new Namibian Government and the Government of South Africa. We have not been asked to intervene in these negotiations.

85. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent talks the Minister has had with the Namibian Government on their economic situation.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs had wide-ranging talks with President Nujoma during his recent visit to Windhoek for the Namibian independence celebrations. They discussed economic issues, mainly in the context of Namibia's priority for aid.

South Africa

18. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the role of the Commonwealth in ending apartheid in South Africa.

Mr. Waldegrave: We believe that the international community, including the Commonwealth, should make a positive and practical response to the important changes taking place in South Africa.

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent communications he has had with the Government of South Africa; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs met President de Klerk, Mr. Pik Botha and other South African Ministers in Cape Town on 19 March. They had useful talks which reinforced our views that the South African Government are committed to fundamental reform. He urged them to lift the state of emergency as soon as possible. He also met several opposition leaders in South Africa and saw some of the 250 aid projects which Britain is supporting to help prepare black South Africans for the future after apartheid. He made it clear to everyone he met that our aim is to see apartheid abolished and to help the development of a peaceful, prosperous and democratic South Africa.

German Unification

19. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet the West German Foreign Minister regarding reunification; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs met the West German Foreign Minister during the Anglo-German summit on 30 March, where they had useful discussions on a wide range of issues of mutual interest, including the external aspects of German reunification. They meet frequently and shall certainly do so again at, for example, NATO and EC meetings.

35. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of the two plus four conference on the unification of Germany.

Mr. Waldegrave: Preparatory talks at official level were held in Bonn on 14 March in accordance with the mandate given by the Foreign Ministers of the Federal Republic of Germany, German Democratic Republic, France, United Kingdom, USSR and United States in Ottawa on 13 February. Officials discussed procedural questions and the agenda of future meetings. The next meeting will take place after the formation of a new German Democratic Republic Government.

45. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's response to steps towards German reunification following the East German election results on 18 March.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have welcomed the GDR elections on 18 March as a great day for Europe and East Germany. We hope the two plus four talks can get down to substantive business as soon as the new democratically elected GDR Government are formed.

67. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to meet the Foreign Minister of East Germany to discuss German unification; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: After the appointment of a new Foreign Minister for East Germany, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs looks forward to discussions of matters of mutual interest. He would, in any case, expect to meet him/her at the first meeting at ministerial level of the two plus four talks on the external aspects of German unification, for which, as yet, no date has been set.

Ivory

20. **Miss Hoey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current state of the stockpiled ivory in Hong Kong.

Mr. Waldegrave: The latest available figure for the current stock of elephant ivory held in Hong Kong (to the nearest tonne) is 472 tonnes, 356 tonnes of which are available for trading.

EC Policies

23. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further proposals he intends to place before his European Community partners for the development of Community policies.

Mr. Maude: We have taken the lead in the Community on a wide range of issues, among them giving effect to the detailed measures called for in stage 1 of the Delors report on economic and monetary union; the development of policy towards eastern Europe, strengthening the partnership between the US and the Community and urging rapid progress towards completing the single market.

We shall press our EC partners to continue to give top priority to completion of the 1992 programme, and to maintaining an outward-looking and liberal Community, in line with the commitments which we have secured in successive recent European Councils.

Hong Kong

24. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next intends to visit Hong Kong.

Mr. Maude: I shall be visiting Hong Kong from 7 to 11 April.

Drugs Trade

25. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance he intends to give to south Asian countries in their attempt to curb the international drugs trade.

Mr. Sainsbury: South Asia, as the principal source of heroin reaching the United Kingdom, is a priority area for our drugs-related assistance. We are currently funding large-scale, drugs-related projects, in both Pakistan and India, managed by the United Nations fund for drug abuse control.

German Democratic Republic

26. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what message has been sent by his Department to the victors in last month's general election in the German Democratic Republic.

Mr. Waldegrave: We would expect to send a message to the new Foreign Minister of the GDR once a Government have been formed. We have welcomed the elections as a great day for Germany and for Europe.

37. **Mr. Watts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the elections in the German Democratic Republic.

Mr. Waldegrave: The elections in East Germany on 18 March were, as confirmed by foreign observers, free, fair and well organised. We have welcomed the elections as a great day for Europe and for Germany.

Brazil

27. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the Government of Brazil about their development of ballistic missiles.

Mr. Waldegrave: None.

United Nations (Human Rights)

28. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the last meeting of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva.

33. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the last meeting of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva.

Mr. Sainsbury: The Commission on Human Rights is the major United Nations forum for discussion of human rights issues. At its last session from 29 January to 9 March it discussed a very large number of human rights problems and, in particular, adopted resolutions critical of the human rights situations in a number of countries. The wide range of views represented at the commission meant, however, that on a number of issues it did not go as far as we would have wished.

53. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking following the last meeting of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva.

Mr. Sainsbury: As a member of the commission the United Kingdom delegation played an active part in its work. We shall continue our efforts to promote respect for human rights and to urge compliance by all states with their international obligations.

Romania

29. **Mr. Arbuthnot:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will take all possible steps to encourage free and fair elections in Romania.

Mr. Waldegrave: We wish to encourage free and fair elections in Romania. To promote this we invited a group of members of the Romanian political parties to visit the United Kingdom in March to study our political and electoral systems. We hope to fund the visit to Romania of a group of up to 12 local government officers to observe the election campaign and poll on 20 May. We also welcome the decision of the IPU to send observers, and are encouraging the Romanians to invite observers from the Council of Europe. We have also contributed 118 tonnes of paper to a wide range of political parties for their use in the election campaign.

China

30. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has any current plans to visit Peking.

Mr. Maude: No.

Central America

31. **Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to meet members of the Government of the United States to discuss human rights in central America.

63. **Mr. Nicholas Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to meet the members of the Government of the United States to discuss human rights in central America.

78. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to meet members of the Government of the United States to discuss human rights in central America.

Mr. Sainsbury: We have regular discussions with the United States Administration on a wide variety of subjects, including central America.

Eastern Europe (Electronics)

32. **Mr. Stern:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library the consolidated reports of observers sent to recent east European elections.

Mr. Waldegrave: I will gladly arrange for any such reports to be placed in the Library.

Baltic States

34. **Mr. Alton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with officials and Ministers of the Soviet Union and Lithuanian Governments about the future of the Baltic states.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have recently taken a number of opportunities to make our concerns known to the Soviet Union. We have emphasised that it is vital that progress should be made through dialogue between the Soviet authorities and the Lithuanians, and that a settlement should be reached which is acceptable to both sides and which enables the Lithuanian people to decide their own future. We have stressed the need for restraint on all sides.

51. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received about the right to self-determination of Estonia and the other Baltic states.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have received a number of representations about Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania from individuals and interest groups in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. Our views are clearly on record.

71. **Mr. Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has received any recent requests from the Baltic states in support of self-determination; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: Our criteria for recognition of a state were set out in an answer which I gave to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on 19 March. Our support for the right of the Baltic peoples to decide their own future is clearly on record.

Nicaragua

36. **Mr. Norris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of whether the handover of power to the new democratically elected Government of Nicaragua is proceeding satisfactorily.

Mr. Sainsbury: Preparations for the transfer of power appear to be going well. The agreement of 27 March between transition teams clarifies some important points, notably on civilian control of the army. The agreement of 23 March between Contra leaders and representatives of the new Government on demobilisation of the Contras also gives grounds for optimism. We are, however, disturbed by reports that the Sandinistas are distributing weapons to loyal followers, stripping Government assets, depleting reserves, and voting for themselves privileges and immunities.

Middle East

38. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Britain's contribution to finding a diplomatic and peaceful solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

58. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on the peace process in the middle east.

66. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to further peace in the middle east.

70. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of peace negotiations in the middle east.

76. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of peace negotiations in the middle east.

80. **Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress towards a peace settlement in the middle east.

84. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department is taking to help advance the peace process in the middle east.

Mr. Waldegrave: We aim to encourage a dialogue between Israel and representative Palestinians as the first step towards a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israel dispute. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs discussed the peace process with King Hussein last month and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs had a useful meeting with Mr. Bassam Abu Sharif on 1 March. We look forward to the formation of a new Israeli Government able to carry the process forward. We continue, in the meantime, to work for the improvement of conditions in the occupied territories.

Sri Lanka

39. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the Government of Sri Lanka about human rights.

Mr. Sainsbury: The British high commissioner in Colombo most recently raised the subject with President Premadasa on 28 February. The Sri Lankan Government are in no doubt of our concern.

Cuba

40. **Mr. Janman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has any plans to meet President Castro of Cuba.

Mr. Sainsbury: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has no such plans.

Cyprus

42. **Ms. Armstrong:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy towards Cyprus following the breakdown of the United Nations talks.

Mr. Maude: We have worked actively to promote the adoption of UN Security Council resolution 649 on Cyprus. In line with it, we will continue to support UN efforts to bring about a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement to the Cyprus dispute.

NATO

43. **Mr. Moss:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the implications of the result of the East German elections for the NATO alliance.

Mr. Waldegrave: NATO has long supported the cause for freedom in the German Democratic Republic and throughout eastern Europe. We welcome the democratic election in the GDR. The establishment of a genuine democracy there will contribute to stability and security in Europe. We stress the crucial importance of continued German membership of NATO.

Cameroons

44. **Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the application for the Cameroons to join the Commonwealth.

Mr. Waldegrave: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave in response to a similar question from the hon. Member on Wednesday 13 December 1989.

Hungary

46. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the elections in Hungary.

62. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the elections in Hungary.

Mr. Waldegrave: We welcome Hungary's free and democratic elections on 25 March. They are an important milestone in the development of a pluralist democracy. We look forward to the formation of a new Government after the second round of elections on 8 April and to continued good relations.

93. **Sir Russell Johnston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to be able to meet a representative of the new Hungarian Government.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs looks forward to early contacts with the new Hungarian Government once formed, but has no firm plans as yet.

European Parliament

47. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has any plans to promote representation within the European Parliament based on a proportional ratio of population to seats.

Mr. Maude: The allocation of seats in the European Parliament has been the subject of negotiations within the framework of successive treaties since that of 1951 establishing the European Coal and Steel Community, under which the original Common Assembly was set up. Relative population has become the principal factor in determining the allocation of seats.

Vietnam

48. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what talks the Minister has recently had with NGOs about the situation in Vietnam.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke) on 12 March. ODA is in close touch with the NGOs. They have recently submitted proposals for projects in the areas from which most of the boat people have come. These are receiving careful consideration.

Taiwan

49. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to visit Taiwan; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has no plans to do so; in 1950 we ceased to recognise the nationalist authorities as the Government of China; since that date it has been our policy to have no formal dealings with the authorities in Taiwan.

Vietnamese Boat People

52. **Mr. Ted Garrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement on the situation of Vietnamese boat people in Hong Kong.

75. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement on the situation of Vietnamese boat people in Hong Kong.

77. **Mr. Eadie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement on the situation of Vietnamese boat people in Hong Kong.

Mr. Maude: For the first time since May 1987, there is now a sustained net outflow of Vietnamese boat people from Hong Kong. But it is too soon to know whether there will be another large influx into Hong Kong this year.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on living conditions in the closed camps for Vietnamese boat people.

Mr. Maude: The standard of living conditions in Hong Kong's 10 detention centres depends to a large extent on the degree of overcrowding. At present there are 44,000 Vietnamese boat people living in these detention centres, which have a combined design capacity of 43,000 places. A further 5,000 places will become available during May to accommodate the new influx which it is feared will arrive in the coming months.

The UNHCR provides a full range of services to all detention centres through programmes operated by voluntary agencies. These services include education for children and adults, medical and family planning services, social work and welfare services.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department is taking to improve conditions in the closed camps for Vietnamese boat people.

Mr. Maude: Following the influx of 34,000 Vietnamese boat people in 1989, the Hong Kong Government have constructed new accommodation providing a total of 23,000 places. This has eased the overcrowding and has led to a significant improvement in conditions. In 1989-90 the total cost of providing asylum in Hong Kong was about £90 million. Of this, Her Majesty's Government provided £21 million to cover part of the cost of the building programme.

Jacques Delors

57. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet Jacques Delors, and what matters he hopes to discuss.

73. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet the President of the European Commission; and what matters he hopes to discuss.

74. **Mr. Sean Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet the President of the European Commission; and what matters he hopes to discuss.

92. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet Jacques Delors; and what matters he hopes to discuss.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs next expects to meet the President of the Commission at a meeting of Foreign Ministers on 21 April, at which the special informal meeting of EC Heads of State or Government on 28 April will be discussed.

Council of Ministers

54. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the General Affairs Council of Ministers meeting of 2 to 3 April.

61. **Mr. Frank Cook:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the General Affairs Council of Ministers meeting of 2 to 3 April.

86. **Ms. Short:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the General Affairs Council of Ministers meeting of 2 to 3 April.

Mr. Maude: The Council which my right hon. Friend and I attended considered preparations for the inter-governmental conference due to open before the end of the year, and Herr Genscher reported on recent developments in Germany. The Commission reported on talks in Tokyo on EC/Japan trade; and on progress in EC/EFTA discussions; and on the signature of a trade, commercial and economic agreement with Czechoslovakia. We proposed that all quantitative restrictions on imports from Czechoslovakia should be removed from 1 July.

The council discussed work on immigration problems, and member states' policies on visas for eastern Europe. My right hon. Friend argued for further measures of Community support to the black population of South Africa, and a trade and co-operation agreement with Argentina was signed.

Ministers of the Twelve agreed, at my right hon. Friend's suggestion, to issue a further statement on Lithuania, urging restraint and dialogue as the way to achieve an outcome acceptable to all.

Irish Republic

55. **Mr. Gow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Foreign Minister of the Irish Republic about the claim of articles 2 and 3 of the Republic's constitution and of the Irish Supreme Court to jurisdiction over part of Her Majesty's dominions.

Mr. Hurd: We are in regular touch with the Irish Government. A judgment of the Irish Supreme Court cannot affect Northern Ireland's position within the United Kingdom in international law. Irrespective of articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution, both

Governments are agreed that any change in the status of Northern Ireland would come about only with the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland.

Chancellor Kohl

56. **Mr. Snape:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet Chancellor Kohl, and what issues he hopes to discuss.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs met Chancellor Kohl at the Anglo-German summit on 30 March. At that meeting the two sides had a useful and wide-ranging discussion on matters of mutual interest, including the external aspects of German unification.

We remain in close contact with the Federal German Government. Our next meeting with Chancellor Kohl is likely to be at the EC summit in Dublin on 28 April.

Mr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what matters were discussed during his recent meeting with Chancellor Kohl on 29 and 30 March.

Mr. Maude: A range of issues were discussed during Chancellor Kohl's visit on 29 and 30 March, including German unification, NATO matters, Lithuania, South Africa and the European Community.

Anti-Semitism

59. **Mr. Janner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement regarding anti-semitism in eastern Europe.

Mr. Waldegrave: We of course deplore anti-semitism in all its forms and will do all we can to counter it. Our embassies are monitoring the situation in eastern Europe carefully. Although some incidents have been reported, we think that there has been no general increase in anti-semitism in the area, although the free atmosphere has allowed it to be expressed more openly. We will be glad to have the hon. and learned Member's own assessment after his forthcoming visit to the area.

Nelson Mandela

60. **Mr. Adams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to meet Nelson Mandela, and what matters he hopes to discuss.

91. **Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next expects to have discussions with Nelson Mandela; and what issues will be raised.

Mr. Waldegrave: When they met briefly in Namibia on 21 March, Mr. Mandela told my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs that he hoped to have a further meeting before long. My right hon. Friend looks forward to discussing with him the recent positive developments in South Africa, and the best way to maintain a process of peaceful change.

Bulgaria

64. **Mr. Amos:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will meet the Foreign Minister of Bulgaria to discuss ways in which the United Kingdom can assist in the establishment of democracy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has no firm plans to meet the Bulgarian Foreign Minister again. They met in Ottawa in February and had a useful discussion. I met Mr. Dimitrov in Sofia also in February and at the recent Council of Europe Ministers meeting in Lisbon. A group of Bulgarian politicians recently visited London under the auspices of the Great Britain-East Europe Centre and the IPU to study our democracy in action. We greatly welcome progress towards democracy in Bulgaria and hope the election to be held on 10 June will be completely free and fair.

EC Organisations (Siting)

65. **Mr. Day:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the prospects for Britain's bid for the siting of the European Environment Agency and the European bank for reconstruction and development.

Mr. Maude: We continue to pursue vigorously our bids to have the European Environment Agency and the European bank for reconstruction and development located in the United Kingdom. Both our candidates, Cambridge and London respectively, have an excellent case and are strong contenders.

Cambodia

68. **Mr. Geraint Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent diplomatic efforts Her Majesty's Government have made to find a solution to the situation in Cambodia.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) on 26 March by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

Anglo-German Summit

69. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on the outcome of the Anglo-German summit on 30 March.

83. **Mr. Temple-Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on the outcome of the Anglo-German summit on 30 March.

Mr. Maude: At the Anglo-German summit in London on 30 March, my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretary of State for Defence, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs had useful discussions with their German opposite numbers on a wide range of issues of mutual interest. The successful occasion underlined our close relations with the Federal Republic of Germany, one of our most important allies and partners.

Lithuania

72. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent consideration the British Government have given to their relations with Lithuania and the Soviet Union.

87. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent consideration the British Government have given to their relations with Lithuania and the Soviet Union.

90. **Mrs. Margaret Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent consideration the British Government have given to their relations with Lithuania and the Soviet Union.

Mr. Waldegrave: We support the right of the Baltic peoples to decide their own future, and have welcomed the considerable progress made in the past two years.

In view of recent developments in Lithuania, we think it vital that restraint should be shown on all sides and that progress should be made through dialogue between the Soviet authorities and the Lithuanians. We attach particular importance to the repeated statements by the Soviet leadership that there is no question of use of force. We have made clear our concerns to the Soviet authorities.

Herr Genscher

79. **Mr. Adley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next intends to meet Herr Genscher; and what he proposes to discuss.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs met the West German Foreign Minister during the Anglo-German summit on 30 March, where they had useful discussions on a wide range of issues of mutual interest, including the external aspects of German reunification. They meet frequently and shall certainly do so again soon at, for example, NATO and EC meetings.

UN Peacekeeping Forces

81. **Mr Livsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what budget Her Majesty's Government set for this year's contribution to United Nations peacekeeping forces' activities.

Mr. Sainsbury: The 1990-91 supply estimates published in March 1990 seek provision of £34·680 million for the United Kingdom's contribution to specific United Nations peacekeeping operations. In addition, a small number of United Nations peacekeeping operations are financed directly from the United Nation's regular budget.

Kuwait

88. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met representatives of the Kuwait Government; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Waldegrave: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs met the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister at the EC/GCC ministerial meeting in Muscat on 17 March where Foreign Ministers of both groupings discussed issues of common interest. His last bilateral meeting with a Kuwaiti Minister was in November 1989 with the Minister of the Interior.

Council of Europe

89. **Mr. Hardy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his policy as to whether the wider role which the Council of Europe has recently developed should lead to an acceptance that it be involved in formal and continuing consideration of at least some aspects of the conference on security and co-operation in Europe.

Mr. Waldegrave: Both the Council of Europe and the CSCE have crucial roles in furthering democratic values in Europe. These roles should complement and not duplicate one another. The Council of Europe's special ministerial meeting in Lisbon on 23-24 March agreed that the Council of Europe should be represented in a member state's delegation at the forthcoming CSCE conference on the human dimension in Copenhagen.

Foreign Policy

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many volumes of the series on British foreign policy 1945-55, "Documents on British Policy Overseas," have been produced; how many copies have been distributed to *(a)* United Kingdom embassies or diplomatic missions abroad and *(b)* United Kingdom universities and research institutes; how many departmental staff or consultants to his Department are employed on preparation and production of the series; and what has been the cost to date in current prices of the series.

Mr. Sainsbury: The series "Documents on British Policy Overseas," announced in the House of Commons by Sir Alec Douglas-Home on 2 July 1973, is a collection of the most important documents in the archives of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office relating to British policy overseas, and is regarded as an indispensable source for British foreign policy in the period from 1945 to 1955. The following eight volumes have been published so far:

Series I (1945-50)

Volume I The Conference at Potsdam, July-August 1945 (HMSO, 1984) £85.

Volume II Conferences and Conversations 1945: London, Washington and Moscow (HMSO, 1985) £75.

Volume III Britain and America: Negotiation of the United States Loan, August-December 1945 (HMSO, 1987) £35.

Volume IV Britain and America: Atomic Energy, Bases and Food, December 1945-July 1946 (HMSO, 1987) £35.

Volume V Germany and Western Europe, 11 August-31 December 1945 (HMSO, 1990) £55.

Series II (1950-55)

Volume I The Schuman Plan, the Council of Europe and Western European Integration 1950-1952 (HMSO, 1986) £70.

Volume II The London Conferences, 1950 (HMSO, 1987) £35.

Volume III German Rearmament, 1950 (HMSO, 1989) £39.

British embassies and diplomatic missions abroad do not receive copies of DBPO, but information material is sent to overseas posts and copies of the volumes are available on loan from the FCO library. In cases where a volume is of particular current relevance to an embassy a copy may be supplied for retention.

United Kingdom universities and research institutes purchase their copies of DBPO.

DBPO is produced by a small team of independent historians working in the historical branch of the library and records department of the Foreign and

Commonwealth Office. The editorial staff, who also provide historical advice within the FCO, comprise two editors, two assistant editors and three research assistants. No consultants are employed.

The costs of the printing and publication of DBPO are borne by Her Majesty's Stationery Office, and are recovered by it as revenue from sales.

Whitehead Detention Centre

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he is taking concerning the recent case of the suffocation of a child at birth due to lack of medical facilities at the Whitehead detention centre clinic; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: The Hong Kong authorities have recently completed a thorough investigation of this case.

The medical evidence indicates that the child died at least 24 hours before the onset of labour and probably considerably earlier. The child did not suffocate at birth.

The allegations of inadequate medical facilities are unfounded. Whitehead has a well-equipped clinic but it is the usual practice to transfer women in labour to a nearby hospital as happened in this case.

Ministers' Meeting, Lisbon

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent meeting of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in Lisbon.

Mr. Maude: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) on 26 March.

Indonesia

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has on changes in the human rights situation in East Timor since January.

Mr. Sainsbury: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, on 29 March to the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon).

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received on the policy of the Indonesian Government towards people demonstrating in favour of independence from Indonesia.

Mr. Sainsbury: We have received written representations from two human rights organisations and several Members of Parliament.

Correspondence (MEPs)

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many communications he has received from Members of the European Parliament since 18 June 1989, that concern local or United Kingdom matters; and if he will make it his practice where such matters are involved to provide the hon. Member for the local constituency with a copy of the correspondence and the reply for information.

Mr. Maude: Where Members of the European Parliament raise matters in correspondence which are exclusively of local interest, the practice is to reply suggesting that the MEP should refer the matter to the hon. Member for the constituency concerned. As with other correspondence, replies to such communications would normally be copied to the hon. Member concerned only if the MEP had himself copied his letter in this way. We have received no such communications since 18 June 1989.

A separate arrangement applies in respect of consular cases, under which our normal practice is to copy correspondence with MEPs to the appropriate hon. Member in view of the direct personal involvement in such cases of hon. Members' constituents.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 5 April 1990

HOUSE OF COMMONS

First Aid

Mr. Strang: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many staff in the House of Commons have first aid or medical training; how many of these staff are available in the case of accidents; and where these staff are located.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Fifty members of staff of the House, 127 police officers, 108 security officers and 12 members of the fire section are trained in first aid including resuscitation techniques. Quotas of staff from all Departments of the House have been agreed bearing in mind the need to provide cover in the outbuildings as well as having first aiders available by day and night. Their location is shown in the green page supplement in the front of the Palace of Westminster telephone directory.

Mr. Strang: To ask the Lord President of the Council what first aid provision is provided by the House; what form this takes; where such provision is located; and what first aid information is made available to the staff who work in the House and its outbuildings.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: Details of first aid provision and procedures to be followed in an emergency are contained in the leaflet "Medical Facilities and First Aid in the Palace of Westminster and in the Parliamentary Outbuildings" issued jointly by the Serjeant at Arms and Black Rod. I am arranging for a copy to be sent to the hon. Gentleman. Notices indicating the location of first aiders and first aid boxes are displayed in the Palace of Westminster and outbuildings, and details of first aid and medical facilities are given in appendix D of the staff handbook which is issued to all members of staff.

Toilets

Mr. Strang: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many toilets are provided *(a)* in the House and *(b)* in each of its outbuildings, (i) for women and (ii) for men; and if he will estimate separately the number of women and the number of men who work in these buildings with easy access to these toilet facilities.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The information requested is as follows:

Location	*Number of Lavatories* *Male*	*Female*	*Mixed*	*Disabled*
Palace of Westminster (Commons Area)	55	34	7	1
Norman Shaw North	11	9	—	1
Norman Shaw South	9	8	3	—
St. Stephens House	8	8	5	—
1 Canon Row	8	7	—	1
3 Deans Yard	5	7	—	—
6-7 Old Palace Yard	2	2	1	—
2 The Abbey Garden	3	4	—	—

I regret that an estimate of the numbers of women and men with access to these facilities could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Accidents

Mr. Strang: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will state the number of reported accidents in *(a)* the Palace of Westminster and *(b)* its outbuildings for each year over the last 10 years for (i) hon. Members, (ii) hon. Members' staff, (iii) staff employed by the House in administration, (iv) staff employed by the House in catering, (v) staff employed by the House for other services, (vi) outside contractors and (vii) members of the general public; how many people work at the House and its outbuildings in each category; and what is the number of visitors from the general public each year.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The information requested is as follows:

	1980	*1981*	*1982*	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
(a) Palace of Westminster-reported accidents										
Members	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	3	—	1	2
Members' staff	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	—	1	1	2
Administration department's staff	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Refreshment department's staff	15	44	26	34	47	29	31	20	25	66
Other departments' staff	n.a.	19	13	11	9	13	14	7	7	19
Outside contractors	n.a.	2	3	1	—	—	—	1	1	3
General public	n.a.	22	29	20	22	35	18	14	8	12
(b) Parliamentary outbuildings—reported accidents										
Members	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	1	—	—	—
Members' staff	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	1	3	—	1	—
Administration department's staff	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	2	8	1	—	—	4	2
Refreshment department's staff	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other departments' staff	n.a.	1	1	2	3	2	2	2	—	1
Outside contractors	n.a.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
General public	n.a.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

n.a. = Not available.

The number of people in each category are:

	Number
Members	649
Members' Staff	n/a
Administration Department Staff	94
Refreshment Department Staff	261
Other Departmental Staff	652
Outside Contractors	n/a
Members of the General Public	[1]

[1] See following table.

The estimated number of visitors were:

	Line of Route	Public Galleries
1981	287,700	167,655
1982	98,639	186,112
1983	103,375	140,100
1984	134,332	173,733
1985	140,390	170,371
1986	118,304	163,802
1987	112,176	147,439
1988	128,084	176,048
1989	115,312	179,345

Written Answers (Cost)

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Lord President of the Council what is the current average cost of providing a written parliamentary answer.

Sir Geoffrey Howe: The average cost is currently £54.

NATIONAL FINANCE

European Commission Budget

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total net contribution to the European Commission budget made in the latest available year by *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the Federal Republic of Germany, *(c)* France and *(d)* Italy.

Mr. Major: I refer the right hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary gave the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on 22 March 1990 at columns *687-88*.

Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency

Mr. John Carlisle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans the Government have for the future of the Treasury's Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency.

Mr. Ryder: Following a review last year of CCTA's role, activities and organisation, the Government have decided that there continues to be a need, centrally within the Government, to provide and co-ordinate IT services and advice for Departments, both individually and collectively, and to help formulate Government policies on IT. CCTA will continue to discharge these functions as part of the Treasury.

CCTA will be looking to make more use of the private sector in the development and maintenance of its own services and will focus its efforts on activities which the private sector cannot or is unwilling to undertake or where CCTA can add significantly greater value for money. CCTA will also increase its monitoring of the effectiveness and quality of products and services provided by the private sector to the Government.

The latest decisions call in addition for a package of management reforms at CCTA encompassing:

(i) improved services to customers,
(ii) new management accounting systems, output and performance indicators,
(iii) more systematic charging for direct services to Departments, and
(iv) improved corporate and strategic planning.

A new advisory board will be established under Treasury chairmanship to advise the Treasury's senior management on the scale and broad composition of CCTA's forward work programme.

Copies of the management summary of the review and of the detailed decisions on it are being placed in the Library.

National Savings

Mr. French: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total value of the holdings of each issue of national savings certificates for the last five years which have remained unencashed for more than a year after their maturity date.

Mr. Ryder: The estimated total value of the holdings of each issue of national savings certificates which have remained unencashed for more than a year after their maturity date was as follows at 31 December in each of the last four years. Figures for 1985 are not available.

£ million
(Principal and interest)

	1986	1987	1988	1989
Fixed-interest issues				
1 to 6 and conversion	4·37	4·05	3·77	3·44
7	25·12	24·41	22·89	20·63
£	1·67	1·64	1·55	1·39
8	12·82	12·32	11·14	9·49
9	39·71	38·59	35·10	30·03
10	93·38	90·02	79·99	66·66
11	38·20	36·56	31·43	25·44
12	153·11	148·01	126·55	102·92
Decimal	316·04	313·38	279·13	242·78
14	801·30	749·18	547·18	388·34
16	430·39	405·97	288·66	187·11
18	496·68	459·82	324·64	218·33
19	784·12	1,899·07	1,145·74	693·94
21	—	283·24	200·43	132·67
23	—	333·92	696·82	407·08

	1986	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
24	—	—	466·42	254·36
25	—	—	90·78	315·04
26	—	—	—	206·93
TOTAL FIXED-INTEREST	3,196·91	4,800·18	4,352·85	3,306·58
Index-linked issues				
Retirement	1,056·62	975·65	843·99	709·55
Second	253·85	1,158·09	1,575·96	1,460·28
TOTAL INDEX-LINKED	1,310·47	2,133·74	2,419·95	2,169·83
TOTAL ALL ISSUES	4,507·38	6,933·92	6,772·80	5,476·41

Wales (Official Visits)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the dates on which he has made an official visit to Wales since his appointment to his present post.

Mr. Major: I have not visited Wales since taking up my present post. I intend, however, to visit Wales in July of this year.

German Monetary Union

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the implications for the British economy of German monetary union.

Mr. Ryder: The main implications of German monetary union for the British economy will be through its impact on world trade flows, an assessment of which was contained in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report 1990-91."

Income Tax

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of the individuals who, in the fiscal year 1989-90, were subject to the composite rate tax, would, if the Budget proposals for its abolition had been in force, have paid *(a)* income tax at the basic rate and *(b)* no income tax.

Mr. Major: About 75 per cent. of individuals with composite rate income would have been liable to pay at least some tax at basic rate, and about 25 per cent. would not have been liable to pay any. Wives with composite rate income have been included as taxpayers or non-taxpayers according to the liability of their husbands.

Mr. Hind: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much income tax rates would need to be increased to fully meet an increase in Government expenditure in 1990-91 of 17½ per cent.; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: Assuming that it were all financed by income tax, a 17½ per cent. increase in general Government expenditure would require a rise in the basic rate of 13p.

Merchant Shipping

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what investment incentives he intends to introduce to stop United Kingdom shipping companies flagging abroad; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what measures he intends to introduce to enable United Kingdom shipping companies to maintain their merchant fleets and crews.

Mr. Lilley: We have already introduced a number of measures to help United Kingdom shipping companies in recent years. These have included the relaxation of the rules governing a seafarer's eligibility for the 100 per cent. foreign earnings deduction, and the extension of the business expansion scheme to ship chartering companies.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will extend for United Kingdom shipping companies, the maximum charter period permitted for BES ship schemes to five years.

Mr. Lilley: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will improve the terms for United Kingdom shipping companies, for roll-over relief for corporation tax on profits from ship sales.

Mr. Lilley: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so. When a ship is sold, the present system ensures that tax relief is recovered where the depreciation allowed exceeds that actually incurred over the period of ownership.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will reinstate for United Kingdom shipping companies for a period of five years, free depreciation, 100 per cent. ship allowance, against investment in new and second-hand ships.

Mr. Lilley: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so. The present capital allowances regime is already more generous for ships than commercial depreciation.

Married Man's Allowance

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total cost to the revenue of the married man's allowance in the 1989-90 financial year.

Mr. Lilley: I refer my hon. Friend to "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1990-91 to 1992-93", chapter 21, appendix F.

Charities

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received concerning his proposals relating to covenants to benefit charities.

Mr. Lilley: The whole Budget package for charities has been warmly welcomed. In response to requests, the Inland Revenue has issued some 1,350 copies of the guidance, first published on Budget day, to help charities and individuals making charitable covenants to get them right for tax.

British Telecom

Mr. Hind: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to sell off to the public the Government's shareholding in British Telecom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: My right hon. Friend continues to keep the timing of a sale under review in the light of market conditions and the other priorities for the privatisation programme.

THE ARTS

"The Three Graces"

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister for the Arts what consideration he has given to the bid for "The Three Graces" from the Scottish national gallery.

Mr. Luce *[holding answer 4 April 1990]*: I am aware of the interest shown by the National Galleries of Scotland and also that the gallery is prepared to commit £1 million from its purchase grant towards the purchase of "The Three Graces". I am also aware of the considerable expense and effort which the Victoria and Albert museum has put into its public appeal. It is for these institutions to decide in which way it would be appropriate for them to conduct their fund-raising efforts.

TRANSPORT

Motor Vehicle Licences

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish for each post office district in England and Wales *(a)* the number of post offices currently issuing motor vehicle licences and *(b)* any planned increases in the number of post offices issuing motor vehicle licences.

Mr. Portillo: The number of post offices issuing vehicle excise licences in each post office district in England and Wales is currently as follows:

Post office district	*Number of offices*
Newcastle	138
Lancashire and Cumbria	129
Leeds	144
Liverpool	80
Manchester	128
Sheffield	137
North Midlands	127
Birmingham and Coventry	80
South and West Midlands	113
Bristol	132
Wessex	138
Devon and Cornwall	183
East Midlands	120
Norwich	141
Oxford	113
Colchester	117
Aldershot	132
Hastings	117
Brighton	93
London North	79
London Central	43
London Western	90
London Eastern	69
London South West	91
London South East	95
North and Mid Wales and Marches	166
South Wales	162
Grand total	3,157

Any increase in the number of the licensing post offices increases the charges made by Post Office Counters to the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency. The possibility of a further extension is, however, currently being examined with the Post Office. Any changes in the licensing network that result will be given full publicity.

Daylight Saving

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the effects on the totals of road casualties if the clocks were advanced by one hour throughout the year.

Mr. Portillo: I refer the hon. Member to paragraph 35 of the Government's Green Paper, Cmd. 722, where estimates of 813 killed and seriously injured and 2,060 total casualties saved are given. Copies of the Green Paper are in the Library of the House.

Road Improvements, North Devon

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the progress in road improvements and bridge building of the Barnstaple downstream bridge and the Aller Cross to Blackmore Gate road.

Mr. Portillo: The Barnstaple downstream bridge scheme and improvements to the Aller Cross to Blackmore Gate road are the responsibility of the local highway authority, Devon county council.

Roads (London)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many objections, petitions and letters of support were received for each of the London assessment studies between 15 December 1989 and 28 February.

Mr. Portillo: An analysis of the responses will be published shortly.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultation methods will apply before he lays regulations concerning the introduction of red routes in London.

Mr. Portillo: There will be further detailed consultations on the proposals in "Traffic in London". Over the coming months there will be specific local consultations with the authorities and representatives of the residents and traders concerned in the proposed red routes pilot scheme.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what consultations he proposes before making detailed proposals concerning the widening of the A1 at Archway island and Highbury corner;

(2) what meetings he plans to have with the local authority, local businesses and local community groups concerning the improvements to the A1 at Archway and Highbury corner.

Mr. Portillo: It is too soon to announce the timetable and arrangements for taking forward the road proposals arising from the assessment studies.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what powers the London Traffic Commissioner will have; and when he expects to make an appointment.

Mr. Atkins: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) on 4 April.

Railways (Electrification)

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will provide a table giving the percentage of total route miles of railway passenger services electrified in the United Kingdom and in each of the other EEC states.

Mr. Portillo: At present, 27 per cent. of British Rail's total route miles are electrified. Equivalent percentage figures for other EEC countries are as follows:

	Percentage
Belgium	60·0
Denmark	7·5
France	34·0
Germany	42·0
Greece	0·0
Ireland	2·0
Italy	57·0
Luxembourg	60·0
Netherlands	65·0
Portugal	13·0
Spain	49·0

Figures for total route miles of passenger services only which are electrified are not available.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consideration he is giving to giving loan sanction to West Yorkshire passenger transport authority, over several years, to finance the electrification of routes between Bradford and Leeds and along the Aire valley; and whether the scheme satisfies his financial criteria for such investment.

Mr. Portillo: The West Yorkshire passenger transport executive has put a case to the Department, and discussions are taking place. More details are needed before any decision can be taken.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals from British Rail he is considering to ensure a continuous programme of electrification on British Rail; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: British Rail's 1989 corporate plan includes electrification of the following lines: Portsmouth-Southampton; Cambridge-King's Lynn; Heathrow Express to Paddington; Manchester international airport link; Birmingham cross-city line; Hooton-Chester to Ellesmere Port; and the east coast main line. It is for British Rail to come forward with any further proposals for electrification which would satisfy its normal investment criteria.

Rail Pollution

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the amount of atmospheric pollutants produced by *(a)* electric traction for railways and *(b)* diesel traction; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Figures on atmospheric pollution directly attributable to United Kingdom railways are available in the 1989 digest of environmental protection and water statistics, a copy of which is in the Library.

Traffic (Leeds-Bradford)

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has for the reduction of traffic congestion between Leeds and Bradford and along the Aire valley which can be brought fully into operation within three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Work on the A650 Drighlington bypass to the south-west of Leeds is due to start on 23 April 1990. The 4km long single carriageway road is expected to be complete in early 1992 and will relieve traffic congestion on the A650 trunk road through Drighlington and Adwalton particularly at the A58 Whitehall road junction.

The Department has four further schemes in the national road programme to improve the trunk road between Bradford and Skipton in the Aire valley. These are the A629 Skipton-Kildwick improvement, the A650 Hard Ings road, Keighley, the A650 Airedale route section 3—Crossflatts to Cottingley Bar—and the Shipley eastern bypass.

Haulage Licences

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidance is given by his Department to highway authorities for granting operators' licences to private hauliers in respect of examinations of the suitability of access routes to the applicant's proposed depot.

Mr. Portillo: Consideration of applications for goods vehicle operator licences is the responsibility of local independent licensing authorities. Local highway authorities have a right of objection to such applications. It is for the highway authority concerned to consider what action, if any, should be taken, using its traffic regulations powers, in respect of traffic generated by a goods vehicle operating centre.

Road Accidents

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the number of persons who have died in road accidents for every year since 1979 and for the first three months of 1990.

Mr. Portillo: The information is as follows:

Number of persons killed in road accidents in Great Britain 1979 to 1989

	Numbers
1979	6,352
1980	6,010
1981	5,846
1982	5,934

	Numbers
1983	5,445
1984	5,599
1985	5,165
1986	5,382
1987	5,125
1988	5,052
1989	[1]5,230

[1] Provisional.

Figures for the first three months of 1990 are not yet available.

River Tyne (Road Bridge)

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to build a new road bridge across the River Tyne between the Newcastle upon Tyne, East parliamentary constituency and Gateshead.

Mr. Portillo: No, but I am aware that a cross-Tyne study is being undertaken by the local authorities in Tyne and Wear to consider traffic capacity across the River Tyne.

Newcastle Quayside Development

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what impact the Tyneside urban development corporation's proposed east Newcastle quayside development project will have on east-west and north-south traffic flows in Newcastle upon Tyne.

Mr. Portillo: The traffic implications of the proposed quayside development are a matter for discussion between the city council and the corporation. There are no trunk roads involved.

Safety at Sea

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the "Study into Hours of Work: Fatigue and Safety at Sea" produced by the Medical Research Council in December 1989 and subsequently submitted to his Department.

Mr. McLoughlin: Professor Ivan Brown's report on his study into hours of work, fatigue and safety at sea was forwarded to representative organisations on 2 February for comment. All comments received will be taken into account before any decision is made on what further action, if any, is appropriate.

Second Severn Crossing

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, in the new legislation to provide for the second Severn crossing, he will ensure that the toll concession for the disabled remains as on the existing bridge.

Mr. Portillo: I intend to propose in any new legislation that disabled people should continue to be exempt from tolls.

Blind People

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will introduce within the United Kingdom a provision to enable registered blind persons to take with them a non-paying companion on rail journeys; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Local authorities in Great Britain outside London already have discretion to offer travel concessions on local public transport, including free travel, to the companion of a blind person who requires his assistance in order to travel.

A5 (Nuclear Waste)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has on the transport of nuclear waste products along the A5.

Mr. Portillo: The Department does not collect information of this kind.

Shipping

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the balance of payments in shipping in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. McLoughlin: The overall balance of the sea transport account is as follows:

	£ million
1979	+38
1980	+14
1981	−190
1982	−437
1983	−778
1984	−594
1985	−456
1986	−471
1987	−594
1988	−593

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Appeals

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Attorney-General whether there are any plans to increase the number of staff at the Court of Appeal criminal division.

The Attorney-General: Yes; there are plans to make a small increase in staff in order to take account of the projected increase in work.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Attorney-General (1) what is the average length of time that an appeal *(a)* against conviction and *(b)* against sentence currently waits to be heard by the Court of Appeal criminal division;

(2) what is the average length of time that an expedited appeal *(a)* against conviction and *(b)* against sentence waits to be heard by the Court of Appeal criminal division.

The Attorney-General: A total of 32·3 per cent. of appeals against conviction are ready for hearing within six months of receipt of notice of appeal in the criminal appeal office and 84·3 per cent. are ready within 12 months. Thirty per cent. of appeals against sentence are ready for hearing within three months of receipt of notice of appeal and 65·2 per cent. are ready within six months. The time taken for an appeal to be heard is governed in part by the amount of preparatory work involved, and in trying to list cases with the minimum of delay the Registrar of Criminal Appeals must ensure that counsel and solicitors acting for each appellant have adequate time to prepare their cases. Where delays in listing appeals do occur they tend to be caused by the court's obligation to balance the conflicting needs of applicants who all wish their appeals heard as soon as possible.

Directions to expedite hearings are made by the court in individual cases. Those with leave to appeal against conviction or short sentences are, wherever possible, given earlier consideration than those appealing against long sentences. Information relating to expedited appeals is not recorded separately.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Attorney-General (1) how many appeals *(a)* against conviction and *(b)* against sentence are waiting to be heard by the Court of Appeal criminal division;

(2) how many expedited appeals *(a)* against conviction and *(b)* against sentence are waiting to be heard by the Court of Appeal criminal division.

The Attorney-General: At 31 March 1990 there were 339 appeals against conviction and 724 applications for leave to appeal against conviction waiting to be heard by the Court of Appeal criminal division. There were also 471 appeals against sentence and 969 applications for leave to appeal against sentence. Information relating to expedited appeals is not recorded separately.

Social Security Commissioners

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Attorney-General how many appeals have been made to the social security commissioners in each standard planning region in each of the last 10 years; how long on average it has taken to deal with these appeals each year; and what has been the shortest and longest time any appellant has had to wait for a decision in each year.

The Attorney-General: This information is not available in the form and for the period requested. However, the number of appeals made in each of the calendar years from 1985 to 1989 to the commissioners in the regions of England, Wales and Scotland are given in the first part of the table. The length of time taken to deal with these appeals to final disposal is available only in respect of those disposed of in the years 1988 and 1989 and the figures are given in the second part of the table.

Social security commissioners

Year	Number of appeals England	Wales	Scotland	Total	Number of days to disposal Average	Shortest	Longest
1985	1,982	104	590	2,676	—	—	—
1986	[1]1,860	—	406	2,266	—	—	—
1987	2,878	76	654	3,608	—	—	—
1988	4,015	55	779	4,849	250	13	450
1989	4,435	38	716	5,189	404	1	1,493

[1] Including Wales.

Land Registry

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Attorney-General what progress is being made towards establishing Her Majesty's Land Registry as an executive agency in accordance with the recommendations of the report of the Prime Minister's efficiency unit, "Improving Management in Government: The Next Steps."

The Attorney-General: The Land Registry is to be established as an executive agency on 2 July 1990.

The Government consider the Land Registry is well suited to the executive agency form of organisation and that the resultant management flexibilities together with the possibility in the longer term of the registry operating a trading fund will provide significant overall improvement in the service provided to the registry's customers.

Consistent with the basic approach of the Government's "next steps" initiative, the Lord Chancellor has decided that the Chief Land Registrar (who will be the agency chief executive) should no longer be required by statute to be a barrister or solicitor of 10 years' standing. He wishes to be able to appoint the best possible person for this important post and considers it essential that he or she should be selected primarily on the basis of his or her management abilities. The Government therefore propose to introduce amendments to the Courts and Legal Services Bill at Committee stage for this purpose. Arrangements will be made, by regulation, to ensure that the legal functions currently performed personally by the Chief Land Registrar are reserved to an appropriately qualified senior lawyer in the Land Registry.

Australia Constitution Act 1900

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Attorney-General when the Government will respond to representations from the Australian Government to release one of the original copies of the Australia Constitution Act 1900 on a permanent basis.

The Attorney-General: The Government have received representations from the Australian Government requesting that the original copy of the Australia Constitution Act 1900, at present on loan to Australia and on display in Parliament house in Canberra, should remain in Australia permanently. The British Government have decided that it would be right to find a way to offer the document to the Commonwealth of Australia as a gift. The copy of the Act is a public record under the terms of the Public Records Act 1958 and cannot at present be disposed of as a gift or on permanent loan. The Government will, therefore, shortly be introducing legislation relating only to this particular case designed to place this document outside the provisions of the Public Records Act and enable it to be released to the Commonwealth of Australia as a gift.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Schools (Land Sales)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many sites within school grounds have been sold off as surplus to requirements for the period 1989-90 and so far in 1990.

Mr. Alan Howarth: This information is not held by the Department.

Wales (Official Visits)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish the dates on which he has made an official visit to Wales since his appointment to his present post.

Mr. Jackson: My right hon. Friend's ministerial responsibilities in Wales are limited to provision of some higher education, and science. I am planning to visit the university of Wales within the next few months.

Armed Forces

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will set up an inquiry into the possible ways of improving further and higher education by incorporating teaching methods and materials currently used by Her Majesty's armed forces.

Mr. Jackson: At the invitation of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, Her Majesty's inspectors advise on aspects of educational and training provision within the armed forces. Through exchanges of information, a route already exists for the best of good practice in either sector to be reflected in the other.

Teachers (Training)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish for each local authority area the number of teachers in each of the last three years who have undertaken INSET and other courses of professional development *(a)* during school hours and *(b)* after school, at weekends and during school holidays.

Mr. Alan Howarth *[holding answer 29 March 1990]*: The information obtained under the LEA training grants scheme on the volume of training taking place for which release is or is not required, expressed as training days, is set out in the table:

	1987-88 Training days		*1988-89 Training days*				*1989-90 Training days*			
Local education authority	*Requiring release*	*Not requiring release*	*Requiring release*	*Non-contact days*	*Other not requiring release*	*Total not requiring release*	*Requiring release*	*Non-contact days*	*Other not requiring release*	*Total not requiring release*
Avon	52,465	36,847	54,453	38,491	30,912	69,403	74,077	55,000	29,190	84,190
Barking	12,835	8,086	[1]31,259	[1]6,500	[1]10,950	[1]17,450	26,545	9,338	12,300	21,638
Barnet	21,809	9,883	9,735	13,002	5,233	18,235	10,665	12,750	20,421	33,171
Barnsley	10,386	8,240	[1]7,511	[1]9,855	[1]4,680	[1]14,535	11,310	9,000	6,140	15,140
Bedfordshire	46,118	12,552	35,883	9,500	8,611	18,111	50,807	8,815	3,741	12,556
Berkshire	23,774	25,735	23,947	30,325	15,258	45,583	45,250	29,120	26,187	55,307
Bexley	7,223	5,523	[1]6,540	[1]5,250	[1]5,238	[1]10,488	6,730	11,720	6,200	17,920
Birmingham	64,570	19,306	63,346	29,090	45,085	74,175	80,797	53,510	37,172	90,682
Bolton	10,887	8,700	9,360	7,200	11,675	18,875	16,310	6,600	7,100	13,700
Bradford	59,084	37,749	26,234	24,140	31,502	55,642	88,877	26,700	9,600	36,300
Brent	5,290	9,250	[1]13,978	[1]14,500	[1]7,200	[1]21,700	6,840	8,300	5,150	13,450
Bromley	18,320	6,500	16,065	2,340	3,491	5,831	11,605	5,000	4,398	9,398
Buckinghamshire	31,978	27,728	29,085	14,070	18,680	32,750	32,666	16,500	24,991	41,491
Bury	20,223	63,101	20,116	13,955	7,678	21,633	48,538	9,375	65,496	74,871
Calderdale	26,448	11,300	[1]20,333	[1]7,272	[1]1,506	[1]8,778	13,574	6,768	3,618	10,386
Cambridgeshire	56,201	11,674	45,994	1,545	20,769	37,314	46,044	21,528	25,591	47,119
Cheshire	27,020	65,430	31,139	25,200	19,222	44,422	51,576	46,740	50,275	97,015
Cleveland	12,190	37,348	15,887	26,400	22,003	48,403	10,500	38,000	26,500	64,500
Cornwall	19,942	26,075	62,708	18,270	10,057	28,327	15,119	21,500	37,462	58,962
Coventry	33,798	14,494	12,524	10,854	9,175	20,029	14,030	10,700	8,000	18,700
Croydon	11,364	14,878	11,939	4,429	21,495	25,924	15,492	4,476	42,874	47,341
Cumbria	18,181	19,285	19,678	20,210	5,403	25,613	22,107	19,475	3,143	22,618
Derbyshire	66,467	56,696	[1]47,137	[1]45,000	[1]27,000	[1]72,000	62,244	40,500	31,069	71,569
Devon	28,735	66,277	[1]29,448	[1]5,700	[1]12,464	[1]18,164	75,608	37,922	61,650	99,572
Doncaster	23,130	4,976	17,443	14,415	7,859	22,274	17,696	14,259	7,401	21,660
Dorset	28,189	38,198	[1]31,579	[1]22,880	[1]5,800	[1]28,680	29,375	22,750	20,710	43,460
Dudley	18,550	4,100	17,578	11,708	5,547	17,255	35,973	13,190	5,929	19,119
Durham	16,276	24,218	15,635	24,705	20,347	45,052	19,300	27,500	44,417	71,917
Ealing	11,247	2,578	[1]8,895	[1]2,500	[1]450	[1]2,950	6,500	10,200	300	10,500
East Sussex	44,090	37,009	[1]38,826	[1]17,916	[1]7,811	25,727	30,425	24,860	8,759	33,619
Enfield	25,865	19,777	27,035	10,980	4,420	15,400	27,297	16,275	22,394	38,669
Essex	60,500	40,500	62,000	37,000	50,000	87,000	78,000	35,000	47,000	82,000
Gateshead	5,990	1,352	[1]9,274	[1]8,280	[1]929	[1]9,209	7,190	7,950	950	8,900
Gloucestershire	35,378	5,756	43,231	20,395	9,886	30,281	62,005	20,700	9,337	30,037
Hampshire	81,915	44,198	[1]78,000	[1]9,000	[1]37,800	[1]46,800	60,260	42,000	28,060	70,060
Haringey	15,620	14,076	[1]4,198	[1]7,300	[1]7,436	[1]14,736	8,465	7,550	7,612	15,162
Harrow	6,772	14,472	[1]3,505	[1]7,000	[1]8,510	[1]15,510	8,000	7,150	13,698	20,848
Havering	24,550	8,500	5,750	6,525	53,224	59.749	5,000	10,000	48,200	58,200
Hereford and Worcester	36,238	7,612	32,373	20,000	9,128	29,128	76,020	20,520	10,640	31,160
Hertfordshire	44,800	26,247	46,235	1,089	34,206	35,295	55,339	17,200	22,833	40,033
Hillingdon	8,106	9,633	[1]3,782	[1]8,500	[1]17,489	[1]25,989	4,600	8,960	16,357	25,317
Hounslow	13,235	11,439	10,639	10,020	9,943	19,963	8,636	10,025	8,320	18,345
Humberside	30,358	32,836	30,547	21,519	23,510	45,029	27,699	35,580	46,540	82,120
Inner London	114,883	168,124	[1]117,500	[1]85,000	[1]77,600	[1]162,600	[1]60,600	48,000	143,860	191,860
Isle of Wight	7,279	3,291	7,238	6,090	2,831	8,921	7,00	5,000	2,740	7,740
Isles of Scilly	59	88	[1]120	0	[1]25	[1]25	250	125	50	175
Kent	62,332	23,054	[1]67,304	[1]18,000	[1]12,000	[1]30,000	[1]46,159	[1]45,226	[1]39,892	[1]85,118

	1987-88 Training days		1988-89 Training days				1989-90 Training days			
Local education authority	*Requiring release*	*Not requiring release*	*Requiring release*	*Non-contact days*	*Other not requiring release*	*Total not requiring release*	*Requiring release*	*Non-contact days*	*Other not requiring release*	*Total not requiring release*
Kingston Upon Thames	10,090	6,055	10,756	4,056	4,454	8,510	6,425	4,882	3,232	8,114
Kirklees	31,504	16,525	33,843	17,500	4,511	22,011	30,278	18,885	4,279	23,164
Knowsley	7,738	3,054	5,057	4,800	10,760	15,560	6,125	9,600	1,200	10,800
Lancashire	87,432	28,845	89,509	36,111	30,050	66,161	90,000	55,000	25,000	80,000
Leeds	32,455	33,259	[1]26,080	[1]33,465	[1]35,683	[1]69,148	57,712	25,885	9,887	35,772
Leicestershire	50,895	23,086	[1]62,814	[1]520	[1]7,596	[1]8,116	71,690	19,500	430	19,930
Lincolnshire	24,178	5,197	42,706	22,635	9,176	31,811	35,099	21,800	17,314	39,114
Liverpool	24,450	20,370	[1]9,200	[1]18,000	[1]13,440	[1]31,440	46,002	22,500	30,691	53,191
Manchester	33,931	19,278	31,891	21,210	17,840	39,050	20,997	21,210	19,145	40,355
Merton	6,961	6,770	9,895	6,700	3,335	10,035	2,670	6,000	3,023	9,023
Newcastle Upon Tyne	29,728	17,263	17,271	12,419	4,784	17,203	19,117	11,935	2,300	14,235
Newham	15,498	5,144	[1]12,922	[1]6,000	[1]14,013	[1]20,013	9,935	10,750	7,885	18,635
Norfolk	22,735	62,695	22,774	37,248	13,702	50,950	21,405	27,260	40,186	67,446
North Tyneside	16,193	11,348	14,529	5,597	8,590	14,187	12,984	6,423	12,170	18,593
North Yorkshire	69,024	17,337	[1]88,603	[1]10,772	[1]11,503	[1]22,275	85,252	10,894	10,419	21,313
Northamptonshire	96,865	39,285	46,290	21,958	13,867	35,825	55,049	25,190	27,238	52,518
Northumberland	14,453	14,092	14,903	13,700	18,158	31,858	16,653	13,710	19,797	33,507
Nottinghamshire	85,056	32,665	137,101	40,940	27,451	68,391	139,402	35,424	26,123	61,547
Oldham	18,402	17,008	[1]16,207	[1]10,505	[1]6,503	[1]17,008	17,390	10,000	12,000	22,000
Oxfordshire	42,641	47,957	43,188	24,775	34,605	59,380	47,134	23,615	35,783	59,398
Redbridge	8,400	4,500	12,707	8,088	3,794	11,882	14,494	9,000	6,000	15,000
Richmond Upon Thames	5,532	4,133	7,217	4,203	1,715	5,918	7,762	3,850	2,415	6,265
Rochdale	12,101	9,803	[1]12,010	[1]11,000	[1]9,010	[1]20,010	12,430	8,336	25,942	34,278
Rotherham	13,511	4,315	16,939	12,520	3,362	15,882	16,081	12,630	10,167	22,797
Salford	15,215	5,059	[1]15,700	[1]2,770	[1]1,520	[1]4,290	23,421	0	2,728	2,728
Sandwell	9,102	17,716	12,358	14,182	16,321	30,503	12,630	11,600	23,825	35,425
Sefton	11,934	2,435	14,802	9,462	3,953	13,415	8,773	6,524	5,454	11,978
Sheffield	38,150	12,400	36,880	13,000	5,200	18,200	31,910	12,000	4,500	16,500
Shropshire	34,450	3,000	29,005	18,000	8,940	25,940	23,080	18,000	12,470	30,470
Solihull	29,825	15,918	18,508	10,900	7,783	18,683	10,510	9,000	4,753	13,753
Somerset	24,183	14,920	24,015	17,268	13,685	30,953	18,261	17,365	13,181	30,546
South Tyneside	13,315	3,104	[1]19,928	[1]4,167	[1]25,000	[1]29,167	4,985	13,244	6,817	20,061
St. Helens	9,739	4,085	8,633	8,865	7,924	16,789	5,400	8,865	2,489	11,354
Staffordshire	26,805	61,085	57,920	41,500	20,291	61,791	44,049	41,500	3,345	44,845
Stockport	6,363	14,675	23,057	6,729	5,376	12,105	14,430	14,460	440	14,900
Suffolk	30,290	41,378	36,361	24,260	24,428	48,688	43,510	24,490	12,100	36,590
Sunderland	18,650	18,357	[1]17,340	[1]15,000	[1]10,666	[1]25,666	19,335	14,675	29,319	43,994
Surrey	58,274	12,286	[1]37,690	[1]35,190	[1]8,130	[1]43,320	61,346	35,190	21,676	56,866
Sutton	3,850	5,204	[1]5,900	[1]3,750	[1]6,830	[1]10,580	1,521	5,497	600	6,097
Tameside	15,624	5,484	15,024	10,828	2,834	13,662	15,852	9,235	7,034	16,269
Trafford	8,192	6,318	15,253	6,177	4,512	10,689	11,672	6,660	2,586	9,246
Wakefield	14,218	14,630	11,030	11,725	3,469	15,194	17,338	14,045	4,579	18,624
Walsall	23,691	9,552	9,993	21,250	4,733	25,983	13,805	19,320	2,000	21,320
Waltham Forest	13,797	11,100	12,181	9,420	2,805	12,225	9,438	13,300	5,192	18,492
Warwickshire	12,210	35,929	[1]24,800	[1]25,000	[1]20,851	[1]45,851	28,050	17,500	39,200	56,700
West Sussex	14,503	24,297	[1]21,949	[1]24,000	[1]26,539	[1]50,539	34,479	19,600	19,981	39,581
Wigan	27,335	10,360	22,347	0	10,970	10,970	23,664	4,270	5,437	9,707
Wiltshire	23,797	9,101	[1]35,135	[1]13,518	[1]7,902	[1]21,420	20,694	26,693	12,159	38,852
Wirral	10,934	13,718	8,743	12,376	18,265	30,641	11,120	11,000	10,600	21,600
Wolverhampton	12,022	42,314	9,569	9,105	14,715	23,820	21,322	19,068	45,006	64,074
England	2,683,951	2,009,110	2,650,513	1,522,084	1,353,582	2,875,666	2,891,772	1,766,728	1,754,454	3,521,182

Notes:

1987-88 outturn.
1988-89 outturn.
1989-90 estimated.

[1] Estimated.

Teachers' Pay and Conditions

Mr. Gerald Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has now considered the views expressed by the local authority employers, teacher unions and others on his proposals following the third report of the Interim Advisory Committee on School Teachers' Pay and Conditions.

Mr. MacGregor: After careful consideration of the representations I have received I have decided to accept the recommendations contained in the third report of the Interim Advisory Committee on School Teachers' Pay and Conditions, but to stage their introduction over the period up to 1 January 1991 and to make some minor modifications.

I believe that the changes to be introduced will markedly increase the attractiveness of teaching as a profession and improve career prospects for good teachers. The introduction of range pay for heads and deputies, and of incremental enhancements and local scales for classroom teachers, will greatly improve the scope for flexible local decision taking to meet local circumstances. The new discretionary £750 pay supplement for teachers in the inner London weighting area will help tackle the special problems in London.

Drafts of the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document 1990, an order which will give effect to this document, and a circular to local education authorities and others are being sent to the relevant local authority associations, teacher unions and bodies representing the interests of the governors of voluntary schools and grant-maintained schools, inviting their comments by Thursday 26 April 1990.

The draft document incorporates the changes recommended by the IAC, subject to staging and to some modifications. These include the assimilation of deputy head teachers in existing school groups 6 and 9 one point higher on the new pay spine, and the addition of one extra spine point on the top of the normal range for deputy head teachers in new school groups 1, 2 and 3 and for head teachers in new school groups 1 and 2.

Youth Service

Mr. Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what arrangements he proposes to make at national level to assist the youth service in responding effectively to the challenges of the 1990s.

Mr. MacGregor: From 1 April 1991, I have decided to build on the experience and expertise of the national level youth service bodies I currently fund, particularly the unit comprising the National Youth Bureau and the Council for the Education and Training of Youth and Community Workers, by channelling that funding through one single, high-profile and comprehensive national youth agency (NYA). This will have clear responsibility to work with both the voluntary and the local authority sectors of the youth service to improve the quality, range and effectiveness of their responses to the priority objectives we are establishing with them.

To ensure a co-ordinated approach, I shall fund this body to undertake a range of education-related functions, including the development of curricular content and methods, especially in advice and counselling; the development, endorsement, accreditation and, where necessary, the provision of youth worker training; the collection, dissemination and publication of information; support for managers of youth service organisations and operations, particularly in the voluntary sector, including management training; response to international interests and programmes; and direct support for Government initiatives in these areas. It will be open to other Departments and agencies to support similar work through the agency in their particular areas of responsibility.

In recognition of the valuable contribution of the voluntary sector, and to realise an effective partnership between it and the local authority sector, I propose to implement the recommendations of the efficiency scrutiny of Government funding of the voluntary sector, published yesterday, by requiring the director personally to ensure that the agency, its work and staff are responsive to the needs of the voluntary sector and of volunteers, and to report to me annually on this. I propose also to permit the body to fund voluntary youth organisations to undertake curriculum and training development projects as an integral part of its functions in these areas. I shall expect it, in all the work I fund, to promote the active participation of young people, and to seek to secure private sponsorship and otherwise increase its income from non-Government sources.

These arrangements are designed to meet the needs of the clients of the bodies I currently fund. Should, however, the National Council for the Voluntary Youth Service and the National Association of Young People's Counselling and Advisory Services and the British Youth Council consider the needs of their members would not be fully met, I would be prepared to explore the possibility of them competing for limited funding as national voluntary youth organisations, for eligible programmes of work outside the scope of the national youth agency. Once this has been determined, my officials will consult the territorial education Departments as to which of the national youth agency's functions could usefully be undertaken in respect of their areas and otherwise to secure co-operation and co-ordination with any comparable bodies they fund. Detailed arrangements for managing the national youth agency will be settled in consultation with the interests concerned.

Neil McCluskey

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he will reply to a letter from the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth dated 9 February marked urgent and referring to Neil McCluskey esq. of Imperial college.

Mr. Jackson: The Department has received a very large number of letters about student loans at the same time as the Education (Student Loans) Bill has been before Parliament. I am sorry that replies to some hon. Members have been delayed. A concerted effort is in hand to ensure that replies are despatched to all hon. Members urgently.

British Council (Brussels)

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what benefits have accrued since February 1989 from establishment by the British Council Brussels office of the higher education programme within its European Commission liaison unit.

Mr. Sainsbury: I have been asked to reply.

I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Indonesia

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will seek to have the human rights situation in East Timor included on the agenda of the June meeting of the inter-governmental group on Indonesia.

Mrs. Chalker: It would not be appropriate for this subject to feature on the formal agenda of the June meeting.

Education for All

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what goals were agreed at the "Education for All" conference in Thailand this month;

how Her Majesty's Government will ensure that these goals are reached; and what plans Her Majesty's Government have to increase the aid given specifically to primary education and adult literacy.

Mrs. Chalker: The ultimate goal affirmed by the world declaration on education for all is to meet the basic learning needs of all children, youth and adults.

Progress towards this goal will rest mainly with individual developing country Governments establishing intermediate goals to suit local circumstances, and, in respect of the aid programme, the priorities they have. We are not able to order the way in which other Governments allocate resources to a variety of sectors, but I believe that the consequences of the conference will enable us more easily to encourage and expand support for primary education and adult literacy programmes, the latter with an emphasis on learning for women.

Tropical Rain Forests

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) how much British aid has been directed to the tropical forestry action plan to date; and how much is planned for the next three years;

(2) if he will place in the Library a copy of all the representations he has received about the advisability of continuing support for the tropical forestry action plan;

(3) what assessment has been made of the extent of deforestation resulting from the tropical forestry action plan; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what input his Department has had into the tropical forestry action plan; and what account he has taken of recommendations about its effectiveness;

(5) what specific measures are being adopted within the tropical forestry action plan to ensure the reversal of deforestation and the protection of biological diversity.

Mrs. Chalker: The tropical forestry action plan (TFAP) is not a fund or organisation to which donors contribute funds. It is a mechanism under which recipient countries review their forestry sectors, and donors can co-ordinate assistance and have a dialogue with each country about policy issues. The product is a national tropical forestry action plan for each country taking part in the process.

The TFAP requires strengthening. I called for its revision when I addressed the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) general conference last November. I said that policies relating to forests need examining and those that encourage deforestation need changing. Policies should encourage reaforestation and agroforestry, and better agricultural practices which help take the pressures off forests. They should take account of the knowledge and interests of the peoples of the forests. Shortly after the conference the FAO set up an independent review to examine the TFAP and make recommendations for reform. The review team visited London last month and met my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs as well as representatives of the timber trade and NGOs. It is due to report in the summer. I have placed a copy of ODA's written submission to the review in the Library of the House.

The ODA has supported or is supporting the preparation of national forestry action plans in 11 countries at a cost of £0·4 million; and we currently plan to assist with the preparation of a further nine plans. We are currently funding eight projects related to national forestry action plans at a cost of £13 million. We are considering 22 further projects, the cost of which will depend on their precise design. All ODA assistance through the TFAP is subject to our normal rigorous appraisal and careful management.

ODA forestry advisers participate in the twice-yearly meetings of an informal group of technical advisers responsible for TFAP from donor agencies, and liaise with the TFAP co-ordinating unit within the FAO.

The FAO has been quoted in the *New Scientist* as saying that it is nonsense to say that the TFAP has promoted deforestation. The independent review should provide an assessment of the TFAP to date.

Specific measures to reverse deforestation and protect biological diversity are included in national tropical forestry action plans. Conserving forest ecosystems is one of the five priority areas highlighted when the TFAP was launched in 1985.

It is not normal practice to place departmental correspondence in the Library of the House.

Romania

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has any further plans to help improve health care in Romania.

Mrs. Chalker: In addition to the help we have already provided, directly and through the European Community, we now propose to contribute £500,000 to the World Health Organisation's programme of assistance for the Romanian health service.

Overseas Aid

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the Government have any plans for additional overseas aid.

Mrs. Chalker: Yes. At the Zambia consultative group on 9 to 11 April we intend to pledge a new grant of £30 million. It is to be spent on essential imports required to implement the economic reform programme for 1990 that Zambia has agreed with the International Monetary Fund. We are also offering to reschedule some £12·85 million of repayments, including accumulated arrears, due to Britain in 1990-91 on past aid loans to Zambia. These new measures are additional to our technical co-operation programme, worth some £14 million last year. In addition, the external financing limit for the Commonwealth Development Corporation will be increased by £25 million from £28 million to £53 million. The increase will enable the corporation to continue assisting the economies of developing countries, in particular in the private sector. These increases in aid will be met in part by a charge to the reserve of £30 million; the remainder will come from the existing overseas aid programme.

PRIME MINISTER

European Social Charter

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister if she will raise at the next meeting of the European Council the action plan of the Commission to implement the provisions of the social charter largely by majority voting procedures.

The Prime Minister: I have at present no plans to raise the matter at the next Council. The voting arrangements for each proposal in the action programme will depend on the legal base put forward by the Commission and this will become clear only when it publishes its detailed proposals.

Engagements

Mr. Stern: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 24 April.

The Prime Minister: I hope to have meetings with ministerial colleagues and others and carry out my duties in the House, after which I shall depart for Istanbul to be present at the 75th anniversary of the Gallipoli landings the following day.

Floods, North Wales

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Prime Minister if she will establish an appeal fund for the victims of the north Wales sea floods.

The Prime Minister: Appeal funds have already been established in the three areas worst affected by the floods and the Government have made contributions to each of them.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if she will receive a deputation of council leaders and residents of the north Wales coasts concerning the north Wales sea floods of March;

(2) if she will visit the Clwyd county council headquarters to meet the chief executive of Clwyd city council to receive a report on the impact of the north Wales sea floods upon the residents of those areas affected;

(3) if she will visit north Wales to meet the victims of the sea floods of March.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales has already visited the area to see the damage and meet the victims of the floods. He and his officials of his Department have held meetings with the local authorities most involved.

European Single Market

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Prime Minister what information she has as to the number of directives concerning the creation of a single market within the European Community in 1992 which have been enacted in the national legislation of each member state and subsequently implemented; and what percentage of the total directives this represents in each case.

The Prime Minister: The latest information on the implementation of single market measures in national legislation comes from the Commission's fifth progress report on the White Paper on the internal market. I am delighted to report that this shows the United Kingdom in first place on its implementation record, with only nine measures remaining unimplemented. This highlights the United Kingdom's record as a reliable partner in the Community. The table gives the overall position member state by member state.

	Belgium	*Federal Republic Germany*	*Denmark*	*Spain*	*France*	*Greece*	*Italy*	*Ireland*	*Luxembourg*	*Netherlands*	*Portugal*	*United Kingdom*
Measures notified	53	75	77	55	68	46	36	67	58	63	37	77
Measures not notified	22	11	9	28	16	26	30	13	18	20	42	7
Infringement proceeding	12	1	1	2	3	9	20	5	9	4	2	2
Derogation	—	—	—	4	—	6	—	1	—	—	8	1
Not applicable	3	3	3	1	3	3	4	4	5	3	1	3
Per cent.	61	86	89	65	78	57	42	78	68	72	46	90

Lithuania

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Prime Minister what recent communication she has received from Professor Landsbergis, the President of Lithuania; what has been her response; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I have received a letter from Professor Landsbergis drawing attention to a number of documents and declarations relating to the status of Lithuania. Our views on the incorporation into the Soviet Union of the Baltic states, and on the status of Lithuania, are clearly on record.

South Africa

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister if she will seek to persuade the South African Government to allow the free flow of funds from outside South Africa to the United Democratic Front.

The Prime Minister *[pursuant to her reply, 13 March 1990, c. 156]:* Further information has come to my attention concerning impediments to the flow of funds to the United Democratic Front. The main South African laws dealing with foreign funding—the Fund Raising Act 1978 and the Disclosure of Foreign Funding Act 1989—do not impede the flow of funds to the UDF. However, the UDF is still listed under the Affected Organisations Act 1974 which prevents it from receiving funds from foreign sources. The other restrictions on the UDF were lifted on 2 February and we would like to see the restrictions under the Affected Organisations Act lifted also.

HEALTH

Kidney Donors

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received about the willingness of people to become kidney donors; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: We receive frequent representations on organ donation from a wide range of individuals and organisations. On 16 November 1989 I chaired a seminar on ways of improving the voluntary donation of organs.

The transcript is now available and I have placed copies in the Library; my letter which accompanies the transcript sets out the action that is in hand.

Discussions at the seminar illustrated both the complexity of the subject and the diversity of views on the best way forward. The initiatives we have already taken should, however, continue to produce results for a considerable time, and we do not propose to make any major changes in policy at present.

Two initiatives of particular importance are the first national audit of potential donors in intensive care units, and the organ donation publicity programme. Both were discussed in some detail at the seminar. The audit and other recent studies have raised a number of medical issues which could significantly affect the potential for organ donation. Professional bodies are addressing these issues. We have expanded the Department's publicity budget, from approximately £50,000 four years ago to about £200,000 per annum today. The transcript gives details of the ways in which the money has been spent, and our plans for 1990-91.

Mental Hospitals

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list in the *Official Report* the hospitals for the mentally ill and handicapped which he told the Committee on the National Health Service and Community Care Bill on 27 February, column 129, would become empty over the next five years, the number of patients in each at the latest available date, the district health authority in which each is situated; and whether it is in or near an urban area.

Mr. Freeman: The tables show mental handicap and mental illness hospitals planned to close over the next five years, the latest patient numbers and the district health authority in which each hospital is situated. The other information requested is not held centrally.

Table 1

Mental handicap hospitals	*Latest numbers of patients*	*District health authority*
South East Thames		
Leybourne Grange	360	Maidstone[1]
Eastry	84	Canterbury and Thanet
Grove Park	70	Lewisham and North Southwark
Laughton Lodge	45	Eastbourne
Mount Pleasant	39	Hastings
Yorkshire		
Brandesburten	221	Hull
Claypenny	167	York
Whixley	46	Harrogate
Stansfield	60	Calderdale
Caistor	35	Grimsby[2]
Oxford		
Wayland Hospital	63	West Berkshire
Trent		
Aston Hall	327	Southern Derbyshire
Balderton	176	Central Nottinghamshire
Wessex		
Coldharbour	40	West Dorset
Burderop	65	Swindon
Pewsey	85	Swindon
East Anglian		
Risbridge	119	West Suffolk
Lothingland	67	Great Yarmouth and Waveney
Jane Walker	83	East Suffolk
Hadleigh House[3]	19	East Suffolk
Hales Hospital	42	Norwich
North Western[4]		
Brockhall Hospital	400	Hyndburn and Ribble Valley
Scott House	14	Rochdale
Offerton House	80	Stockport

[1] Managed by Tunbridge Wells.

[2] Located in North Lincolnshire but managed by Grimsby DHA.

[3] Mental handicap unit within St. Clement's mental illness hospital.

[4] Numbers of beds.

Table 2

Mental illness hospitals	*Latest numbers of inpatients*	*District health authority*
Yorkshire		
Storthes Hall Hospital, near Huddersfield	389	Huddersfield
Trent		
Rauceby Hospital	304	South Lincolnshire
The Pastures	454	Southern Derbyshire
Carlton Hayes Hospital	470	Leicestershire
Mapperley Hospital	305	Nottingham
Middlewood Hospital	606	Sheffield
The Towers	394	Leicestershire
Kingsway Hospital	363	Southern Derbyshire
East Anglian		
St. Audry's Hospital, Woodbridge	372	East Suffolk
St. Nicholas' Hospital	131	Great Yarmouth and Waverney
St. Andrews	335	Norwich
North East Thames		
Friern Hospital[1]	673	Hampstead
Claybury Hospital	722	Waltham Forest
South East Thames		
Cane Hill Hospital	343	Croydon[2]
Tooting Bec Hospital	420	Wandsworth[3]
Hellingly Hospital	154	Eastbourne
St. Augustines Hospital	235	Canterbury and Thanet
South West Thames		
Long Grove Hospital, Epsom	404	Kingston and Esher
Brookwood Hospital	489	South West Surrey
Wessex		
Whitecroft Hospital	75	Isle of Wight
Herrison Hospital, Dorchester	263	West Dorset
Old Manor Hospital[1]	216	Salisbury
Oxford		
St. John's Hospital	282	Aylesbury Vale
St. Crispin's Hospital	263	Northampton
Littlemore Hospital	226	Oxfordshire
West Midlands		
Barnsley Hall Hospital	169	Bromsgrove and Redditch
Rubery Hill Hospital	211	South Birmingham
Central Hospital	298	South Warwickshire
Hollymoor Hospital	279	Solihull

Mental illness hospitals	*Latest numbers of inpatients*	*District health authority*
Mersey		
Rainhill Hospital	487	St. Helens and Knowsley
Parkside Hospital	485	Macclesfield
Winwick Hospital	815	Warrington
North Western		
North Manchester (Springfield) Hospital[1]	145	North Manchester
Northern		
St. Mary's Stannington	495	Gateshead
South Western		
Mendip Hospital	96	Somerset
Moorhaven Hospital	157	Plymouth

[1] With some facilities remaining on site.

[2] Managed by Bromley.

[3] Managed by West Lambeth.

North Western RHA

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each district of the North Western regional health authority the number of *(a)* in-patients, *(b)* qualified nursing staff and *(c)* consultants for the latest available year; and if he will give figures for the five previous years.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information regarding the number of in-patients and qualified nursing staff for each district of the North Western regional health authority is given in the tables. Details relating to the total number of consultants in the North Western region and in the three teaching hospitals are given in the table.

Information about the number of consultant contracts in non-teaching health authorities is not held centrally.

In-patient cases treated, North Western Region, 1983-1988-89

Health Authority	*1983*	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*
Lancaster	21,738	22,963	24,538	23,113	23,592	21,331
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde	34,023	35,896	37,146	37,972	39,159	40,963
Preston	35,178	35,882	38,803	39,907	40,499	41,544
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley	38,888	40,454	41,507	40,465	43,315	41,988
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	28,951	29,533	29,658	31,912	31,695	31,431
West Lancashire	15,501	15,965	17,359	17,580	17,540	16,117
Chorley and South Ribble	4,429	4,496	4,415	4,434	4,503	5,037
Bolton	33,471	33,837	35,289	35,385	37,205	37,812
Bury	20,362	20,988	21,166	22,125	23,130	22,702
North Manchester	41,236	40,534	40,496	40,133	39,332	41,224
Central Manchester	43,053	44,975	46,418	46,288	50,285	46,423
South Manchester	67,532	68,509	69,361	69,798	72,719	72,389
Oldham	26,480	27,581	29,273	28,902	30,707	31,392
Rochdale	20,137	20,973	21,597	22,962	22,494	21,769
Salford	43,591	42,806	42,860	43,636	44,220	43,934
Stockport	34,637	34,822	36,718	37,623	38,004	37,375
Tameside and Glossop	23,555	23,480	26,858	27,894	28,766	28,877
Trafford	18,604	18,982	18,487	17,678	17,570	16,914
Wigan	34,301	35,080	35,679	36,871	39,805	41,326

Source: 1983-1986, SH3 return, 1987-88 onwards, SH3a return

Qualified Nurses and Midwives[1] *30 September 1983-1988 (Excluding Agency)*

North Western by District

Whole-time Equivalent[2]

	1983	*1984*	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*
North Western HQ	20	10	20	20	20	20
Lancaster	1,170	1,190	1,170	1,190	1,170	1,150
Blackpool Wyre and Fylde	1,320	1,350	1,370	1,390	1,400	1,450
Preston	1,400	1,510	1,590	1,580	1,600	1,550
Blackburn Hyndburn and Ribb	1,530	1,640	1,690	1,680	1,320	1,310
Burnley Pendle and Rossendale	1,550	1,600	1,660	1,680	1,880	1,860
West Lancaster	570	560	580	600	600	560
Chorley and South Ribble	400	430	450	450	450	450
Bolton	970	1,010	1,060	1,140	1,160	1,190
Bury	650	680	660	670	670	680
North Manchester	1,310	1,350	1,420	1,440	1,440	1,560
Central Manchester	1,230	1,250	1,340	1,318	1,320	1,400
South Manchester	1,740	1,820	1,860	1,890	1,990	1,930
Oldham	850	880	930	960	940	920
Rochdale	740	750	770	770	720	720
Salford	1,590	1,640	1,740	1,800	1,780	1,870
Stockport	1,270	1,340	1,310	1,280	1,360	1,310
Tameside and Glossop	730	770	790	810	840	870
Trafford	690	710	740	760	750	770
Wigan	1,310	1,320	1,330	1,380	1,370	1,400

Source: Department of Health (SM13) annual census of NHS non-medi[illegible]

[1] Excludes qualified nurses and midwives under further training.

[2] All figures are independently rounded to the nearest (10) whole time equiv[illegible]

Hospital Medical and Dental Consultants at 30 September each year

	North Western Region	Central Manchester (Teaching)	South Manchester (Teaching)	Salford DHA (Teaching)
1983	1,117·2	129·2	152·5	98·5
1984	1,138·3	129·9	150·9	99·2
1985	1,160·0	132·8	150·5	101·6
1986	1,192·1	138·2	152·0	102·6
1987	1,207·3	139·7	152·7	97·9
1988	1,219·3	134·6	156·7	97·1

Notes:

[1] Figures represent Whole Time Equivalents.

[2] Includes Permanent Paid and Honorary Staff.

[3] Prior to 1987 Senior Hospital Medical/Dental Officers with allowance were included with Consultants.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish for each health authority in the north-west *(a)* the net income from private patients and clinics and *(b)* the amounts written off as bad debts in each year since 1979.

Mr. Freeman: Following are figures recorded in the 1985-86 to 1988-89 annual accounts of the district health authorities comprising the Mersey and North Western health regions. The income shown arises from charges to private patients under sections 65 and 66 of the National Health Service Act 1977 and is recorded under each heading net of sums written off in each financial year (which may include amounts due from earlier years). Separate write-off figures for income due under sections 65 and 66 were not collected centrally before 1985-86.

Income from Private Patients (Under Sections 65 and 66 of the NHS Act 1977) & Related Losses

	1985-86				1986-87			
	Income		Amounts Written off		Income		Amounts Written off	
Mersey Region	*In-Patients (Section 65)* £	*Out-Patients (Section 66)* £	*In-Patients (Section 65)* £	*Out-Patients (Section 66)* £	*In-Patients (Section 65)* £	*Out-Patients (Section 66)* £	*In-Patients (Section 65)* £	*Out-Patients (Section 66)* £
District Health Authorities								
Chester	22.090	12,342	229	66	35,543	19,116	0	128
Crewe	259,678	92,548	2,114	361	285,494	103,174	1,864	409
Halton	0	1,849	0	0	22,652	10,856	0	0
Macclesfield	95,307	30,867	1,076	912	117,661	36,647	2,236	208
Warrington	372,546	22,401	1,116	37	391,511	23,164	1,433	271
Liverpool	397,819	62,026	1,187	650	363,060	70,616	3,034	725
St Helens and Knowsley	123,694	40,712	0	0	92,258	36,489	0	64
Southport and Formby	189,862	24,399	0	0	152,399	29,296	1,028	210
South Sefton	90,957	24,750	0	274	88,552	30,768	6,210	218
Wirral	136,729	35,617	3,038	156	113,396	37,976	7,138	2,052

	1985-86				1986-87			
	Income		Amounts written off		Income		Amounts written off	
North Western Region	*In-patients (Section 65)* £	*Out-patients (Section 66)* £	*In-patients (Section 65)* £	*Out-patients (Section 66)* £	*In-patients (Section 65)* £	*Out-patients (Section 66)* £	*In-patients (Section 65)* £	*Out-patients (Section 66)* £
District Health Authorities								
Lancaster	24,780	14,162	294	160	21,602	18,839	1,201	78
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde	85,267	15,446	3,743	300	76,774	21,684	0	0
Preston	255,714	76,427	75	122	165,886	75,158	919	545
Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley	37,663	19,980	0	0	26,124	27,743	830	448
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	83,300	17,082	0	169	49,208	15,573	1,102	33
West Lancashire	298,793	26,401	756	463	297,834	30,581	168	147
Chorley and South Ribble	18,108	3,586	0	9	11,531	2,058	0	0
Bolton	14,826	6,253	0	0	10,978	10,261	0	0
Bury	264,029	36,256	2,402	1,160	256,608	44,764	1,216	0
North Manchester	17,893	19,418	1,599	911	19,081	32,568	0	771
Central Manchester	986,870	91,110	0	0	769,043	98,038	4,450	356
South Manchester	595,354	180,329	0	7,356	618,542	235,345	10,357	770
Oldham	80,433	10,596	1,646	54	127,835	16,892	1,088	237
Rochdale	4,691	6,451	0	69	4,576	9,780	0	124
Salford	66,146	46,665	0	0	77,565	43,229	1,305	4
Stockport	53,893	27,443	0	739	34,681	29,536	232	744
Tameside and Glossop	21,320	11,807	102	394	27,199	15,846	661	76
Trafford	37,085	12,451	462	190	55,926	12,050	154	97
Wigan	83,213	38,910	0	0	75,936	40,042	98	875

Income from private patients (under sections 65 and 66 of the NHS Act 1977) and related losses

Mersey region	1987-88				1988-89			
	Income		*Amounts written off*		*Income*		*Amounts written off*	
	In-patients (Section 65) £	*Out-patients (Section 66)* £	*In-patients (Section 65)* £	*Out-patients (Section 66)* £	*In-patients (Section 65)* £	*Out-patients (Section 66)* £	*In-patients (Section 65)* £	*Out-patients (Section 66)* £
District health authorities								
Chester	30,520	17,932	259	305	25,828	11,459	97	147
Crewe	297,912	104,288	2,892	533	347,848	124,830	628	318
Halton	64,978	21,271	103	132	55,916	31,123	9	164
Macclesfield	118,123	38,492	1,637	12	131,203	40,618	1,713	251
Warrington	390,064	28,104	241	100	214,403	21,483	1,327	698
Liverpool	332,247	81,828	0	0	413,167	104,785	0	0
St. Helens and Knowsley	96,315	29,152	0	0	79,233	38,102	0	414
Southport and Formby	106,002	15,094	760	248	64,168	17,272	1,410	391
South Sefton	85,646	30,763	1,751	234	142,072	37,264	0	118
Wirral	118,265	48,154	876	551	74,065	57,089	0	0

North Western Region	1987-88				1988-89			
	Income		*Amounts written off*		*Income*		*Amounts written off*	
	In-patients (Section 65) £	*Out-patients (Section 66)* £	*In-patients (Section 65)* £	*Out-patients (Section 66)* £	*In-patients (Section 65)* £	*Out-patients (Section 66)* £	*In-patients (Section 65)* £	*Out-patients (Section 66)* £
District health authorities								
Lancaster	7,415	12,463	512	1,761	14,797	9,831	386	377
Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde	84,914	30,249	1,057	264	111,384	39,115	0	225
Preston	151,073	64,646	797	988	136,515	63,130	1,216	639
Blackburn, Hyndburn and R.V.	40,568	30,912	0	213	25,921	38,477	0	0
Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale	35,617	21,276	0	0	35,092	19,197	0	264
West Lancashire	347,255	42,929	1,820	1,454	376,807	57,159	868	671
Chorley and South Ribble	7,927	1,459	0	0	9,502	1,587	0	0
Bolton	8,888	10,189	0	210	8,399	14,000	0	386
Bury	259,251	43,118	674	0	342,235	78,185	572	0
North Manchester	23,154	32,515	1,544	743	12,090	23,356	162	199
Central Manchester	976,350	99,733	39	72	935,099	232,946	552	3,631
South Manchester	884,314	252,105	10,775	5,118	955,114	345,357	20	2,642
Oldham	161,807	18,820	0	294	162,340	19,453	138	223
Rochdale	17,484	9,208	0	55	6,474	12,995	52	233
Salford	88,474	44,899	0	0	58,125	57,398	0	249
Stockport	44,598	34,965	103	362	31,175	36,829	0	238
Tameside and Glossop	22,080	14,455	0	134	28,802	16,457	0	80
Trafford	40,943	13,001	360	141	16,914	13,197	0	227
Wigan	77,302	37,287	0	672	119,063	40,345	0	0

Note: [1] *The table excludes income due under Section 58 of the NHS Act 1977 (which arises mainly from services provided to private health care establishments) and which for the authorities shown totalled some £241,147 in 1988-89. Separate write-off figures for this category of income are not collected centrally.*

Adjournment Debates

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many Adjournment debates and Consolidated Fund debates have been answered by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health since his appointment in December 1988; and what was the mean time at which the Adjournment debates finished.

Mr. Freeman: I have answered a total of 52 Adjournment debates and Consolidated Fund debates since my appointment in December 1988 until today. I regret that the information about the mean time of finishing can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Alzheimer's Disease

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the district of Easington suffer from Alzheimer's disease and senile dementia.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are suffering from Alzheimer's disease *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in North Staffordshire district health authority.

Mr. Freeman: This information is not collected centrally.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what support is currently available to local groups offering support to the carers of those with Alzheimer's disease; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Such local voluntary groups are eligible for grants from health authorities or local authority social services departments. They will continue to benefit from the project work centrally funded under the Government's "Helping the Community to Care" programme. At national level, the Department currently gives a grant of £130,000 per year to the Alzheimer's Disease Society as a contribution towards the running costs of its headquarters' services.

Drugs

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the reasons why there has been no inquiry into discounts received by dispensing doctors on their drug purchases since 1983; and why there are no plans to hold such an inquiry.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Doctors are reimbursed only their actual expenses. The effect of a discount scale for dispensing doctors (unlike the one for pharmacists) is to regulate reimbursement between dispensing and non-dispensing doctors. A further inquiry will be required in due course to establish whether there should be any change to the discount scale.

Toxic Shock Syndrome

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths from toxic shock syndrome have been reported in 1990.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is not yet available.

Abortions

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received regarding actions of the West Norfolk and Wisbech health authority in respect of terminating pregnancies on social grounds; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department has received correspondence from four hon. Members on this subject. I understand that the health authority has not received any formal representations. Under the Abortion Act 1967 a pregnancy may be terminated only if two registered medical practitioners are of the opinion, formed in good faith, that an abortion is justified in terms of the Act. It is for health authorities to decide the level of their provision for abortion services in the light of local needs and priorities and competing claims on resources.

Public Services (Free Health Care)

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of the cost to the Exchequer of providing free prescriptions and free dental treatment to policemen, firemen and members of the armed services and their families.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Employment in these services confers no automatic exemption from NHS charges. Such personnel and their families pay prescription or dental charges if they use NHS facilities, unless they qualify for exemption under the NHS regulations by virtue of their age or other personal circumstances. The terms and costs of repayment schemes operated by the services themselves are matters for my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

Hospital Services

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of those hospitals in England which provide supra-regional (i) chorioncarcinoma services, (ii) craniofacial services, (iii) endoprosthetic services for primary bone tumours, (iv) heart transplantation, (v) liver transplantation, (vi) non-transplant liver services, (vii) neonatal and infant cardiac surgery, (viii) psychiatric services for deaf people, (ix) retinablastoma services and (x) stereotactic radiosurgery.

Mr. Freeman: Units designated to provide the supra-regional services specified are located at the following hospitals:

Supra-regional service	*Hospital(s)*
1. Chorioncarcinoma services	Jessop Hospital for Women, and Weston Park Hospital, Sheffield, Charing Cross Hospital, London
2. Craniofacial services	Radcliffe Infirmary, Oxford, Queen Elizabeth Hospital and Children's Hospital, Birmingham, The Hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond Street, London
3. Endoprosthetic services for primary bone tumours	Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital, London, Royal Orthopaedic Hospital, Birmingham
4. Heart Transplantation	Freeman Hospital, Newcastle General Hospital, Sheffield, Papworth Hospital, Cambridge and The Hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond Street, London, Harefield Hospital, St. George's Hospital, London, Wythenshawe Hospital, Manchester
5. Liver Transplantation	Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge, King's College Hospital, London, Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham, and St James's University Hospital, Leeds
6. Non-transplant liver services	King's College Hospital, London, Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham, and Children's Hospital, Birmingham
7. Neonatal and infant cardiac services	Freeman Hospital, Newcastle, Killingbeck Hospital, Leeds, Guy's Hospital, London, Southampton General Hospital, Bristol Royal Hospital for Sick Children, Children's Hospital, Birmingham, Royal Liverpool Children's Hospital, Harefield Hospital and National Heart and Chest Hospitals, Brompton, The Hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond Street, London
8. Psychiatric services for deaf people	Springfield Hospital, London, Whittingham Hospital, Preston
9. Retinablastoma services	St. Bartholomew's Hospital, London
10. Stereotactic Radiosurgery	Royal Hallamshire Hospital, Sheffield

For some services, clinical activity also takes place in units which are not designated.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of those medical conditions which cannot be treated by hospitals within England but can be treated by hospitals within Wales.

Mr. Freeman: We are not aware of any medical conditions for which treatment services exist in Wales which are not similarly provided in England.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) which hospital in England has the longest waiting list for arthritic hip joint surgery; which has the lowest waiting period for arthritic hip joint surgery; and if he will specify the number of waiting days for each;

(2) which hospital in England has the longest waiting period for hernia operations; which has the lowest waiting period for hernia operations; and if he will specify the number of waiting days for each;

(3) which hospital in England has the longest waiting period for varicose veins surgery; which has the lowest waiting period for varicose veins surgery; and if he will specify the number of waiting days for each.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We do not collect centrally information on waiting lists and times for individual hospitals or specific medical conditions.

AIDS

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will respond to the resolution of the European Parliament calling on member Governments not to sponsor visitors to the sixth international conference on AIDS in June 1990 in San Francisco;

(2) whether his Department intends to sponsor any visitors to the sixth international conference on AIDS in San Francisco.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No decision has yet been taken on a response to the resolution of the European Parliament or on sponsorship of visitors to the sixth international conference in San Francisco.

Community Homes (Secure Places)

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many secure places there are in community homes and youth treatment centres; how many young people they currently contain; and how many of these young people are *(a)* on remand and *(b)* under sentence.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The number of places available in approved local authority secure units in England on 31 March 1990 was 288. There were 58 secure places in youth treatment centres on that date.

Such accommodation is available for children in care generally, some of whom will be juvenile offenders or alleged offenders. Young people who have been convicted of grave crimes, and sentenced to be detained under section 53 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933, may also be placed in such accommodation.

Details of placements in local authority secure units are collected centrally only on an annual basis, although these do not provide full information in the form requested. The latest information available of the legal status of children in approved secure units is given in "Children Accommodated in Secure Units During the Year Ending 31 March 1988, England". Copies are available in the Library. On 31 March 1988, 228 children were accommodated in local authority secure units and 56 in security in youth treatment centres.

South Manchester Health Authority

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has yet received any recommendations from the management team led by John Yates which is examining waiting lists in South Manchester; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The 1990-91 series of studies has only recently begun. We have not yet received any recommendations relating to South Manchester. The team will make recommendations to the Department once it has completed its assessment of the district's waiting lists.

Cervical Cancer

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current extent of the cervical screening programme for women between the age of 25 years and 35 years in England and Wales; and what is the current incidence of cervical cancer among this age group.

Mr. Freeman: For information on the cervical cancer screening programme I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) on 3 April at columns *518-19*. The number of newly registered cases of malignant neo-plasm of the cervix uteri in women aged 25 to 34 years inclusive in 1984 (England and Wales) was 622; the rate per 100,000 (female) population was 18·3.

General Practitioners

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes there have been between 1979 and the latest available year in *(a)* general practitioners' remuneration and *(b)* the number of practice staff employed by general practitioners.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: From 1 April 1990 the intended average net remuneration for general practitioners will be £33,280. On 1 January 1991 this figure will rise to £34,680. Payments for reaching preventive care targets for childhood immunisation and cervical screening will be made outside this average figure. These payments will amount to as much as £1,800 for childhood immunisation (children aged under two), and £2,280 for cervical screening, per annum. The corresponding level of remuneration in 1979 was £12,830. All these figures exclude practice expenses which are reimbursed to GPs.

The total number of practice staff qualifying for direct reimbursement under the ancillary staff scheme increased by 70 per cent. from 33,721 (20,121 whole-time equivalents) in 1979 to 57,410 (33,863 whole-time equivalents) in 1988.

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list in the *Official Report* those areas in which general practitioners will be in receipt of the proposed deprivation allowance.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) on 15 March 1990, at columns *364-65*.

Student Nurses

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes there have been between 1979 and the latest available year in *(a)* the basic remuneration and *(b)* the average overtime payments for (i) first-year student nurses and (ii) third-year student nurses; and what is the bursary for project 2000 student nurses.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Between April 1979 and April 1990 the basic pay of first-year and third-year student nurses increased by 143 per cent. (6·8 per cent. in real terms) and 159 per cent. (14 per cent. in real terms) respectively. Information on allowances such as overtime and special duty payments to student nurses is available only from 1984-85 and indicates that their earnings from these sources add about 11 per cent. to basic pay. For 1990-91, nurses have received a pay rise of 10·6 per cent. with a further 2 per cent. from January 1991. In addition inner London weighting has risen by 28 per cent. This means that average earnings now range from £6,320 (£6,440 from January 1991) for a first-year student nurse outside London to £9,025 (£9,168 from January 1991) for a third-year student nurse in inner London. Project 2000 bursaries for students aged under 26 at the start of their course are £4,700 in London and £4,000 elsewhere. For those aged 26 and over the equivalent figures are £5,200 and £4,500.

Blind People (Certification)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he intends to revise the arrangements for certifying a person as blind or partially sighted; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The content and format of form BD8, which is used by consultant ophthalmologists to certify a person as blind or partially sighted, has been substantially revised following the recommendations of the working group on inter-agency collaboration on visual handicap. The new form, which was introduced on 1 April 1990, has been distributed to health authorities together with instructions for its use. The new form is designed to secure significant improvements in the way that data are collected about the causes of blindness and partial sight and more efficient arrangements for passing on relevant information to the visually handicapped person's GP and local social services department. These improvements will assist local authorities in the effective planning and delivery of services for visually handicapped people.

Mental Health (Code of Practice)

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the membership of the working group established in 1989 to draft the Mental Health Act 1983 code of practice; and if he will give details of any request he has made to the Mental Health Act Commission to monitor the code.

Mr. Freeman: The working group was composed of the following members:

Chairman:

Mr. A. J. Collier, CB—formerly deputy secretary, Department of Health and Social Security;

Members:

Professor E. Murphy—consultant psycho-geriatrician and general manager, Lewisham and north Southwark health authority;

Mrs. J. Miles—general manager, priority care services unit, Aylesbury Vale health authority;

Mr. M. Brown—director of nursing (mental health) West Lambeth health authority;

Mr. N. Welch—principal officer, (psychiatric hospitals) Oxfordshire social services department.

Secretary:

Mr. W. Bingley—legal director of MIND, on secondment to the Department of Health while acting as secretary;

Assistant secretary:

Mrs. M. Houston—Department of Health.

I have asked the Mental Health Act Commission to monitor the implementation of the code of practice, and from time to time to advise Ministers on any changes that Ministers should consider making to the code. In addition, I have asked the commission to consider the criticisms of the code made by Lord Mottistone in the debate in the other place on 29 January 1990 at columns 68 to 86 and to advise Ministers upon them by the end of this calendar year. I know that the commission will be pleased to receive any representations on these specific criticisms or on the code generally.

Welfare Milk

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to ensure that the modified welfare milk scheme is now operating fairly especially on milk retailers who provide doorstep deliveries, and that persons in receipt of milk tokens are not being deprived of such a service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Following the change in the reimbursement system for the supply of liquid welfare milk, officials from the Department and the Department of Social Security have been advising all sectors of the dairy trade on the best means of operating the modified scheme fairly. I understand that many processors and suppliers have agreed and are currently operating cost-sharing arrangements.

Very few beneficiaries have reported that their normal supplier has refused to accept tokens. In those cases where this has occurred the beneficiary can usually find an alternative without difficulty and local social security offices are able to offer advice.

Salmonella

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has made an assessment of the implications for salmonella contamination levels of the inclusion of microparticulated egg milk protein as a replacement for raw egg in mayonnaise; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I assume that the microparticulated egg milk protein referred to is the product Simplesse recently approved for use in frozen desserts by the USA Food and Drug Administration.

In the United Kingdom, food regulations require commercially prepared salad cream and mayonnaise to contain at least 1·3 per cent. egg yolk solids derived from pasteurised egg product. The microparticulated egg milk protein does not contain any egg yolk and could not be used to replace eggs in salad cream or mayonnaise. Therefore, there are no implications for salmonella contamination levels.

"Home Life"

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he intends to review his Department's publication, "Home Life"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: We have no plans at present to review "Home Life". It will, however, be reinforced and supplemented as a code of practice by a series of published guidance documents on standards to be looked for in residential care, as part of the community care implementation programme.

Residential Homes

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the sufficiency of local registration authorities' resources to monitor and inspect registered care homes and nursing homes and unregistered care homes and nursing homes; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Registered Homes Act 1984 gives local authorities responsibility for registering and inspecting private and voluntary residential care homes catering for four or more residents and district health authorities responsibility for the registration and inspection of all independent hospitals and nursing homes.

The scale of fees for registering and inspecting homes in the independent sector are fixed in regulations made under that Act and take into account the costs incurred by authorities nationally. In accordance with the proposals in the White Paper "Caring for People", social services authorities will be expected to inspect their own homes and the cost will be taken into account in the 1990 local authority settlement.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the sufficiency of the number of National Health Service nursing homes and social services part III homes to allow people a choice of private and public sector when considering residential or nursing care.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The White Paper "Caring for People" reaffirmed the Government's commitment to securing a wider range of options for people who need continual nursing or residential care. This includes NHS nurse-managed units, local authority homes, or nursing or residential care provided by the independent sector. It is for the statutory agencies involved to make an appropriate assessment of care needs which takes into account the views of the individual and his or her carer.

The National Health Service and Community Care Bill includes provisions for local authorities to draw up and publish their plans for community care. We will expect such plans to aim at an appropriate balance between public and private residential care and nursing home provision, in the light of local circumstances.

Child Abuse

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to ensure that persons convicted of child abuse are deregistered from the nursing register maintained by the United Kingdom council for nursing; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is for the English National Board and the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting to investigate allegations of misconduct by nurses, midwives and health visitors in England, and to determine whether the person concerned should be removed from the professional register. If the hon. Member requires further information, he may wish to contact the chairman of the council.

Private Security Firms

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* the names of all the private security firms currently employed by his Department, *(b)* the number of employees for each firm on the contract, *(c)* the total value of each contract and *(d)* the total value of all contracts for each financial year since 1984-85.

Mr. Freeman: At present Thorn Security Ltd. and Centuryan Security Ltd. hold contracts to guard some of our headquarters buildings. The number of guards employed, the value of each contract and the total value of all contracts for each financial year since 1984-85, is information which I am not at liberty to reveal because it relates to the security of our buildings and is a matter of commercial and contractual confidentiality.

Olestra

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the nutritional implications of olestra.

Mr. Freeman: Olestras are sucrose polyesters classified as food additives by the Food Advisory Committee (FAC). The Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy (COMA), in response to a FAC request for advice, has convened a panel to consider the nutritional implications of the consumption of olestra. The panel is currently awaiting further data from the manufacturers.

Food Hygiene

Mr. Robert Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total number and percentage of successful prosecutions for breaches of the food hygiene regulations in the hotel and catering industry in each year since 1980.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is not held centrally. The following illustrative figures are taken from the annual reports of the Institution of Environmental Health Officers (IEHO). They are based on responses by local authorities to an annual questionnaire from the institution. Response rates vary and figures cannot therefore be compared year on year; they relate to all food premises.

Prosecutions and convictions under the Food Hygiene (General) Regulations 1970

	Prosecutions	*Convictions*	*Per cent.*
1980	1,739	1,631	94
1981	1,139	1,036	91
1982	920	821	89
1983-84	1,128	1,023	91
1984-85	775	712	92
1985-86	790	679	86
1986-87	907	679	75
1987-88	960	901	94

Mr. Robert Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations he has received against the provisions contained in clause 12 of the Food Safety Bill as they relate to the powers of environmental health officers to issue emergency prohibition order notices.

Mr. Freeman: Forty-two, apart from representations made in both Houses of Parliament during the current passage of the Food Safety Bill.

Doctors (Staffordshire)

Mrs. Golding: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will obtain and publish a list of doctors about whom complaints have been made to the Staffordshire family practitioner committee for their refusal to sign postal vote forms for patients to enable them to vote in elections.

Mr. Freeman: Apart from the hon. Member's letter received on 4 April by the Staffordshire family practitioner committee, the FPC has not received any complaints about doctors refusing to sign postal vote forms for patients to enable them to vote in elections.

NHS Costs

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the average cost per *(a)* in-patient case, *(b)* out-patient case and *(c)* day case attendance in each year since 1979 in cash and constant prices.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 1 March 1990]:* The information requested for the financial years 1979-80 to 1986-87 is shown in the table together with the available information for 1987-88.

As a result of the implementation of the recommendations of the steering group on national health services information (the Korner committee), the costing information submitted by authorities from 1987-88 is not comparable to that for previous years. The returns for 1987-88 (the latest from which information is currently available)—focus on district-based treatment costs by specialty-specialty groups within all hospitals as opposed to the less satisfactory earlier basis which sought to produce overall average costs per patient by types of hospital determined only by the main bed usage.

England—Average hospital costs

	In-patient case		*Out-patient case*		*Day case attendance*	
	£ (cash)	*£ (at 1989-90 prices)*	*£ (cash)*	*£ (at 1989-90 prices)*	*£ (cash)*	*£ (at 1989-90 prices*
1979-80	466·72	935·50	61·58	123·43	35·80	71·76
1980-81	593·08	1,004·46	78·22	132·48	45·16	76·48
1981-82	640·40	987·89	87·55	135·06	51·74	79·81
1982-83	689·83	992·48	94·23	135·57	59·53	85·65
1983-84	687·74	945·33	98·21	134·99	58·71	80·70
1984-85	708·29	927·48	102·25	133·89	60·69	79·47
1985-86	718·94	893·53	108·88	135·32	65·80	81·78
1986-87	759·52	912·93	116·14	139·60	70·60	84·86

	Patients using a bed—consultant episode		*Out-patient referral*	
	£ (cash)	*£ (at 1989-90 prices)*	*£ (cash)*	*£ (at 1989-90 prices)*
1987-88	445·60	508·35	96·71	110·32

Source: The annual costing returns (financial returns for 1987-88) of the district health authorities in England and their predecessor area health authorities.

Notes:

1. The figures have been expressed at 1989-90 prices by the use of the Gross Domestic Product deflator.
2. The figures for in-patients/patients using a bed exclude the expenditure and activity data related to patients whose length of stay frequently exceeds the normal short duration (e.g. geriatrics, mental illness, mental handicap, etc.) by hospital type or by specialty for 1987-88.
3. The 1987-88 cost per consultant episode (equivalent to a case) excludes general services overheads but groups in-patients and day cases (those who occupy a bed for at least a period of time but do not stay overnight) under recommended Korner definitions "patients using a bed".
4. The figures for out-patients relate to new cases/referrals some of which necessitate more than one attendance at out-patient clinics.

NHS Catering Costs

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the cost of catering per patient per day in each regional health authority in each year since 1979 expressed in cash and constant prices.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 1 March 1990]:* The information requested for the financial years 1979-80 to 1987-88 is shown in the table. The figures include the costs of provisions, labour and energy.

Hospital costs—Average total cost of meals per patient day £ (cash)

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*
Northern	1·84	2·11	2·34	2·52	2·55	2·66	2·74	2·84	3·40
Yorkshire	1·89	2·21	2·42	2·62	2·60	2·69	2·77	2·96	3·58
Trent	2·05	2·33	2·45	2·66	2·71	2·78	2·81	2·98	3·54
East Anglia	2·56	2·39	2·58	2·73	2·78	2·89	2·94	3·07	3·71
North West Thames	1·96	2·27	2·44	2·45	2·58	2·69	2·83	3·02	3·46
North East Thames	1·85	2·11	2·28	2·45	2·54	2·60	2·70	2·89	3·43
South East Thames	2·06	2·33	2·42	2·51	2·55	2·68	2·91	3·11	3·56
South West Thames	1·91	2·19	2·22	2·33	2·39	2·55	2·66	2·90	3·51
Wessex	2·00	2·27	2·48	2·63	2·60	2·81	2·90	3·02	3·50
Oxford	1·95	2·24	2·44	2·55	2·63	2·70	2·76	3·04	3·46
South Western	1·94	2·18	2·37	2·52	2·58	2·72	2·74	2·86	3·29
West Midlands	1·97	2·29	2·44	2·58	2·61	2·70	2·75	2·86	3·69
Mersey	1·81	2·09	2·24	2·39	2·38	2·49	2·56	2·63	3·07
North Western	1·96	2·32	2·53	2·68	2·64	2·76	2·79	2·94	3·12

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*
SHAs	2·81	3·12	2·40	3·49	3·56	3·72	3·93	4·33	3·41
England	1·97	2·24	2·41	2·55	2·59	2·70	2·78	2·94	3·45

Hospital costs—Average total cost of meals per patient day £ (at 1989-90 prices)

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*
Northern	3·69	3·57	3·61	3·63	3·51	3·48	3·41	3·41	3·88
Yorkshire	3·79	3·74	3·73	3·77	3·57	3·52	3·44	3·56	4·08
Trent	4·11	3·95	3·78	3·83	3·73	3·64	3·49	3·58	4·04
East Anglia	5·13	4·05	3·98	3·93	3·82	3·78	3·65	3·69	4·23
North West Thames	3·93	3·84	3·76	3·52	3·55	3·52	3·52	3·63	3·95
North East Thames	3·71	3·57	3·52	3·52	3·49	3·40	3·36	3·47	3·91
South East Thames	4·13	3·95	3·73	3·61	3·51	3·51	3·62	3·74	4·06
South West Thames	3·83	3·71	3·42	3·35	3·29	3·34	3·31	3·49	4·00
Wessex	4·01	3·84	3·83	3·78	3·57	3·68	3·60	3·63	3·99
Oxford	3·91	3·79	3·76	3·67	3·62	3·54	3·43	3·65	3·95
South Western	3·89	3·69	3·66	3·63	3·55	3·56	3·41	3·44	3·75
West Midlands	3·95	3·88	3·76	3·71	3·59	3·54	3·42	3·44	4·21
Mersey	3·63	3·54	3·46	3·44	3·27	3·26	3·18	3·16	3·50
North Western	3·93	3·93	3·90	3·86	3·63	3·61	3·47	3·53	3·56
SHAs	5·63	5·28	3·70	5·02	4·89	4·87	4·88	5·20	3·89
England	3·95	3·79	3·72	3·67	3·56	3·54	3·46	3·53	3·94

Source: The annual costing returns (financial returns for 1987-88) of the district health authorities in England and those of the special health authorities for the London postgraduate teaching hospitals. (Predecessor authorities prior to 1982-83).

Nuclear Dust Storm, Towyn

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what health warnings and emergency procedures are being carried out at Towyn in respect of the nuclear dust storm warning that was issued on 27 March for that area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: I have been asked to reply.

A mini instrument environmental radiation meter type 6-80 was used to measure external radiation in Towyn and samples of sediment were analysed using a nuclear data high resolution germanium gamma spectrometer. The NRPB's assessment of the impact of the radioactivity in the sediment on the public took into consideration the inhalation of windblown dust and concluded that the resulting doses were only a small fraction of natural background radiation.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Private Security Firms

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the names of all the private security firms currently employed by his Department, the number of employees for each firm on the contract, the total value of each contract and the total value of all contracts for each financial year since 1984-85.

Mr. Cope: The Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments currently employ a total of 10 security firms on guarding contracts. It would not be in the interests of security to release the names of the firms—details of each contract are subject to commercial confidence. The current total value of contracts, which are usually for a two-year period, is £3,128,785. The firms concerned at present employ about 210 security guards. The total value of all contracts for each financial year since 1984-85 is as follows:

Financial year	*Total value of contracts* £
1984-85	1,202,889
1985-86	1,093,350
1986-87	1,086,330
1987-88	981,906
1988-89	1,007,958
[1]1989-90	1,142,227

[1] Estimate.

These figures are not directly comparable to those given in earlier answers since they do not include the value of contracts for non-departmental public bodies.

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will now answer the question from the hon. Member for Walsall, South, No. 155, for answer on 13 February on the private security industry.

Mr. Cope: I am replying to the hon. Member today.

Mr. Gerard Slane

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what representations he has received from the family of Mr. Gerard Slane or their representatives.

Mr. Cope: I have received no representations from the family of Gerard Slane or their representatives.

Fair Employment Commission

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the chairman and the chief executive of the Fair Employment Commission are perceived to be *(a)* Protestants, *(b)* Roman Catholic or *(c)* other.

Mr. Needham: Under section 19 of the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1989, with certain exceptions, the commission may not provide information which discloses, or from which there can be deduced, the religious belief of any identifiable individual without his or her written consent. No such consent has been given by the chairman or chief executive of the Fair Employment Commission.

Advertising Expenditure

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total publicity and advertising expenditure, including for privatisation, of his Department and public bodies for which his Department has responsibility in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1989.

Mr. Cope: The expenditure by the Northern Ireland Departments, the Northern Ireland Office and their sponsored bodies, where this information is readily available, was:

Financial years 1979-80 £	1989-90 £
[1]1,967,657	[2]10,595,500

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[1] Details of expenditure by the Department of Agriculture and the Northern Ireland Office are not available.

[2] Estimate.

Western Health and Social Services Board

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, further to his written answer to the hon. Member for Londonderry, East of 9 March, *Official Report*, column *878*, how many of the 48 per cent. of staff whose religion had to be ascertained by a search of their personnel files were *(a)* Roman Catholics, *(b)* Protestants and *(c)* of no religious persuasion.

Mr. Needham: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave on 28 March at columns *212-13*.

Executive Houses

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the executive dwellings at Holly Park road, Killinchy, County Down, were built; and what the finance which had been allocated for the improvement scheme to these dwellings in the year 1990-91 has been spent on.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The information it would provide is that the dwellings were built in 1957 and that an improvement scheme is programmed to begin towards the end of the 1991-92 financial year covering kitchens, bathrooms, windows, rewiring, heating, flues, doors and insulation. Finance has not been allocated for 1990-91.

Further Education Lecturers

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the likely effect on the numbers of full-time lecturers employed by colleges of further education of the new funding arrangements for the youth training programme.

Dr. Mawhinney: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to a question by the hon. Member for Antrim, East (Mr. Beggs) on 2 April 1990 at column *449*.

Road Accidents, Castlereagh

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many road accidents there have been on the road between Shaw's Bridge and the Miltown junction with the dual carriageway in the borough of Castlereagh for the calendar year 1989.

Mr. Cope: There were 16 road accidents reported to the police in which injuries have been sustained on this stretch of road during the 1989 calendar year. No record is kept of road accidents in which there have been no injuries.

Anglo-Irish Secretariat

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans there are to transfer the Anglo-Irish secretariat from Maryfield to within the grounds of the Stormont estate.

Mr. Cope: There are no plans to transfer the secretariat from its present location.

Residential Care Service

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many children from the Republic of Ireland are presently transferred to the residential care service in Northern Ireland; and who pays for the care of such children.

Mr. Needham: There are at present no children from the Republic of Ireland transferred to the residential care service in Northern Ireland.

Police Rent Allowances

Mr. Stevens: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement concerning the outcome of representations he has received on his decision to set aside certain elements of the police negotiating board's recommendations on rent allowance.

Mr. Brooke: Amending regulations were laid before both Houses of Parliament on 7 March. I have received representations about the effect of these on Royal Ulster Constabulary officers whose maximum limit of rent allowance was last reviewed in 1988, on the grounds that they are at a disadvantage when compared to officers in forces which had a review date in 1989. As a result of these representations I have therefore decided that Royal Ulster Constabulary officers should have their existing allowance increased as from 1 April by the movement in the retail prices index since the force maximum limit was last reviewed. Further amending regulations to give effect to my decision will be made as soon as possible.

This is in addition to the arrangements already provided for in the amending regulations whereby no officer in receipt of rent allowance on 31 March will receive less after that date than he was getting then.

Statistical Divisions

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what are the latest figures for the number of staff presently employed, and the full complement of staff, including vacant posts, by grade, in the statistical divisions in his Department; if he will differentiate between staff in statistical posts and staff in administrative posts; and if he will give the staffing complements by grade, and differentiated between statistical and administrative posts, proposed for 1990-91.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 12 March 1990]:* The information in respect of the Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office is as follows:

	Number employed	*Complement*	*Vacancies*	*Forecasts*
Statistical posts				
Assistant Secretary Economist	1	1	—	1
Chief Agriculture Economist	1	1	—	1
Deputy Chief Agriculture Economist	1	2	1	2
Senior Principal Scientific Officer	1	1	—	1
Senior Principal Economist	1	1	—	1
Principal Agricultural Economist	3	3	—	3
Principal Scientific Officer	4	4	—	4
Principal Economist	10	10	—	11
Principal Research Officer	1	1	—	1
Senior Agricultural Economist	4	5	—	5
Senior Scientific Officer	1	1	—	1
Deputy Economist	14·5	13·5	—	16·5
Agricultural Economist	5	5	—	5
Higher Scientific Officer	2	4	2	4
Senior Assistant Economist	19	21	2	21
Assistant Economist	3	3	—	3
Scientific Officer	7	8	1	8
Inspector Group 4	3	2	—	2
Inspector Group 3	—	—	—	—
Inspector Group 2	3	3	—	3
Assistant Scientific Officer	2	2	—	2
Total	86·5	91·5	6	95·5
Administrative posts				
Deputy Principal	2	2	—	3
Staff Officer	6	6	—	7
Executive Officer I	13	13	—	15
Executive Officer II	26	27	1	26
Administrative Officer	65	66	1	66
Administrative Assistant	33	35	2	35
Personal Secretary	1	1	—	1
Total	146	150	4	153

Stevens Inquiry

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will make it his policy that those soldiers in the Ulster Defence Regiment who were arrested in connection with the Stevens inquiry but who were not charged with a scheduled offence, are properly compensated for losses incurred as a result of having to move home for security reasons.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 23 March 1990]:* My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the hon. Gentleman.

AIDS

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many cases of full-blown AIDS are presently being treated in Northern Ireland; and how many hospitals are involved in such treatment.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 2 April 1990]:* Six cases of full-blown AIDS are presently being treated in the Royal Victoria hospital in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many deaths in which AIDS was the main or a contributory cause have occurred in Northern Ireland during each year since 1984.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 2 April 1990]:* The information requested is as follows:

	Number
1984	0
1985	1
1986	0
1987	0
1988	2
1989	7
[1]1990	2

[1] To date.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many HIV positive cases which have yet to develop into full-blown AIDS have been detected in Northern Ireland; and what are the trends and projections for the years up to the year 2000.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 2 April 1990]:* Forty-four HIV positive cases detected in Northern Ireland have not yet developed into full-blown AIDS.

The incidence of HIV infection and the number of AIDS cases in Northern Ireland are too small to provide a statistical basis on which to make meaningful projections of the likely rate of spread of AIDS.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if Northern Ireland is to be included in the Government's programme of anonymous HIV serosurveys which began on 15 January.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 2 April 1990]:* Depending on the results obtained from the pilot studies now taking place in Great Britain, the DHSS will consider whether to introduce such a programe in Northern Ireland.

Robberies

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the Irish Republic's authorities have sought to extradite anyone from Northern Ireland to the Irish Republic in connection with the Gormanston train robbery.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 2 April 1990]:* It is not the practice either to confirm or deny the existence of an extradition request.

Labour Statistics, Coleraine

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the present level of *(a)* male and *(b)* female unemployment in the Coleraine area; and what were the levels (i) five years, (ii) 10 years and (iii) 15 years ago.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 2 April 1990]:* Unemployment in the Coleraine jobmarket area for the period 1975 to 1990 is as follows:

	Male	*Female*
February 1975	957	342
February 1980	1,452	654
February 1985	2,853	1,018
February 1990	2,580	876

The unemployment statistics given in the table for the Coleraine jobmarket area are not comparable over time mainly due to changes in the rules or procedures for claiming benefits. Seasonally adjusted figures, that is figures compiled on a consistent basis over time, are produced only for Northern Ireland as a whole.

Retail Trade

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons he estimates to have been employed in retailing in *(a)* Coleraine town, *(b)* Limavady town, *(c)* Magherafelt town, *(d)* Londonderry city and *(e)* Belfast city in each of the last 10 years; how many of those persons were (i) employees and (ii) owners or partners and (1) how many were part-time and (2) full-time employed.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 3 April 1990]:* Figures on the number of jobs in retail distribution for the areas requested are readily available only from the census of employment. The information available from this source over the past decade is as follows:

Employees in employment—retail distribution

Town	*Full-time*	*Part-time*	*Total*
1981			
Belfast	9,442	4,260	13,702
1984			
Belfast	8,111	4,535	12,646
Coleraine	425	243	668
Limavady	135	68	203
Londonderry	1,380	683	2,063
Magherafelt	180	62	242
1987			
Belfast	8,018	5,383	13,401
Coleraine	626	376	1,002
Limavady	204	218	422
Londonderry	1,378	947	2,325
Magherafelt	153	99	252

Notes:

1. The Coleraine, Limavady, Londonderry and Magherafelt towns have been approximated by electoral wards. The data for Belfast relates to the district council area.
2. The information requested is available for 1981 only for Belfast.
3. Part-time is defined as those working up to and including 30 hours per week.
4. The census of employment does not collect data on owners and partners and this is not readily available from other sources.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

EC Liaison Unit, Brussels

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the first year of operation of the European Commission liaison unit in Brussels.

Mr. Sainsbury: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Know-how Fund

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the members of the advisory board of the know-how fund and the organisations they represent.

Mr. Waldegrave: The members of the advisory board of the know-how fund and the organisations they represent are as follows:

Mr. George Robertson, Member of Parliament.
Sir Russell Johnston, Member of Parliament.
Mr. Nigel Forman, Member of Parliament.
Mr. Gavin Laird, CBE, Amalgamated Engineering Union.
Dr. Zbigniew Pelczynski, Oxford University.
Mr. Ralph Land, Rank Xerox.
Dr. Edwina Moreton, *The Economist*.
Dr. Norman S. Wooding, CBE, East European Trade Council.
Hella Pick, *The Guardian*.
Professor Richard Crampton, University of Kent.
Mr. John Murphy, Theodore Goddard.
Mr. Jolyon D. Larkman, Barclays Bank plc.
Dr. John Howell, Ernst & Young.
Mr. Angus Cargill, The Conservative Council on Eastern Europe.
Sir Frank Lampl, Bovis Construction Ltd.
Dr. Dennis Deletant, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London.

Hong Kong

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will institute an independent judicial inquiry into cases in which Mr. Warwick Reid was involved during his employment in the Department of the Attorney-General of Hong Kong; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: In view of the continuing inquiries being conducted by the independent commission against corruption, it is not my intention to institute an independent judicial inquiry.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimates he has as to the number of Hong Kong citizens who have emigrated to *(a)* Canada, *(b)* Australia, *(c)* the United States of America and *(d)* the United Kingdom in each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Maude: Estimates of emigration are available only on an aggregated basis. According to Hong Kong Government estimates, emigration from Hong Kong in each of the last 10 years was:

	Number
1980	22,400
1981	18,300
1982	20,300
1983	19,800
1984	22,400
1985	22,300
1986	19,000
1987	30,000
1988	45,800
1989	42,000

Over 90 per cent. of these went to Canada, Australia and the United States.

During the past 10 years the number of BDTCs and BN(O)s from Hong Kong accepted for settlement in the United Kingdom was:

	Number
1980	1,710
1981	1,450
1982	1,070
1983	1,050
1984	1,040
1985	950
1986	880
1987	920
1988	1,150
1989	1,360

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will give details of the sale by the Hong Kong authorities of confiscated animal tusks, skins or antlers and other products during 1989; and what other methods of disposal were employed.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 29 March 1990]*: No sale of confiscated animal tusks, skins, or antlers was conducted during 1989. Methods of disposal included releasing live specimens to the wild where appropriate, sending specimens to zoos, educational and scientific institutions or other CITES authorities, and incineration of perishable items.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when was the last auction in Hong Kong of endangered species products seized by the authorities; what items were auctioned; and how much was realised.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 29 March 1990]*: The last sale of seized products of CITES appendix II species was conducted in February 1988. The items offered for sale included ivory, reptile skins, deer antlers, American ginseng, fur skins of otter and wildcat skins. Some HK $2 million was realised.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many prosecutions were initiated by the Hong Kong authorities in the second six months of 1989 arising from illegal imports, exports and possession of endangered species.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 29 March 1990]*: In the second half of 1989 the Hong Kong authorities initiated a total of 92 prosecutions arising from illegal imports, exports and possession of endangered species.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many restaurant inspections were carried out by the Hong Kong authorities in the second six months of 1989 to ensure no rare and endangered species of animals and plants were offered for sale as food; and if any seizures were made.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 29 March 1990]:* Eighty-two restaurant inspections were carried out by the Hong Kong authorities in the second half of 1989 to ensure that no endangered species were illegally offered for sale: three seizures were made involving one monitor lizard, one monkey (pet), one sea turtle carapace and 0·79 kg of crocodile meat.

Ivory

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many investigations have been carried out by the special task force on ivory trade of the Customs and Excise Department in Hong Kong since it was set up; and how many seizures of ivory it has made.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 29 March 1990]:* Sixty-two investigations have been carried out by the special task force of the Customs and Excise Department in Hong Kong since its establishment. These investigations have resulted in 20 seizures of ivory.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much ivory has been exported from Hong Kong since 26 February; and to which countries it was exported.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 29 March 1990]:* The Hong Kong authorities have been notified of some 35 kg of ivory exports since 26 February 1990: 6 kg bound for Taiwan and 29 kg for Mexico.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much of the total ivory stockpile known to be in Hong Kong cannot be identified according to country of origin.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 29 March 1990]:* One hundred and sixteen tonnes are not supported by CITES documents and their countries of origin cannot be ascertained.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if any of the ivory in Hong Kong now known not to have CITES documentation has been confiscated by the Hong Kong authorities.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 29 March 1990]:* No.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Her Majesty's Government will urgently reconsider their decision to allow a six-month reservation on behalf of Hong Kong ivory stocks; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 29 March 1990]:* No. We shall withdraw the reservation on 18 July. From that date Hong Kong will comply with the ban on international trade in ivory.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the elephant ivory currently held in Hong Kong under CITES regulations has been physically weighed by the authorities.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 29 March 1990]:* Yes.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Hong Kong management authority has now supplied the relevant statistical material relating to elephant ivory to the Hong Kong branch of the World Wide Fund for Nature.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 29 March 1990]:* Yes.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his reply of 22 March, *Official Report,* column *718,* if he will give details of the export destination of the 50 tonnes of ivory exported from Hong Kong since the original declaration was made and, in each case, whether it was raw or worked ivory.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 29 March 1990]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 8 March, Volume 168, column *789.*

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West of 22 March, *Official Report,* column *718,* how many traders made voluntary declarations of ivory stocks held which led to a figure of 670 tonnes of ivory stock in Hong Kong being given on 20 July 1989; and how many made declarations under the statutory requirements.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 29 March 1990]:* The estimated figure of 670 tonnes was based on voluntary declarations by some 630 traders. Following the introduction of possession licensing some 880 applications for possession of commercial ivory were received. Many of the applicants for possession licences are ivory carvers and small retail shops holding small quantities of ivory.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 22 March to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West, *Official Report,* column *718,* what was the nature of the inspections carried out by the Hong Kong authorities on the 116 tonnes of elephant ivory not possessing CITES documentation.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 29 March 1990]:* The quantity of ivory held was checked physically against the amounts declared by those applying for possession licences.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 22 March to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West, *Official Report,* columns *717-18,* by what means the Hong Kong authorities were able to establish the legal acquisition of the 116 tonnes of ivory which did not have CITES documentation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 29 March 1990]:* I cannot add to the reply I gave the hon. Member on 22 March, Vol. 169, columns *717-18.*

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs under what circumstances ivory entered Hong Kong without CITES documentation.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 29 March 1990]:* Some ivory entered Hong Kong before CITES came into effect. Some worked ivory was imported without CITES documents before the introduction in 1988 of import controls on worked ivory.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what are the mechanics of registration of Hong Kong ivory stocks.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 29 March 1990]:* All holdings over 5 kg require a possession licence. This itemises tusks and large cut pieces which are individually marked to assist identification. The total stock of the individual licence holder is registered with the Hong Kong Agriculture and Fisheries Department. After registration, licensed traders holding ivory in excess of the licensed quantity, or any person holding commercial quantities of ivory without a licence, can be investigated and prosecuted, as necessary.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what difficulties have been experienced by the Hong Kong authorities with the software of the computer programme being used to register existing ivory stockpiles.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 29 March 1990]:* The original software provided no facility for individual categories of ivory stocks. Improvements have been made recently.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of the commercial stocks of ivory in Hong Kong have now been entered into the computer system; and what this is in tonnes.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 29 March 1990]:* Four hundred and seventy-two tonnes of commercial stocks have been entered into the computer system. This represents all the commercial stocks registered with the Hong Kong authorities.

WALES

Drug Trials

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if student nurses and nurses in Wales take part in drug trials; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: Clinical trials on drugs are carried out under strict protocols which are supervised locally in Welsh health authorities by clinical trial units and ethical medical research committees. No central records are maintained on the involvement of student nurses and nurses.

Schools (Ancillary Workers)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish for each local authority area the number of ancillaries employed in *(a)* 1970-71, *(b)* 1979-80 and *(c)* 1988-89 in (i) the primary and (ii) the secondary sector, and the ratio of ancillaries to teachers and pupils in each case.

Mr. Roberts: The information as at September each year is given in the following tables. Data in respect of 1970-71 are not available.

	1979-80			*1988-89*		
	Number of ancillaries[1]	*Ratio of ancillaries to teachers*[3]	*Ratio of ancillaries to pupils*	*Number of ancillaries*[1]	*Ratio of ancillaries to teachers*[3]	*Ratio of ancillaries to pupils*
Primary						
Clwyd	329	5·8	128·5	325	5·4	118·6
Dyfed	176	10·5	180·1	286	5·6	106·5
Gwent	185	10·9	249·9	425	4·2	97·4
Gwynedd	68	17·7	352·4	117	8·6	169·1
Mid Glamorgan	344	7·6	175·5	327	7·6	163·1
Powys	90	7·2	119·8	100	5·9	97·5
South Glamorgan	190	8·7	196·0	206	7·8	172·2
West Glamorgan	304	6·0	126·0	345	5·0	103·5
	Number of ancillaries[2]			*Number of ancillaries*[2]		
Secondary						
Clwyd	237	8·3	139·5	323	5·5	85·1
Dyfed	167	10·3	164·9	167	9·3	141·9
Gwent	297	8·3	133·7	327	6·0	89·9
Gwynedd	91	12·7	204·2	114	10·3	143·7
Mid Glamorgan	354	8·1	136·2	354	6·8	106·7
Powys	65	9·0	141·1	71	8·2	112·6
South Glamorgan	240	8·4	144·8	224	7·4	119·7
West Glamorgan	27	6·9	113·5	315	5·1	73·8

[1] Includes National Nursery Examination Board (NNEB) qualified nursery assistants and other assistants employed in the classroom.

[2] Includes laboratory/workshop technicians, resource technicians, library assistants, nurses and office staff.

[3] Excludes peripatetic teachers.

NHS Performance-related Bonuses

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many health managers in each of the health authorities in Wales receive performance-related bonuses;

(2) if he will make a statement on performance-related bonuses in the National Health Service in Wales;

(3) what sums of money were paid in each health authority area in performance-related bonuses in 1988 and 1989.

Mr. Grist: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the replies I gave the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) on 15 February 1990 and 15 March 1990.

The numbers of general and senior managers in each of the health authorities currently authorised to receive a performance-related pay element in their salary are as follows:

Senior staff authorised to receive PRP[1]

Health authority	*Number*
Clwyd	10
Gwynedd	7
Powys	3
Gwent	7
Mid Glamorgan	10
South Glamorgan	8
West Glamorgan	7
East Dyfed	4
Pembrokeshire	3
Welsh Health Common Services Agency	5

[1] Subject to intervening staff movements.

Particulars of actual payments made are confidential.

Flooding, North Wales

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will back new financial measures to assist in the provision of seven days a week creche facilities for families affected by the north Wales sea floods; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: The provision of such facilities would be a matter for the relevant local authorities to consider.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will call a conference of social services officials, health officials, housing officials, voluntary workers and local authority financial officers to review and extend the help and guidance given to sea flood victims of the north Wales coast; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: My right hon. Friend and I have every reason to believe that the statutory and voluntary agencies have worked effectively together in coping with the effects of the flooding. None of the various bodies concerned has asked for such a conference to be convened.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will make a further payment of £150,000 to the north Wales sea flood appeal to assist residents with compensation claims; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will visit Rhyl to meet the March flood victims; and what measures he will take to assist those in the Rhyl area who suffered material damage and loss.

Mr. Peter Walker: I have visited the areas of north Wales which suffered the worst flooding, as has my hon. Friend the Minister of State. The Government have already taken exceptional measures in making contributions to the appeal fund for disaster victims and in increasing the rate of grant payable under the Bellwin scheme from 75 per cent. to 85 per cent. of eligible expenditure. I have also provided special assistance to farmers affected by sea water inundation.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the health of victims affected by the north Wales coast sea floods.

Mr. Grist: I understand from Clwyd health authority that there is at present no evidence of outbreaks of disease in the areas affected by the recent severe flooding.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will meet Clwyd county council and borough councils for the north Wales coast to consider further practical and financial measures to help flood victims.

Mr. Peter Walker: I met the local authorities involved during my visit to north Wales on 6 March. Since then my officials have been in close contact with officials of the councils involved, and I have received no request for a further meeting. I have already announced that the Bellwin scheme of special financial assistance will apply to all eligible expenditure incurred by local authorities in dealing with the emergency. Exceptionally, grant will be paid at a rate of 85 per cent. In addition, I have announced a donation of £150,000 to the three appeal funds.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will meet farmers' leaders to dicuss the impact of the March sea inundation upon farming practice and finances; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Walker: I have visited the area and been kept fully informed of the impact of sea water flooding of agricultural land. The farmers concerned have been advised of the special assistance I have made available to meet the cost of the remedial treatment to flooded land and of the assistance available under existing grant schemes to help meet other costs.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what further action he will take to assist (i) elderly people affected by the recent sea inundation of the north Wales coast (ii) young children and (iii) parents of children of school age.

Mr. Peter Walker: Consideration is being given to a report from a member of my social services inspectorate who recently visited the affected areas to experience the social problems at first hand.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his latest estimate of the cost of flood damage on the north Wales coast after sea inundation in March.

Mr. Peter Walker: It is still too early to make any firm estimates of the cost of flood damage in north Wales.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action his Department is taking to clear the mud contaminated by plutonium from the Sellafield nuclear reprocessing plant deposited in the Towyn area after the February storms.

Mr. Grist: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) on 2 April, Volume 170, column *442*.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what radiation monitoring equipment is being sent to Towyn in respect of the mud contaminated by plutonium from the Sellafield nuclear processing plant after the February storms and also in respect of the nuclear dust storm warning issued on 27 February; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: A mini instrument environmental radiation meter type 6-80 was used to measure external radiation in Towyn and samples of sediment were analysed using a nuclear data high resolution germanium gamma spectrometer. The NRPB's assessment of the impact of the radioactivity in the sediment on the public took into consideration the inhalation of windblown dust and concluded that the resulting doses were only a small fraction of natural background radiation.

A40, Carmarthen

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales for what reason on Sunday 1 April, on the eastbound dual carriageway of the A40 one mile to the west of Carmarthen, speed limits of 50 mph on one stretch, 30 mph on another, together with road signs to the effect that the outside lane was closed, were in force.

Mr. Roberts: Work was completed on the major reconstruction of the A40 west of Carmarthen on 30 March. The cones, which were part of substantial traffic management measures, were removed on 31 March and the warning signs during the afternoon of 1 April. This period was not unreasonable for the amount of work involved.

Mentally Handicapped People

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of those centres in Wales which specialise in dental treatment for the mentally handicapped.

Mr. Grist: The policy of the Welsh Office, as set out in the all-Wales strategy for the development of services for mentally handicapped people, is that persons with a mental handicap should have access to public services, including generic health services, in the same manner as other people in the community. Any special needs of people with a mental handicap are generally provided for by the community dental service, as detailed in Welsh Office circular WHC(89)28 "The Future Development of Community Dental Services", or in the hospital service. The appropriate level and source of service for long-term hospital residents is a matter for local determination. Information is not held centrally on centres specialising in dental treatment for mentally handicapped people.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what provision is made in Welsh hospitals for the post-operative care of mentally handicapped patients.

Mr. Grist: The policy of the Welsh Office, as set out in the all-Wales strategy for the development of services for mentally handicapped people, is that persons with a mental handicap should have access to public services, including generic health services, in the same manner as other people in the community. It is for district health authorities to determine ways of meeting any special needs for post-operative care, including the provision of nurses qualified in the field of mental handicap. Information is not held centrally on the provision made in individual hospitals.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) which hospital in Wales has the longest waiting list for arthritic hip joint surgery; which has the lowest waiting period for arthritic hip joint surgery; and if he will specify the number of waiting days for each;

(2) which hospital in Wales has the longest waiting period for varicose veins surgery; which has the lowest waiting period for varicose veins surgery; and if he will specify the number of waiting days for each.

Mr. Grist: Information about numbers of patients on waiting lists for individual operations is not collected centrally.

Hospital waiting list statistics, analysed by specialty, are published in the Welsh hospital waiting list bulletin 1990: No. 1, a copy of which is in the Library.

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the rate poundage that will be used in Wales as the basis for calculating the uniform business rate.

Mr. Peter Walker: The uniform business rate poundage for Wales is 36·8p. The method of calculating it did not depend upon a particular level of rate poundage. It has been set in line with the Government's commitment to raise broadly the same amount in real terms from private businesses and the nationalised industries in the first year of the new system as in the last year of the old.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what is his estimate of the sums payable to the Welsh Office for the yea[illegible]90-91 in respect of non-domestic rates by each of the borough or district councils in the county of Dyfed;

(2) what is his estimate of the sums that will be paid by the Welsh Office for the year 1990-91 in respect of non-domestic rates to the county of Dyfed and to each of the boroughs or district councils in Dyfed respectively.

Mr. Grist: The information requested is shown in the following table:

Local authority	*Contribution into the pool*[1] £	*Entitlement from the pool*[2] £
Carmarthen	4,761,327	1,399,793
Ceredigion	4,470,789	1,578,656
Dinefwr	2,378,428	961,446
Llanelli	7,741,743	1,868,612
Preseli Pembrokeshire	8,201,994	1,718,363
South Pembrokeshire	7,852,064	1,048,827
Dyfed	—	45,635,651
TOTAL	35,406,345	54,211,348

[1] Represents provisional estimates of 1990-91 contributions into the Welsh non-domestic rating pool as declared by authorities on form NNDR1.

[2] Represents each authority's share of the 1990-91 distributable amount of non-domestic rates.

Community Councils

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will consider at a suitable legislative opportunity reintroducing the provision for an annual public meeting for residents of a community council area to question the community council as a body on its work in the preceding year similar to that opportunity which was available from 1948 until the enactment of the Local Government Act 1972.

Mr. Grist: I have no plans for legislation on this matter. The Local Government Act 1972 (section 27 and schedule 12, part V) enables a chairman of a community council, any two councillors representing the community on the council or any six local government electors for the community to convene, at any time, a community meeting to discuss community affairs.

Workers Educational Authority

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy concerning the organisation and funding of the WEA in Wales.

Mr. Roberts: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave on 4 April to my hon. Friend the Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett).

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will publish a table showing the budgeted average expenditure per head for the year 1990-91 for *(a)* Berkshire, *(b)* Oxfordshire, *(c)* Westminster and *(d)* Wandsworth; and what information he has on the reasons for the variations.

Mr. Chope: The information is as follows:

Budgeted 1990-91—Net revenue expenditure per head of relevant population

	£/head
Berkshire	732
Oxfordshire	714
Westminster	1,286
Wandsworth	1,176

Expenditure differences reflect the decisions of the local authorities concerned, taking account of their functions and the needs of their areas.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the amounts of each component in the standard spending assessments of each council in the north-west, together with the respective totals.

Mr. Chope: The amounts are listed in the table:

1990-91 Standard spending assessments by major service block (£ million)

	Education (£ million)	*Personal Social Services (£ million)*	*Police (£ million)*	*Fire and Civil Defence (£ million)*	*Highway maintenance (£ million)*	*Other services (£ million)*	*Capital financing (£ million)*	*Total (£ million)*
Blackburn	—	—	—	—	—	13·087	2·095	15·182
Blackpool	—	—	—	—	—	11·759	1·608	13·367
Bolton	87·298	19·964	—	—	9·814	26·800	14·000	157·876
Burnley	—	—	—	—	—	7·145	0·838	7·983
Bury	51·895	11·132	—	—	6·522	13·971	8·206	91·726
Cheshire CC	294·559	53·680	30·911	14·971	31·175	15·473	33·922	474·691
Chester	—	—	—	—	—	7·587	0·645	8·232
Chorley	—	—	—	—	—	5·059	0·453	5·512
Congleton	—	—	—	—	—	3·888	0·354	4·242
Crewe and Nantwich	—	—	—	—	—	6·330	0·563	6·893
Ellesmere Port and Neston	—	—	—	—	—	4·805	0·692	5·497
Fylde	—	—	—	—	—	3·941	0·400	4·341
Greater Manchester Fire and Civil Defence Authority	—	—	—	53·472	—	−1·536	2·352	54·288
Greater Manchester Police Authority	—	—	115·636	—	—	−3·321	1·744	114·059
Halton	—	—	—	—	—	7·719	1·030	8·749
Hyndburn	—	—	—	—	—	5·728	0·565	6·293
Knowsley	64·361	17·242	—	—	4·200	16·330	10·820	112·951
Lancashire CC	445·622	92·854	52·506	24·768	41·530	25·634	60·042	742·956
Lancaster	—	—	—	—	—	8·597	0·831	9·428
Liverpool	177·391	57·952	—	—	14·833	63·099	36·277	349·552
Macclesfield	—	—	—	—	—	7·675	0·677	8·352
Manchester	163·642	59·803	—	—	19·332	62·748	35·107	340·630
Merseyside Fire and Civil Defence Authority	—	—	—	35·860	—	−1·030	1·704	36·535
Merseyside Police Authority	—	—	77·791	—	—	−2·234	1·249	76·806
Oldham	76·526	18·014	—	—	6·962	23·116	14·550	139·168
Pendle	—	—	—	—	—	6·171	0·523	6·693
Preston	—	—	—	—	—	11·691	1·510	13·201
Ribble Valley	—	—	—	—	—	2·585	0·266	2·811
Rochdale	71·852	17·430	—	—	6·378	19·361	12·929	127·950
Rossendale	—	—	—	—	—	3·965	0·362	4·327
Salford	71·245	23·705	—	—	9·825	24·040	17·924	146·740
Sefton	87·681	20·254	—	—	7·406	27·657	15·043	158·041
South Ribble	—	—	—	—	—	4·774	0·415	5·190
St. Helens	60·740	12·272	—	—	5·277	17·185	13·615	109·089
Stockport	81·829	18·110	—	—	10·334	24·830	13·058	148·160
Tameside	69·741	16·562	—	—	8·074	19·849	10·589	124·815
Trafford	64·046	15·114	—	—	8·672	20·017	14·020	121·869
Vale Royal	—	—	—	—	—	5·982	0·467	6·449
Warrington	—	—	—	—	—	10·947	0·983	11·931
West Lancashire	—	—	—	—	—	5·866	0·579	6·446
Wigan	95·977	18·894	—	—	8·993	23·882	17·879	165·626
Wirral	112·387	26·943	—	—	8·066	30·980	18·760	197·136
Wyre	—	—	—	—	—	5·665	0·766	6·431

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will amend the community charge regulations so that in applying the standard community charge a distinction is made between properties that are in use as second homes and unoccupied properties which the owners are endeavouring to sell because they have moved somewhere else.

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to increase the three-month period before which a standard community charge is liable for a domestic property which is for sale; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities to my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) on 21 March 1990 at columns *658-59*.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make it his policy to assist the Data Protection Registrar's representative investigating the disclosure of personal data from community charge registers from London borough of Wandsworth sources to the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope); and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The Department has always given, and will continue to give, full assistance to the Office of the Data Protection Registrar.

Mr. Colin Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out in the *Official Report* a list of charging authorities together with the other adjustment being made by each to its community charge precept.

Mr. Chope: I intend to lay a summary of the information returned by individual authorities in the Library of the House after the recess.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment who will be required to pay the costs involved in obtaining a liability order from the court pursuant to the operation of the Community Charges (Deductions from Income Support) (No. 2) Regulations 1990 No. 545.

Mr. Chope: The costs associated with obtaining a liability order would form part of the amount for which the order is made against the charge payer.

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements he is making for consultation about adjustments to the SSAs for individual authorities for the financial year 1991-92.

Mr. Chope: My officials have just started discussions with officials of the local authority associations. This will provide the associations with the opportunity to put forward any new evidence on SSAs.

Sir Peter Emery: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in descending order the percentage increases in budgeted spending by county councils for 1990-91 over spending for 1989-90 and indicate the political control of each council.

Mr David Hunt: I am arranging for a summary of the information returned by individual authorities to be placed in the Library of the House after the recess.

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will provide a breakdown of the amount of central Government grant provided to local authorities per head of population in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland for each year since 1979;

(2) what factors lead to the difference between the percentage of local authority income represented by central Government grants in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales;

(3) what was the precentage figure of local authority finance provided in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, respectively, from *(a)* central Government grant, *(b)* domestic rates and *(c)* business rates in each year since 1979; and what are the projected figures for 1990-91.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 27 March 1990]:* I will write to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will issue guidance to local authorities on the implementation of community charge regulations in respect of medical and other postgraduate students from overseas following specialist short courses of study of up to 12 months' duration in Britain.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 3 April 1990]:* Everyone following a full-time course of education will be eligible for the student relief regardless of his nationality. In other cases, postgraduate or medical students will be subject to an authority's personal community charge if they are deemed to be solely or mainly resident within that authority's area by the relevant community charges registration officer. Guidance on these points is contained in practice note No. 9, "Sole or Main Residence", and practice note No. 23, "Students and the Community Charge", which have been sent to all charging authorities.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total amount of grant distributed by central Government to *(a)* the Essex and *(b)* East Sussex county councils; and what were the comparable payments in each of the previous five years.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* The information is as follows:

Revenue grants[1]

	Essex *£ million*	*East Sussex* *£ million*
1984-85	190·340	79·810
1985-86	167·120	75·318
1986-87	162·469	73·243
1987-88	167·537	75·451
1988-89	152·197	81·866
1989-90	130·358	75·790

[1] Comprising Block Grant and specific and supplementary grants.

Docklands

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much money has been allocated to the London Docklands development corporation's social development fund; how much has been spent so far; and what projects have been financed.

Mr. Moynihan: The LDDC does not have a "social development fund". However, total expenditure, arising from the memorandum of agreement between the LDDC and the London borough of Newham is £25,349,000; details are listed in the table. Total docklands-wide expenditure by the corporation to date on social and community projects is £83,821,000 including housing, education, training and community support. It would not be practicable to list all of these projects.

Project	*Expenditure (£ 000s)*
Queensland and Westland points—Environmental works and meeting rooms	548
Royal Victoria Gardens—Paddling pool, play equipment, safety surface	155
Beckton Alps—remedial and safety works	67
Beckton district park—Various works	83
East Beckton district centre—Phase 1 infrastructure works	870
Mid Beckton school—Parking and pedestrian access	91
East side Cyprus by-pass landscaping	119
West side Cyprus by-pass landscaping	88
Refurbishment of Thames House for Newham community college	315
Winsor Park social housing	19,863
Dock directors access centre	850
North Beckton housing refurbishment	2,300
Total	25,349

Mobility

Mr. McWilliam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the sums of money put into the national mobility scheme by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* local authorities in each year since its inception.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The level of funding provided by the Department of the Environment each year was:

	£
1980-81	6,258
1981-82	77,309
1982-83	76,382
1983-84	67,130
1984-85	70,625
1985-86	74,983
1986-87	152,596
1987-88	170,082
1988-89	178,451

Local authorities have not made any direct financial contribution towards the national mobility office's cost of running the national mobility scheme.

Boundary Commission

Mr. Tom Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what timetable he envisages for implementing the recommendations of the Local Government Boundary Commission.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend must allow a period of at least six weeks to elapse after he has received a report from the Local Government Boundary Commission for England. Usually a longer period is allowed in which the public can make representations about the report. When he decides to implement recommendations put to him by the commission it is his usual practice to put them into effect, with or without modification, from 1 April of the year following his decision. In a few cases a longer period has been allowed because of the magnitude of the changes, or because the decision has been announced only shortly before 1 April.

In the current programme statutory reviews of London and the metropolitan counties, the commission is required to complete its reviews by 31 March 1992. The commission has not yet made any recommendations on these reviews to my right hon. Friend, but I understand that it expects to begin to do so in the latter half of this year.

Skiing

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what Government money has been paid to *(a)* the English Ski Council and *(b)* any other body promoting skiing in England; and if he will make it his policy that no Government funding goes to any organisation to support attempts to build a ski slope in Reddish vale.

Mr. Moynihan: The Sports Council allocated grants of £69,696 to the English Ski Council and £320,000 to the British Ski Federation in its financial year 1989-90. The figure for the Sports Council's regional expenditure for skiing in 1989-90 is not yet available. Neither the Government nor the Sports Council have received an application for funding towards a ski slope in Reddish vale.

Bathing Waters

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to ensure that the coastal waters off the Durham coast will meet European Economic Community bathing standards; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Details were published on 20 October 1989 at column *261* of a £1·1 billion (1987 prices: £1·4 billion at November 1989 prices) investment programme to bring the remaining identified bathing waters up to European standards. An additional £1·5 billion investment programme to treat all sewage before discharge to coastal waters was announced by my right hon. Friend on 5 March at column *452*. We intend that these programmes should be integrated and completed as soon as practicable.

Discharge Consents, Stanlow

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consents the Shell site at Stanlow currently possesses for discharges into *(a)* the Mersey and *(b)* the Gowy; when they were last reviewed; and when they are next planned to be reviewed.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I understand from the National Rivers Authority (NRA) that consented discharges of trade, sewage and surface water effluent from the Shell site at Stanlow are to either the Manchester ship canal, or the River Gowy and its tributaries. Details of these consents are held on the public register maintained by the NRA and available for inspection at the North West regional office, New Town house, Buttermarket street, Warrington.

The consents for these discharges have been reviewed on an individual basis, as appropriate, the most recent reviews being in July 1988.

The NRA is currently engaged in discussions with Shell with a view to improving the site drainage arrangements at Stanlow, and as a consequence is further reviewing all the discharge consents for the site.

Dungeness

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on plans laid for the protection of Dungeness head in Kent.

Mr. Trippier: Dungeness is a site of special scientific interest notified by the Nature Conservancy Council under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. It has also been identified as meeting the criteria necessary for designation as a special protection area under the EC directive on the conservation of wild birds (79/409/EEC) and as a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar convention (Cmnd. 6465) and, therefore, the advice to planning authorities contained in Department of the Environment circular 27/87 applies.

County Councils

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing the population and the number of staff employed by Hampshire county council and that of the neighbouring county councils of Wiltshire, Berkshire, Surrey, West Sussex and also the same information in respect of Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire.

Mr. Chope: The information requested is listed in the table:

Authority	*Total staff (December 1989)*	*Population (Thousands)*
Bedfordshire	20,388	531
Berkshire	22,749	747
Buckinghamshire	22,069	627
Hampshire	51,054	1,543
Hertfordshire	37,427	986
Surrey	26,852	1,000
West Sussex	22,304	703
Wiltshire	20,986	557

Note: The staffing figures are for general services only; they do not include law and order services. The police function in some of the non-metropolitan counties is carried out by a joint police authority.

Sources:

1. Joint Staffing Watch—December 1989 survey.
2. OPCS mid-year estimates of population (1988).

Leeds Development Corporation

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Leeds, Central of Wednesday 22 March, if he will list those activities designated by the Leeds development corporation as liaison with the local community.

Mr. Moynihan: Leeds development corporation is actively consulting and liaising with the local community about its activities. It is consulting the local community about the planning frameworks that it is preparing for the Leeds development area. It is consulting the local community about highway and development proposals.

The corporation publishes and circulates a biannual newspaper called *Update* to keep the local community informed of its progress and activities. It holds and attends public meetings and stands ready to discuss local ideas and concerns.

Water Privatisation

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many investors bought shares in the water industry when it was privatised.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 24 January 1990 to my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) at column *747*.

Sewage Disposal

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the effectiveness of present sea outfalls off the Durham coast; and what recommendations the pollution inspectorate has made on primary, secondary and tertiary treatment of sewage.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The National Rivers Authority is responsible for consenting and monitoring the effectiveness of discharges to coastal waters. Sea outfalls at Crimden are known to affect adversely the identified bathing water there. Northumbrian Water plc has plans to improve these discharges. My right hon. Friend announced on 5 March at column *452* that all discharges to coastal waters will be required to receive at least primary treatment.

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many comments and inquiries he has received regarding the future use of long sea outfalls or sewage disposal; and how the European Community's policies and directives affect this practice.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: As recorded in my right hon. Friend's statement on 5 March at column *452*, the views of interested parties are summarised in the report by Consultants in Environmental Sciences Ltd., a copy of which is in the Library. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is also aware of evidence from a variety of sources (including the CES report) taken by the Environment Committee inquiring into bathing waters and long sea outfalls. The EC-proposed municipal waste water treatment directive generally requires secondary treatment of sewage prior to discharges where it can be shown that there are no adverse environmental effects. These requirements are in line with my right hon. Friend's statement on sewage treatement policy on 5 March. A copy o the explanatory memorandum on the proposed municipal waste water directive is in the Library.

Greenhouse Effect

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what recent representations he has received regarding the greenhouse effect.

Mr. Trippier: A paper on the greenhouse effect, prepared by the European Commission, was discussed at the Environment Council meeting on 22 March when my right hon. Friend made a number of suggestions for positive action by the Community.

Water Industry

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the total level of investment planned by the water industry over the next 10 years.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The total investment allowed for in setting charges limits for the water industry in England and Wales over the next 10 years was £26·3 billion (1989-90 prices). The Secretary of State's recent announcement that in future all significant discharges of sewage to sea should be treated and that dumping of sewage sludge at sea should be ended will increase the investment programme to around £28 billion.

Colliery Sites (Reclamation)

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what arrangements he has made with British Coal about the reclamation of colliery sites.

Mr. Moynihan: My Department and the Department of Energy have held a number of discussions with British Coal about the problems of coalfield dereliction. I am glad to say that, as part of the outcome of those discussions, the British Coal Corporation has accepted responsibility for the restoration of collieries which close in the four years following 31 March 1990.

I regard this as an important step forward in placing environmental responsibilities where they belong. I believe that as a result of this agreement land will be reclaimed to an acceptable standard more quickly than would otherwise be the case. We shall keep the arrangement under review and will be considering how the problems of coalfield dereliction may best be tackled in the longer term.

In large part, these additional liabilities will be eligible for deficiency grant under the Coal Industry Act 1990, so there will be no significant adverse impact on the corporation's finances.

The undertaking does not apply in Scotland and Wales where the derelict land grant systems operate on a different basis.

The full terms of the agreement are as follows:

1. British Coal will continue its current practice of consulting with the relevant local planning authority(ies) about the appropriate planning future for the sites of any colliery which closes.

2. In respect of any deep mine started before 1 July 1948 which closes within four years commencing 1 April 1990, British Coal will agree to an acceptance of responsibility for the restoration of such sites to a soft end use. This acceptance of responsibility will not affect in any way the corporation's present practice of seeking appropriate planning consents for redevelopment of the site as soon as appropriate following any announcement of closure.

3. When the planning consent provides only for restoration to a soft end use, British Coal will demolish all buildings, plant and machinery structures or erections and will restore the colliery surface areas, together with adjoining or associated tip areas used solely for the deposit of mineral waste for that colliery, in accordance with a scheme agreed with the mineral planning authority, within a period of 24 months from the date when mining operations have permanently ceased, or such longer period as may be provided for in the agreed scheme.

4. Where the planning consent provides that the whole site or part of the site is appropriate for redevelopment, the land will be valued as if no responsibility for restoration to a soft end use existed, but to discharge its voluntary undertaking, British Coal will contribute to any subsequent derelict land grant-aided scheme the notional cost of restoration of the whole site to a soft end use to a standard acceptable to the mineral planning authority. In a situation where the cost of such restoration is unable to be agreed between British Coal and the mineral planning authority, then such costs will be determined on the basis of an independent valuation.

Caravans (London)

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his most recent estimate of the number of traveller caravans in the Greater London area which are not based on permanent sites provided under the Caravan Sites Act; and what were his similar estimates for each of the past five years.

Mr. Chope: Estimates of the number of caravans in Greater London on unauthorised sites are:

	Number
January 1985	209
January 1986	638
January 1987	550
January 1988	450
January 1989	391
January 1990	318

Palace of Westminster (Lifts)

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many lifts there are in the House and its outbuildings, and if there have been any lift reports in the last 10 years.

Mr. Chope: There are 69 lifts in the Palace of Westminster and its outbuildings. There is also one escalator serving the underground car park. Regular internal maintenance reports are logged at monthly and quarterly intervals. Independent safety reports are also produced at six-monthly intervals.

Strip Lighting

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment with what frequency the strip lighting for offices and corridors is cleaned and replaced.

Mr. Chope: Strip lighting in the Palace of Westminster and its outbuildings is cleaned approximately once a year and tubes are replaced as necessary.

Parish and Community Councils

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will consider bringing forward proposals in the next local government Bill to extend the power of the local government Commissoner for Local Administration to investigate allegations of maladministration by parish councils in England and community councils in Wales.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Local Government Act 1974 did not extend the powers of the Commissioners for Local Administration (the local ombudsmen) to parish and community councils because the existence of parish and community meetings enables any local government elector to raise any question or parish or community business directly with the rest of the electorate. This argument still appears valid.

Dogs

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of measures taken to deal with dangerous dogs; what recent representations he has received calling for further measures, including a dog registration scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department is monitoring the effect of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1989. Thre has been no problem in identifying owners in recent attacks so there would be no benefit from introducing a dog registration scheme.

Palace of Westminster (Fire Inspection)

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when there was last a full fire inspection of the House and its outbuildings.

Mr. Chope: The last full fire inspection of the Palace, which took approximately six months to undertake, was completed in 1986. The majority of the outbuildings were inspected in the last financial year and the remainder will be in the current financial year.

In addition, all proposed alterations to the fabric of buildings are agreed with the fire officer before the work is carried out.

Crown Suppliers and PSA

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress he is making in implementing his proposals for the privatisation of the Crown Suppliers and the Property Services Agency.

Mr. Chope: I have nothing to add to the reply I gave to the hon. Member on 15 March 1990 at column *311*.

Nature Conservancy Council

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he intends to implement any of the recommendations made by Lord Carver's committee arising from its recent inquiry into the future of the Nature Conservancy Council.

Mr. Trippier: We are at present considering the Select Committee's report and, as I indicated in Standing Committee, expect to make a positive response to its recommendations as soon as possible.

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the rate poundage that will be used in England as the basis for calculating the uniform business rate.

Mr. Chope: The uniform business rate poundage in England for 1990-91 is 34·8p.

Newcastle Quayside Development Scheme

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much public money he proposes to spend through the Tyneside urban development corporation on the Newcastle quayside development scheme, in Newcastle upon Tyne, East constituency.

Mr. Moynihan: No final decision has yet been reached on the amount of public money to be invested in this scheme.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he has taken to ensure that *(a)* Mr. Godfrey Bradman and the Rosehaugh property group and *(b)* Stanley Millar Builders are able to meet their financial commitments through Newcastle Quayside Developments to the Tyneside urban development corporation's proposed scheme in Newcastle upon Tyne, East for which they are preferred developer.

Mr. Moynihan: No decision has been taken on the scheme for the east quayside area of Newcastle upon Tyne, which is being progressed by the Tyne and Wear development corporation. It is the responsibility of the development corporation to satisfy itself with regard to the financial standing of any companies with which it enters into agreements.

Pesticides

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has concerning the toxicity of pesticides in combination; and what plans he has for further research.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am aware of the research that has been carried out on this subject by the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology, in conjunction with Reading university. A proposal that the Department should fund further work in this area is currently under consideration by my Department.

Newcastle (Inner-City Partnership)

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the present population of *(a)* the city of Newcastle, *(b)* the part of Newcastle covered by the inner-city partnership action programme's geographical boundaries and *(c)* the part of Newcastle upon Tyne, East parliamentary constituency that lies within the inner-city partnership action programme's geographical boundaries.

Mr. Moynihan: The Registrar-General's mid-year estimates (1988) give the population of the city of Newcastle upon Tyne as 279,700. Newcastle city council estimates that the current population of its inner area is about 110,000, of which approximately 48,000 is within the Newcastle upon Tyne, East parliamentary constituency.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the criteria he used in deciding to withdraw inner-city partnership funding from the east Newcastle victim support scheme.

Mr. Moynihan: This project, a former Tyne and Wear county council scheme, has received UP support since 1980-81. In 1986-87 it was submitted by the city of

Newcastle for tapered funding on the standard arrangements for time-expired projects agreed by partnership committee. This funding ceased, as agreed, on 31 March 1990.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which of the approved projects under the inner-city partnership action programme listed in his letter to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East, dated 29 March, are located in Newcastle upon Tyne, East parliamentary constituency.

Mr. Moynihan: The following four projects approved in the 1990-91 Newcastle/Gateshead partnership action programme are located within the Newcastle upon Tyne, East parliamentary constituency: Wharrier Street school "Design For Play" (phase 2); the St. Oswald's environmental improvements project; the East End psychiatric community care scheme; and the East End carers outreach project. A further 10 new approved projects are inner-city-wide initiatives.

Environmental Technology Transfer Programme

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the contribution made by his Department to the European Communities network of environmental technology transfer programme; and what benefits have accrued to the United Kingdom from this programme.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 3 April 1990]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him yesterday by my hon. Friend the Minister responsible for industry and enterprise. The Department of the Environment has not participated in the European Commission network of environmental technology transfer (NETT).

Local Government Boundaries

Mr. Franks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what powers he has under section 61 of the Local Government Act 1972; and if he has ever called a local inquiry under this section of the Act.

Mr. David Hunt *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* Section 61 of the Local Government Act 1972 empowers the Local Government Boundary Commissions for England and for Wales and district councils to hold public local inquiries as part of their reviews of local government areas. The section confers no powers on the Secretary of State. It follows that the Secretary of State has held no inquiries under this section.

Nuclear Dust Storm, Towyn

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement in respect of the nuclear dust storm warning issued on 27 March for the Towyn area.

Mr. Grist: I have been asked to reply.

A mini instrument environmental radiation meter type 6-80 was used to measure external radiation in Towyn and samples of sediment were analysed using a nuclear data high resolution germanium gamma spectrometer. The NRPB's assessment of the impact of the radioactivity in the sediment on the public took into consideration the inhalation of windblown dust and concluded that the resulting doses were only a small fraction of natural background radiation.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensions

Sir Peter Hordern: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would have been the cost to public funds if the state retirement pension had been paid in line with increases in average earnings, rather than prices, in each of the last 10 years.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information requested is contained in the reply given to the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) on 20 March at column *595*.

Sir Peter Hordern: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners are dependent upon the state retirement pension alone; and what proportion they bear to the total number of pensioners, in each of the last 10 years.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The most recent figures available are set out in the table. The family expenditure survey does not identify state retirement pension separately from income support and housing benefits. However, few pensioners rely solely on their state pension as their only income as the vast majority would be entitled to extra help from income-related benefits.

Proportion of pensioner tax units

	per cent.
1979	20·2
1980	19·8
1981	18·6
1982	17·6
1983	16·7
1984	18·0
1985	14·5
1986	15·9
1987	13·5

Notes:

1. *Source:* Family Expenditure Survey.
2. A pensioner tax unit is the unit on which a tax assessment is made.

One-Parent Families

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many one-parent families have applied for and been awarded Department of Social Security financial help during each of the last five years as a result of marriage break-up; and what is the total cost to the Department of Social Security of maintaining such families.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information requested is available only for supplementary benefit/income support and is set out in the table:

Supplementary Benefit/Income Support paid to lone parents who are divorced or separated: numbers and expenditure

Year	*Number of lone parent claimants*	*Annual equivalent* *Cash (£ million)*	*Real terms (1988-89 prices (£ million)*
1983	304,000	606	837
1984	319,000	680	895
1986	364,000	833	1,041
1987	381,000	902	1,035
1988	400,000	1,072	1,072

Notes:

1. *Source:* Annual Statistical Enquiries for the relevant years. There was no Enquiry in 1985.

2. Information is for divorced and separated lone parents, men and women.

3. *Annual Equivalent:* This is derived from the average amounts in payment to these categories of lone parents at the time of the Enquiries.

Community Charge

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his best estimate of the total amount of central Government support required to cover community charge rebates in Scotland in 1989-90 and 1990-91; and if he will express this as a percentage of total expected income from the community charge in Scotland.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information requested is in the table:

Scotland

	1989-90	*1990-91*
Central Government Grant for Community Charge rebates/Benefit. (£ million)	214	225
Rebates as a percentage of total expected Community Charge income (per cent.)	21	20

Note: The figures for 1990-91 reflect the increase in the upper capital limit announced in the Budget statement.

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, further to the answer given to the hon. Member for Colne Valley of 12 March, *Official Report*, column 66, concerning the cost of abolishing savings thresholds above which no community charge rebate is payable, what would be the estimated cost to the Exchequer of abolishing the capital limit *(a)* altogether and *(b)* for pensioners only, presuming that those people were receiving income amounting to 10 per cent. per annum from their savings.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The cost of abolishing both the upper and lower capital thresholds and the tariff income, and assuming instead an income from capital of 10 per cent. per annum, would be *(a)* £20 million for all claimants and *(b)* £15 million for pensioners only. A total of 590,000 benefit units would gain by these changes (by becoming entitled or by increasing their benefit). A total of 2,330,000 benefit units would lose (by losing all or part of their benefit).

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the number of people within the district of Easington who will qualify for community charge rebate following the rise in the capital disregard to £16,000.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information requested is not available. Data are not available to provide reliable estimates on such a detailed regional basis.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many of the people in Scotland estimated by the Government to be eligible for poll tax rebate are now in receipt of a rebate.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: For 1989-90 the latest estimate of the number of community charge rebates in payment in Scotland is 930,000. Rebates to couples are counted as one rebate.

Benefit Claims

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what information he has about the length of time taken to process different types of benefit claims *(a)* now and *(b)* prior to implementation of the new social security system.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Since the Government reforms were introduced in 1988, the social security system has become simpler for claimants to understand and easier for staff to operate. As a result there have been very real all-round improvements in the clearance times of claims. The table shows comparable performance in key benefit areas.

Average clearance time for benefit claims

Days

	1987-88	[1]*1989-90*
Income support	6·3	4·7
Retirement pension	26·7	21·2
Sickness benefit/invalidity benefit	11·3	9·8
Attendance allowance	40·5	[2]42·5
Mobility allowance	40·0	37·0

[1] April to February.

[2] Provisional figure.

Widows' Pensions

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average length of time that is taken to deal with applications for widows' pensions.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I regret that this information is not available. However, if the hon. Member had a particular case in mind perhaps he would write to me.

Benefits

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the additional administrative cost, for each benefit where applicable, of paying half the appropriate benefit rate for couples to each partner and paying any child addition to the partner taking the major responsibility for the child.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, for community charge benefit, couples are already assessed jointly; entitlement is divided between them, and their community charge bills are individually rebated.

Pensions (Additional Component)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what was the average additional component payable each year since 1978 on top of the basic retirement pension for persons who retired each year since then on average earnings; and what he estimates the additional component will be each year from now until 1998 if prices rise 5 per cent. per year and average earnings rise 7 per cent. per year;

(2) if he will give his latest estimate of the average additional component from the state earnings-related pension scheme on top of the basic retirement pension payable each year since 1978 for persons who retired each year since then on average earnings; and what he estimates the additional component will be to 1998 on the basis of the Treasury forecasts of rises in prices and earnings.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answers 13 February and 26 February 1990]*: Information as available is set out in the table. The amounts apply to a person in full-time employment who has been paid average earnings since April 1978, has never contracted out of the state earnings-related pension scheme and retires on 6 April in each year, assuming price rises of 5 per cent. per year and average earnings increase by 7 per cent. per year effective from April 1991.

Year of retirement	*Additional pension at retirement (£ per week)*
1978	nil
1979	0·95
1980	2·20
1981	3·95
1982	6·20
1983	8·45
1984	10·80
1985	13·55
1986	16·50
1987	20·20
1988	24·35
1989	29·25
1990	35·65
1991	41·30
1992	47·55
1993	54·50
1994	62·45
1995	71·10
1996	80·70
1997	91·35
1998	103·15

Pensioners

Mr. Lester: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish figures for the latest year available showing the number of *(a)* single and *(b)* married retirement pensioners with gross weekly incomes excluding state pension benefits of any category, at the following levels: less than £5, £5 to £10, £10 to £15, £15 to £20, £20 to £30, £30 to £40, £40 to £50, £50 to £60, £60 to £70, £70 to £80, £80 to £90, £90 to £100, £100 to £150, £150 to £200, £200 to £250, £250 to £300, £300 to £350, £350 to £400, £400 to £450, £450 to £500 and over £500.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 22 February 1990]*: The latest information, as available, is set out in the table:

Gross income less RP and income support £5 per week	*Percentages of*	
	Single pensioners	*Married pensioners*
Less than 5	11·3	4·6
5 to 10	8·1	4·4
10 to 15	10·1	5·0
15 to 20	10·5	5·9
20 to 30	21·2	12·6
30 to 40	11·7	9·7
40 to 50	5·8	7·6
50 to 60	4·1	5·5
60 to 70	2·5	5·2
70 to 80	1·9	4·4
80 to 90	2·4	4·7
90 to 100	1·9	2·8
100 to 150	4·0	11·0
150 to 200	1·7	5·0
200 to 250	0·9	3·4
250 to 300	0·9	2·4
300 to 350	0·4	1·5
350 to 400	0·2	1·0
400 to 450	0·1	1·0
450 to 500	0·1	0·6
Over 500	0·3	1·8

Note: Due to rounding figures may not sum to 100.
Source: Family Expenditure Survey 1987.

Marginal Tax Rates

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing the numbers of lower-paid families with and without children, whose marginal tax rates including benefit withdrawal will be *(a)* 90 to 100 per cent., *(b)* 80 to 90 per cent., *(c)* 70 to 80 per cent., *(d)* 60 to 70 per cent., *(e)* 50 to 60 per cent. and *(f)* 40 to 50 per cent., taking into account the tax changes for 1990-91.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 26 March 1990]*: The information requested is set out in the table:

Marginal deduction rates—working heads of tax units
Numbers with marginal deduction rates at or above certain levels
1990-91

	Thousands
100 per cent and over	0
90 per cent. and over	40
80 per cent. and over	220
70 per cent. and over	410
60 per cent. and over	420
50 per cent. and over	420
40 per cent. and over	550

Notes:

1. These estimates are not comparable with the figures in Table 14.19 of the Public Expenditure White Paper because of sampling and grossing factors, the incorporation of Community Charge Benefit, independent taxation, and the effects of earnings growth.
2. Marginal Deduction Rates shown are for heads of benefit units in receipt of Family Credit, rent rebate or Community Charge Benefit when at least one partner works 24 hours or more a week.
3. Estimates are based on 1985, 1986 and 1987 Family Expenditure Surveys uprated to 1990-91 levels.
4. Estimates are rounded to nearest 10,000.
5. Estimates incorporate the Department of the Environment guideline Community Charges announced in January.

Family Incomes

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing the level of gross earnings in April 1990 at which *(a)* a single householder, *(b)* a married couple, *(c)* a married couple with two children aged four and six years and *(d)* a single parent with one child, aged three years, will lose in housing benefit, assuming full take-up of family credit, average rent and rates and other assumptions, as in his reply to the hon. Member for Sunderland, North (Mr. Clay), *Official Report*, 1 December 1987, c. *565-66*.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[pursuant to her reply, 2 March 1990, c. 366]*: The information requested is given in the table:

Level of gross earnings at which housing benefit ceases

Family type	*£ per week*
(a) Single householder	81·20
(b) Married couple	108·00
(c) Married couple with two children aged 4 and 6	98·76
(d) Single parent with one child aged 3	57·58

Notes:

1. The examples assume child benefit is in payment for examples *(c)* and *(d)* and family credit is in payment for example *(d)*.
2. The rent is assumed to be £19·71 for examples *(a)* and *(b)*, £23·48 for example *(c)* and £21·86 for example *(d)*.
3. Community charge is assumed to be £350·00.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Vagrancy

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many of those *(a)* arrested, *(b)* prosecuted and *(c)* convicted of (i) begging and (ii) sleeping out in 1987, 1988 and 1989 were aged (1) under 18 years, (2) 18 to 25 years (3) 25 to 55 years and (4) over 55 years;

(2) how many of those prosecutions undertaken under the provisions of the Vagrancy Act 1824 in *(a)* the Metropolitan police district and *(b)* England and Wales were dealt with by way of (i) summons and (ii) arrest;

(3) how many people were convicted of *(a)* sleeping out, *(b)* begging and *(c)* being found on enclosed premises in the years 1988 and 1989 in (i) the Metropolitan police district and (ii) England and Wales;

(4) how many people were prosecuted under the provisions of the Vagrancy Act 1824 in the years 1988 and 1989 in *(a)* the Metropolitan police district and *(b)* England and Wales;

(5) what figures he has as to the numbers of people prosecuted for *(a)* begging, *(b)* sleeping out and *(c)* being found on enclosed premises who (i) have been discharged from psychiatric care and (ii) have been discharged from local authority care.

Mr. John Patten: Information is not held centrally on the number of arrests under the Vagrancy Act 1824. Neither is it collected on people who have been prosecuted for offences under the Act who have been discharged from either psychiatric or local authority care. Information on the number of prosecutions and convictions under the Vagrancy Act 1824 is given in the tables.

Data for 1989 will not be available until autumn 1990.

Table A. Persons prosecuted for offences of begging and sleeping out under the Vagrancy Act 1824 by age-group for years 1987 and 1988. England and Wales

	Prosecutions		*Convictions*	
Age-group	*1987*	*1988*	*1987*	*1988*
Begging				
Under 18	11	8	9	7
18 to under 25	55	81	54	75
25 to under 55	349	414	327	373
55 and over	51	70	50	57
Total	466	573	440	512
Sleeping out				
Under 18	1	—	1	—
18 to under 25	6	6	6	5
25 to under 55	5	10	5	7
55 and over	2	1	2	1
Total	14	17	14	13

Table B. Total number of prosecutions under the Vagrancy Act 1824 by summons and arrest figures for the Metropolitan Police District[1] and England and Wales 1988

Area	*Prosecutions*	*Arrests*	*Summons*
Metropolitan Police District	1,006	996	10
England and Wales	2,810	1,988	822

[1] Including the City of London.

Table C. Persons convicted of sleeping out, begging and being on enclosed premises for an unlawful purpose under the Vagrancy Act 1824 in the Metropolitan Police District[1] and England and Wales 1988

Offence	*Metropolitan Police District*	*England and Wales*
Sleeping out	10	13
Begging	455	512
Being on enclosed premises for an unlawful purpose	83	374

[1] Including the City of London.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the cost of detaining someone overnight in police cells following their arrest under the Vagrancy Act 1824; and what is the cost of the processing, conveyance and prosecution in a magistrates court of a person so arrested.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Most of the information requested is not available and would be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The average cost of a prosecution in the magistrates court is £21 (1988 prices).

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received about the Vagrancy Act 1824; and if he has any plans to abolish it.

Mr John Patten: In the past 12 months we have received seven written representations from hon. Members about the Vagrancy Act 1824, and written and oral representations from the National Association of Probation Officers, the End Vagrancy Act Campaign and the Children's Society. We have noted several observations on the subject in proceedings in both Houses. My Department has also received a few letters from members of the public.

We have no present plans to repeal the Act, which covers a wide range of offences including indecent exposure.

Pentonville Prison

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current number of convicted and unconvicted prisoners intended to be held in Pentonville prison; what is the current number of prisoners held in Pentonville prison; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: The certified normal accommodation (CNA) of HMP Pentonville is 641[1]. A programme of major refurbishment currently in hand there will increase its CNA by more than 200 places over the next two years. The population of the prison on 30 March was 941 (including 194 unconvicted).

[1] On 11 February 1990.

Lorrain Osman

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what nationality is Lorrain Osman; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: Mr. Lorrain Osman is a Malaysian citizen. He is also qualified for the right of abode in the United Kingdom under section 2(1)*(c)* of the Immigration Act 1971 by virtue of his birth in Penang and five years' residence in this country, and he became a British citizen on 1 January 1983 when the British Nationality Act 1981 came into force.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has examined documents in the matter of a request by the Government of Hong Kong for the extradition of Mr. Lorrain Osman which were prepared and sworn by Mr. Warwick Reid of the Hong Kong Government, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: No documents prepared and sworn by Mr. Warwick Reid have been submitted by the Hong Kong Government in the matter of Mr. Osman's extradition.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on who laid the complaint against Mr. Lorrain Osman in Hong Kong for which his return to Hong Kong is requested by the Hong Kong authorities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The complaint against Mr. Osman was laid in Hong Kong by Mr. Anthony Edmund Robey, a senior officer in the Independent Commission Against Corruption.

Immigration

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many passports are currently held at *(a)* Lunar house, Croydon, *(b)* Liverpool nationality office and *(c)* Queen Anne's Gate.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Liverpool Nationality Department

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the reasons for the industrial action taken by officers of the Liverpool nationality department on Friday 23 March and Monday 26 March.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: On 31 January, in reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) at column *205*, my right hon. and learned Friend announced that the nationality work of the immigration and nationality department would be concentrated in the existing Liverpool nationality office. On 2 March, following initial discussions with the trade union side of the immigration and nationality department Whitley council, a letter was sent to the trade union side setting out the Department's detailed proposals for the transfer of work from Lunar house, Croydon to the Liverpool nationality office and for the consequential staffing arrangements. A response to that letter is awaited.

In the week beginning 19 March, some problems arose over the transfer of work and some members of staff of the Liverpool office did not attend for duty during the afternoon of 23 March or on 26 March. A meeting was held between management and the trade union side on 26 March, following which a joint statement on the future handling of the relocation was agreed. The staff who had been taking industrial action returned to work the following day.

Extradition

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department under what provisions the courts examine any requests for bail in extradition cases; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The Bail Act does not apply to extradition cases, and there is therefore no presumption in favour of bail, as with cases for trial in this country. Under section 9 of the Extradition Act 1989, however, the court of committal may grant bail if it considers that it would be appropriate to do so.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy on the return of a person to any requesting country under the Extradition Act 1989 if the person requested might be prejudiced at any trial by reason of his race, nationality or political opinions.

Mr. John Patten: Section 6(1)(d) of the Extradition Act 1989 provides that a person shall not be extradited if it appears that he might, if returned, be prejudiced at his trial or punished, detained, or restricted in his personal liberty by reason of his race, religion, nationality or political opinions.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy on whether any period of remand suffered in the United Kingdom by an offender held for the purposes of extradition should be counted against any sentence that offender may incur in the requesting country; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: This is a matter for the requesting state. The general practice in most countries with which we have extradition arrangements is for time spent on remand in the requested state to be taken into account when calculating sentence, and to facilitate this we provide information about such periods from our records.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether, in the case of prisoners held on remand for the purposes of extradition, the requesting country pays the costs so incurred should it oppose bail; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: It is a general principle of extradition arrangements between countries that the requested state meets the costs of a fugitive's detention.

Durham Prison (Staffing)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was *(a)* the complement of officers and staff working within HMP Durham and *(b)* the prison population within HMP Durham for each year since 1979.

Mr. Mellor: The target staff in post for officers (including principal and senior officers) in HMP Durham is 387 for 1990-91 and the complement for other staff is 138·5. The number of officers in post dating back to just before the introduction of "fresh start" is:

	Number
1 April 1986	326
1 April 1987	330
1 April 1988	368
1 April 1989	377

Other historical data are not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Moreover, comparisons with staffing levels pre-"fresh start" are inevitably misleading because of differences in calculation methods, in particular the heavy reliance on officer overtime.

The population at HMP Durham since 1 April 1979 was as follows:

	Number
1 April 1979	1,095
1 April 1980	1,123
1 April 1981	1,072
1 April 1982	1,013
1 April 1983	1,004
1 April 1984	934
1 April 1985	1,211
1 April 1986	942
1 April 1987	1,161
1 April 1988	1,232
1 April 1989	1,058
1 April 1990	992

Asylum

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give, by nationality, the number of asylum seekers who have applied for asylum in the United Kingdom *(a)* at the ports of entry and *(b)* after entry during 1989 and 1990; and if he will state for each of the above categories and by nationality (i) the number refused, (ii) the number granted refugee status and (iii) the number granted exceptional leave to remain.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Provisional information on the numbers of applications for refugee status in the United Kingdom, and of grants and other decisions, in 1989, is shown in the table. Final information for 1989 will be published in the Home Office statistical bulletin, "Refugee Statistics United Kingdom 1989", in the summer. Information for 1990 to date is not yet available. Provisional figures for refugee applications and decisions, by nationality, are provided quarterly to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and copies are in the Library.

Applications[1] received for refugee status in the United Kingdom, and decisions[1], by nationality and place of application, 1989

Number of persons

Nationality	*Applications received*		*Decisions[2]*					
			Granted refugee status		*Granted exceptional leave*		*Refused refugee status*	
	At ports	*After entry[3]*	*Following port application*	*Following after-entry application[3]*	*Following port application*	*Following after-entry application[3]*	*Following port application*	*Following after-entry application[3]*
Europe								
Czechoslovakia	6	46	—	11	—	19	—	12
Hungary	1	17	—	2	—	12	—	3
Poland	3	32	—	7	—	17	1	14
Romania	1	12	—	6	—	8	—	6
Turkey	3,656	697	193	134	1,010	400	2	26
Yugoslavia	6	7	—	—	—	2	—	6
Others	12	25	—	1	—	9	—	4
Total	3,685	836	193	161	1,010	467	3	71
Americas								
Chile	2	14	—	6	—	6	—	10
Colombia	47	30	5	16	—	13	—	1
Others	—	7	—	5	1	4	—	4
Total	49	51	5	27	1	23	—	15
Africa								
Angola	80	43	1	9	5	4	3	—
Ethiopia	271	76	22	182	7	12	—	—
Ghana	30	67	1	12	3	54	1	6
Seychelles	19	6	—	58	11	30	—	—
Somalia	2,092	204	77	317	108	31	3	—
South Africa	12	11	—	23	—	2	1	—
Sudan	7	33	—	22	—	1	—	—
Uganda	1,068	141	6	35	122	115	1	6
Zaire	58	136	—	28	1	2	2	3
Others	13	35	1	9	4	7	3	16
Total	3,650	752	131	695	261	258	14	31

Nationality	*Applications received*		*Decisions*[2]					
	At ports	*After entry*[3]	*Granted refugee status*		*Granted exceptional leave*		*Refused refugee status*	
			Following port application	*Following after-entry application*[3]	*Following port application*	*Following after-entry application*[3]	*Following port application*	*Following after-entry application*[3]
Middle East								
Iran	133	291	23	119	110	554	—	19
Iraq	243	116	33	52	108	227	—	8
Lebanon	86	71	—	3	19	206	2	6
Libya	—	16	5	4	—	15	1	6
Syria	—	5	—	6	—	3	—	5
Others	5	37	—	1	—	9	1	10
Total	467	536	61	185	237	1,014	4	54
Asia								
Afghanistan	67	52	—	28	45	36	4	1
Bangladesh	5	2	—	—	—	1	—	—
India	9	380	—	—	—	2	6	33
Pakistan	2	232	—	7	44	63	42	519
Sri Lanka	1,325	190	1	1	278	261	8	24
Others	9	59	—	10	—	9	—	—
Total	1,417	915	1	46	367	372	60	577
Other and unknown nationality	101	114	12	57	16	37	—	18
Grand total	9,369	3,204	380	1,171	1,892	2,171	81	766

[1] Provisional figures.

[2] Decisions do not necessarily relate to applications made in 1989.

[3] Includes also figures for the small number of applications made from outside the United Kingdom.

Fire Service (Lancashire)

Mr. Lee: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he expects to receive any proposals from Lancashire county fire brigade on fire cover in Lancashire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: I understand that the chief fire officer of Lancashire fire brigade has recently completed a review of fire risk categorisation and standards of fire cover; and that he has presented his report and findings to the public protection committee of Lancashire county council.

The fire authority has decided to consult widely within the county. This exercise, which will include district and town councils, local Members of Parliament and the fire service trade unions, is not expected to be completed until the end of August at the earliest.

A fire authority which proposes to reduce the operational establishment of its brigade is required to seek the approval of my right hon. and learned Friend to the reductions under the terms of section 19 of the Fire Service Act 1947. My right hon. and learned Friend is committed to maintaining nationally recommended minimum standards of fire cover and to the maintenance of an effective fire service.

Mr. Lee: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current strength of the retained fire service in Pendle; and what is its annual cost and the cost per call-out.

Mr. John Patten: The combined retained strength of the four fire stations in Pendle is 55 firefighters operating six retained fire appliances.

I understand from Lancashire county fire brigade that it does not hold information on the specific cost of the retained service in Pendle and it is not, therefore, possible to produce the costings requested.

Hong Kong

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from police officers born in the United Kingdom who are serving in the Hong Kong police and who have married Hong Kong citizens, concerning the right of abode for their spouse in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Government have received a number of representations on behalf of police officers in Hong Kong about the immigration and nationality status of their spouses. Under the British Citizenship (Designated Service) Order 1982 the normal residential requirements in the British Nationality Act 1981 may be waived if an application for naturalisation as a British citizen is made by the spouse of a member of the Royal Hong Kong police force who is a British citizen and was recruited in the United Kingdom. In addition the spouses of British citizens living abroad have the assurance that subject to the provisions in the immigration rules they may at any time come to live in the United Kingdom with their husbands and wives. We are considering whether any further arrangements are necessary under immigration provisions to protect the position of British citizen spouses in the special circumstances of Hong Kong and we will make an announcement in due course.

Forensic Scientists

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many forensic scientists of *(a)* up to three, *(b)* three to six, *(c)* six to nine, *(d)* nine to 12 and *(e)* 12 to 15 years' experience, respectively, left the employment of the Metropolitan police forensic science laboratory in 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is listed in the table:

	Number
Up to three years' experience	6
Three to six years' experience	1
Six to nine years' experience	5
Nine to 12 years' experience	4
Twelve to 15 years' experience	1

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many forensic scientists were employed at the Metropolitan police forensic science laboratory as specialists in fires on 1 January of each year from 1986 to 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The number of forensic scientists employed at the Metropolitan police forensic science laboratory as specialists in fire investigation on the dates in question was as follows:

	Number
1 January 1986	4
1 January 1987	3
1 January 1988	2
1 January 1989	4
1 January 1990	4

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any proposals to introduce a supplement to the salaries of scientists employed at the Metropolitan police forensic science laboratory; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We are discussing with the receiver a case for pay improvements for scientists at the Metropolitan police forensic science laboratory.

Deportation

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out the numbers of people removed from the United Kingdom pursuant to a decision to deport them for each year since 1979 for the following nationalities: *(a)* Indian, *(b)* Nigerian, *(c)* Australian and *(d)* all Commonwealth Caribbean countries.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is given in the table:

Number of persons removed from the United Kingdom under the deportation process for certain nationalities, 1979 to 1989

	Nationality			
Year	*India*	*Nigeria*	*Australia*	*Commonwealth Caribbean countries*
1979	45	97	11	14
1980	59	119	11	14
1981	62	117	4	25
1982	52	122	7	25
1983	45	149	3	21
1984	45	214	6	20
1985	52	224	5	12
1986	37	181	3	28
1987	64	213	8	25
1988	102	382	5	65
1989	125	548	4	80

Birmingham Six

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 21 March, *Official Report*, column *633*, what are the terms of reference of the Devon and Cornwall police inquiry into the new evidence submitted on behalf of the Birmingham Six; when he expects the inquiry to report; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. and learned Friend has sent to the chief constable of the West Midlands police a copy of representations from the solicitor acting on behalf of the Birmingham Six, and has asked him for a report on matters arising out of those representations. The chief constable has asked the Devon and Cornwall constabulary to undertake inquiries on his behalf. It is too early to form a view on the length of time those inquiries are likely to take.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he proposes to take concerning the missing evidence of the West Midlands police force on matters concerning the Birmingham Six.

Mr. John Patten: It has not been established that any relevant evidence concerning the Birmingham Six case is missing. Representations about this possibility are among the issues which have been raised by the solicitor acting for the convicted men. These have been passed by my right hon. and learned Friend to the chief constable of the West Midlands police and will be investigated by the Devon and Cornwall police.

London Demonstration

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Irish tricolours were flown by demonstrators in central London on Saturday 31 March; what is the estimated extent of participation by Irish immigrants in the demonstration; and if he will make a statement about Irish Republican involvement in the demonstration.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the Commissioner that it is not known how many Irish tricolours were flown during the anti-community charge demonstration on Saturday in central London nor is it known how many people of Irish origin took part. There was no Irish Republican involvement in the organisation of the demonstration.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will establish an independent judicial inquiry into public disorder in London on 31 March; if he will ensure the terms of reference allow investigation into whether any groups or organisations were responsible for instigating violence; whether policing arrangements were appropriate and whether the march route and rally venue were suitable; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: As my right hon. and learned Friend announced to the House on Monday 2 April at columns 893-94, the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis is undertaking a review of the events of Saturday 31 March to see what lessons can be learned from what occurred. This will take into account all the arrangements which were made for policing the demonstration. A full criminal investigation is being conducted with a view to identifying offenders from photographs and film and prosecuting them.

Debt Default

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were in prison for debt default *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in Strangeways prison, Manchester, in the last week for which figures are available.

Mr. Mellor: According to the records held centrally, on 28 February 1990 435 fine defaulters were held in prison service establishments in England and Wales of whom 32 were in Manchester. Similar information for prisoners committed for non-payment of debts is not readily available. However, 55 non-criminal prisoners other than Immigration Act detainees were in prison service establishments on 28 February, none of whom was in Manchester. About half of these prisoners would have been debtors. Detailed information about the population of prisoners committed for non-payment of debts is published annually in "Prison Statistics England and Wales" (table 6.1 of the latest issue, for 1988 Cm. 825), copies of which are in the Library.

Members' Inquiries

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, pursuant to his answer of 2 March, *Official Report,* column *350,* he will make a statement on the delays in the case of IM (Prison No. W90297) (HO reference PDP M27656/8/1).

Mr. Mellor: I am writing to the hon. Member today. I apologise for the delay in replying to this letter.

Residential Homes

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions there have been in each of the last five years for offences against people in *(a)* registered care homes and nursing homes and *(b)* unregistered care homes and nursing homes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: Information is not collected centrally.

HMP Manchester

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many inmates from Her Majesty's prison Manchester have been transferred since 1 April to Her Majesty's prison Wakefield.

Mr. Mellor: Since 1 April, 22 inmates have been transferred from HMP Manchester to HMP Wakefield. By yesterday lunchtime two had been discharged, having reached the end of their sentences.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many officers from Her Majesty's prison Wakefield have since 1 April been temporarily transferred to duties at Her Majesty's prison Manchester.

Mr. Mellor: The numbers of prison officers from HMP Wakefield on detached duty at HMP Manchester on each day since 1 April is as follows:

	Number
1 April	48
2 April	34
3 April	28
4 April	26

Prison Officers

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take steps to introduce additional standby teams of prison officers which can be drafted into particular prison establishments at times of particular staff shortages or disturbance.

Mr. Mellor: Contingency plans are already in place to enable additional manpower to be made available to establishments at short notice, if the need arises. This manpower is initially drawn from neighbouring establishments, but, where necessary, the catchment area can be and is extended nationally.

Interception of Communications Tribunal

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who has been appointed to succeed the late Lord Fraser of Tullybelton as president of the interception of communications tribunal; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: The hon. Mr. Justice Macpherson of Cluny has been appointed as president of the tribunal established under the Interception of Communications Act 1985.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Disciplinary Procedures

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will list the firms criticised by his Department's inspectors or the joint disciplinary scheme.

Mr. Redwood: I assume the hon. Member is referring to accountancy firms. I listed the firms criticised in reports of inspectors published since June 1979 in the replies I gave to the hon. Member on 19 December 1989 at column *139* and 21 February 1990 at column *782*. Copies of the reports of the joint disciplinary scheme are in the Library.

Company Accounts

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will take steps to ascertain the merchant banks which promote off-balance sheet financing schemes.

Mr. Redwood: No. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 3 April.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will amend the Companies Acts to require the directors of a company to respond to the circumstances mentioned in the statements filed by auditors in accordance with section 390 of the Companies Act 1985.

Mr. Redwood: With effect from 1 April, section 390 has been replaced by section 394, which was inserted into the Companies Act 1985 by section 123 of the Companies Act 1989.

I have no plans for further legislation in this area. It is for the shareholders to decide what explanations from the directors may be called for in the light of statements made by a former auditor of their company.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will amend section 385 of the Companies Act 1985 to require directors or auditors to give an indication of the details of the audit tender to shareholders.

Mr. Redwood: No. The appointment of auditors by the general meeting gives shareholders the opportunity to seek details of the terms of the proposed appointment.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will seek to amend the Companies Acts in order to specify auditors' responsibilities in detail similar to those of directors of companies.

Mr. Redwood: Under the Companies Act 1985 it is the responsibility of the directors to prepare accounts and of auditors to report whether those accounts have been properly prepared in accordance with the Act and give a true and fair view. Parliament has only recently considered and amended, in the Companies Act 1989, the relevant detailed provisions of the 1985 Act and I see no need to reopen the matter.

Germany (Trade)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the effect of a united Germany on the medium-term prospects for the United Kingdom balance of trade with West and East Germany.

Mr. Redwood: In 1989 exports to the FRG were £11 billion and imports £20 billion; exports to the GDR amounted to £106 million and imports £169 million. The medium and longer-term effects on the balance of trade of a united Germany remain uncertain. In the shorter term, exports to the present FRG could increase as a result of British companies supplying customers in the GDR through or in co-operation with companies in the FRG. In the medium and longer term, unification should free the GDR from the constraints imposed by shortages of convertible currency and the potential for increased exports could be considerable; but so too will be competition for the business. As to imports from a united Germany, it remains to be seen how successfully GDR producers are able to compete following a move from a command to a market economy. My Department is keeping prospects under review.

Wales (Visits)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish the dates on which he has made an official visit to Wales since his appointment to his present post.

Mr. Ridley: I visited Companies House and ECGD in Cardiff on 23 February this year. I also visited the Patent Office in Newport on 1 March this year.

Accountancy Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will launch an independent inquiry into the influence of major accountancy firms on the accountancy bodies and their major policy-making committees.

Mr. Redwood: No.

Departmental Reports

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make it his practice that his Department reports shown to trade associations will be made available to Parliament.

Mr. Redwood: No.

Astra Holdings

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received concerning the company Astra Holdings; if he will institute an inquiry into the company's affairs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I cannot comment on the affairs of individual companies. I am prepared to consider any information the hon. Member may provide which might warrant an inquiry.

Flooding, Wales

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will visit Clwyd county and borough councils to discuss residents' problems concerning insurance claims after the inundation by the sea in the March floods; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: No. Neither the Department nor the Association of British Insurers has received any representations about problems on insurance claims but if the hon. Gentleman writes to me about residents' concerns, I would be glad to look into them.

Shareholders' Rights

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if his Department has any plans to alter the rights of shareholders in any privatised industries or companies.

Mr. Redwood: I have no plans to do so. The Government reject the idea of "public interest companies" where Government take voting control without buying all of the equity or where the rights of shareholders to profits and dividends are deliberately curtailed.

Tampons (Health Warnings)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received about the need to write health warnings on the outside of tampon packaging.

Mr. Forth: I have received representations from the Department of Health, the Women's Environmental Network, and the hon. Members for Barking (Ms. Richardson) and for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short). The industry has agreed to improve the safety labelling on the outside of packets of tampons and on the leaflet enclosed, and the Department of Health is content that these improved warnings are an adequate safeguard.

Garston Amhurst

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 15 February, *Official Report*, column *389*, if his Department has discovered further contacts with Garston Amhurst Associates.

Mr. Redwood: Since I told the House on 15 February, at columns *390-91*, of a contact between my Department and Garston Amhurst Associates in 1984, a further letter has been found on a general file when looking for unrelated documents. This was dated 13 October 1987 and sent to my Department by GAA's solicitors. It enclosed a letter from GAA to a third party, which stated categorically that GAA did not need a PF(I) licence because it did not deal in securities. It also recorded a telephone conversation with an official in the DTI of which we have no independent record. I am sorry that this came to light only after the previous question was answered.

Faulty Goods

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps the Government are proposing to take in response to the Law Commission's conclusion in paragraph 5.18 of the report on "Sale and Supply of Goods", Cm. 137, concerning the right to a refund for faulty goods shortly after purchase.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 28 March 1990]:* The Law Commission's recommendations are summarised in part 8 of its report. The Government have announced the intention to implement its recommendations for legislation (subject to minor clarifying amendments). However, paragraph 5.18 of its report reached no conclusion and made no recommendations.

Ethnic Enterprises

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what effect the harmonisation proposals under the Single European Act, due to be implemented by 1 January 1993 or thereafter, will have on black and minority ethnic enterprises in *(a)* hairdressing, *(b)* food imports and exports, *(c)* other import/export trades, *(d)* restaurants, *(e)* arts and crafts, *(f)* clothing manufacture and retailing, *(g)* books and periodicals, *(h)* videos and films and *(i)* music, entertainment and sports; what other major effects the proposals will have on black and minority ethnic people in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* The effects of the single European market will be felt long before 1 January 1993. Indeed, many single market measures are already in force. It is not possible to tell what the effects of the single market will be on the detailed sectors mentioned: the outcome will depend on the dynamic reaction of individual businesses. However, the single market offers enormous opportunities to all British businesses. The Cecchini report, carried out for the European Commission, suggests optimistically that there will be a 4·5 per cent. boost to EC GDP. These opportunities are open to ethnic minorities enterprises as they are to all others. In addition, under the Home Office's ethnic minority business initiative, business advice centres are open in north, south and west London, Birmingham and Bristol, to offer advice to ethnic minority enterprises.

Correspondence (MEPs)

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, since 18 June 1989, how many communications he has received from Members of the European Parliament that concern local or United Kingdom matters; and if he will make it his practice, where such matters are involved, to provide the hon. Member for the local constituency with a copy of the correspondence and the reply for information.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* Where Members of the European Parliament raise matters in correspondence which are exclusively of local interest, the practice is to reply suggesting that the MEP should refer the matter to the hon. Member for the constituency concerned. As with other correspondence, replies to such communications would normally be copied to the hon. Member concerned only if the MEP had himself copied his letter in this way.

Balance of Trade

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the practice of his Department on answering questions about the balance of trade with the EC.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 2 April 1990]:* Following the reorganisation in 1989 of the Government statistical service as a result of the recommendations of the review of economic statistics, the responsibility for publishing the main economic aggregates now falls to the Central Statistical Office, and questions about such aggregates are answered by Treasury Ministers. Questions concerning disaggregated trade statistics are answered by DTI Ministers. They would include a question on the balance of trade in manufactured goods with the EC. A copy of the guidelines for the allocation of questions seeking economic statistics is available in the Library of the House.

Japanese-owned Car Firms

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what advice the Council of Ministers has had from the EC Commission about transitional restrictions on the export of cars from United Kingdom Japanese-owned firms to the continent; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 2 April 1990]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer my right hon. Friend gave him on 22 January 1990 at columns *504-5*.

Pension Funds

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many complaints his Department has received in the last five years concerning pension funds in general and pension fund re-investment in pensioners' holding companies from *(a)* individuals and *(b)* others;

(2) how many representations his Department has received in the last five years concerning pension fund re-investment; how many of the representations were critical of the present re-investment system; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will estimate how many pension schemes include *(a)* director trustees and *(b)* employee trustees;

(4) if he will estimate the total value of pension fund surpluses re-invested in the pensioners' holding company; and if he will supply the figures where the pension fund invests in *(a)* equity issues of the sponsoring company, *(b)* convertible securities issued by the sponsoring company, *(c)* preference stocks issued by the sponsoring company, *(d)* restricted classes of stock, *(e)* any form of loan stock issued by the company other than convertible and *(f)* any property occupied by the sponsoring company;

(5) if he will list in order the companies he has received most complaints about concerning *(a)* general practice and *(b)* pension fund re-investment over the last three years;

(6) what is the total number of companies that have disclosed pension fund re-investment under regulation 7 and schedule 3, paragraph 6, of the Occupational Pension Schemes (Disclosure of Information) Regulations, SI 1986, No. 1046, since November 1987; and if he will make a statement;

(7) which aspect of pension fund administration he has received most critical representations about; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: I have been asked to reply.

Information is not held by the Department on all matters raised by my hon. Friend. Representations have been received on a range of issues related to occupational pension matters in recent years, but details of numbers are not kept.

The Occupational Pensions Board, in its report "Protecting Pensions", recommended that restrictions should be introduced on the extent of self-investment by pension schemes in their related employer. This recommendation was accepted and appropriate powers have been taken in the Social Security Bill.

There have been some representations about these proposals from employers, outlining the possible effects for their businesses and pension schemes if the scheme is required to dispose of assets held in the company too quickly. As a result we intend to mount a survey which will provide up-to-date information on the extent of self-investment and which will guide us in framing the necessary regulations.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Moorland

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement about measures to prevent the over-grazing of moorland.

Mr. Maclean: There are no easy solutions to the problem of environmental over-grazing of moorland while maintaining the viability of upland farming so essential to the less-favoured areas (LFAs). The current national restrictions on payments of hill livestock compensatory allowances (HLCAs) of six ewes per hectare in the severely disadvantaged part of the LFA and nine ewes per hectare in the disadvantaged area serve to discourage over-grazing while the new EC limit confining HLCA payments to 1·4 livestock units per hectare will further limit the extent of the problem from January 1991. We are now considering whether the new EC legal provisions permitting member states to take account of environmental considerations in this scheme can be made more specific. Grants available to farmers through the farm and conservation grant scheme facilitate the regeneration of heather and payments under management agreements in the North Peak environmentally sensitive area are directed at the specific problems of moorland management.

Arthioposthia Triangulata

Mr. Alton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has as to the spread of arthioposthia triangulata on the British mainland and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The Planarian can grow up to 15 cm long and weigh 2 g. It is found under stones and dead wood on the soil surface where it rests between feeds on its earthworm prey. The Planarian attaches itself to a worm and moves up the body until its mouth comes into contact with worm tissue. It releases digestive juices which dissolve the worm. The Planarian can then suck up this earthworm "soup". A whole worm can be completely eaten in 30 minutes.

In Northern Ireland the Planarian has apparently wiped out a normal earthworm population in a field which the Department of Agriculture in Northern Ireland had been monitoring. This is abnormal. The Planarian would appear to co-exist happily with earthworms in southern Scotland.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will allow representatives from animal welfare groups to inspect the control methods used by his Department on cattle being used for research into bovine spongiform encephalopathy at the experimental husbandry farms at Boxworth, Drayton, Gleadthorpe, High Mowthorpe and Redesdale.

Mr. Maclean: We welcome the interests of any responsible animal welfare groups and would be willing to make arrangements for them to visit the farms referred to; but like any professionally organised research and development undertaking they cannot accommodate unscheduled visitors.

Although the cattle at the EHFs mentioned are part of a research programme into bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), none is affected by the disease. In the event of any of these cattle showing signs of infection with BSE they will be dealt with under the procedures laid down in the BSE order, but in the interim all are subject to the normal codes of practice for animal welfare and to ADAS's normal high standards of animal husbandry.

Drift Net Fishing

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on drift net fishing.

Mr. Curry: No.

EC Rivers and Oceans Programme

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on progress made with the European Communities European rivers and oceans system programme; and what benefits have accrued to the United Kingdom from this programme.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have been asked to reply.

The European river ocean system programme (EROS 2000) is an interdisciplinary research project on biogeochemical processes in the European coastal environment. Most effort has focused to date on the Gulf de Lions area of the Mediterranean. I understand that progress has been good, and the results are beneficial to United Kingdom and European science. The Commission's water pollution research report 13 describes the first EROS 2000 workshop held in March 1989. The report of a second workshop in February 1990 is in press. These reports can be obtained direct from Directorate General XII in Brussels.

Agriculture Council

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the detailed agenda of the European Community Agriculture Council on 25 and 26 April and on United Kingdom ministerial attendance at that Council.

Mr. Curry: The principal item on the agenda of the Agriculture Council on 25 and 26 April will be the Commission's 1990 farm price proposals. There are also likely to be discussions on the non-food use of agricultural products, the small-scale cotton producers' aid and an exchange of views on the GATT multilateral trade negotiations.

The Minister and I shall attend the meeting.

Sewage Sludge (Plastic)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has made an assessment of the quantities of plastic contained in sewage sludge dumped in the sea and what effect the presence of plastic has on *(a)* the marine environment and *(b)* the fishing industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The Ministry's monitoring of sewage sludge disposal grounds has identified a significant quantity of litter only at the Tyne disposal ground. This litter contains a small percentage of plastic material. Litter presents an aesthetic problem in the marine environment. It is an unpleasant inconvenience for fishermen whose gear becomes contaminated. The Ministry has required the holder of the disposal licence to instal effective new screening to prevent litter from contaminating the sludge. Screening is now in place at one of the two treatment works concerned, and will shortly be completed at the remaining works.

Simplesse

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what labelling requirements will apply in respect of products containing Simplesse; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Products containing Simplesse would be subject to the Food Labelling Regulations 1984. The regulations require a precise product description to ensure that the purchaser is fully informed about the true nature of the food, and can distinguish between similar foods. The presence of Simplesse would also need to be indicated in the list of ingredients.

In addition, under section 6 of the Food Act 1984, the labelling should not be false or misleading.

Olestra

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food and the novel food panel of the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy, to report on the product Olestra; whether the nutritional implications of the product are being considered; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: Before giving its advice to Ministers, the Food Advisory Committee has sought advice on the safety and nutritional implications of Olestra from the two expert committees referred to by the hon. Member. More information has been sought from the company concerned and the committees' advice is not likely to be available in the near future. Food additive regulations would have to be amended before Olestra could be used in food in the United Kingdom.

Fishing Industry

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he is yet able to announce the outcome of his recent consultations with the fishing industry about changes in the licence transfer rules to permit the aggregation of fishing vessel capacity.

Mr. Curry: Yes. Fisheries Ministers have carefully considered the industry's reactions to the consultation document which was issued last November. In the light of the views we received, we have decided to introduce capacity aggregation arrangements, but, in response to a number of useful comments and suggestions, we are making some important changes from the proposals which were outlined in our consultation document.

We have decided that we should introduce arrangements which allow fishermen to transfer the licences from more than one vessel to a larger vessel. A fisherman will also be allowed to aggregate more than one licence on to an existing licensed vessel. This would enable him, for example, to lengthen or re-engine his vessel. These aggregation arrangements will be subject to the rule that the capacity of the newly licensed vessel must not be more than 90 per cent. of the aggregate capacity of the previously licensed vessels as measured by a formula which takes account of both vessel size and engine power. As envisaged in our consultation document, it will be possible to aggregate only licences of similar type.

We are also changing the rules for the transfer of licences from one vessel to another. We are continuing the current provision which permits such transfers as long as neither the tonnage nor the horsepower of the newly licensed vessel exceeds that of the previous licensed vessels. However, to provide some improved flexibility, fishermen will be allowed to transfer licences from one vessel to another larger or more powerful vessel provided the capacity of the new licensed vessel is no more than 90 per cent. of the capacity of the previously licensed vessel as measured by the formula. The present restrictions on transfers between length bands will be removed.

In the light of a number of representations, we have also decided to extend licensing to commercial fishing for all species by United Kingdom vessels over 10 m in all waters round the United Kingdom, although the exemption from licensing for mackerel fishing by hand-held line will continue to apply. Thie extension will not apply to salmon and sea trout which are already covered by licensing arrangements run by the National Rivers Authority. Vessels fishing other than for profit will also be excluded from the need to be licensed. A statutory instrument will be laid before the House as soon as possible after the Easter recess. Subject to parliamentary approval, the new licensing order will take effect in early May. The new arrangements for capacity aggregation and licence transfers will take effect from the same date.

With the introduction of these new arrangements, it is necessary to clarify policy for dealing with licence transfers among freezers and pursers with pelagic licences. In future, if the pelagic licence of one or more freezers or pursers is transferred to another freezer or purser intending to fish against a producer organisation's pelagic allocation, the receiving vessel's producer organisation will receive allocations reflecting the track record or records of the licence or licences transferred. Similarly, if the pelagic licence of one or more pursers or freezers is transferred to a purser or freezer fishing or wishing to fish with an individual vessel pelagic allocation, the allocations to the receiving vessel will reflect the track record or records of the licence or licences transferred. Vessels with individual vessel allocations will in future be able to arrange for up to 70 per cent. of their allocations to be fished by other vessels in the same ownership or producer organisation which also have individual vessel allocations.

The new capacity aggregation and licence transfer rules will provide some useful extra flexibility for fishermen wishing to restructure their businesses. We will be keeping under close review the operation of these arrangements and particularly the impact of the new capacity formula and the new provision for capacity aggregation.

We are also preparing another consultation paper about further liberalisation in our licensing and management arrangements which would allow fishermen to acquire increased fishing possibilities without necessarily increasing their fishing capacity. We have called these arrangements entitlement aggregation. We intend to circulate this paper for the industry's comments by the middle of May and will hope to receive the industry's views by the end of June. In the light of the industry's reactions we will consider how to take forward the issues raised, and this could include pilot schemes.

ENERGY

Offshore Oil Platforms

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) in respect of the Auk production platform, how many times this has been inspected by the appropriate certifying authority in the last five years; what were the dates of inspection; what are the dates of inspection by his Department's inspectors in the same period; what was the result of these inspections; what regulations and guidance notes were in force at the time of construction of the installation; whether any exemption was applied for or granted to these provisions; whether the facilities on the installation comply with all current regulations and guidance notes; what is the number of injuries, including fatalities, occurring on the installation since it was positioned; how many breaches of regulations or Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 provisions have been reported to him; how many he has passed to the appropriate prosecution authority for action; and what is his latest estimate of the life of the installation;

(2) in respect of the Central Cormorant production platform, how many times this has been inspected by the appropriate certifying authority in the last five years; what were the dates of inspection; what are the dates of inspection by his Department's inspectors in the same period; what was the result of these inspections; what regulations and guidance notes were in force at the time of construction of the installation; whether any exemption was applied for or granted to these provisions; whether the facilities on the installation comply with all current regulations and guidance notes; what is the number of injuries, including fatalities, occurring on the installation since it was positioned; how many breaches of regulations or Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 provisions have been reported to him; how many he has passed to the appropriate prosecution authority for action; and what is his latest estimate of the life of the installation;

(3) in respect of the Hutton production platform, how many times this has been inspected by the appropriate certifying authority in the last five years; what were the dates of inspection; what are the dates of inspection by his Department's inspectors in the same period; what was the result of these inspections; what regulations and guidance notes were in force at the time of construction of the installation; whether any exemption was applied for or granted to these provisions; whether the facilities on the installation comply with all current regulations and guidance notes; what is the number of injuries, including fatalities, occurring on the installation since it was positioned; how many breaches of regulations or Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 provisions have been reported to him; how many he has passed to the appropriate prosecution authority for action; and what is his latest estimate of the life of the installation;

(4) in respect of the Montrose production platform, how many times this has been inspected by the appropriate certifying authority in the last five years; what were the dates of inspection; what are the dates of inspection by his Department's inspectors in the same period; what was the result of these inspections; what regulations and guidance notes were in force at the time of construction of the installation; whether any exemption was applied for or granted to these provisions; whether the facilities on the installation comply with all current regulations and guidance notes; what is the number of injuries, including fatalities, occurring on the installation since it was positioned; how many breaches of regulations or Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 provisions have been reported to him; how many he has passed to the appropriate prosecution authority for action; and what is his latest estimate of the life of the installation.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on Monday 2 April 1990 at columns *406-11* about the offshore safety regime.

The most recent inspection of the Auk platform took place in May 1989, of Cormorant A in October 1989, of North Cormorant in February 1990, of Hutton in July 1989, of North West Hutton in November 1989, and of Montrose in January 1990. Central Cormorant is an underwater manifold centre linked to Cormorant A. The dates on which these platforms were installed are as follows:

Platform	*Installation Date*
Auk	July 1974
Cormorant A	May 1978
North Cormorant	April 1981
Hutton	September 1984
North West Hutton	September 1981
Montrose	August 1975

Source:
Development of the Oil and Gas Resources of the United Kingdom, Department of Energy 1989.

There has been one fatality on these platforms during the past five years; this occurred on Cormorant A in April 1989. My Department investigates all fatal accidents.

Over the same period, there has been one conviction for breach of United Kingdom safety legislation on these platforms following investigations by my inspectors. This involved Santa Fe UK Ltd. on which a penalty of £250 was imposed on 6 July 1988 following an incident on the Montrose platform.

Non-fossil Fuel Obligation

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many non-fossil fuel obligation projects he expects to accept; and what will be the criteria used in assessing the project for acceptance in the obligation.

Mr. Baldry: In setting the level of the non-fossil fuel obligation to be placed on the public electricity suppliers in respect of renewables-sourced electricity generating capacity, my right hon. Friend will have regard to the amount of capacity that could be secured through projects that are ready to sign contracts with the PESs. However, the arrangements that the public electricity suppliers make in order to meet their respective obligations are a matter for the suppliers themselves.

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many projects and for what capacity his Department expects to apply for inclusion in the non-fossil fuel obligation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The public electricity suppliers have received applications from over 300 renewables-sourced electricity generating projects, representing between 1 and 2 GW of capacity, for contracting within the non-fossil fuel obligation. These are now being processed by the PESs, and my right hon. Friend proposes to make an order in the early summer to reflect the amount of capacity that would be secured though those projects that are ready to sign contracts.

Dr. Michael Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the intended duration of contracts for purchased wind power under the renewable energy tranche of the non-fossil fuel quota; and whether such contracts will be renewable under similar terms at the expiry of that period.

Mr. Baldry: The first order setting the level of the non-fossil fuel obligation in respect of renewables-sourced electricity generating capacity will cover the period from 1990 until 1998. The arrangements that the public electricity suppliers make in order to meet their respective obligations are a matter for the suppliers themselves. In deciding what terms to offer to renewables-sourced generators after 1998 the suppliers will wish to take account of the extent of any non-fossil fuel obligation beyond 1998. The Government expect to take decisions on this in 1994.

Low-sulphur Coal

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Easington (Mr. Cummings) of 26 March, *Official Report*, column *85*, on low-sulphur coal imports, what methodology he has employed to calculate that the United Kingdom will comply in full with the European Community large combustion plants directive.

Mr. Baldry: The means by which the Government intend to ensure that the United Kingdom complies with the EC large combustion plants directive were set out in a consultation paper published by the Department of the Environment last August. A copy of this paper is in the Library of the House.

Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of evacuation plans from the neighbouring locale in the event of a serious incident at either *(a)* Heysham or *(b)* Hartlepool nuclear power station; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The effectiveness of evacuation plans for the neighbouring population of nuclear power stations is regularly tested in exercises. Exercise participants, which include the police, local authorities and the emergency services, help assess these exercises with a view to identifying possible improvements.

Electricity Licences

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what licences have been granted under section 6 of the Electricity Act 1989 authorising the generation, transmission or supply of electricity.

Mr. Wakeham: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and I have now issued licences to all those requiring licences from commencement of the new regime: principally, but not solely, the successor companies of the electricity supply industry in England and Wales and Scotland. Copies of those licences will be placed in the Libraries of each House. They are substantially the same as the model licences published on 12 February and 22 March.

These and future licences will also be available for inspection and copying at the offices of the Office of Electricity Regulation.

EMPLOYMENT

National Minimum Wage

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answer of 2 February, *Official Report*, column *375*, to the hon. Member for Stretford, on what date work on estimating the effect of a national minimum wage first began; and when it was completed.

Mr. Howard: In recent years my Department has considered the effect of minimum wages on a number of occasions. Work estimating the effect of a national minimum wage in the context of the social charter started in early October 1989. After consultation between officials, both within and outside my Department, the work was completed towards the end of January 1990, and a note explaining the method used was placed in the Library on 2 February.

Steel Foundries

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of skill shortages in the 1990s among those working in the steel foundry and casting industry; and what action he is taking to provide skills such as pattern making.

Mr. Nicholls: The statutory engineering industry training board currently has responsibility for assessing future skill needs in the steel foundry and casting industry. There are indications that skill shortages are developing in this sector. The Government look to the employers in the industry to work together to solve such skill shortages.

Wages Councils

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he has any plans to increase the staffing of the wages councils.

Mr. Nicholls: No.

Council of Ministers

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he last met his counterparts in the Council of Ministers; and what was discussed.

Mr. Howard: I last met my European Community counterparts at an informal meeting of EC Labour and Social Affairs Ministers in Dublin on 1 and 2 March. Our discussions covered action to assist the long-term unemployed, and training assistance for eastern Europe.

At the meeting I secured a commitment from the EC Commission to make regular reports to the Council of Ministers on member states' records in implementing European legislation.

Youth Training Scheme

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if unemployed young people over 18 years who *(a)* refuse to participate in a youth training scheme or *(b)* leave a youth training scheme early without good cause, will be subject to the benefit sanctions which apply to approved training schemes.

Mr. Eggar: The youth training scheme (YTS) is the only training scheme approved by the Secretary of State for Employment for the purposes of social security legislation. Under that legislation a young person over the age of 18 who is offered a place on the YTS and without good cause refuses or fails to apply for or accept that place, or voluntarily leaves YTS, can be subject to the unemployment benefit sanctions.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the estimated expenditure on YTS for 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mr. Nicholls: Planned expenditure on youth training, as set out in "The Government's Expenditure Plans 1990-91 to 1992-93", Cm 1006, is £1,010 million in 1989-90, £907 million in 1990-91 and £808 million in 1991-92.

Training and enterprise councils and local enterprise companies in Scotland whose bids to run training credit pilots are accepted will have additional funds available for their training credit pilots. These will involve a transfer of the appropriate proportion of relevant elements from the revenue support grant, and additional sums of £12 million in 1991-92 and £25 million in subsequent years will be made available.

Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what requirements will be placed on youth training and employment training providers by TECs and LECs in respect of disciplinary and grievance procedures for non-employed trainees, what will be the role of the regional office of the Training Agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: When TECs and LECs take over the delivery of training programmes they will be required to determine and establish the grievance and disciplinary procedures applying to non-employed trainees. It will be the role of the Training Agency to establish effective contractual arrangements with TECs and LECs, including the establishment of grievance and disciplinary procedures.

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what guidance he will issue on how youth training and employment training non-employed trainees will have any disciplinary and grievance procedures explained to them during their period of induction and on the role of trade unions or other representatives in taking up individual cases; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: Under existing guidance, providers of youth training and employment training are required to have a written code of practice setting out the disciplinary and grievance procedures for trainees. These procedures, together with any relevant agreements with trade unions, should be explained to trainees during the induction process.

After exhaustion of normal local procedures, trainees may refer their grievances to officials of the Training Agency and also, in the case of YT trainees, to the careers service.

Work Permits

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many applications for work permits remained unsettled with his Department at the latest available date.

Mr. Eggar: The number of applications for work permits under consideration at 30 March 1990 was 3,945.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many work permits were issued to foreign nationals in each of the past two years; in what main areas of work; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The total number of work permits granted in 1988 and 1989 for overseas nationals to work in Great Britain were 25,973 and 29,730 respectively. The main areas of work for which permits were granted were:

Occupational group	*1988*	*1989*
Performers	11,705	12,107
Companies secretaries, accountants	2,999	4,877
Directors and general managers	2,319	2,059
Personnel and management specialists[1]	1,770	1,279
Engineering researchers, designers and consultants[1]	1,086	1,695
Natural science researchers and consultants	981	1,155
Teachers and instructors[1]	806	840
Cooks and waiters[1]	779	1,104
Health diagnosing and treating occupations[1]	685	973
Sportspersons[2]	647	—
Marketing and public relations specialists[2]	—	629

[1] Ranking changed in 1989.

[2] Appeared in top ten for one year only.

Of these, 3,790 and 4,228 work permits were granted in 1988 and 1989 under the training and work experience scheme.

Training

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the total sum to be expended by his Department on the finance of training in the current year; and by what percentage this has changed in real terms over the past five years.

Mr. Nicholls: Records are kept on the basis of the standard financial year for Government expenditure, which runs from 1 April to 31 March.

The total estimated expenditure on training, by the Training Agency, in 1990-91, is £2,693,000.

There is a reduction in the estimated provision for 1990-91 against forecast outturn for 1989-90, both in cash terms and constant 1990-91 prices. This is due to reduced expenditure on youth training, reflecting demographic changes, and savings accruing from the transfer of the operating costs of the Skills Training Agency to the private sector.

The total spent by the Training Agency, and its predecessors, the Training Commission and the Manpower Services Commission, for the years 1985-86 to 1988-89, and the forecast outturn for 1989-90, at constant 1990-91 prices, and the percentage year-on-year changes are as follows:

Year	*£*	*Per cent.*
1985-86	1,648,500	
1986-87	1,830,700	+11·1
1987-88	1,945,400	+6·3
1988-89	2,328,800	+19·7
1989-90	2,840,400	+22·0
1990-91	2,693,000	−5·2

Prices were calculated by use of the GDP deflator index.

The figures are inclusive of the following programmes:

Youth Training Scheme
Employment Training
Technical and Vocational Education Initiative
Non Advanced Further Education
Business Growth Training
Skills Training Agency
Adult Training
Scientific and Technical Equipment in Schools

and all related administration costs net of receipts.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the latest level of unemployment for *(a)* England and *(b)* Cornwall.

Mr. Nicholls: In February 1990 the unadjusted number of unemployed claimants was 1,272,230 in England and 14,678 in Cornwall and Isles of Scilly.

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what changes he intends to make to the compilation and publication of labour market statistics and other information following the introduction of training and enterprise councils.

Mr. Nicholls: None.

Industrial Action

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the total number of working days lost due to industrial action in *(a)* January and February 1979, *(b)* 1988 and *(c)* 1989.

Mr. Nicholls: The total number of working days lost as a result of industrial action in January and February 1979 was 5·4 million. There were 3·7 million days lost in the whole of 1988 and it is provisionally estimated that 4·1 million days were lost in 1989.

Health and Safety

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will estimate the additional resources which will be needed by local authorities to enforce the Health and Safety (Enforcing Authority) Regulations 1989;

(2) whether he will allocate additional funds to local authorities in whose areas major pop concerts are held, to enable them to implement the Health and Safety (Enforcing Authority) Regulations 1989.

Mr. Nicholls: It is for local authorities to determine the resources they need to enforce the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974. The local authority associations agreed to local authorities undertaking additional responsibilities, including health and safety in entertainment, under the Health and Safety (Enforcing Authority) Regulations 1989, without extra resources, but acknowledged that local authorities would need to have effective priority planning systems to ensure that they address the higher-risk activities.

Easington Colliery (Flooding)

Mr. Cummings: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will call for a report from Her Majesty's chief inspector of mines on the flooding of the low main seam at Easington colliery.

Mr. Nicholls: No. The Health and Safety Executive has inspected the flood site and will continue to monitor the situation.

Disabled People

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the average annual net cost to the Treasury of *(a)* a disabled person supported in the sheltered placement scheme and *(b)* a disabled person supported in a sheltered workshop or Remploy factory.

Mr. Eggar: The most recent estimates made by my Department, which relate to 1986-87, are:

	£
Sheltered placement scheme	260
Sheltered workshops	2,620
Remploy	2,630

The basis for these estimates, which depend upon a number of assumptions, is described in the Department of Employment research paper No. 69.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment for each training and enterprise council established, how many board members have *(a)* small business experience, *(b)* hotel and catering experience and *(c)* tourism, leisure and related industry experience, excluding *(b)*; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Training and enterprise councils (TECs) will include lists of their board members in their corporate plans. Private sector board members should broadly reflect the mix of commerce and industry in their area and should include executives with first-hand experience of running small businesses as well as major employers. In addition, TECs will need to demonstrate that they command support in the business community across the whole area which they cover.

Skill Centres

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many offers for the skill centres included a request that the Government should provide money to take over the skill centres; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: The Skills Training Agency (STA) was offered for sale by private tender. Details of individual offers received are commercially confidential. It was for individual bidders to decide whether to make allowances in their offers in respect of particular expenditures which they envisaged if their bids were successful.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the offers received for the skill centres, give the reason for rejection, where applicable in each case; and state who made the evaluation of the offers.

Mr. Eggar: The Skills Training Agency (STA) was offered for sale by private tender. Details of individual offers received are commercially confidential. The Government's sale advisers, Deloitte Corporate Finance, assessed all offers against the Government's six objectives for the sale (a copy of which was placed in the Vote Office on 13 February 1990). Deloittes, in conjunction with my Department's other advisers, evaluated all the offers and made recommendations to my Department.

Correspondence (MEPs)

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many communications he has received from Members of the European Parliament since 18 June 1989 that concern local or United Kingdom matters; and if he will make it his practice where such matters are involved to provide the hon. Member for the local constituency with a copy of the correspondence and the reply for information.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* I have received a total of 40 communications since 18 June 1989, 29 of which dealt with local matters and the remaining 11 with national matters.

When a Member of the European Parliament writes about a matter which is of purely local interest, my reply would suggest that the MEP should refer the matter to the hon. Member for the constituency concerned. Such replies would normally be copied to the hon. Member concerned only if the MEP had copied his own letter in this way.

SCOTLAND

Local Government Finance

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the maximum payment of community charge, including community water charge, payable by a single pensioner and a pensioner couple on a basic retirement income in Scotland in 1989-90 and 1990-91 for each local authority; and if he will express each sum payable as a percentage of the total community charge in that area.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I have been asked to reply.

Single pensioners and pensioner couples in receipt of only basic state retirement pension (currently £43·60 a week plus £26·20 a week for a dependent partner) with no other source of income and savings of £3,000 or less are entitled to the maximum community charge rebate of 80 per cent. of the community charge for the area. This excludes community water charges, which are not rebated.

The information requested is in the tables.

Single Pensioner

	1989-80 Annual Community Charge and Community Water Charge payment	*As a percentage of total Community Charge (including Water Charge)*	*1990-91 Annual Community Charge and Community Water Charge payment*	*As a percentage of total Community Charge (including Water Charge)*
Berwickshire	72·00	31	70·20	29
Etterick and Lauderdale	74·20	30	72·00	29
Roxburgh	74·20	30	72·60	29
Tweeddale	74·40	30	72·40	29
Clackmannan	72·00	24	82·20	23
Falkirk	63·80	25	69·60	24
Stirling	74·00	24	83·40	23
Annandale and Eskdale	73·10	29	83·00	30
Nithsdale	71·50	29	81·80	30
Stewartry	71·10	29	79·60	30
Wigtown	71·70	29	79·80	30

	1989-90 Annual Community Charge and Community Water Charge payment	*As a percentage of total Community Charge (including Water Charge)*	*1990-91 Annual Community Charge and Community Water Charge payment*	*As a percentage of total Community Charge (including Water Charge)*
Dunfermline	73·00	25	77·20	24
Kirkcaldy	74·00	25	77·80	24
North East Fife	78·40	25	80·40	24
Aberdeen City	84·80	28	86·60	28
Banff and Buchan	79·14	29	79·60	29
Gordon	76·60	29	76·00	30
Kincardine and Deeside	74·20	30	72·60	31
Moray	76·20	29	75·80	30
Badenoch and Strathspey	63·00	27	70·00	28
Caithness	61·00	27	69·40	29
Inverness	61·20	27	69·20	29
Lochaber	63·40	27	73·40	28
Nairn	61·60	27	69·60	29
Ross and Cromarty	63·80	27	73·80	28
Skye and Lochalsh	61·00	27	69·40	29
Sutherland	57·20	28	67·20	29
East Lothian	89·20	24	96·60	24
Edinburgh City	92·80	24	102·80	23
Midlothian	87·20	24	94·00	24
West Lothian	86·20	24	92·60	24
Argyll and Bute	70·60	25	80·80	25
Bearsden and Milngavie	74·80	25	81·00	25
Clydebank	74·60	25	85·40	25
Clydesdale	75·40	25	82·40	25
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	70·20	26	78·00	25
Cumnock and Doon Valley	70·40	26	78·20	25
Cunninghame	70·80	25	79·80	25
Dumbarton	74·80	25	87·60	25
East Kilbride	78·80	25	87·40	25
Eastwood	71·60	25	74·80	26
Glasgow City	76·40	25	84·40	25
Hamilton	73·40	25	81·40	25
Inverclyde	73·40	25	80·40	25
Kilmarnock and Loudon	69·00	26	77·20	26
Kyle and Carrick	76·80	25	83·20	25
Monklands	73·80	25	84·00	25
Motherwell	76·20	25	80·00	25
Renfrew	74·20	25	84·80	25
Strathkelvin	75·00	25	83·80	25
Angus	75·40	26	77·00	26
Dundee City	81·60	25	84·00	25
Perth and Kinross	76·60	26	77·60	26
Orkney	50·40	34	56·80	36
Shetland	28·26	25	57·49	45
Western Isles	61·40	36	75·20	38

Pensioner couple

	1989-90 Annual Community Charge and Community Water Charge payment	*As a percentage of total Community Charge (including Water Charge)*	*1990-91 Annual Community Charge and Community Water Charge payment*	*As a percentage of total Community Charge (including Water Charge)*
Berwickshire	113·00	26	112·40	25
Etterick and Lauderdale	117·40	25	116·00	25
Roxburgh	117·40	25	117·20	25
Tweeddale	117·80	25	116·80	25
Clackmannan	129·00	22	149·40	22
Falkirk	112·60	22	124·20	22
Stirling	133·00	22	151·80	22
Annandale and Eskdale	118·20	25	132·00	25
Nithsdale	115·00	25	129·60	25
Stewartry	114·20	25	125·20	26
Wigtown	115·40	25	125·60	26
Dunfermline	128·00	23	139·40	22
Kirkcaldy	130·00	22	140·60	22
North East Fife	138·80	22	145·80	22
Aberdeen City	139·60	24	141·20	24
Banff and Buchan	128·28	25	127·20	25
Gordon	123·20	25	120·00	25
Kincardine and Deeside	118·40	25	113·20	26
Moray	122·40	25	119·60	25
Badenoch and Strathspey	106·00	24	114·00	24

	1989-90 Annual Community Charge and Community Water Charge payment	*As a percentage of total Community Charge (including Water Charge)*	*1990-91 Annual Community Charge and Community Water Charge payment*	*As a percentage of total Community Charge (including Water Charge)*
Caithness	102·00	24	112·80	25
Inverness	102·40	24	112·40	25
Lochaber	106·80	24	120·80	24
Nairn	103·20	24	113·20	25
Ross and Cromarty	107·60	23	121·60	24
Skye and Lochalsh	102·00	24	112·80	25
Sutherland	94·40	24	108·40	25
East Lothian	160·40	22	174·20	22
Edinburgh City	167·60	22	186·60	22
Midlothian	156·40	22	169·00	22
West Lothian	154·40	22	166·20	22
Argyll and Bute	122·20	23	140·60	23
Bearsden and Milngavie	130·60	23	141·00	23
Clydebank	130·20	23	149·80	23
Clydesdale	131·80	23	143·80	23
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	121·40	23	135·00	23
Cumnock and Doon Valley	121·80	23	135·40	23
Cunninghame	122·60	23	138·60	23
Dumbarton	130·60	23	154·20	22
East Kilbride	138·60	22	153·80	22
Eastwood	124·20	23	128·60	23
Glasgow City	133·80	23	147·80	23
Hamilton	127·80	23	141·80	23
Inverclyde	127·80	23	139·80	23
Kilmarnock and Loudon	119·00	23	133·40	23
Kyle and Carrick	134·60	23	145·40	23
Monklands	128·60	23	147·00	23
Motherwell	133·40	23	139·00	23
Renfrew	129·40	23	148·60	23
Strathkelvin	131·00	23	146·60	23
Angus	129·80	23	133·00	23
Dundee City	142·20	23	147·00	23
Perth and Kinross	132·20	23	134·20	23
Orkney	74·80	28	82·60	29
Shetland	49·73	22	74·94	35
Western Isles	88·80	29	105·40	30

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many pensioners have been refused community charge rebate in Scotland because of the level of their savings.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I have been asked to reply. The information requested is not available.

Travellers

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many proposals from each of the district and islands councils to provide sites for travelling people he has received to date; how many he has accepted from each district and islands council and how many he has rejected, and on what grounds he rejected them, from each district and islands council.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Twenty-three official traveller sites have been provided to date and building work on a further three permanent sites is expected to be completed shortly. In addition 16 locations identified by local authorities are currently at various stages of consideration. Three sites have been refused planning permission following public local inquiries, in the district councils of Dundee, Stirling and Perth and Kinross. More detailed information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will consider legislation to compel local authorities to meet their pitch targets for official sites for travelling people in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No.

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if it remains official policy that permanent sites should facilitate the movement of travelling families; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Government are continuing their long-established policy of encouraging the provision of a network of properly equipped sites for travelling people throughout Scotland. The policy is backed by the availability of 100 per cent. capital grant towards the development costs of the sites. A full network of official sites should help to make it easier for travelling families to move legally from area to area.

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what formula was used to determine how many official sites should be provided for travelling people in Scotland, as recommended by his advisory committee, SDD circular No. 5/1989, appendix C.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The advisory committee held extensive consultations with individual local authorities to assess traveller site requirements throughout Scotland and its recommendations form the basis of the pitch targets set.

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has on instances where travellers have been encouraged by local authorities to provide their own site, as recommended in the third report of his advisory committee on travelling people.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No information is held centrally on the extent to which local authorities have encouraged provision of travellers' sites by travellers.

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the latest estimate for the number of travelling people in Scotland; who provides this estimate; how it is updated; and what information about travelling families will be sought within the 1991 census.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The latest estimate, based on information from local authorities, suggests that there are about 3,000 travellers in Scotland, in 750 families. Information on number is reviewed by the Secretary of State's advisory committee on Scotland's travelling people in the course of its regular contacts with local authorities. Travelling families will be expected to provide the same information as anyone else in the 1991 census. No special information about travelling people will be sought.

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the latest target set, and by which date this target should be met, for *(a)* the total recommended number of official sites for travelling people in Scotland and *(b)* the recommended number of official sites for travelling people for each of the district and islands councils.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The pitch target set for each district council is listed in the table. No specific date has been set for the achievement of these targets, but local authorities are encouraged to meet them as soon as possible.

Pitch targets

Region and District	*Target*
Borders	
Berwickshire	15
Ettrick and Lauderdale	6
Roxburgh	10
Tweeddale	10
Central	
Clackmannan	20
Falkirk	28
Stirling	42
Dumfries and Galloway	
Annandale and Eskdale	12
Nithsdale	18
Stewartry	3
Wigtown	17
Fife	
Dunfermline	8
Kirkcaldy	18
North East Fife	20
Grampian	
City of Aberdeen	36
Banff and Buchan	20
Gordon	0
Kincardine and Deeside	0
Moray	10
Highland	
Badenoch and Strathspey	6
Inverness	24
Lochaber	30
Nairn	20
Caithness	
Ross and Cromarty	
Skye and Lochalsh	
Sutherland	
Lothian	
City of Edinburgh	40
East Lothian	20
Midlothian	
West Lothian	45
Strathclyde	
Argyll and Bute	38
Cunninghame	24
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	12
Kyle and Carrick	8
Cumnock and Doon Valley	6
Dumbarton	20
Clydebank	12
Bearsden and Milngavie	20
Strathkelvin	
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	
Glasgow	55
Monklands	32
Motherwell	56
Hamilton	42
East Kilbride	6
Clydesdale	15
Eastwood	0
Renfrew	16
Inverclyde	0
Tayside	
Angus	37
City of Dundee	20
Perth and Kinross	85
Total—Scotland	982

There is no identified demand for travellers' sites in the areas of the islands councils.

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which of the district and islands councils have met their recommended pitch target for their provision of official sites for travelling people in their area to the latest available date.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: At 31 March 1990 the local authorities which have met their recommended pitch target are listed in the table:

Ettrick and Lauderdale
Tweeddale
Falkirk
Annandale and Eskdale
Stewartry
North East Fife
Banff and Buchan
Gordon
Kincardine and Deeside
Caithness
Inverness
Nairn
Ross and Cromarty
Skye and Lochalsh
Sutherland
Clydebank
Cumnock and Doon Valley
Cunninghame
Dumbarton
Eastwood
Hamilton

Inverclyde
Kyle and Carrick
Renfrew

There is no identified demand for travellers' sites in the areas of the islands councils.

A9 Alness-Tain

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the current anticipated start date for improvement of the A9 Alness-Tain; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: There are two remaining sections to be upgraded on the A9 between Alness and Tain. The sections are between Broomhill and Logie Easter and between Logie Easter and Garrick bridge. The necessary preparatory work and statutory procedures are planned to be completed by September 1991 and September 1993 respectively. Actual start dates for schemes are decided annually for the year ahead, in the light of the relative priority of the competing schemes and of the available financial resources.

Maternity Services, Moray

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he has yet received the option appraisal document relating to maternity, obstetric and gynaecological services in Moray; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what official consultations he has held in the past three months with *(a)* Grampian health board and *(b)* Moray health council in connection with the development of maternity services in Moray;

(3) what time scale he envisages for *(a)* improvement of existing maternity services in Moray and *(b)* the establishment of enhanced maternity services in Moray;

(4) when he anticipates making a public pronouncement on the future development of maternity services in Moray.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Grampian health board's option appraisal submission has been received and, in view of the scale of investment required for the preferred option, it is being given detailed and careful consideration.

I have not met either the Grampian health board or Moray local health council within the last three months.

Grampian health board has already improved maternity services in west Grampian and I understand that agreement has also been reached on the transfer of obstetric, gynaecological and paediatric services for patients west of the Spey to Highland health board.

Moray

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next expects to visit Moray constituency.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Neither my right hon. and learned Friend nor I have any plans at present for a ministerial visit to Moray constituency. However, as chairman of the Conservatives in Scotland I will be addressing a public meeting in Moray constituency on 10 April 1990.

Scottish Office (Staffing)

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the full complement of staff employed by the Scottish Office in each of its Departments, and what are the projections for number of employees in each of the next three years.

Mr. Rifkind: There is no fixed complement for the Scottish Office, but at 1 March 1990 the number of staff employed in the Scottish Office (including the Scottish prison service) was 10,212. Details are as follows:

Department	*Number of staff*
Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland	1,474·5
Scottish Development Department	1,289·5
Scottish Education Department	552·0
Scottish Home and Health Department	876·5
Industry Department for Scotland	384·5
Central Services	1,700·0
Scottish Prison Service	3,935·0
Total	10,212·0

Estimates of the number of staff who could be employed within the relevant running cost provision are contained in tables 15.11.3 and 15.7.12 of the commentary on the Scottish public expenditure programmes to 1993, a copy of which is in the Library.

Registers of Scotland

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about his plans to establish the Department of the Registers of Scotland as a "next steps" agency.

Mr. Rifkind: I informed the House on 11 January that the Department of the Registers of Scotland was to be established as the first "next steps" agency from within my sphere of responsibility on 1 April. I shall preside at a launch ceremony on 6 April.

Over the next three years I have set the agency a target of reducing the turnround times on its two principal categories of work as follows:

> for recording writs on the Sasines Register, a reduction from 30 to 17 weeks;
>
> for registration of dealings on the Land Register, a reduction from 35 to 19 weeks.

The agency's long-term aim will be to achieve turnround times of eight weeks for both registers.

During the coming year, the Keeper will be presenting a phased programme for the extension of the Land Register to the remaining two thirds of Scotland.

In addition, I have set the agency a target of achieving a reduction in unit costs of at least 5 per cent. in real terms for each of its main categories of work in each of the three years from 1990-91 to 1992-93.

I am establishing an advisory board to give me a view on the range and quality of the agency's services and on its priorities. The membership will represent the main users of the agency's services.

The Keeper of the Registers of Scotland as the agency's chief executive, will be directly accountable to me for the agency's achievements.

I have placed a copy of the agency's framework document and the accompanying press release in the

Libraries of both Houses. This latter document contains details of the target turnround times I have set for the main activities of the agency over its first three years.

Health Service Staff

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state the total staff pay bills for speech therapy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, clinical psychology and pharmacy, for 1986-87, 1987-88, 1988-89, and 1989-90; and if he will provide the latest figures on staff pay bills for speech therapy in each area health authority.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 27 March 1990]:* Information on total staff pay bills is not available centrally before 1988-89 nor at health board level. The figures for 1988-89 and estimated figures for 1989-90 based on returns for the first three quarters are shown in the table.

Total annual gross pay by staff group: Scotland

£ million

Staff group	*1988-89*	*1989-90*[1]
Speech therapy	2·9	3·8
Physiotherapy	13·8	15·7
Occupational therapy	5·9	7·1
Clinical psychology	3·0	3·5
Pharmacy	6·9	8·0

[1] Estimate.

Anthony Cavendish

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total cost to the Crown of the proceedings in relation to Anthony Cavendish.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 3 April 1990]:* My right hon. and learned Friend does not yet know the total cost to the Crown of the legal action The Lord Advocate *v The Scotsman* Publications and Others relating to the book "Inside Intelligence". These costs still require to be finally determined.

Skiing Developments

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many representations he has received in relation to that portion of the Highland regional council structure plan relating to skiing development at Lurcher's gulley and in the northern corries of the Cairngorms; how many of these representations were opposed to such development; how many were in favour; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Proposals for the extension of skiing into Lurcher's gully in the Cairngorms feature in Highland regional council's structure plan review which was formally submitted to my right hon. and learned Friend for his approval on 19 January. The period during which objections could be made ended on 2 March, by which time 7,120 letters objecting to the proposals had been received. A further 135 letters had been received expressing support for the proposals. My right hon. and learned Friend is considering the council's proposals and the representations received and will announce his decision in due course.

DEFENCE

Nuclear Tests

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether there have been any recent British nuclear weapons tests or United States tests carried out on behalf of the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The last United Kingdom nuclear test was, as my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement informed the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas) on 14 December 1989, *Official Report,* column *820,* conducted at the Nevada test site on 8 December 1989.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has any further information regarding recent joint United Kingdom/United States nuclear warhead tests in the United States.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Yes. Pursuant to the answer of my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence Procurement to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas) of 14 December 1989, *Official Report,* column *820,* I can now say that on 16 December, some eight days after the test, a minor seepage of radioactive gas began in the vicinity of the test site. The seepage, which lasted for about three weeks, involved barely detectable levels of radioactivity and posed no health or environmental hazard on or off the site. Very low-level radioactive seepage following such tests is not unusual.

Low Flying

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Don Valley on 7 March, *Official Report,* column *709,* what height restrictions and operational radius are in effect for low-flying military jet aircraft at the aerodrome at Netherthorpe.

Mr. Neubert: As a licensed aerodrome, Netherthorpe is allocated, under the provisions of the Air Navigation Order, an aerodrome traffic zone of 2 nautical miles radius to a height of 2,000 ft during its daily hours of operation. Although military aircraft are not generally bound by the Air Navigation Order, it is my Department's practice to reflect such provisions in military flying regulations, and this is the case in respect of Netherthorpe.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what changes are planned for the structure of the military low-flying system in west Yorkshire as a result of the changes to the boundaries of the Leeds-Bradford special rules airspace with effect from 3 May; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what changes are planned for the structure of the military low-flying system in the vicinity of Blackpool following the abolition of the Blackpool special rules zone with effect from 3 May; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neubert: Changes in regulations governing civilian air traffic in the United Kingdom are, where appropriate, reflected in the regulations governing the United Kingdom military low-flying system, and the implications, if any, of the changes to which the hon. Member refers will be considered in due course as part of the continual monitoring of the operation of the military low-flying system.

Bombs (Accidental Release)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list, by date and location for the last four years to date, the occasions when a bomb has been accidently released by a Royal Air Force aircrew; and if he will show in his answer *(a)* the type of aircraft involved and *(b)* whether it was (i) a live or (ii) a dummy bomb.

Mr. Neubert: There has been one occasion since March 1986 when RAF aircrew accidentally released a weapon outside military range danger areas. This was on 2 March 1988; the aircraft was a Tornado GR1; the weapon was a practice bomb containing only a small "spotting" charge; and it was not found.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list, by date and location, for the last four years to date, the occasions when a bomb has been accidently released by the aircrew of a NATO air force over the United Kingdom; and if he will show in his answer *(a)* the air force involved, *(b)* the type of aircraft and *(c)* whether the bomb was (i) live or (ii) a dummy one.

Mr. Neubert: We have no record of any bombs being accidentally released over the United Kingdom by the aircrew of other NATO air forces.

Air Traffic Controllers

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many military air traffic controllers are working alongside civil air traffic controllers to date; at what locations; if he will list them by unit; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will list by year for the last five years, and by location, the number of military air traffic controllers who have worked alongside civil air traffic controllers.

Mr. Neubert: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the hon. Member.

Sea Harrier (Accident)

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the date, location and circumstances of the crash of a Sea Harrier aircraft aboard the aircraft carrier Ark Royal during February; what injuries were sustained by the pilot; what was the tail number of the aircraft; and what lessons have been learnt from the series of Sea Harrier accidents in the past year.

Mr. Neubert: I refer the hon. Member to my reply on 9 February 1990, at column *816*. There was no such crash. All accidents which occurred during 1989 remain under official investigation.

Cruise Missiles

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what agreements have been reached at ministerial level regarding the deployment of sea-launched cruise missiles by NATO.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: NATO Ministers have agreed that, as part of the post-INF restructuring of nuclear forces, SACEUR should consider the availability of the whole spectrum of nuclear weapons, including SLCMs.

Defence Review

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department is currently conducting a full defence review of United Kingdom requirements and deployments.

Mr. Neubert: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 3 April to the hon. Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson).

Soviet Nuclear Tests

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of the security implications for the United Kingdom of the decision by the Government of the Soviet Union to transfer testing of nuclear weapons from Semipalatinsk, Kazakhstan, to an island test site within the Arctic circle.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There is none.

Soviet Aircraft (Interceptions)

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if a Soviet aircraft has even been intercepted by a Royal Air Force aircraft operating from Stornoway;

(2) how many interceptions of Soviet military aircraft were made by Royal Air Force aircraft in the United Kingdom air defence region per week, on average, during 1989.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Detailed information about interceptions of Soviet aircraft by the Royal Air Force is classified.

Stornoway Airport

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many simulated attacks on Stornoway airport are scheduled during Exercise Elder Forest 90.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress in the phase II construction work at Stornoway airport.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Construction of new fuel installations at Stornoway started in 1989, and work on a new fuel jetty and pipeline began in January this year; both are due for completion in early 1991. Planning is well advanced for work on nine aircraft shelters and associated support facilities, which is expected to start at the end of this year and be completed in late 1992; some additional work on upgrading elements of the airfield infrastructure will be carried out in the same period.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on the numbers and types of aircraft to be deployed at Stornoway airport for Exercise Elder Forest 90, the units to which these aircraft belong and the dates of their arrival at and departure from Stornoway;

(2) what are the earliest and latest times of the day when flying activity is scheduled for jet aircraft deployed at Stornoway airport for Exercise Elder Forest 90; and whether any activity outside those times will be permitted.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are no plans to deploy military aircraft to Stornoway airport during Exercise Elder Forest 90, which is scheduled from 23 to 27 April. However, a number of Tornado F3 aircraft will use the airport as a turnround base during the exercise. It is not possible to specify in advance the numbers of aircraft, the units involved, or the arrival and departure times; these will depend upon how the exercise develops. There are, however, no plans to use the airport outside the hours of 8 am to 10 pm.

Link-Miles Ltd.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the contracts his Department has with Singer Link-Miles.

Mr. Alan Clark: The Ministry of Defence has at present 106 current headquarters contracts with Link-Miles Ltd; a further 34 have been completed and closed during the financial year 1989-90. The total value of these contracts is £175 million, of which £30 million remains to be paid. The company supplies flight, maritime and vehicle simulators, and training systems.

Hydrographic Office, Taunton

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about agency status for the Hydrographic Office at Taunton.

Mr. Tom King: On 6 April, I will be launching the Hydrographic Office as the Ministry of Defence's first defence support agency. The agency comprises the Hydrographic Office at Taunton and the associated chart depots at Portsmouth, Devonport and Rosyth naval bases. The Hydrographer of the Navy, Rear-Admiral J. A. L. Myres, has been appointed the agency's chief executive.

As I said in the House on 18 October 1989, columns 154-55, defence support agencies will be run on "next steps" lines but will remain within the defence chain of command. Such agencies complement my Department's new management strategy, under which I am to secure better value for the defence budget through closer alignment of financial accountability with line management responsibilities, and by a system of performance reviews. The establishment of the Hydrographic Office as a defence support agency is a significant landmark in this process.

The aim of the Hydrographic Office has always been, and will continue to be, to supply hydrographic, oceanographic and other such information to the Royal Navy, while also offering unclassified charts and publications to the merchant marine and other non-naval users. The professional standards which have been the hallmark of success for the Hydrographic Office for nearly two centuries will continue to be upheld. The greater freedom and flexibility now granted to the chief executive will provide him with new opportunities to build on this firm base.

Accordingly, the chief executive has been set the following key targets:

To improve the quality of service by reducing, within the year 1990-91, the time taken to promulgate all immediate dangers by radio navigation warnings from 24 to 20 hours; increasing the number of new charts and new editions by at least 5 per cent. per annum; reducing by 70 charts per annum the imperial unit charts through modernisation.

To increase the revenue from commercial sales by 10 per cent. over 5 years.

To increase productivity by an average of at least 1 per cent. per annum.

To reduce gross operating costs by £100,000 in 1990-91.

By these and other improvements in performance, to achieve an overall increase in efficiency by an average of 3·5 per cent. per annum over the years 1991-92 to 1994-95.

To develop, within 1990-91, an improved system of output measurement so that progress against this overall target can be accurately assessed.

To develop, within 1990-91, improved management information and management accounting systems.

Procurement Executive Airfields

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will make a statement about the future of the procurement executive airfields.

Mr. Neubert: In due course.

Royal Naval Armaments Museum

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide an inventory of items in the royal naval armaments museum, Gosport.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the ownership of items in the royal naval armaments museum, Gosport.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The majority of items held in the naval ordnance collection are owned by the Ministry of Defence, but the collection does contain some exhibits which have been loaned by museums or private individuals.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the future of the royal naval armaments musuem, Gosport.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A number of options for the future of the naval ordnance museum, Gosport, are under consideration in the wider context of our disposal of the ex-royal naval armament depot at Priddy's Hard.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what talks he held with locally elected representatives prior to the issue of a letter by Ms. Jan Wildy, head of central disposal unit at the Ministry of Defence stating that further discussions with the borough of Gosport over the future of the royal naval armaments museum at Gosport are to be abandoned.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Talks on the disposal of the ex-royal naval armament depot, Priddy's Hard, Gosport, including the future of the naval ordnance museum, were held with locally elected representatives by my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman) on 16 December 1987 in Portsmouth, and on 25 May 1988 in London; and by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence Procurement on 5 July 1989 in London.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of the royal naval armaments museum, Gosport in each of the last five years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Annual maintenance costs of the naval ordnance collection were:

	£K
1985-86	52·41
1986-87	53·95
1987-88	55·98
1988-89	54·83
[1]1989-90	55·95

[1] Estimated.

European Fighter Aircraft

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what problems have arisen in the reaching of an agreement on the nose radar development contract for the European fighter aircraft; and if he will make a statement;

(2) when he expects an agreement to be reached with his counterparts on the choice of consortium for the European fighter aircraft nose radar development contract; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: At this stage I have nothing to add to what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have said on 6 March, column 712, and 23 January, columns 869-72, respectively.

Duchess of Kent Military Hospital

Mr Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make an announcement about the future of the Duchess of Kent military hospital at Catterick.

Mr Archie Hamilton: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) on 5 March 1990, *Official Report*, column *537*.

Hunts (Licensing)

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what are the conditions of the licence held by the Borders/West Percy hunt that allows them to hunt on Ministry of Defence land at Otterburn;

(2) what are the conditions of the licence held by the Cambridgeshire hunt that allows them to hunt on Ministry of Defence land at Brampton wood;

(3) what are the conditions of the licence held by the Tynedale hunt that allows them to hunt on Ministry of Defence land at Ouston;

(4) what are the conditions of the licences held by the Bedale and West of York hunt that allow them to hunt on Ministry of Defence land at Ripon Parks and Catterick;

(5) what are the conditions of the licences held by the Wensleydale harriers that allow them to hunt on Ministry of Defence land at Stainton and Bellerby;

(6) what are the conditions of the licences held by the Zetland hunt that allow them to hunt on Ministry of Defence land at Feldom and Catterick;

(7) what is the cost of issuing licences to hunts to use Ministry of Defence land; and what contribution individual hunts make to this cost.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the hon. Member.

Challenger 2 Tank

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether Vickers Defence Systems has been notified that it has successfully completed the second of three contractual milestones for the development and demarcation of the Challenger 2 tank.

Mr. Alan Clark: No. The milestone 2 report was received from Vickers Defence Systems on 9 March and is now being assessed by my Department.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 18 April 1990

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Solicitors

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Attorney-General what advice has been given by the Lord Chancellor to judges about criticising solicitors from the bench without giving the solicitor an opportunity to be heard.

The Attorney-General: It would not be appropriate for the Lord Chancellor to issue advice to judges on a matter of this kind. However, in May 1989, the presiding judges of England and Wales issued a notice to all judges emphasising that, while the decision as to whether or not to criticise a solicitor in open court must be one for the discretion of the individual judge, there is and always has been an obligation on the judge both to give the solicitor an opportunity to be heard and to refrain from making criticism in open court until after the facts have been established.

Burglary

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Attorney-General what guidance is given to magistrates as to whether magistrates courts or Crown courts are the appropriate courts for dealing with domestic burglary.

The Attorney-General: Subject to the relevant legal provisions, the decision whether an either-way offence should be tried summarily or committed to the Crown Court is one for the discretion of the court. However, the Lord Chief Justice has set up a working party under the chairmanship of Lord Justice Farquharson to consider what guidelines might properly be given to magistrates on the committal of either-way cases, including domestic burglary, to the Crown court.

Social Security Appeals

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Attorney-General what is the average time which elapses between a letter seeking leave to appeal to the Social Security Commissioners and notification of the decision of the Social Security Commissioners.

The Attorney-General: The average in 1989 was 404 days.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Attorney-General what proposals he has received to shorten delays in the appeal process through the Social Security Commissioners.

The Attorney-General: I have received none.

EMPLOYMENT

National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses

125. **Mr. Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he next expects to meet the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses.

126. **Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he next expects to meet the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses.

127. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he next expects to meet the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses.

Mr. Eggar: I am always prepared to see representatives of small business organisations who wish to meet with me.

Training (Staffordshire)

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the current special training needs funding made in respect of each trainee in Staffordshire; if he will identify extra training resources required by those with special training needs; and what are the proposed figures for the forthcoming year in respect of each trainee in Staffordshire for special training needs.

Mr. Eggar: The information could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Training Agency programmes allow training to be tailored to meet individual requirements, and funding depends on the nature and severity of each trainee's need. The figures for the forthcoming year are for agreement between individual training providers and the Training Agency's area office and, in future, the training and enterprise councils.

Disabled People

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many severely disabled people have received help under the business on own account scheme in each of the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Eggar: The information requested about the number of severely disabled people helped under the business on own account scheme for each of the last five years is given in the table:

	Number of approvals
1985-86	5
1986-87	1
1987-88	6
1988-89	8
1989-90	7

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps his Department has taken to ensure that 3 per cent. of its work force is registered disabled people.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 5 April 1990]:* The Employment Department group has developed a number of initiatives to attract, retain and develop more staff with disabilities, both registered and unregistered. Specific measures include guaranteed interviews for registered disabled people with the minimum educational qualifications; surveys of the needs of staff with disabilities and appropriate remedial action; new guidance for management; the improvement of outreach to organisations of and for people with disabilities; the development of arrangements for staff with severe mobility difficulties to work at home; the routine consideration of access to buildings, training and developmental opportunities and the provision in operational plans for special aids and equipment.

Careers Service

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he intends to broaden the scope of the careers service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: I have at present no plans to do so.

Earnings

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a table showing average weekly earnings for men and women by *(a)* industry and *(b)* industrial sector for the years 1980-89.

Mr. Nicholls: The information is published in tables 79 to 82 of part C of the annual new earnings survey reports for full-time male and female adult employees, and in table 177 of part F for part-time female adult employees. Equivalent figures for part-time males are not available. Copies of the reports are in the Library.

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a table showing the numbers of men, the numbers of women, and the percentage of the population whose average weekly earnings are *(a)* £5, *(b)* £10, *(c)* £15, *(d)* £20, *(e)* £25, *(f)* £30, *(g)* £35, *(h)* £40, *(i)* £45, *(j)* £50, *(k)* £55, *(l)* £60, and *(m)* £65, or more below the average weekly, by industry sector for each of the years 1980 to 1989.

Mr. Nicholls: The readily available information is published in tables 66 to 69 of part C of the annual new earnings survey reports for full-time male and female adult employees. Equivalent analyses for the weekly earnings of part-time employees are not available; the distribution of the hourly earnings of part-time adult women is published in table 172 of part F. Copies of the reports are in the Library.

YTS

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will set out the latest available figures for *(a)* fatal and *(b)* serious injuries among YTS trainees; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholls: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to his hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) *Official Report*, 26 March 1990, column *58*.

THE ARTS

Glory of the Garden Programme

Mr. Butler: To ask the Minister for the Arts what further progress he has made with the Glory of the Garden programme.

Mr. Luce: I have recently announced major changes in the structure of arts funding in the English regions. These will build on the changes begun in the Arts Council's Glory of the Garden initiative and will include a further substantial shift in grant-giving responsibilities from the Arts Council to the regions.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

China

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what representations he has made to the Chinese authorities regarding the raid on the home and subsequent detention of Pastor Xiangao of Canton;

(2) what representations he has made to the Chinese authorities regarding the persecution of the Church there; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: Our inquiries indicate that Pastor Lin Xiangao has by now been released. We and our EC partners have again recently expressed our concern to the Chinese Government about freedom of religion and the treatment of the Church in China, and specifically about the arrest of certain Catholic priests last year.

Casablanca

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement concerning the seizure of cargo from the vessel Casablanca at Puerto Cortes, in so far as British interests are involved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: We understand that on 22 March at Puerto Cortes, Honduras, part of the cargo of bananas of the Netherlands-registered vessel Casablanca was removed in pursuance of an order by a Honduran court in favour of a US-owned banana exporter against a Honduran grower, and that the bananas removed had been bought for a British company for export from Honduras. Another vessel experienced similar difficulties on 30 March. Her Majesty's ambassador has expressed to the Honduran authorities our concern over the disruption of trade and our hope that any legal problems can quickly be resolved, to enable trade to resume without hindrance.

Hong Kong

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what procedures are followed when a pregnant woman in the detention camps in Hong Kong goes into labour.

Mr. Maude: All the centres have well-equipped clinics but they do not have facilities for child delivery. When a woman goes into labour an ambulance is called by the clinic staff and she is immediately transferred to a maternity home or hospital. The ambulance response times are very short.

Mr. Shore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many posts the Chinese Government have said they would not allow Hong Kong residents with British passports to occupy.

Mr. Maude: The Basic Law provides that certain principal posts in the Hong Kong special administrative region should be restricted to Chinese nationals who are permanent residents of the special administrative region and who do not hold right of abode in any foreign country. Based upon the current establishment of the Civil Service, this would affect some 20 to 30 posts. In addition, the Basic Law places the same restrictions on members of the Executive Council and the President of the Legislative Council: it also limits the number of seats in the legislature which may be occupied by persons who are not Chinese nationals or who have the right of abode in foreign countries to 20 per cent.

Terrorism

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what definition of terrorism his Department has developed for policy purposes.

Mr. Waldegrave: We use as a general guide the definition assigned to "terrorism" in section 20 of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989.

Lebanon (Hostages)

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps have been taken in the last two months by the Government to try and free the British hostages held in the Lebanon.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have continued the efforts described in the answer give by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 30 January to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Leith (Mr. Brown). The hon. Gentleman may be sure that our work to secure the release of the British hostages will continue unabated.

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will arrange a meeting with Mr. Perez de Cuellar, secretary-general of the United Nations, to press for new international measures to secure the release of British hostages held in the Lebanon.

Mr. Waldegrave: We are committed to ensuring that the plight of the hostages remains high on the international agenda. We are in regular touch with Mr. Perez de Cuellar and his staff on this and other issues.

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he plans an early meeting with the successor to the present Archbishop of Canterbury to discuss British hostages in the Lebanon.

Mr. Waldegrave: We are in close touch with the Archbishop of Canterbury and his staff about the British hostages in Lebanon. This will remain the case for as long as necessary.

Iraq (Nuclear Weapons)

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will instruct his Department to convey to the official representatives of the Arab League in London the views of Her Majesty's Government on the statement by the Arab League secretariat on 30 March supporting Iraq and criticising Her Majesty's Government regarding his statement in the House on 29 March on alleged attempts by Iraq to smuggle components for nuclear weapons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have explained in detail to the Arab League Secretary-General in Tunis our position on the prevention of the illegal export of capacitors from Britain.

Israel (Soviet Jews)

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy regarding the emigration of Soviet Jews to Israel, assuming the settlement of such emigrants within the borders of Israel prior to June 1967; and whether this policy has been made clear to the Arab League and to the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

Mr. Waldegrave: We warmly welcome the freedom of Soviet Jews to emigrate to Israel proper and elsewhere. The Arab League and the PLO are well aware that this is our view.

Palestine (Terrorist Threats)

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether his Department will seek the co-operation of the Palestine Liberation Organisation to investigate in order to establish whether any credence should be placed upon the threats of terrorist violence against Britain and other countries reported to have been made by the Islamic Army Front for the Liberation of Palestine on 31 March.

Mr. Waldegrave: No. The PLO does not include a group of this name.

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether his Department will seek the co-operation of the Palestine Liberation Organisation in order to establish whether any credence should be placed upon the threats of terrorist violence against Britain and other countries reported to have been made by a group close to the Palestine Hamas Organisation calling itself the Organisation of Revolutionary Action—Arab Resistance Front on 31 March.

Mr. Waldegrave: No. The PLO does not include a group of this name.

Jerusalem

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether, following the statement of Mr. Yasser Arafat on 31 March, he will instruct Her Majesty's Ambassador in Tunis to ask the Palestine Liberation Organisation to specify what portions of Jerusalem should become Palestinian sovereign territory, and what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on that matter.

Mr. Waldegrave: We are opposed to all unilateral moves to prejudice the final status of Jerusalem, which remains in our view to be determined by negotiation as part of a comprehensive peace settlement.

Nepal

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representation he has made to the Nepalese authorities regarding the imprisonment of the Rev. Charles Mendies.

Mr. Sainsbury: Her Majesty's ambassador in Kathmandu raised the case specifically on 8 December 1989. We have regularly conveyed British concern about the treatment of Christians in Nepal to the Nepalese Government. My noble Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office discussed these issues during his visit to Kathmandu in late February.

Olympic Games

Mr. Tom Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support British embassies abroad are now giving to the Manchester British Olympic bid; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: British missions abroad have been taking every opportunity to commend Manchester's bid to International Olympic Committee members. They have encouraged and helped IOC members to visit Manchester and have afforded every assistance to Manchester's Olympic bid committee members visiting their territories.

European Council

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will set out the criteria used in selecting the United Kingdom representative on the committee of permanent representatives to the European Council; and if he will list those who have represented the United Kingdom on COREPER since 1 January 1973.

Mr. Sainsbury: The United Kingdom's permanent representatives to the European Communities since accession in 1973 have been:

Sir Michael Palliser, 1971-75
Sir Donald Maitland, 1975-79
Sir Michael Butler, 1979-85
Sir David Hannay, 1985 to date.

All have been senior members of Her Majesty's diplomatic service with extensive experience of European Community affairs.

Argentina

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of his recent meetings with the Argentine Foreign Minister.

Mr. Sainsbury: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs had a friendly and businesslike meeting with Dr. Cavallo on 9 April. They discussed a range of bilateral issues including investment, co-operation against drug-related crime and fisheries conservation. They also signed a visa abolition agreement, which is due to enter into force on 8 June.

There was no discussion of Falklands sovereignty.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Haberdashers' Aske's City Technology College

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give details of the amount and date of any payments so far made by his Department to the Haberdashers' Company in respect of the costs of planning for the establishment of a Haberdashers' Aske's city technology college; and what further expenses in this respect he has agreed to meet.

Mr. MacGregor: Payments of £37,732 were made to the Haberdashers' Company in February 1990, and payments of £16,982 have been authorised this month to date. I have so far agreed to pay the costs of a project director, educational consultants and legal fees in relation to the forthcoming establishment of a CTC company.

Ms. Ruddock To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he intends to accept the proposal by the Haberdashers' Company, in a letter dated 30 November 1989, that notwithstanding any future discontinuance of the proposed Haberdashers' Aske's city technology college, no obligation to repay capital grants should be imposed on the Haberdashers' CTC Company so long as the leased property in question continues to be used for educational purposes; and how this proposal accords with 'the provisions of section 105(5) of the Education Reform Act 1988.

Mr. MacGregor: The terms of the funding agreement made between myself and the Haberdashers' Aske's City Technology College Company in relation to the establishment of the Haberdashers' Aske's city technology college will be in conformity with section 105(5) of the Education Reform Act 1988.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether the Haberdashers' CTC Company has yet been formed for the purposes of establishing a city technology college on the sites of the present Haberdashers' Aske's schools in Deptford.

Mr. MacGregor: The Haberdashers' CTC Company has not yet been formed. I expect that a company will be formed by the early summer of this year, subject to the completion of the necessary processes.

Traveller Children

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proportion of traveller children attended *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools in the latest year for which figures have been collected: and how many children are in each category.

Mr. MacGregor: This information is not available.

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he is proposing to take to ensure that in the year 1990-91 all traveller children attend school.

Mr. MacGregor: It is the duty of parents to ensure that children of compulsory school age receive efficient full-time education suitable to their age, ability and aptitude and any special educational needs they may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise. It is for local education authorities to ensure that the parents of any children of compulsory school age in their area are fulfilling this duty.

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the total amount of grant sought by education authorities from his Department towards the education of travellers' children for the year 1990-91; what were the criteria for awarding allocations; and what, in each case, was the percentage and the amount awarded against the bid.

Mr. MacGregor: Grant was sought to support expenditure of £13·8 million on the education of traveller children in 1990-91. The draft circular issued in July 1989 indicated that in the case of satisfactory bids exceeding the total grant available, priority would be given, as far as possible, to the maintenance of existing special provision. A total of 57·6 per cent. of the expenditure sought has been approved. The percentage of individual LEA bids allocated and the consequent expenditure levels are as follows:

LEA	*Per cent. of bid allocated*	*Approved expenditure £000's*
Avon	70·0	260·1
Barnsley	0	0
Bedfordshire	99·5	207·1
Berkshire	95·6	212·4
Bolton	0	0
Bradford	96·7	165·8
Brent	18·8	26·7
Bromley	91·1	84·1
Buckinghamshire	83·2	245·5
Bury	39·7	9·1
Cambridgeshire	84·4	249·1
Camden	0	0
Cheshire	0	0
Cleveland	55·0	62·9
Cornwal	0	0
Croydon	0	0
Cumbria	15·6	13·8
Derbyshire	52·3	145·2
Devon	99·4	139·5
Doncaster	26·1	58·1
Dorset	90·9	57·0
Durham	23·7	110·7
Ealing	9·1	12·0
East Sussex	40·4	54·4
Essex	95·8	509·5
Gateshead	75·0	35·8
Gloucestershire	41·9	59·8
Greenwich	77·8	75·4
Hackney	0	0
Hammersmith/Fulham	13·1	9·6
Hampshire	0	0
Haringey	63·2	78·1
Harrow	25·1	40·7
Havering	32·8	8·8
Hertfordshire	96·3	600·2
Hillingdon	0	0
Hounslow	71·9	96·1
Humberside	74·5	226·7
Kensington/Chelsea	26·3	8·0
Kent	13·1	173·0
Lambeth	18·6	16·5
Lancashire	95·4	293·6
Leeds	68·7	193·9
Leicestershire	28·7	85·0
Lewisham	73·0	49·0
Lincolnshire	97·8	162·8
Liverpool	0	0
Manchester	60·4	286·1
Newcastle	34·8	16·0
Newham	82·1	46·8
Norfolk	33·9	65·3
North Yorkshire	51·9	105·0
Northamptonshire	78·3	184·0
Northumbria	100·0	32·0
Nottinghamshire	29·4	28·8
Oxfordshire	98·5	282·0
Richmond	73·0	14·6
Rochdale	0	0
Rotherham	0	0
Salford	0	0
Sefton	47·4	39·9
Sheffield	78·2	156·4
Solihull	57·7	22·1
Somerset	41·9	58·6
Southwark	86·2	200·5
Suffolk	82·2	122·5
Surrey	68·7	322·9
Tower Hamlets	34·8	17·8
Trafford	58·7	19·2
Wakefield	79·0	86·4
Waltham Forest	0	0
Wandsworth	0	0
West Sussex	71·6	114·8
Wigan	55·7	56·3
Wiltshire	51·1	76·0
Wolverhampton	87·2	739·1

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the total number of traveller children for whom education authorities made applications for funding from his Department in 1990-91.

Mr. MacGregor: Approximately 13,900 traveller children were identified in the applications for funding. The information received from authorities was, however, incomplete.

British Antarctic Survey

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when the decision was taken to approve the funding to the British Antarctic Survey for the construction of a hard rock airstrip at Rothera base in the Antarctic.

Mr. Jackson: Additional funds for the construction of the crushed rock airstrip at the British Antarctic Survey Rothera station were announced by my right hon. Friend on 8 November 1988 at columns *134-35*. The final decision on the project was subject to the completion of a comprehensive environmental evaluation and the incorporation of agreed environmental protection clauses in any contract. The project was finally agreed by the natural environment research council in August 1989.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make it his policy to make funds forthcoming to enable the British Antarctic Survey to remove abandoned bases and British rubbish on Deception Island by *(a)* allocating new funds for this purpose and *(b)* using part of the £22 million currently designated for the construction of a hard rock airstrip at Rothera base; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Following the public expenditure autumn statement in 1989, a total of £250,000 was made available in each of the financial years 1990-1991 and 1991-1992, with £75,000 in subsequent years to assist the British Antarctic Survey with the improvement of waste disposal and environmental management at its existing bases and to assist with the clean-up of abandoned sites, including the one on Deception Island. Some of the £11·1 million allocated for the Rothera airstrip is also being used in minimising and monitoring the environmental impact of the construction.

Displaced Persons

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science which local authorities have applied under section 210 of the Education Reform Act 1988 for grant to *(a)* finance existing provision for refugees or displaced persons living in camps or reception centres and *(b)* finance new provision; how many of *(a)* and *(b)* have received grant; and what is the amount of grant allocated to each local authority.

Mr. MacGregor: The following local authorities have applied for grant to (a) finance existing provision for refugees or displaced persons living in camps or reception centres:

Derbyshire, Richmond-upon-Thames, Surrey.

(b) finance new provision

Oxfordshire, Kirklees

Derbyshire, Richmond and Surrey also applied for grant to expand their provision.

All these authorities have received grant. Expenditure to be supported in 1990-91 is as follows:

	£000's
Derbyshire	35·2
Kirklees	26·7
Oxfordshire	15·8
Richmond	54·1
Surrey	39·0

Manchester Education Authority

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on his Department's meeting on 4 April with the deputation from Manchester education authority.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I met a delegation from the authority on 4 April. The delegation drew to my attention a number of concerns, especially the level of Manchester's annual capital guideline for 1990-91. The Department has made careful note of the points raised at the meeting and will bear them in mind in future discussions with the authority.

Voluntary Youth Organisations

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will set the level of funding for 1990-91 for voluntary youth organisations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: The Department has allocated £2·1 million in grant aid to 67 national voluntary youth organisations for the 1990-91 financial year, for a range of programmes of work related to this Department's priority objectives for the youth service. The organisations concerned have been informed individually of their allocations.

Discretionary Awards

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the level of expenditure by local authorities on discretionary awards to 16 to 18-year-olds in 1987-88.

Mr. Jackson: For the academic year 1987-88, local authorities in England and Wales reported expenditure of nearly £38 million on lesser-value discretionary awards made under section 2 of the 1962 Education Act (as amended) to students aged 16 to 18.

National Curriculum

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he now expects to announce the remaining subject working parties for the national curriculum; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my hon. Friend gave him on 15 March 1990, *Official Report*, column *318*.

Special Needs

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has on the provision of funding for in-service training for teachers specialising in special needs subject areas for the years 1985-86 to 1989-90.

Mr. MacGregor: Under the local education authority training grants scheme and the in-service teacher training grants scheme which it replaced, funds have been made available in each of these years for the training of teachers in special needs areas. Under the previous scheme, the funding was intended to cover expenditure of about £1·98 million in 1985-86 and about £2·079 million in 1986-87 on training teachers in special educational needs in ordinary schools. Under the present scheme, the total amounts of expenditure eligible for support in the relevant national priority areas were as follows:

	(£000s)
1987-88	
Special needs (schools)	3,500
Special needs (further education)	500
Total	4,000
1988-89	
Hearing impairments	1,500
Visual impairments	600
Severe learning difficulties	2,200
Designated teachers in ordinary schools	1,240
Special needs (further education)	600
Total	6,140
1989-90	
Hearing impairments	1,700
Visual impairments	900
Severe learning difficulties	2,500
Designated teachers in ordinary schools	1,400
Special needs (further education)	600
Total	7,100

Allergy Research

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what research projects financed by the Medical Research Council are being carried out into allergies.

Mr. Jackson: The latest information available from the medical research council (MRC) indicates that in 1988-89 total expenditure on projects wholly or partly related to allergies was about £1 million. A full list of such projects funded in 1989-90 will be available from the MRC in July.

Bradford Community College

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will take steps to make extra funds immediately available to Bradford community college to obviate reductions in the numbers of students enrolled at the college and redundancies of teaching staff; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Bradford's education component of its standard spending assessment (SSA) for 1990-91 is £179·7 million. Decisions about service budgets and the allocation of resources are a matter for the authority.

Schools Budgets

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) if he has any proposals to ensure that schools operating local management of schools receive a very high proportion of the schools' budget; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will make it his policy to devolve the whole of the schools' budget to eligible schools operating under local management of schools; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what measures are in place on the proportion that local education authorities can retain of schools' budgets; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what powers he has to ensure that a high proportion of the schools' budget is administered by the schools themselves.

Mrs. Rumbold: Statutory guidance on local management of schools states that local education authorities are expected to delegate to governors responsibility for the large majority of their expenditure on schools. Most of the resources held back at the discretion of local education authorities are subject to an initial overall ceiling of 10 per cent. of total spending, with a target of reducing this proportion to 7 per cent. within three years. We will review in the light of experience the limit on discretionary retention of resources, including the items of spending subject to this limit.

Education Support Grant, Liverpool

Mr. Hind: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much money was available to Liverpool local authorities in education support grants in each of the last three years, and how much of the funding was taken up by Liverpool city council in each of those years.

Mr. MacGregor: The amounts of grant allocated to the local education authorities in the Liverpool area under the education support grants programmes for the last three years were as follows:

		£,000	
	1987-88	*1988-89*	*1989-90*
Knowsley	373·7	541·0	1,031·8
Liverpool	679·4	941·5	855·3
St. Helens	321·0	455·6	659·7
Sefton	154·6	456·5	519·8
Wirral	445·5	521·6	630·3

The amount of grant claimed by Liverpool LEA in 1987-88 was £655,300 and in 1988-89 £896,300, representing a take-up of 96 per cent. and 95 per cent. respectively of the LEA's approved allocations in those years. Figures for 1989-90 are not yet available, since a final claim for the last quarter of the financial year has not yet been submitted.

ENERGY

Gas Tariffs

Mr. Rost: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will amend the Gas Act 1986 to reduce the 25,000 therm threshold for tariff control.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Government's views on the 25,000 therm boundary is included in its response to the recommendations of the second report of the Energy Select Committee on industrial gas prices.

Electricity Bills

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what assessment has been made of the effect of offering rebates on domestic electricity bills to prospective shareholders of the distribution companies on *(a)* the number of applications for shares, *(b)* the unit price of electricity for non-shareholder consumers and *(c)* electricity conservation;

(2) what proposals he has for offering rebates on domestic electricity bills to the prospective or actual shareholders of the electricity distribution companies; and if he will make a statement;

(3) whether any rebate he proposes for shareholders, prospective or actual, of the electricity distribution companies on their bills will apply to business customers *(a)* under 100,000 kw, *(b)* under 1 mw, *(c)* over 1 mw and *(d)* over 50 mw.

Mr. Baldry: No decisions have yet been taken on any incentives that may be available to shareholders and customers of the electricity distribution companies.

Electricity

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller) of 2 april, *Official Report*, column *411*, he will make it his policy to require the National Grid Company to purchase the renewables-sourced energy on behalf of public electricity suppliers in England and Wales.

Mr. Peter Morrison: No.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his most up-to-date assessment of the amount of renewables-sourced energy purchased by the public electricity suppliers in England and Wales in *(a)* 1995, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2005.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The amount of renewables-sourcesd electricity purchased by the public electricity suppliers during the lifetime of the non-fossil fuel obligation will be influenced by the level of the obligation, and applications to contract within the first NFFO renewables order are now being processed by the suppliers in consultation with my Department. A series of further tranches will be brought forward during the 1990s; these are currently expected to total some 600 mw. The amount of renewables-sourced electricity puchased outside the obligation is a commercial matter for the suppliers themselves.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his most up-to-date assessment of the impact of the European Commission decision of 28 March approving the Government's non-fossil fuel obligation for the period 1990 to 1998 on the amount of renewables-sourced energy purchased by the public electricity suppliers of England and Wales in the year 2000.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The Commission's decision to authorise aid in relation to United Kingdom nuclear electricity will mean that the amount of renewables-sourced electricity generating capacity will be significantly higher throughout the 1990s than if the non-fossil fuel obligation had not existed.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his most up-to-date assessment of the level of renewables-sourced energy purchased by the public electricity suppliers of England and Wales in the year 2000 and 2005 coming from *(a)* methane gas recovery from landfill, *(b)* refuse incineration, *(c)* small-scale hydro and *(d)* wind power.

Mr. Peter Morrison: Renewables technologies have the potential to make a substantial contribution to electricity generating capacity. My Department's most recent assessment of the extent of this contribution is set out in Energy Paper No. 55, copies of which are in the Libraries of both Houses.

Nuclear Installations (Safety Reviews)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects to receive the final reports of the current long-term safety reviews on *(a)* Dungeness A, *(b)* Hinkley Point A and *(c)* Trawsfynydd.

Mr. Baldry: I understand that the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate is currently undertaking detailed assessment of the long-term safety reviews prepared by the licensee at Dungeness A, Hinkley Point A, and Trawsfynydd. The inspectorate's findings will be published over the next nine to 18 months.

Radioactive Gas Emissions, Sellafield

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what assessment has been made of the extent to which the operation of the Pond 5 fuel-handling plant and the actions of staff at Sellafield have met health and safety requirements on each occasion that there has been an emission of radioactive gas from the pond arising from chemical reactions or works being carried out in each year since 1985.

Mr. Baldry: I understand that during the operation of this plant there has been no incident which has led to significant emissions of radioactive gas.

Energy Technology Reports

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what were the main conclusions of the Energy Technology Support Unit report on environmental and economic implications of small scale CHP; and if he will place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The report, the third in the energy and environment paper series by the Department's chief scientist's group at ETSU, examines the possible environmental and economic potential of small-scale combined heat and power (CHP) in Britain, and considers the realistic contribution that it might make to the abatement of greenhouse gases, particularly carbon dioxide. The broad conclusions of the report are that, in the longer term, there is a realistic prospect that small-scale CHP could provide electricity equivalent to about 10 per cent. of current demand, and that this would cut United Kingdom carbon dioxide emissions by 4 per cent.

I have arranged for copies of the report to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what were the main conclusions of the Energy Technology Support Unit report on the abatement of gaseous emissions by energy-efficient lighting; and if he will place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The report from the Department's chief scientist's group at ETSU, assessed the scope for using existing technologies to improve the energy efficiency of lighting in the United Kingdom. The broad conclusions are that, using cost effective measures, 8 per cent. of United Kingdom electricity demand could be saved; that the minimum potential for reduction in emissions of carbon dioxide (CO_2) was calculated to be equivalent to 2 per cent. of current United Kingdom CO_2 emissions; and that, including reductions in other gases such as methane, total emissions of greenhouse gases would be reduced by 1·4 per cent.

I have arranged for a copy of the report to be placed in the Library of the House.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Business Investment

109. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of gross domestic product was accounted for by business investment in 1989.

115. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of gross domestic product was accounted for by business investment in 1989.

122. **Mr. Arbuthnot:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of gross domestic product was accounted for by business investment in 1989.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Business investment accounted for 13 per cent. of gross domestic product at current market prices in 1989.

Mr. Sumberg: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the level of business investment during 1989 and 1988.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Business investment reached £56 billion in 1989, at constant 1985 prices, up from £51·5 billion in 1988. Between 1986 and 1989 business investment grew by over 40 per cent. in volume terms.

European Monetary System

110. **Mr. Fearn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from British industry regarding British entry into the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system.

Mr. Ryder: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations.

Interest Rates

111. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the effect of high interest rates on businesses.

Mr. Ryder: Interest rates have been set to put downward pressure on inflation, which is the greatest threat to the future prosperity of business.

Manufacturing Investment

113. **Mr. Tim Smith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the level of manufacturing investment in *(a)* 1989 and *(b)* 1982.

121. **Mr. Stevens:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the level of manufacturing investment in *(a)* 1989 and *(b)* 1982.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Estimates of manufacturing investment for 1989 and 1982 are shown at table I of the GDP press notice (CSO(90)39) released on 16 March. Copies of the notice are available from the House of Commons Library.

Manufacturing Industry (Labour Costs)

114. **Mr. Butterfill:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the unit labour costs for United Kingdom manufacturing industry for the last three years.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The figures for unit labour costs for the United Kingdom manufacturing industries are given in the table.

Year	*Manufacturing Unit Labour costs 1985=100*	*Percentage Changes*
1986	104·6	
1987	105·2	0·6
1988	106·3	1·0
1989	110·5	4·0

EC (Trade Balance)

116. **Mr. Allen Adams:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the balance of trade with the European Economic Community in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1989.

117. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the balance of trade with the European Economic Community in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1989.

119. **Ms. Armstrong:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the balance of trade with the European Economic Community in *(a)* 1979 and *(b)* 1989.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The information may be found in the monthly review of the external trade statistics and its 1989 mid-year supplement, available from the Library of the House, or on the Central Statistical Office database which may be accessed through the Library.

Manufacturing Output

118. **Mr. Hannam:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the level of manufacturing output in *(a)* 1988 and *(b)* 1983.

120. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the level of manufacturing output in *(a)* 1988 and *(b)* 1983.

123. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the level of manufacturing output in *(a)* 1988 and *(b)* 1983.

124. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the level of manufacturing output in *(a)* 1988 and *(b)* 1983.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Figures on the level of United Kingdom manufacturing output are published in the monthly index of output of the production industries press notice, table 1.

Training

Mr. Amos: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what effect he expects his Budget to have on training.

Mr. Norman Lamont: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor proposed a tax relief on business donations to the new training and enterprise councils, or TECS, most of which will be coming into operation over the next year. I expect this to encourage businesses to contribute more money to local training and enterprise initiatives.

Football

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from football authorities about his Budget.

Mr. Ryder: The Football Association, the Football League and the Football Trust have expressed appreciation of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's proposal to reduce the rate of pool betting duty for the benefit of football supporters.

Top Rate Tax

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) by how much revenue from top rate tax has risen in *(a)* percentage terms and *(b)* real percentage terms since the top rate was reduced to 40 per cent.;

(2) by how much revenue from top rate tax has changed since the top rate was reduced to 40 per cent.

Mr. Lilley: Liability to income tax at rates of 40 per cent. and above is estimated to have increased by £3·1 billion between 1987-88 and 1990-91, an increase of 40 per cent. in nominal terms and 15 per cent. in real terms. The estimate is based on a projection of the 1987-88 survey of personal incomes and is provisional. It reflects independent taxation and the allowances and thresholds proposed in the 1990 Budget.

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many taxpayers he estimates would pay more in tax were the top rate to be raised from 40 to 50 per cent.;

(2) how much revenue would be raised were the top rate of tax raised from 40 to 50 per cent.

Mr. Lilley: The revenue yield in a full year at 1990-91 levels for income from an increase in the higher rate of income tax from 40 to 50 per cent. is estimated to be £3 billion; 1·7 million taxpayers would pay more tax. The estimates are based on a projection of the 1987-88 survey of personal incomes and are provisional. They reflect independent taxation and the levels of allowances and thresholds announced in the 1990 Budget, but they exclude the consequential effects on capital gains tax and any behavioural effects.

Investment Income

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how much revenue he estimates would be raised by a 7·5 per cent. investment income surcharge on investment income above *(a)* £5,000, *(b)* £2,500 and *(c)* £1,000 in 1989-90;

(2) how much revenue he estimates would have been raised by a five per cent. investment income surcharge on investment income above *(a)* £5,000, *(b)* £2,500 and *(c)* £1,000 in 1989-90.

Mr. Lilley: Provisional estimates are as follows:

Yield in a full year for 1989-90

£ million

Threshold	*Rate of surcharge*	
£	*5 per cent.*	*7·5 per cent.*
1,000	1,000	1,500
2,500	800	1,200
5,000	600	900

Estimates are based on a projection of the 1987-88 survey of personal incomes and are, therefore, provisional.

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would have been the revenue gain of a capital gains tax threshold of £2,500 in the last financial year.

Mr. Lilley: It is tentatively estimated that the full year yield of a reduction in the 1989-90 capital gains tax annual exempt amount to £2,500 would be of the order of £100 million. This estimate allows for some change in taxpayers' behaviour in response to the reduced annual exempt amount, but does not allow for possible short-term effects. No allowance has been made for any change in the treatment of capital gains of companies which are taxed within corporation tax.

Environmental Quality

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the fiscal measures he has taken in his Budget on the quality of the United Kingdom environment.

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the fiscal measures he has taken in his Budget on the quality of the United Kingdom environment.

Mr. Lilley: The Budget proposed a widening of the price differential between unleaded and 4-star leaded petrol from 14·2 to 15·6 a gallon (3·1 to 3·4p a litre). This will continue the process, begun in the 1987 Budget, of encouraging car drivers to switch to the use of unleaded petrol. The burden of taxation on motorists was also shifted from vehicle excise duty, which was frozen, to petrol usage; the duty was more than revalorised to compensate. The Budget also proposed that tax relief be made available for expenditure by waste disposal operators on preparing sites for waste disposal and making sites good after disposal operations have ceased. These measures will bring worthwhile environmental benefits.

Duty-Free Allowances

Mr. John Townend: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will review the travellers' allowance which at present applies to goods obtained outside the European Community.

Mr. Ryder: The allowances for goods obtained outside the EC derive from EC legislation. They include both quantitative limits on alcohol and tobacco, and a £32 value allowance for other items. The £32 value allowance has the limited purpose of waiving duty and tax on small purchases of a personal or souvenir nature. The Government have long supported Commission proposals to increase this very low allowance, but some member states have blocked any rise for fear of the increased revenue loss from cross-border shopping or through opposition to the availability of duty-free sales for intra-EC traffic, to which the same level of allowances applies.

The Government remain committed to a substantial increase in this allowance.

Departmental Staff

Mr. Tom Arnold: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the responsibilities of each of the deputy secretaries in his Department and the number and ranks of staff reporting to each.

Mr. Ryder: There are six deputy secretaries in the Treasury. Their responsibilities and the number of staff who report to them are as follows:

Responsibilities	*Staff numbers*
Overseas Finance	
European Community Group	
Aid and Export Finance Group	
International Finance Group	
(Three Grade 3, Six Grade 5, and 63 other staff)	72
Public Finance	
Fiscal Policy Group	
Financial Institutions and Markets Group	
Monetary Group	
Public Sector Finance Division	
(Three Grade 3, Eight Grade 5, and 105½ other staff)	116½
Industry	
Public Enterprises Group	
Industry, Agriculture and Employment Group	
Home Transport and Education Group	
(Two Grade 3, Seven Grade 5, and 86 other staff)	95
Public Services	
Social Services and Territorial Group	
Local Government Group	
Treasury Officer of Accounts and Purchasing	
Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency	
(Four Grade 3, Twelve Grade 5 and 489½ other staff)	505½

Responsibilities	*Staff numbers*
Deputy Chief Economic Adviser	
Forecast and Analysis Group	
Medium Term and Policy Analysis Group	
Public Expenditure Economics Group	
(Three Grade 3, Seven Grade 5, and 46 other staff)	56
Civil Service Management and Pay (Responsibility of Second Permanent Secretary prior to January 1990)	
Management Policy and Running Costs Group	
Personnel Policy Group	
Pay and Industrial Relations Group	
Civil Service Catering Organisation	
(Three Grade 3, Nine Grade 5, and 1,102 other staff including 599 Industrials)	1,114

The remainder of the Department reports directly to the permanent secretary, the second permanent secretary (public expenditure) or the chief accountancy adviser. Staff in these areas total 1,169.

Third World Debt

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what aspects of the Brady plan to assist indebted Third world countries he envisages being implemented in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Ryder: The Government support the strengthening of the debt strategy, agreed at the 1989 spring meetings of the IMF—IBRD, to allow limited use of fund and bank resources to support voluntary agreements between debtors and banks on commercial debt relief. The extent to which UK banks participate in these arrangements is a matter for their commercial judgment.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met the Governor of the Bank of England to discuss Third world debt.

Mr. Ryder: My Right hon. Friend the Chancellor regularly meets the Government of the Bank of England. The discussions cover many subjects.

Energy Prices

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what will be the effect of proposed price increases in the gas and electricity industries on the average household budget.

Mr. Ryder: The announced increases in gas and electricity prices for the coming year will add about 0.4 per cent. to the retail prices index once the tariffs have been fully implemented. The combined weight of gas and electricity in the RPI is 4.3 per cent.

Employee Share Ownership Plans

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has had about his proposals for ESOPs.

Mr. Lilley: My Right hon. Friend the Chancellor's Budget proposal for a new CGT rollover relief for those selling shares to ESOPs has been generally welcomed.

Mortgage Arrears

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the latest figures for the number of mortgage payers in arrears on their payments of *(a)* six months and *(b)* 12 months; and what are the comparable figures for 1987, 1988 and 1989.

Mr. Ryder: The latest figures available are for the second half of 1989. They cover building societies and Abbey National plc. At the end of 1989 there were 58,380 mortgages six to 12 months in arrears and 12,100 were 12 months or more in arrear. The equivalent figures for the end of 1988 were 37,200 and 8,930 respectively and for the end of 1987, 48,220 and 13,000 respectively.

Oil and Gas Revenues

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the reply by the right hon. Member for City of Chester (Mr. Morrison) on 29 March, *Official Report,* column *281,* if he will list the revenues accruing to the Exchequer in respect of crude oil, natural gas liquids and gas for each of the years 1980 to 1989.

Mr. Lilley: Government revenues from United Kingdom oil and gas production cannot be apportioned between crude oil, natural gas liquids and gas. The available figures are as follows:

£ billion

	Government revenues from United Kingdom oil and gas production[2]	*Gas Levy*
1980-81	3·7	—
1981-82	6·5	0·4
1982-83	7·8	0·5
1983-84	8·8	0·5
1984-85	12·0	0·5
1985-86	11·3	0·5
1986-87	4·8	0·5
1987-88	4·6	0·5
1988-89	3·2	0·4
[1]1989-90	2·3	0·3

[1] (provisional).

[2] Includes Royalty, Supplementary Petroleum Duty, Petroleum Revenue Tax and Corporation Tax (before ACT set-off).

Invisible Trade

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the balance of payments for invisibles.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The invisibles balance was in surplus by £2·3 billion in 1989.

Fire and Police Services

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the impact on income tax levels of transferring the full cost of fire and police services to central Government.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The impact on income tax of any transfer of local authority functions to central Government would depend on the extent to which revenue support grant was reduced. If grant were reduced by the amount of expenditure transferred, there would be no impact on income tax. But if grant were left unchanged, central taxation would have to rise. If local authorities spent in line with total standard spending in England and Wales, and total current expenditure in Scotland, the total cost of the fire service (including civil defence) and the police service in 1990-91 would be around £5,900 million. If this expenditure were transferred to central Government, and specific grants withdrawn but no adjustment made to revenue support grant, this would imply an increase of about 2p in the basic rate of income tax.

Mortgage Interest Relief

Mr. Paice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the cost to the Treasury if MIRAS were available at a basic rate of taxation equal to 18 per cent.

Mr. Lilley: If basic rate tax relief on mortgage interest payments were given at 18 per cent. rather than 25 per cent. in 1990-91, the direct cost of mortgage interest relief would fall by about £2·25 billion. This assumes that higher rate relief would continue to be given where appropriate at 15 per cent. above the basic rate relief. No allowance is made for any behavioural change.

Taxation

Mr. Paice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the effective tax rate for an individual on *(a)* 1·5, *(b)* two, *(c)* 2·5 and *(d)* three times average income if no income tax or national insurance contributions were payable in respect of incomes under £3,500, if the current top rate of national insurance contributions were payable on all income above £6,000 and at 2 per cent. on income between £3,501 and £6,000 and if income tax were payable at 18 per cent. for £3,501 to £13,500, at 28 per cent. for £13,501 to £22,000, at 40 per cent. for £22,001 to £32,000 and at 50 per cent. on all income earned above £32,001.

Mr. Lilley: The average percentage rates of tax and NIC would be:

Multiples of average earnings[1]			
1·5	*2*	*2·5*	*3*
27·4	32·8	38·0	41·5

[1] Average earnings are those for full time males working a full week at adult rates in all occupations in 1990-91; £303·80 per week; in line with the assumptions in paragraph 3.02 of the 1989 Autumn Statement.

Mr. Rooker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the cost of collection as a proportion of revenue collected in respect of income tax; and if he will set out the figures for each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Lilley: The total cost of the administration and collection of income tax as a proportion of income tax receipts for the last 10 years for which final figures are available is as follows:

Year	*Costs as percentage of receipts*
1979-80	2·26
1980-81	2·40
1981-82	2·12
1982-83	2·17
1983-84	2·17
1984-85	2·25
1985-86	2·27
1986-87	2·29
1987-88	2·25
1988-89	2·24

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the cost of collecting *(a)* income tax and *(b)* value added tax per pound collected in each year from 1986-87 to the most recent year for which figures are available.

Mr. Lilley: The cost of collecting income tax and value added tax per pound collected is estimated to have been:

pence

	Income tax	*VAT*
1986-87	2·29	1.03
1987-88	2·25	1·02
1988-89	2·24	0·95

Shipping

Sir John Farr: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will offer ship owners tax incentives to make it worthwhile to invest in new and secondhand tonnage.

Mr. Lilley: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so. The present capital allowances regime is already more generous than commercial depreciation for ships.

Zambia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has on the status of Zambia's relations with the International Monetary Fund since 1985, listing periods when Zambia was in default on payments to the fund and periods when Zambia had no economic programme agreed with the fund.

Mr. Ryder: During 1985 and up to June 1986 there was no economic programme agreed with the International Monetary Fund, apart from one arrangement agreed in February 1986 which lasted two months. Zambia has been in arrears to the fund since June 1986. In March 1990 a fund-monitored programme was approved.

Trade Statistics

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Central Statistical Office will now be producing the monthly tables of trade statistics previously issued by the Department of Trade and Industry; if the Central Statistical Office will continue to specify the extent of the United Kingdom's trade deficit or surplus which relates to trade with the European Economic Community; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: The enlarged Central Statistical Office took over responsibility for visible trade statistics on 31 July 1989. It continues to publish the monthly statistics of trade formerly issued by the Department of Trade and Industry, including table A12 of the monthly review of external trade statistics which specifies the extent of the United

Kingdom's deficit or surplus with the European Economic Community. The information can also be found on the Central Statistical Office database, which may be accessed through the Library of the House.

European Community Contributions

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if there have been any significant changes in the calculation and assessment of contributions to and receipts from the European Economic Community since the United Kingdom's net contribution for 1989 was last assessed at £1,966 million; and if he will make a statement;

(2) when he anticipates that he will publish the 1990 statement on the Community budget; and if this document will include the latest calculation of the United Kingdom's net contribution to the European Economic Community in the calendar year 1989.

Mr. Ryder: The statement on the 1990 Community budget will be published within the next few weeks. It will include an outturn figure for the United Kingdom's net contribution to the Community budget in 1989; and will explain the differences between that figure and the forecast published in last year's statement (Cm. 680).

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what he estimates to be the difference between the level of inflation for 1990-91 allowed for in the Government's standard spending assessments for local authorities and the figure assumed in his Budget forecasts; and what the difference in expenditure would amount to if local authorities increased their expenditure in accordance with it.

Mr. Norman Lamont [*holding answer 26 March 1990*]: Standard spending assessments for local authorities, like the public expenditure plans, are set in cash terms, and do not make any particular allowance for inflation.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of the 1 per cent. forecast increase in the retail price index attributed to the community charge arises from charge levels in excess of the Government's recommended poll tax figure.

Mr. Norman Lamont [*holding answer 26 March 1990*]: If local authorities had spent in line with standard spending in England and Wales, and with total current expenditure in Scotland, the average community charge in Great Britain would have been around £266. This would have meant an increase of only about 0.1 per cent. in the level of the retail prices index.

Earnings

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will show for 1990-91 those ranges of earnings within which the burden of income tax plus national insurance is less than in 1978-79.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* Since income tax rates have been reduced and the main personal allowances increased by substantially more than the rate of inflation, taxpayers will now pay a lower proportion of their income in tax than in 1978-79 unless their incomes have risen even more rapidly than allowances. Average earnings have risen rather more than this.

In 1990-91, for taxpayers of working age whose incomes have increased in line with earnings, average rates of income tax and national insurance contributions are lower than in 1978-79 for everyone except some married men with earnings up to and including three-quarters of the average. On the same basis, real take-home pay is higher than in 1978-79 at all levels of earnings.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will specify the distribution of gains in the Budget for each item where *(a)* tax or *(b)* national insurance changes were made other than normal indexation, according to income bands: less than £5,000 per year; £5,000 to £7,500; £7,500 to £10,000; £10,000 to £12,500; £12,500 to £15,000; £15,000 to £20,000; £20,000 to £30,000; £30,000 to £50,000 and above £50,000; and if he will indicate the percentage of total (i) tax and (ii) national insurance changes accruing to each group and the percentage of the total numbers of (1) taxpayers and (2) national insurance that each group comprises.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* Information relating to income tax rates and allowances and national insurance contributions is in the table. Losses result solely from the higher rate income tax threshold remaining at £20,700. It is not possible to provide a breakdown by income distribution of gains from the doubling of the blind person's allowance. Estimates are based on a projection of the 1987-88 survey of personal incomes and are therefore provisional.

Range of total income of individual (£ per annum)	*Loss due to freezing of higher rate threshold (£ million)*	*Percentage of total tax loss*	*Total taxpayers (000s)*	*Percentage of total taxpayers in range*	*Total NIC payers (000s)*	*Percentage total NIC payers in range*
Less than 5,000	—	—	2,960	11·5	3,660	15·4
5,000 to 7,500	—	—	4,290	16·6	3,580	15·0
7,500 to 10,000	—	—	4,330	16·8	3,820	16·0
10,000 to 12,500	—	—	3,420	13·3	2,990	12·5
12,500 to 15,000	—	—	2,980	11·6	2,730	11·5
15,000 to 20,000	—	—	3,760	14·6	3,450	14·5
20,000 to 30,000	60	15·8	2,630	10·2	2,390	10·0
30,000 to 50,000	230	60·5	1,010	3·9	910	3·8
Over 50,000	90	23·7	390	1·5	330	1·4
TOTAL	380	100·0	25,770	100·0	23,870	100·0

Tax Relief

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the savings, in a full year at 1990-91 rates, of restricting all allowances and reliefs to the standard rate of tax; and if he will provide a breakdown by category of allowance and relief.

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue would be gained by the Treasury if the higher rate of MIRAS were abolished.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* Estimates of the direct revenue yield in a full year at 1990-91 levels of income from restricting the main income tax allowances and reliefs to the basic rate of income tax are as follows:

	£ million
Personal allowances	1,390
Mortgage interest relief	510
Retirement annuity relief[1]	110

[1] Including relief for retirement annuity payments made by employees.

It would be premature to provide an estimate for employees superannuation and personal pension contributions, since this would depend on take-up. Nor is it possible to provide reliable estimates for the effects of restricting other smaller reliefs to the basic rate.

The direct revenue yield from restricting all reliefs and allowances simultaneously to the basic rate is likely to be in the order of nearly £3 billion, somewhat more than the sum of the yields from restricting the reliefs and allowances separately; this is due to the cumulative effect of bringing more people into higher rate tax. About two thirds of those who would pay more tax as a result of this change are currently liable only at the basic rate.

Estimates are based on a projection of the 1987-88 survey of personal incomes and are provisional. No account is taken of possible behavioural changes or the effect on receipts of capital gains tax.

ENVIRONMENT

Uniform Business Rate

108. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from British industry about the uniform business rate.

Mr. Chope: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), on 5 February 1990, *Official Report*, column *446*.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the reasons for the difference in the rate poundage used for calculating the uniform business rate in Wales and in England.

Mr. Chope: The uniform business rate has been set, in the light of the revaluation of all non-domestic properties in England and Wales, at the level necessary to raise broadly the same income from the business community in 1990-91 as was raised in 1989-90. This resulted in a rate poundage of 34·8p in England, where the national average non-domestic rate poundage in 1989-90 was 258·3p and 36·8p in Wales, where the 1989-90 average was 283·4p.

Tree Replacement

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to ensure that the Countryside Commission has adequate funds to enable it to respond in an effective manner to tree replacement programmes in England and Wales.

Mr. Heathcoat Amory: Total grant-in-aid to the Countryside Commission for the forthcoming financial year has been increased to £25·136 million. This sum includes provision of £2·88 million for the work of the commission's special unit—task force trees—set up to assist replacement planting of amenity trees lost in the storms of October 1987 and January this year. The commission's general programme includes further assistance for tree planting, but it is for the commission to determine detailed allocation of its resources.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) whether expenditure on rubbish collection, street cleaning and campaigns against litter will be excluded from relevant expenditure for rate-capping purposes unless it is deemed excessive;

(2) whether expenditure on sheltering the homeless will be excluded from relevant expenditure for rate-capping purposes unless such expenditure is deemed excessive;

(3) whether that expenditure for protecting children against abuse will be excluded from relevant expenditure for rate-capping purposes;

(4) whether the expenditure of public funds for building indoor lavatories in state schools will be excluded from relevant expenditure for rate-capping purposes;

(5) what categories of expenditure he will exclude from relevant expenditure for charge-capping purposes.

Mr. Chope: My right hon. Friend has not excluded any categories of an authority's expenditure for the purposes of his capping decisions which he announced to the House on 3 April.

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list, with their rates of community charge, those authorities which do not receive assistance from the safety net provisions and which also do not give to the safety net fund.

Mr. David Hunt: I am arranging for copies of the information to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those local authorities which have announced a community charge which is higher than that determined by the metropolitan borough of Rotherham.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will now list the poll tax figure and safety net figure for every local authority.

Mr. Chope: I refer the hon. Members to the answer that my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities gave today to my hon. Friend for Harrogate (Mr. Banks).

Mr. Tom Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information will be provided to him by local authorities for the purpose of assessing the impact of the community charge on charge payers, by district, age and income.

Mr. Chope: None.

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will estimate the level of local income tax which would be payable by *(a)* a man and *(b)* a woman on average earnings in 1989-90 and 1990-91 based on Kirklees council's planned budgets for those years.

Mr. Chope: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) on 4 April 1990, *Official Report*, column *665*.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the circumstances under community charge regulations in which there can be a personal community charge payer and a standard community charge payer living at the same address.

Mr. Chope: Liability to the standard community charge can arise only on the owner or lessee of a domestic property which is not used as the sole or main residence of another person or persons.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate of the cost of administration and collection of the poll tax in 1990-91 *(a)* in Greater Manchester and *(b)* in Manchester Withington; and what were the respective costs of administration and collection of domestic rates in 1989-90.

Mr. Chope: Information on the administration and collection costs of the community charge in 1990-91 is not yet available. Separate figures are not available for the cost of domestic rate collection, but the latest estimate provided by local authorities of the total cost of rate collection in 1989-90 is £11,332,000 for the Greater Manchester area. Figures for the Withington area of Manchester are not separately available, but the figure for Manchester city council is £2,467,000.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the budgeted spend for 1989-90 for each authority, with the equivalent spend uprated by inflation for 1990-91 and the community charge per adult such a spending programme would result in.

Mr. Chope: I am arranging for copies of the expenditure for 1989-90 for each authority to be placed in the Library of the House. Information about the assumed expenditure for 1990-91 and the resulting community charge per adult was placed in the Library on 11 January 1990.

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimate he has made of the cost for each local authority of poll tax capping relating to *(a)* reviewing expenditure at service provision to meet his requirements and *(b)* preparing and sending out new poll tax bills.

Mr. Chope: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Hardy) earlier today.

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those local authorities known to him which have announced their intentions to extend beyond three months the period when a community charge is not payable in respect of empty and unfurnished property.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to him on 4 April 1990, *Official Report*, column *665*.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will update the list provided in his answer to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside, of 12 March, *Official Report*, column *105*, of regulations governing the introduction of the community charge and the uniform business rate which have yet to be *(a)* laid before the House and *(b)* debated by the House.

Mr. David Hunt *[holding answer 5 April 1990]:* The regulations still to be laid before the House are as follows:

The Community Charge

1. The form of substitute bills to be prescribed following a change in budget or precept.
2. Adjustments to rates recoverable or written off after 1 April 1990 relating to earlier years.

National Non-Domestic Rates

3. Payment of interest on overpaid rates.

The last debate on a negative resolution took place in the House on 26 March 1990, while an affirmative resolution was debated on 29 March 1990. None of the remaining regulations requires affirmative resolution.

Tropical Rain Forests

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will institute a co-ordinated governmental review of adverse effects on tropical rain forests resulting from the tropical forestry action plan; if he will suspend funding for the tropical forestry action plan; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what input his Department has had into the tropical forestry action plan; and what account he has taken of recommendations about its effectiveness.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development on 5 April 1990, *Official Report*, columns *733-34*.

Homelessness

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much extra money will be available to Bournemouth borough council under his new proposals to tackle homelessness.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The extra £112 million resources for 1990-91 which I announced recently will go to local authorities in London and the south-east where homelessness pressures, particularly the numbers in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, are greatest. Authorities outside this area, including Bournemouth, generally face less severe pressures of homelessness.

Wales (Official Visits)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the dates on which he has made an official visit to Wales since his appointment to his present post.

Mr. Chris Patten: Since my appointment to my present post I have made no official visit to Wales.

Correspondence

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for South Hams dated 26 March concerning the position regarding the community charge facing Mr. R. J. Bray of Dovedale, Brixham.

Mr. Chope: I will write to my hon. Friend shortly.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will reply to a letter from the hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth dated 23 January referring to Mr. George Chadwick of Rugby.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 6 April.

Caravan Sites (Bradford)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information his Department gathered in the process of granting designation to the local authority on *(a)* the location of private caravan sites in Bradford, *(b)* by whom they are owned and managed, *(c)* who has applied to operate and manage additional private sites, *(d)* rentals being charged by private site owners and *(e)* rental charges levied by Bradford council at caravan sites owned by the council.

Mr. Chope: We are aware that there are two private gipsy caravan sites in the metropolitan district which can accommodate a total of 12 gipsy caravans and that the city council's policy will be to encourage provision of small-scale private sites. We have no detailed information on the operation of these sites or on rental charges levied by Bradford council at the caravan sites that it owns.

Expenditure (Rotherham)

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how he expects his decision on the new expenditure levels within the metropolitan borough of Rotherham will affect the work of this authority to promote the economic regeneration of the derelict or non-derelict areas of the borough;

(2) if he will make it his policy to take steps to ensure that his recent decision to reduce the expenditure of the metropolitan borough of Rotherham will not affect the capacity of that authority or of the South Yorkshire hazardous waste unit to maintain supervision of the public and environmental needs of the area concerned;

(3) what is his estimate of the cuts in expenditure in 1990-91 which will now have to be made by the metropolitan borough of Rotherham in the fields of education, social services, highway maintenance, amenities and recreation, museums and libraries, environmental health and in the accommodation and housing provision for the elderly and disabled.

Mr. Chope: Spending priorities within any lower overall budget will be a matter for the metropolitan borough of Rotherham; as my right hon. Friend made clear to the House on 3 April, we are prepared to consider alternative proposals from Rotherham about the overall level of its budget.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of the costs which will have to be met by the metropolitan borough of Rotherham in enabling it to implement his decision that the community charge shall be reduced.

Mr. Chope: As he informed the House on 3 April, my right hon. Friend estimates the costs of community charge capping will be about £200,000 per charging authority and that the total costs will be between £6 million and £7 million.

Hospital Incinerators

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment by what date all hospital incinerators are required to comply with the specifications contained in Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution waste management paper No. 25 on clinical waste.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Department of the Environment waste management paper No. 25 is a technical memorandum providing general advice and guidance. Specific control of clinical waste incinerators with a capacity of more than one tonne per hour is exercised by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution. The inspectorate is also currently drawing up specific guidance on standards for smaller incinerators which we propose to schedule for local authority air pollution control under the Environmental Protection Bill. This guidance will be published before any incinerator is scheduled for local authority control, and authorities will be obliged to have regard to it in setting standards in legally binding authorisations for individual hospital incinerators.

Bathing Water

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the definitions that have been used by his Department to define a bathing beach since the 1976 Bathing Waters Directive of the European Commission was issued; and on what dates the definitions were changed.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The definition of a bathing water is given in article 1(2)(a) of directive 76/160/EEC. Further advice on relevant criteria for assessing whether waters should be identified under the bathing water directive was given by the Commission of the European Communities in October 1985, in an answer given in the European Parliament.

Water Pollution

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a revised version of table 3.5(a) in the 1989 Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics which would show a nothing found category separately from the total number of water pollution incidents.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Separately available figures for reported pollution incidents where nothing was found relate to the years 1986, 1987 and 1988 and are as follows:

	1986	*1987*	*1988*
Anglian	—	—	—
Northumbrian	—	53	100
North West	579	705	798
Severn-Trent	—	—	—
Southern	147	126	227

	1986	1987	1988
South West	145	327	374
Thames	367	745	551
Welsh	—	—	522
Wessex	241	243	259
Yorkshire	278	415	441
England and Wales	1,757	2,614	3,272

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* a revised version of table 3.5(b) in the 1989 Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics, separately distinguishing for each category of pollution the nothing found column.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will specify in the *Official Report*, what footnote 4 should be for the Welsh Water Authority in table 3.2, on page 27 of his Department's Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics No. 12, 1989.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The footnote which was inadvertantly omitted from table 3.2 of the "Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics No. 12" referred to sewage treatment works in the Welsh Water area and should have been as follows:

> "The majority of the works with numerical consents which were not tested for compliance are understood to be small works for which the authority are asking for descriptive consents."

Cleaning Services

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how and by whom cleaning services are provided to Wellbar house, Gallowgate, Newcastle upon Tyne.

Mr. Chope: Cleaning services at Wellbar house are currently contracted to ISS Servisystem Ltd. and the City and Suburban Window Cleaning Company Ltd.

Mobile Homes

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what official research has been undertaken with local authorities' practices and policies with regard to mobile homes; and what conclusions have been drawn.

Mr. Chope: The Department is currently engaged in research on the mobile homes sector including a postal survey of local authorities in England and Wales and physical and social studies of selected sites. We expect to have the full results of the research programme early next year.

Hedgerows

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many miles of hedgerows have been removed and how many miles planted *(a)* since 1 January 1960 and *(b)* since 1979.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Various estimates have been made for past periods but none covers precisely the periods to which my hon. Friend refers.

A survey of landscape change in England and Wales carried out for my Department and the Countryside Commission in 1986 by Huntings Survey and Consultants Limited showed annual losses in England and Wales of some 2,600 miles of hedgerow between 1947 and 1969, 2,900 miles between 1969 and 1980, and 4,000 miles between 1980 and 1985. A postal survey of farmers on environmental topics carried out by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in 1985 however showed annual losses of 500 miles between 1980 and 1985. The two surveys used different methodologies and neither can be regarded as definitive.

Since 1973 grants have been available to farmers for planting of new hedgerows and for hedgerow laying. In the two years 1987 and 1988, grant was paid for the equivalent of almost 1,200 miles of new hedge planting.

Work is continuing to improve information both on the rate of removal and on the extent of new planting.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had, and with whom, on the introduction of landscape conservation orders as a means of preserving hedgerows.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No such discussions have taken place.

Defective Housing, Nottingham

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assistance his Department is giving to Nottingham city council to rebuild those Tarran Newland design houses designated as defective in the Beechdale area of Nottingham.

Mr. Chope: Nottingham city council's housing investment programme allocation for 1990-91 took full account of the condition of the housing stock in its area. Where private owners of Tarran or Newland properties qualify for assistance by way of reinstatement an exchequer contribution of 90 per cent. is made.

Caravan Sites

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether gypsies living on official local authority sites are subject to the payment of individual community charges; and whether those sites are classified as non-domestic premises.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 5 April 1990]:* A caravan used as a sole or main residence is domestic property and its occupiers are liable to the personal community charge unless they are exempt. In general those parts of a caravan site consisting of non-domestic property are subject to business rates.

HEALTH

South Manchester Health Authority

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital beds have been available within the South Manchester health authority in each of the past 15 years.

Mr. Freeman: Information regarding the number of hospital beds available within the South Manchester health authority is given in the table.

Average number of hospital beds available per day in South Manchester

Year	*Beds*
1974	2,387
1975	2,342
1976	2,409
1977	2,390
1978	2,454
1979	2,407
1980	2,423
1981	2,389
1982	2,401
1983	2,417
1984	2,355
1985	2,277
[1]1986-87	2,187
1987-88	2,112
1988-89	2,068

[1] Change in 1985 from calender to financial years.

Census Material

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions have taken place between officials of his Department or of the census office and the Post Office about use of postal codes in the publishing of census material.

Mr. Freeman: Officials of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys hold regular meetings with the Post Office to discuss the maintenance of OPCS's central postcode directory, which is used by Government Departments and the Health Service to allocate data already held on a post code basis to administrative areas. The use to be made of post codes in statistics to be published from the 1991 census has not yet been discussed in detail at these meetings, although agreement has existed since 1985 that aggregates of post codes could be used to define areas for census statistics.

Consultants (Merit Awards)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultants who served on regional consultants and specialist committees receive merit awards on their retirement; and what percentage this is of all consultants serving on such committees.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not available centrally. The Government's White Paper "Working for Patients" proposes a number of reforms to the distinction awards system, including a proposal aimed at preventing awards being given close to retirement age. This is currently under discussion with the profession.

Children (Illegal Employment)

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the latest official estimate of the number of children illegally employed in Great Britain; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to publish an official estimate of the number of children engaged in illegal employment in Great Britain; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to publish official statistics on the number of children illegally employed in Great Britain; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to publish official figures for the number of children illegally employed in Great Britain; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave the hon. Members for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Dunnachie) and for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) on 9 March 1990 at columns *893-94*.

Royal Colleges

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he next expects to meet the presidents of the royal colleges; and what subjects will be discussed.

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he next expects to meet the presidents of the royal colleges; and what subjects will be discussed.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Whilst no firm date has been set for the next meeting with the presidents of the royal colleges, the previous pattern of formal and informal meetings, either with individual presidents or collectively, is expected to continue, for discussing a range of important health issues.

British Medical Association

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he next expects to meet the president of the British Medical Association; and what he intends to discuss.

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he next expects to meet the president of the British Medical Association; and what he intends to discuss.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has no present plans to meet the president of the British Medical Association.

Fluoride

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his policy towards the use of fluoride as a means of arresting and preventing dental caries; what evaluation he has made of its effectiveness as an agent; and what measures he is adopting to ensure that it is available to population groups most at risk.

Mr. Freeman: The Government's view is that fluoridation of drinking water constitutes a safe and effective means of reducing tooth decay. Evidence of the efficacy of fluoridation in this country is well documented and recent studies confirm the view that further reductions in caries levels in children's teeth, over and above the general decline in caries which has occurred, are achievable through fluoridation of domestic water supplies. These benefits are particularly cost effective in areas where caries levels are otherwise high.

The Government believe it right that decisions on fluoridation should be taken at a local rather than national level. The Water (Fluoridation) Act 1985 imposes a statutory duty on district health authorities to engage in widespread public consultation before any decisions on the implementation of fluoridation schemes are taken. While it is our general view that we should support local initiatives, it is the task of the district health authority to weigh the advantages of fluoridation when deciding to ask water undertakers to fluoridate water supplies in the area. The final discretion whether to agree to fluoridation must, however, rest with water undertakers who need to be satisfied that the health authorities' proposals are technically feasible.

Nurses

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review the current levels of nurse staffing.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Responsibility for setting levels for nursing staff is a matter for individual health authorities, which determine those levels as part of the regular planning process, in the light of local needs and priorities and the available resources.

Heart Transplants

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many heart transplant operations have been conducted in *(a)* Harefield hospital and *(b)* Papworth hospital in each of the last 12 years.

Mr. Freeman: Available information from Harefield and Papworth hospitals, for the 11 years from 1979 to 1989, is shown in the table.

	Harefield		*Papworth*	
	Heart	*Heart/lung*	*Heart*	*Heart/lung*
1979	—	—	3	—
1980	14	—	11	—
1981	13	—	13	—
1982	21	—	16	—
1983	34	1	19	—
1984	78	7	39	3
1985	87	31	44	6
1986	109	42	52	10
1987	140	55	58	15
1988	133	69	58	22
1989	131	53	53	17

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients who have undergone heart transplant operations in the last 12 years have died either as a primary or secondary result of cytomegalavirus.

Mr. Freeman: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Junior Hospital Doctors

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of junior hospital doctors in the Eastern region worked rotas of one in three or worse during the years 1987, 1988, 1989 and estimated for 1990.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information is not available in the form requested. We do, however, have a report from the East Anglian regional health authority on the results of our June 1988 initiative on junior doctors' hours. Some 40 per cent. of junior doctors in the region were on one in three rotas or worse in 1988. By September 1990, some 24 per cent. of junior doctors are expected to be on onerous one in three rotas or worse. This compares with an expected national total of around 13 per cent. on such rotas by that date.

Allergies

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research projects financed by his Department are being carried out into allergies.

Mr. Freeman: None. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) on 3 April 1990, at column *519*.

Christie Hospital

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the costs of providing treatment at Christie hospital will flow back to Christie hospital from those districts which purchase care from Christie hospital in circumstances in which Christie remains *(a)* a directly managed hospital or *(b)* a National Health Service trust.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is intended that contracts between purchasing authorities and hospitals, whether directly managed or under trust status, will cover the full costs of treatment.

Haemophiliacs

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many haemophiliac victims of HIV contaminated factor VIII have died from AIDS; and how many have died since November 1989.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The total number of haemophiliacs with AIDS who have died up to the end of February 1990 is 118. Of that figure 11 have died since November 1989. It is not known how many died as a result of AIDS or from any other cause.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many writs from haemophiliac victims of HIV-contaminated factor VIII have been filed against his Department, regional health authorities and the Committee on Safety of Medicines; and how many were received *(a)* by 31 December 1989 and *(b)* since 1 January 1990.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Health authorities are separately represented and the Department does not routinely receive information on the number of writs issued against them. I understand that 928 writs have been filed against the Department and Committee on Safety of Medicines, of which around 650 were received by 31 December 1989.

Cosmetics

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has made an assessment of the health implications in respect of the clearance given for use as additives in cosmetics of *(a)* silver nitrate, *(b)* ammonia and *(c)* aluminium-based substances; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: No separate assessment has been made. Certain substances used in cosmetics are controlled by the Cosmetic Products (Safety) Regulations 1989 (SI 1989 No. 2233) which implements European Council directive 76/768/EEC as amended by EEC directive 82/368/EEC and subsequent Commission directives. The regulations detail substances that are either not permitted in cosmetics or are permitted subject to specified restrictions. Colouring agents other than those used solely to colour hair, preservatives and UV filters are not permitted unless listed in the schedules to the regulations. Advice on the safety in use of substances used in cosmetics is provided by the EEC Scientific Committee on Cosmetology.

Silver nitrate, ammonia and aluminium based substances are allowed in cosmetics only up to specified limits and the products must be labelled as containing these substances. They are listed in schedule 2, part I of the regulations as

> "substances which cosmetics must not contain except subject to the restrictions laid down."

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has made an assessment of the implications for human health of the clearance given to additives for use in cosmetics which are banned for use as additives in food products.

Mr. Freeman: Exposure to substances approved for use in cosmetics, that is those substances covered by the EEC cosmetics directives, is not comparable to exposure to approved food additives which are invariably ingested. Both are approved only after careful assessment of the health implications. If the hon. Member has any particular substance in mind perhaps he would let me know the details.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will outline his Department's responsibilities in respect of the safety of cosmetic products.

Mr. Freeman: The Department of Health provides advice to the Department of Trade and Industry on all matters pertaining to the safety assessment of cosmetics. Also a toxocologist from the Department is a member of the EEC's Scientific Committee on Cosmetology, established under the terms of the cosmetics directives to advise on the toxicity of cosmetic ingredients and products.

Centre for Applied Microbiology and Research

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he next plans to meet the director of the centre for applied microbiology and research at Porton Down; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: We have no immediate plans to do so. However, officials both of the Department, and of the public health laboratory service of which the centre forms a part, are in regular contact with the director.

Correspondence

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will now answer the letter to him from the hon. Member for Peckham of 26 March about community care services in Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire.

Mr. Freeman: I replied yesterday.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give details about the consultation which will precede the establishment of self-governing trusts; and if he will give *(a)* when consultations will begin, *(b)* how long they will last for, *(c)* who will be involved, *(d)* how they will be monitored and *(e)* where the results will be published.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Applications for NHS trust status will not be invited until after parliamentary approval of the necessary legislation. The relevant region will publicise the proposals and make arrangements for consultation. It will be for regions to determine how best to do this. However, in general we would expect consultation to last for a period of three months. We expect regions to seek the views of those with an interest, particularly the health authorities concerned, staff at the unit, general practitioners, community health councils and the local community. Regions will forward applications, responses received during consultation, and any comments they may have on them to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State so that he can consider them with the application. If my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State decides to approve an application he will make an order to establish the trust.

AIDS

Mr. Cousins: to ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* the number of HIV-positive persons, *(b)* the number of AIDS patients and *(c)* the number of deaths from AIDS in each year and in total to the latest available date both for the United Kingdom and for each National Health Service region since the AIDS epidemic began; and if he will show (i) the numbers of haemophiliacs so affected and (ii) the numbers of non-haemophiliacs so affected as a consequence of infected blood products.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 4 April 1990]*: The tables showing the information reported to the communicable disease surveillance centre and the communicable diseases (Scotland) unit have been placed in the Library. Numbers below 10 in tables showing AIDS data are represented by an asterisk in line with the procedure followed in reports under the AIDS (Control) Act, to safeguard confidentiality.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to repeat the waiting list initiative; and if he will make a statement about the previous initiative.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[pursuant to her reply, 30 March 1990, c. 370]*: I understand that there was a misprint in the hon. Member's question as it first appeared on the Order Paper which rendered the reply inappropriate. A revised reply is as follows.

The waiting list initiative is being continued in 1990-91. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) on 18 January 1990 at columns *403-04*. No decisions have yet been taken about whether to continue the initiative into 1991-92 and beyond.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Battle of the Boyne (Tercentenary)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the tercentenary of the battle of the Boyne will be officially recognised in Northern Ireland this year; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The 12 July 1990 will be a bank holiday in Northern Ireland, as in previous years.

Substantial sponsorship has been provided for a major exhibition at the Ulster museum, entitled "Kings in

Conflict", which examines the roles of William the Third, James the Second and Louis the Fifteenth in Ireland in the 1690s.

Fair Employment

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether United Kingdom civil servants working in Northern Ireland operate under the same monitoring system and code of practice as that detailed in the written reply to the hon. Member for Londonderry, East of 21 February, *Official Report*, column *768*.

Mr. Cope: All Northern Ireland employers are guided by the code of practice published by the Department of Economic Development on 31 December 1989 and subsequently adopted by the Fair Employment Commission as its first code of practice under the Fair Employment (NI) Act 1989.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether members of harbour boards in Northern Ireland are considered as employees by the Fair Employment Commission in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 20 March 1990]:* I am advised that the Commission has not examined the terms upon which members are appointed.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures are being taken to rectify and monitor the religious imbalance amongst employees at principal officer grade and above in the Department of the Environment, Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* The results of monitoring and the measures being taken to provide equality of opportunity in the Northern Ireland civil service are published in the reports of its equal opportunities unit. Copies of these reports are in the Library. These give details about the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland.

Discussions have already taken place with the Fair Employment Commission and the Equal Opportunities Commission about the published findings and the future work programme of the equal opportunties unit. It has been agreed that the latter will focus on the level of representation of females and of Roman Catholics in the higher grades in the Northern Ireland civil service.

Training

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what he is doing to co-ordinate the efforts of the departments of education and economic development on funding and training, to ensure that young people will receive training to equip them with skills and qualifications sought by employers.

Mr. Needham: The youth training programme is the joint responsibility of the Ministers responsible for the Departments of Education and of Economic Development and there are a number of working groups of senior officials from both Departments which meet on a regular basis to co-ordinate action.

Executive Houses

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the executive houses at *(a)* Beechfield estate, Donaghadee and *(b)* Enniskeen estate, Craigavon were built; when the Northern Ireland Housing Executive carried out or proposes to carry out an improvement scheme to houses in both these estates; and why it was decided to give priority to Enniskeen estate.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: This is a matter for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The information that it would provide is that Beechfield estate was completed in 1965 and Enniskeen estate in 1971.

Twenty-eight dwellings in Beechfield estate were fully improved in 1985 and a further 18 had central heating installed. Improvements to the remainder of the estate which have yet to be fully assessed are programmed to begin in the 1992-93 financial year. An external maintenance scheme is currently on site.

Enniskeen estate had central heating installed in 1986 as part of the degasification programme. An external maintenance scheme was completed in 1987 and replacement kitchen units installed in 1989. No further improvements are programmed.

Priorities within each Housing Executive region are determined on the basis of the Housing Executive's assessment of the needs of individual estates.

Flooding (Donaghadee)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he proposes to take to stop the regular flooding at Church lane, Donaghadee, near the old people's home.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No buildings have been affected.

From initial investigations it appears that the flooding is associated with an old culverted millrace which runs through the area. The millrace is not designated within the terms of the Drainage (Northern Ireland) Order 1973. The Department of Agriculture is undertaking further investigations with a view to determining the nature and source of any drainage disability and the person(s) responsible for the millrace.

Flooding, Omagh

The Rev. William McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what reasons it was decided not to provide the statistical and technological investigations relating to the October 1989 flooding in Omagh to the development officer of Omagh district council.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Following flooding in October 1987 a consultant's report on the flood defences in Omagh was commissioned by the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland. The report is private to the Department.

The Department is in the final stages of consideration of the options contained in the report and proposals will be exhibited in line with normal consultation procedures at the offices of Omagh district council. The Department will discuss the proposal with the council at the appropriate time.

Quarrying

The Rev. William McCrea: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total amount of money paid in grants by the various departments of the

Northern Ireland Department of Environment to the quarrying, sand and gravel industries during the period the grant was available; and what was the breakdown of payments in the Mid-Ulster constituency.

Mr. Needham: The Department of the Environment has paid no grants to companies in these sectors. During the past five financial years grants paid to the quarrying, sand and gravel industries in Northern Ireland by the Department of Economic Development were as follows:

	£
1985-86	3,482,376
1986-87	1,125,367
1987-88	160,736
1988-89	166,788
1989-90	38,681
Total	4,973,948

The above figures include the following amounts which were paid to companies in the Mid-Ulster constituency:

	£
1985-86	136,462
1986-87	36,197
1987-88	6,212
1988-89	—
1989-90	—
Total	178,871

Eastern Health and Social Services Board

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how the recently established nine posts of director within the Eastern health and social services board were filled; and how these positions differ in their range of management responsibilities and in salary from the posts that they replaced.

Mr. Needham: As the information requested is complex and detailed, my noble Friend Lord Skelmersdale will write to the hon. Gentleman direct.

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what arrangements are being made by the Eastern health and social services board, pursuant to the abolition of the area executive team with effect from 1 April to ensure that the day-to-day management of health and social services are maintained at high level.

Mr. Needham: The board's general manager will have a strategic management group consisting of nine headquarters directors to support and assist him in the management of the services. The recently appointed unit general managers took up their posts from 1 April 1990 and will each be responsible to the general manager for the management and provision of services within one of the nine units of management.

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the estimated additional cost in 1990-91 of the current restructuring of the Eastern health and social services board.

Mr. Needham: It is expected that the net effect of the restructuring will be that the board expects to maintain its administration costs at approximately 5 per cent. as in previous years.

Enterprise Ulster

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many clients have been asked by Enterprise Ulster to supply additional materials during the course of a job so that it could be completed; and, where this has occurred, what checks were made to ensure that proper use was made of the materials originally supplied.

Mr. Needham: There are no figures available of the number of Enterprise Ulster clients who have been asked and agreed to the supply of additional materials during the course of a job.

Strict checks are carried out by supervisory staff on all materials supplied and used.

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what arrangements there are for Enterprise Ulster having been supplied with materials for a client job not all of which have been used to make a payment in lieu of the return of the material.

Mr. Needham: None. Any surplus materials are either returned to the client or, with his agreement, transferred to another job.

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps are taken to ensure that the practice of Enterprise Ulster in requiring clients to supply the materials needed for a particular job ensures efficient use of such materials and allows for proper stock control.

Mr. Needham: The use of materials, whether obtained by Enterprise Ulster or supplied by clients, is supervised, controlled and monitored by Enterprise Ulster's supervisors and area superintendents who are trained in efficient materials usage and stock control.

Substitute Teachers

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he received the details from Donaghadee high school of substitutes teaching in the school during the month of February; when the substitute teachers will be paid for their work during the month of February; and in which year such payments will be included for tax purposes.

Dr. Mawhinney: Details of the substitute teachers employed in Donaghadee high school during the month of February 1990 were not received in the Department of Education until 21 March 1990. This was two weeks after the due date for receipt of such information and was too late for the normal pay date on 16 March 1990 or the supplementary payroll issued on 20 March 1990.

Special arrangements have been made to issue payment by Friday 6 April 1990 to the substitute teachers for their work during the month of February 1990.

The payment will be made in the 1990-91 tax year and will be included in that tax year for tax purposes.

Enterprise Centres

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of enterprise centres in Belfast, together with the number of units and the percentage number of units occupied in each centre.

Mr. Needham: The information requested is as follows:

Enterprise centre	*Number of units*	*Percentage occupied*
Brookfield Business Centre	50	92
Farset Enterprise Park	26	39
Glenwood Enterprises Ltd.	36	86
Townsend Enterprise Park	26	100
Westlink Enterprises	31	28
Workwest Belfast	15	87
Action Resource Centre	12	100
West Belfast Enterprise Board	11	82

Community Programmes, Belfast

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of programmes funded by BAT and Making Belfast Work, the name of the recipient community organisation and the expenditure involved in each case.

Mr. Needham: In view of the large amount of material involved, I will write to the hon. Member and place copies of the information in the Library.

Income Support

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the level of expenditure on income support for each social security office in Belfast for the years 1987-88, 1988-89 and from April to December 1989.

Mr. Needham: The available information is as follows:

	Weekly Expenditure	
Social Security Office	*Supplementary pension/allowance 6 May 1987 £*	*Income Support 31 May 1988 £*
Andersontown	286,905·02	299,539·46
Corporation Street	371,623·59	438,914·83
Falls Road	282,316·97	327,328·97
Holywood Road	233,191·10	284,933·05
Knockbreda	158,308·59	160,504·29
Shaftsbury Square	191,928·10	205,144·63
Shankill	122,455·27	142,669·75

Source: Annual Statistical Enquiry (5 per cent. sample).

Child Benefit

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish in the *Official Report* the total amount of child benefit paid out per constituency for each of the Belfast parliamentary constituencies for the years 1987-88 and 1988-89.

Mr. Needham: The information is not available in the form requested.

Public Expenditure Belfast

Mr. Jim Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he is able to make of the total amount of public expenditure per constituency for the four parliamentary constituencies in Belfast for the years 1982-83 to 1988-89 inclusive.

Mr. Cope: It is not possible for any reliable estimate of public expenditure per constituency in Belfast to be obtained without incurring disproportionate costs.

Residential Homes

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* private and *(b)* public sector residential and nursing homes there are in Northern Ireland; what is the number of places provided in each sector together with the weekly charges; and how the charges are being met.

Mr. Needham: The information is as follows:

	Homes for persons in need		*Nursing Homes*	
	Statutory	*Private*	*Statutory*	*Private*
Number of Premises	126	97	—	118
Number of Places	3,988	1,285	—	3,353

Notes:

1. At 31 March 1989.
2. At 31 December 1989.

In addition, 40 voluntary homes for persons in need provide 1,271 places and 11 voluntary nursing homes provide 398 places.

Standard weekly charges for statutory homes for persons in need range from £171 to £198 depending on the location of the home and whether it is accommodating elderly, disabled, mentally ill or mentally handicapped people.

Residents who are unable to pay the standard minimum charge may pay a lesser amount, determined by their income. The minimum charge is £37·50 which is equivalent to the basic rate of retirement pension less the personal requirements allowance. A resident whose income is less than the basic rate of retirement pension may be entitled to income support to help with the charges.

Up-to-date information about weekly charges in independent sector homes is not held centrally. Residents whose income is insufficient to meet the charges may be entitled to income support. As of 9 April 1990, the maximum weekly amounts of income support payable for accommodation and care range from £150 to £210 for homes for persons in need, and from £200 to £245 for nursing homes. In addition, a personal allowance of £10·55 is payable.

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether in view of the increase in the number of residential and nursing homes for the elderly, he will arrange for greater involvement of local people in inspections of such homes and for reports of such inspections to be made to district councils and the units of management of the health and social services boards.

Mr. Needham: In "People First", the Northern Ireland policy paper on care in the community in the 1990s, the Department of Health and Social Services has proposed that health and social services boards should set up area inspection units, independent of the day-to-day management of their own homes. They are to inspect and report on standards and quality of care in both statutory and independent sector homes and are to be accountable direct to the area general manager of the board. The units are to include inspectors recruited from outside the board's employment. The Department intends to issue detailed guidance on the establishment of such units and will consult a wide range of interests, including the boards and district councils, during its preparation. Furthermore proposals will issue shortly on the involvement of area health and social services councils in visiting such establishments.

Local Government

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether, following his consideration of responses to the local government consultative paper, he will be proceeding with legislation in the field of local government in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: We are proceeding with the preparation of a proposal for a draft Order in Council. It should be published for consultation before the end of this year. As indicated in the local government consultative paper, the measures proposed cover three areas of local government work:

(i) the conduct of district council business;
(ii) the administration of the environmental health and building control services; and
(iii) competition in the provision of district council services

We received over 60 responses to the local government consultative paper. All have been considered carefully. A number of changes to our proposals have been made as a result.

The proposals were discussed by the chairmen of all the district councils in Northern Ireland, meeting under the chairmanship of Councillor Empey, the Lord Mayor of Belfast.

Terrorism

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which organisations are believed to have been responsible for the terrorist killings of Sam McClean and Harold Keys in the Irish Republic after 15 November 1985; and if anyone has been made amenable to the courts for these murders.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 23 March 1990]:* Despite the best efforts of the Irish authorities I understand that no one has been made amenable to the courts for these callous murders. In the absence of a criminal conviction it is not possible to say who the murderers were, but in both cases the Provisional IRA is reported to have claimed responsibility.

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which organisations are believed to have been responsible for the terrorist killings of Cormac McCabe, John Reid, Stanley Hazelton and Seamus McAvoy in the Irish Republic prior to 15 November 1985; and if anyone has been made amendable to the courts for these murders.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 23 March 1990]:* Despite the best efforts of the Irish authorities I understand that no one has been made amenable to the courts for the callous murders of John Reid, Stanley Hazelton and Seamus McAvoy. The investigation into the murder of Cormac McCabe, which is believed to have taken place in Northern Ireland, was conducted by the RUC and has proved similarly inconclusive. In the absence of criminal convictions it is not possible to say who the murderers were, but in the cases of Mr. Reid and Mr. McAvoy the Provisional IRA is reported to have claimed responsibility.

Fishing

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland by what means his view on the total allowable catch of each species of fish taken in the areas of sea fished by Northern Ireland sea fishermen is put forward at meetings of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 23 March 1990]:* The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea deals with scientific stock assessments which form the basis of advice to the EC Commission, which then formulates proposals for total allowable catches (TACs) to the EC Council of Ministers. The setting of TACs takes place outside the ICES forum.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will carry out a cost benefit analysis on options for placing *(a)* the new scientific staff for the research vessel Lough Foyle and *(b)* the new scientific staff for the research vessel Lough Foyle plus the freshwater biological units staff in Coleraine with the existing fisheries research laboratory staff in (i) the existing fisheries laboratory building with necessary alterations and (ii) in the existing fisheries laboratory building and the existing drainage division building in Coleraine with any necessary additions for extensions of the latter building.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 23 March 1990]:* Practical options for the establishment of a unified aquatic sciences research division on a single site were subject to investment appraisal before a decision was reached to relocate staff from Coleraine-Antrim to Belfast.

The option of a unified division at the fisheries research laboratory at Coleraine was included in the investment appraisal, except that the incorporation of the drainage division office at Coleraine was not considered a viable option in terms of department planning.

Results of the appraisal showed that over a 25-year period, relocation of staff from Coleraine and Antrim to Belfast, and the location of the scientific staff from the research vessel on the same site would have the lowest discounted net cost compared with other options. This decision is now being put into effect. Further cost-benefit analyses are not contemplated.

Detainees

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons *(a)* have been detained under terrorism provisions in police custody since October 1989 and *(b)* have been refused access to a solicitor under section 15 of the Emergency Provisions Act 1987.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 3 April 1990]:* Three hundred and sixty-one persons were detained under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 between the period 1 October 1989 to 31 December 1989. No person was detained during this period under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1987; and no one was refused access to a solicitor.

Statistics in respect of 1990 are not yet available.

Local Authority Funding

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table to show for each of the last five years the sums made available to promote each of the major towns in each of the 26 council areas; and what funds he intends to make available for this purpose over the next three years in each case.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 3 April 1990]:* The information is as follows:

Year	*Belfast* £	*Londonderry* £	*Other district towns*
1986-87	nil	nil	nil
1987-88	30,000	nil	nil
1988-89	74,000	nil	nil
1989-90	80,000	4,000	nil
1990-91	82,000	4,000	nil
1991-92	84,000	10,000	nil
1992-93	86,000	25,000	nil
1993-94	88,000	10,000	nil

Lough Foyle

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what decrease there has been in the area of farms whose land borders on Lough Foyle between the estuary of the River Roe and Magilligan Point since statistics were first collected; and what is his estimate of the present-day value of the land lost during that period.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 3 April 1990]:* The information requested is not available.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he *(a)* has had any survey carried out or *(b)* is aware of any other scientific survey of the intertidal zone off the shore of Lough Foyle between the estuary of the River Roe and Magilligan Point to determine whether that zone has experienced changes in the animal life and vegetation in the last 25 years; whether he has any record of changes in the type of beach from mud to sand; and what changes have been noted in the number and species of bird life in the area over these periods.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 3 April 1990]:* The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland has not undertaken, nor is it aware of other bodies having undertaken, any survey to determine changes in the animal life or vegetation of the intertidal zone between the Roe estuary and Magilligan point. The Department did commission a survey of the intertidal fauna of the entire Northern Ireland coastline. This was a baseline survey and did not refer to any previous work.

Bird counts have been undertaken by other bodies, but the Department does not have details of these counts and has no information on fluctuations in numbers of the various species. The Department does not have any record of changes in the type of beach from mud to sand.

European Community Assistance

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of the criteria which applicants will have to satisfy when applying for European grant assistance under each of the headings outlined in the Northern Ireland community support framework document.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* The primary requirement for applicants is that their proposals should comply with the specific priorities identified by the EC Commission in its Community support framework for Northern Ireland. These call for: improvement of the physical and social environment; reduction in the effects of peripherality; diversification and strengthening of the industrial and tradeable services sectors; development of agriculture and tourism; and training to develop Northern Ireland's human resources. The funds available are, of course, limited, and proposals must also demonstrate value for money.

The detailed project criteria form part of the various operational programmes currently being negotiated with the Commission. As these are agreed, the criteria will be made known to those wishing to put forward proposals. Work is also in hand on application guidelines which will be circulated to local partners, and to others on request.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of the current negotiations between his Department and the European Commission in relation to European funding.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* Negotiations with the Commission on the Northern Ireland Community support framework were completed in December last year. Since then, negotiations continue on the content of the various earning programmes to be supported from our allocations from the three structural funds. Other, special, programmes may also be funded from outside member state allocations and officials are discussing with the Commission how Northern Ireland can best benefit from them. These measures include, of course, the transfrontier programme on which we and the Government of the Republic of Ireland are jointly negotiating with the Commission.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total amount of financial assistance received by *(a)* each Northern Ireland Government Department, *(b)* each district council in Northern Ireland and *(c)* other organisations from European Community sources, in each year since 1980.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* Northern Ireland's largest single source of funding from the European Community is the guarantee section of the European agricultural guidance and guarantee fund. However, the bulk of such receipts are centrally disbursed, by the intervention board for agricultural produce, and details of payments are not generally maintained on a regional basis. There are numerous other sources of EC grant and although, in most of these cases, figures for the Province as a whole are available they are not analysed on the basis sought. Nevertheless it has been possible to construct a table showing for the last three financial years (aggregated) the amounts of structural fund money received by the various Northern Ireland departments, by the district council sector and by other bodies. The details are as follows:

Financial Years	*Northern Ireland Departments*					*District*		
	DANI £ million	*DED £ million*	*DOE £ million*	*DHSS £ million*	*DENI £ million*	*Councils £ million*	*Others £ million*	*Total £ million*
1987-88 to 1989-90	24·1	139·2	18·4	4·6	23·5	11·9	81·2	302·9

(These figures are provisional; their accuracy depends upon 1989-90 receipts being finalised.)

In so far as it would be feasible, the further detail requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Cerebral Palsy

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many children are registered with the Eastern health and social services board who have cerebral palsy in the age groups *(a)* under five years, *(b)* five to 16 years, *(c)* 16 to 24 years and *(d)* 24 years and over;

(2) how many children are registered with the Southern health and social services board who have cerebral palsy in the age groups *(a)* under five years, *(b)* five to 16 years, *(c)* 16 to 24 years and *(d)* 24 years and over.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 5 April 1990]:* There is no requirement upon the health and social services boards to maintain registers of people suffering from cerebral palsy. Although various professional officers and departments hold relevant information, these records can be collated only at disproportionate cost.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Local Government Finance (Rebates)

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many single parent householders in Scotland are *(a)* in receipt of maximum 80 per cent. poll tax rebates and *(b)* eligible for poll tax rebate at less than the maximum rate in 1989-90;

(2) how many single pensioners in Scotland are *(a)* receiving the maximum 80 per cent. poll tax rebates and *(b)* eligible for poll tax rebate at less than the maximum rate in 1989-90.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The latest estimates are in the table.

Community Charge Rebates: Scotland 1989-90

	Number receiving maximum rebate	*Number receiving less than maximum rebate*
Single parent householders	70,000	10,000
Single people aged 60 or over	150,000	100,000

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the estimate of the number of people in Scotland likely to take up their entitlement to poll tax rebate in 1989-90; and what sum of money was allocated for this purpose.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Government do not make forecasts of the numbers entitled to benefits. Estimates of those entitled to community charge rebates will be able to be made retrospectively, when data from the relevant family expenditure survey becomes available. However, in the 1989-90 spring supply estimates (HC 231-XV 88-89) it was estimated that the number of charge payers in Scotland receiving community charge rebates was rather more than 1 million. The total local authority expenditure on rebates was estimated to be £201 million, of which £194 million was met through central Government subsidy.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will indicate the number of people in *(a)* Alyn and Deeside, *(b)* Clwyd and *(c)* Wales who will qualify for poll tax rebate following the rise in the capital disregard to £16,000.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The models used by this Department produce estimates of the numbers of people expected to receive community charge benefit, not of numbers who may be eligible.

(a) and *(b)*—Reliable estimates of number of recipients cannot be provided on the detailed regional basis requested by the hon. Member.

(c)—The latest estimate of the number of individual chargepayers in Wales who will receive community charge benefit is 541,000 in 1990-91.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much was spent on domestic rate rebates in Scotland in 1987-88 and 1988-89; how much was spent on poll tax rebates in Scotland in 1989-90; and what is planned expenditure on poll tax rebates in Scotland in 1990-91.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The latest estimate of spending on domestic rate rebates in Scotland is £212 million in 1987-88 and £168 million in 1988-89. The 1989-90 community charge rebate expenditure in Scotland is estimated to be £222 million and the planned expenditure for community charge benefit in 1990-91 is £232 million.

Disability

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants would qualify for the severe disability premium if it were to be awarded to people receiving attendance allowance and who do not have a carer who receives invalid care allowances for looking after them.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Information on which to base such an estimate is not available.

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make available to the House the report of the Minister with responsibility for the disabled on the groups he met and the projects he visited during his visit in 1989 to the United States of America.

Mr. Scott: The purpose of my visit to the United States of America between 29 July 1989 and 3 August 1989 was to look at ways in which the Federal Government, state governments, welfare organisations and major employers were working to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities through education, health and employment programmes. I regret that a formal report of the visit is not available.

Following meetings in New York, Washington, Baltimore and San Fransisco, my trip culminated in a visit to the California relay system (CRS) in Los Angeles. The CRS provides an unlimited access service which enables people with a hearing impairment to communicate via the telephone network with a hearing person, and is therefore operating on a similar way to the telephone exchange for the deaf operated by the Royal National Institute for the Deaf in London and Glasgow. Both the British and Californian systems provide a valuable service for people with a severe hearing impairment.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what response he has received to "The Way Ahead: Benefits for Disabled People" from the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The association has submitted a detailed written response, and it was represented at a meeting I held on 5 April with the Disability Benefits Consortium to discuss "The Way Ahead." We shall give careful consideration to all the association's comments in carrying forward the detailed work on our proposals.

Child Benefit

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much child benefit has been paid in each of the parliamentary constituencies of Wales for *(a)* 1983 and *(b)* 1988-89.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Information relating to child benefit in Great Britain cannot be sub-divided beyond England, Scotland and Wales. The amount of child benefit expenditure for Wales is estimated to have been £204·4 million in 1983-84 and £234·0 million in 1988-89.

Disability Allowances

Mr. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he proposes to extend the age restriction on qualification for mobility allowance beyond the present limits; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: We intend to incorporate mobility allowance in the new disability allowance from April 1992. Like mobility allowance, the disability allowance will be awarded only in respect of disability occurring before age 65, but there will be no upper age limit for payment provided the criteria continue to be met. When the disability allowance is introduced, we intend to remove the upper age limit for payment of mobility allowance to people who are already receiving it.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what alterations are envisaged in the introduction of the disability allowance to ensure an efficient assessment procedure and minimise distress to the claimant.

Mr. Scott: We are considering the assessment procedures for the disability allowance. We shall be concerned to devise procedures which are efficient, and accessible and helpful to claimants.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average number of weeks that lapses between a claim and the date of notification of the decision to the claimant in respect of allowances for *(a)* mobility, *(b)* attendance and *(c)* severe disablement.

Mr. Scott: The latest available information is as follows:

	Weeks
Mobility allowance (March)	7·0
Attendance allowance (March)	7·6
Severe disablement allowance (February)	12·1

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average time elapsing between a letter of appeal and refusal of mobility allowance and notification of the decision of the adjudicating medical authority.

Mr. Scott: The average time taken between receipt of an appeal to a medical board against a decision on a mobility allowance claim and notification of the decision is currently 11·6 weeks.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average time elapsing between a letter of review after refusal of attendance allowance and notification of the decision of the attendance allowance board.

Mr. Scott: This information is not available.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average time which elapses between a letter of appeal against a refusal to severe disablement allowance or refusal of mobility allowance after a medical board and the medical appeal tribunal hearing.

Mr. Scott: The latest available figures are for the quarter ending on 30 September 1989. During that period, the average time taken between the date of lodgement of an appeal to a medical appeal tribunal and the hearing was 20.8 weeks for severe disablement allowance claims and 16.2 weeks for mobility allowance claims.

Nursing Homes

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to the reply of 2 April, if he will obtain from his Department's local management information on how many of his departmental staff in Bradford, since 1979, have been given permission exceptionally to hold a financial interest in private residential or nursing homes.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: No members of staff have sought permission.

Pensions

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has for the payment of state pensions by means of automatic cash dispensers.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We have no such plans.

Community Charge Benefit

Mr. Franks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations he has received from community charge payers in Barrow about advice by the Barrow district council concerning community charge benefit following the Budget; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: No representations on any advice given by Barrow district council have so far been received.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing the amount of community charge benefit which will accrue to a household, assuming that transitional relief does not apply, where the earnings of the couple are £160 and £50, respectively, the community charge is £420 per person and the said persons are *(a)* a married couple or *(b)* two persons not falling within the category of cohabiting or married couples; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Assuming the figures quoted refer to earnings net of tax and national insurance contributions, *(a)* a married couple with combined net earnings of £210 per week would not qualify for community charge benefit, and *(b)* of two single people not living together as husband and wife with net earnings of £160 and £50 per week respectively, the former would not qualify for community charge benefit and the other would qualify for £5·20 per week.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will take steps to adjust the arrangements for community charge benefit so that married couples who are both employed may be treated in the same way as persons living in the same accommodation who are not married and not regarded as cohabiting couples; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We have no such plans. The structure of community charge benefit is designed to ensure that the recipients' net income, after paying their community charge, is no lower than if they received income support. The assessment rules therefore follow those for income support in assessing married couples differently from two single people who are not living together as husband and wife.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out, by regions and by amounts, as much information as is available to him about the take-up so far of poll tax benefit.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Department does not make forecasts of the number of people entitled to income-related benefits. Take-up estimates are made as and when they can be derived from historical survey data. Take-up estimates for community charge benefit will not be available before 1992.

Household Incomes

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he intends to publish the latest below average household income tables.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Within the next few weeks.

Seafarers

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will introduce a special social security scheme for those engaged in the seafaring industry.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We have no plans to change the social security arrangements for those who work in the seafaring industry. Foreign-going mariners and share fishermen are already subject to special rules in respect of benefit entitlement and contribution liability.

National Insurance

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much extra revenue would be raised by his Department if the upper earnings limit on national insurance contributions were abolished on the basis of existing scales.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: If the upper earnings limit for employees' national insurance contributions were abolished it is estimated that the extra revenue raised at current rates would be £2·45 billion. This assumes that an upper limit would be retained for contracting-out and that all contributions above that limit would be at the full not contracted-out rate.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much revenue would be raised if national insurance contributions were chargeable at current rates on investment income above a national insurance contribution threshold of £3,500.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: If national insurance contributions were charged at the employees' main percentage rate of 9 per cent. on all investment income over £3,500 per year, including that of pensioners, it is estimated that the revenue raised at current rates would be about £1·53 billion. This estimate is based on a projection of the 1987-88 survey of personal incomes and is therefore provisional.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the cost to a pensioner with an investment income of *(a)* £5,000, *(b)* £10,000 and *(c)* £1,000 as a result of the imposition of national insurance contributions on all investment income at current rates of national insurance contributions.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Pensioners do not currently pay national insurance contributions, but if such contributions were charged at the employees' main percentage rate of 9 per cent. on all investment income the cost to a pensioner would be as shown in the table.

Investment income (£)	*National insurance contribution (£)*
5,000	450
10,000	900
1,000	90

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the cost to a pensioner with an investment income of *(a)* £3,500, *(b)* £5,000 and *(c)* £10,000 as a result of imposing national insurance contribution charges on all investment income above £3,000 and above £3,500.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Pensioners do not currently pay national insurance contributions but if such contributions were charged at the employees' main percentage rate of 9 per cent. on all investment income above £3,000 and above £3,500 the cost to a pensioner would be as shown in the table.

National Insurance contributions

Investment income £	*Ceiling of £3,000* £	*Ceiling of £3,500* £
3,500	45	nil
5,000	180	135
10,000	630	585

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the total cost, per week, to individuals on *(a)* 1·5, *(b)* two, *(c)* 2·5 and *(d)* three times average incomes, if the upper earnings limit for national insurance contributions were abolished on the basis of the existing scales.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The table shows the extra cost per week to the individuals concerned assuming that an upper limit was retained for contracting out and that all contributions above that limit would be at the full not contracted-out rate.

Average male full time[1] earnings	*Extra cost per week* £
X 1·5 (£450)	9·00
X 2 (£600)	22·50
X 2·5 (£750)	36·00
X 3 (£900)	49·50

[1] Assumed as £300 in 1990-91 for illustrative purposes.

Radiation Exposure

Mr. Clay: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on what assumptions as to the number of people qualifying for radiation exposure payments and the rates of such payments the estimated cost of the proposed new clause 8 to the Social Security Bill given by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State on 28 March, *Official Report,* columns 636-37, was based.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: For the purposes of the estimate, it was assumed that 1,000 people might be eligible under the terms of the proposed new clause and that payments would be equivalent to the maximum allowable rates of industrial injuries benefits.

Unemployment Cost

Mr. Loyden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his latest estimate for the total costs to the Exchequer of the average unemployed adult including payment of benefits, lost taxes and other taxes.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* In 1989-90 the estimated average weekly benefit cost for unemployed people receiving benefit was £61·80. Estimates of tax revenue forgone are not available.

Single Payments

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will state the value of single payments made between *(a)* April 1988 and March 1989, and *(b)* between April 1989 and the most recent practicable date, in each case both as a total sum and by DSS regions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 3 April 1990]:* The regional variations and total amounts of single payment awards made between April 1988 and March 1989 and April 1989 and February 1990 are shown in the table.

	April 1988 to March 1989 £	*April 1989 to February 1990* £
North-East	5,893,635	13,742
Midlands	6,486,899	38,729
London North	3,818,883	19,408
London South	3,252,343	10,807
Wales and South-Western	3,426,565	10,622
North-West	11,014,049	66,815
Scotland	18,517,967	73,779
Totals	52,410,341	233,902

Spending Power

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish figures, similar to those in his Department's tax/benefit model table, showing net weekly spending power for a lone mother with two children aged four and six years under the benefit system as uprated in April 1990 and in each of the following circumstances *(a)* not working, after one year on benefits, *(b)* earning £20 a week from part-time working and *(c)* working full-time and earning (i) £60, (ii) £70, (iii) £80, (iv) £90, (v) £100, (vi) £110 and (vii) £120 per week.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 2 March 1990]:* The information is in the tables. It should be noted that the results in the tables remain arbitrary. They cannot reflect, except by chance, the actual circumstances of particular people and cannot claim to be representative of the population at large. The tables use hypothetical rents so they do not reflect the full range of housing costs which people can pay.

Single person with 2 children aged 4 and 6

	Net Income (after housing costs) (£ pw)
(a) Not working[1]	76·22
(b) Earning £20 per week part-time	91·22

[1] There is no longer a difference in the amount of benefit paid after one year.

(c)—Earnings and benefits family head in full-time work as at April 1990
Single person with 2 children aged 4 and 6

Tax threshold=£90·87 *Basic tax rate=25 per cent.* *Total net income on income support=£106·41*
Net income after rent and community charge on income support=£76·22

Gross earnings	Tax	National insurance	Take home pay	Family credit	Child benefit	Rent	Rent rebate	Community charge	Community charge rebate	Net income	Net income after rent and community charge	Deduction rate (per cent.)
60·00	0·00	2·18	57·82	52·70	20·10	23·48	0·00	6·71	0·00	130·62	100·43	73·0
70·00	0·00	3·08	66·92	46·33	20·10	23·48	0·00	6·71	0·00	133·35	103·16	73·0
80·00	0·00	3·98	76·02	39·96	20·10	23·48	0·00	6·71	0·00	136·08	103·89	73·0
90·00	0·00	4·88	85·12	33·59	20·10	23·48	0·00	6·71	0·00	138·81	108·62	74·0
100·00	2·28	5·78	91·94	28·81	20·10	23·48	0·00	6·71	0·00	140·85	110·66	80·0
110·00	4·78	6·68	98·54	24·19	20·10	23·48	0·00	6·71	0·00	142·83	112·64	80·0
120·00	7·28	7·58	105·14	19·57	20·10	23·48	0·00	6·71	0·00	144·81	114·62	80·0

Notes to tables:
1. Based on methods and assumptions used in Tax Benefit Model Tables.
2. A community charge of £350 for each adult is assumed throughout.

Mrs. Beckett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish tables, similar to those in his Department's tax/benefit model table, showing net weekly spending power for each of a single wage married couple *(a)* with two children aged four and six years and *(b)* with three children aged three, eight and eleven years, earning (i) £60, (ii) £70, (iii) £80, (iv) £90, (v) £100, (vi) £110, (vii) £120, (viii) £130, (ix) £140, (x) £150, (xi) £160, and (xii) £170 under the benefit system as uprated in April.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 2 March 1990]*: The information is in the tables. It should be noted that the results in the tables remain arbitrary. They cannot reflect, except by chance, the actual circumstances of particular people and cannot claim to be representative of the population at large. The tables use hypothetical rents, so they do not reflect the full range of housing cost which people can pay.

(a)—Earnings and benefits family head in full-time work as at April 1990
Married couple with 2 children aged 4 and 6
Table II

Tax threshold=£90·87 *Basic tax rate=25 per cent.* *Total net income on income support=£128·58*
Net income after rent and community charge on income support=£91·68

Gross earnings	Tax	National insurance	Take home pay	Family credit	Child benefit	Rent	Rent rebate	Community charge	Community charge rebate	Net income	Net income after rent and community charge	Deduction rate (per cent.)
60·00	0·00	2·18	57·82	52·70	14·50	23·48	6·99	13·42	6·93	138·94	102·04	95·0
70·00	0·00	3·08	66·92	46·33	14·50	23·48	5·22	13·42	6·52	139·49	102·59	95·0
80·00	0·00	3·98	76·02	39·96	14·50	23·48	3·44	13·42	6·11	140·03	103·13	94·0
90·00	0·00	4·88	85·12	33·59	14·50	23·48	1·67	13·42	5·70	140·58	103·68	95·0
100·00	2·28	5·78	91·94	28·81	14·50	23·48	0·00	13·42	5·40	140·65	103·75	83·0
110·00	4·78	6·68	98·54	24·19	14·50	23·48	0·00	13·42	5·10	142·33	105·43	83·0
120·00	7·28	7·58	105·14	19·57	14·50	23·48	0·00	13·42	4·80	144·01	107·11	83·0
130·00	9·78	8·48	111·74	14·95	14·50	23·48	0·00	13·42	4·50	145·69	108·79	82·0
140·00	12·28	9·38	118·34	10·33	14·50	23·48	0·00	13·42	4·21	147·38	110·48	83·0
150·00	14·78	10·28	124·91	5·71	14·50	23·48	0·00	13·42	3·91	149·06	112·16	83·0
160·00	17·28	11·18	131·54	1·09	14·50	23·48	0·00	13·42	3·61	150·74	113·84	83·0
170·00	19·78	12·08	138·14	0·00	14·50	23·48	0·00	13·42	2·79	155·43	118·53	44·0

(b)—Earnings and benefits family head in full-time work as at April 1990
Married couple with 3 children aged 3, 8 and 11
Table II

Tax threshold=£90·87 *Basic tax rate=25 per cent.* *Total net income on income support=£149·68*
Net income after rent and community charge on income support=£112·78

Gross earnings	Tax	National insurance	Take home pay	Family credit	Child benefit	Rent	Rent rebate	Community charge	Community charge rebate	Net income	Net income after rent and community charge	Deduction rate (per cent.)
60·00	0·00	2·18	57·82	66·85	21·75	23·48	4·94	13·42	6·42	157·82	120·92	94·0
70·00	0·00	3·08	66·92	60·48	21·75	23·48	3·17	13·42	6·05	158·37	121·47	95·0
80·00	0·00	3·98	76·02	54·11	21·75	23·48	1·40	13·42	5·64	158·92	122·02	95·0
90·00	0·00	4·88	85·12	47·74	21·75	23·48	0·00	13·42	5·23	159·84	122·94	78·0
100·00	2·28	5·78	91·94	42·96	21·75	23·48	0·00	13·42	4·92	161·57	124·67	83·0
110·00	4·78	6·68	98·54	38·34	21·75	23·48	0·00	13·42	4·63	163·26	126·36	83·0
120·00	7·28	7·58	105·14	33·72	21·75	23·48	0·00	13·42	4·33	164·94	128·04	83·0
130·00	9·78	8·48	111·74	29·10	21·75	23·48	0·00	13·42	4·03	166·62	129·72	83·0
140·00	12·28	9·38	118·34	24·48	21·75	23·48	0·00	13·42	3·74	168·31	131·41	83·0
150·00	14·78	10·28	124·94	19·86	21·75	23·48	0·00	13·42	3·44	169·99	133·09	83·0

Gross earnings	Tax	National insurance	Take home pay	Family credit	Child benefit	Rent	Rent rebate	Community charge	Community charge rebate	Net income	Net income after rent and community charge	Deduction rate (per cent.)
160·00	17·28	11·18	131·54	15·24	21·75	23·48	0·00	13·42	3·14	171·67	134·77	83·0
170·00	19·78	12·08	138·14	10·62	21·75	23·48	0·00	13·42	2·84	173·35	136·45	83·0

Notes to tables (a) and (b):

1. Based on methods and assumptions used in tax benefit model tables.
2. A community charge of £350 for each adult is assumed throughout.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Racial Discrimination

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has as to how many members of police forces have been dismissed or required to resign for racially discriminatory behaviour since the introduction of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Statistics are not collected about the use in disciplinary proceedings of specific items in the police discipline code. It is not therefore possible to say how many officers have been found guilty of racially discriminatory behaviour, or how they were punished. Such information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Male Prisoners (Night Attire)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what night attire is provided for male prisoners.

Mr. Mellor: Pyjamas are available for those inmates who wish to wear them.

Disciplinary Adjudications (Prisons)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects a report will be published on the experiment in three prisons whereby legally qualified clerks attended disciplinary adjudications.

Mr. Mellor: A pilot scheme to provide qualified clerks to assist at board of visitors' adjudications is under way in 13 establishments and is being independently monitored. We expect to receive a report of that monitoring by the beginning of 1991 and hope then to publish it.

Penal Establishments

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether research is being undertaken to ascertain the number of people released from long-stay mental hospitals who are in prison department establishments.

Mr. Mellor: The Home Office has commissioned no research specifically on that precise issue but has granted facilities at Leeds prison to assist the Leeds Eastern health authority in one of its projects to ascertain what happens to former long-stay patients.

The extensive checklist used by the research team from the Institute of Psychiatry, university of London, commissioned to produce a psychiatric profile of the sentenced prison population includes the question of in-patient psychiatric history. The institute is scheduled to submit its report at the end of the year.

Overseas Residents

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate, by country, the number of overseas residents who are eligible to register to vote in British general elections.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The table gives an estimate of the number of British citizens living in each country who are likely to have spent fewer than 20 years there. The figures may include people who left the United Kingdom more than 20 years ago, or who were not registered as electors in the United Kingdom when they left as adults, and so do not qualify to register as overseas electors.

Estimates of the number of British citizens who have lived in each country abroad for less than 20 years.

Country	*Number*
Algeria	210
Angola	40
Antigua	50
Argentina	2,500
Ascension	160
Australia	550,000
Austria	4,500
Bahamas	2,500
Bahrain	5,500
Bangladesh	410
Barbados	2,000
Belgium	20,000
Belize	300
Bermuda	3,500
Bolivia	150
Botswana	4,000
Brazil	6,550
Brunei	1,450
Bulgaria	60
Burma	30
Canada	1,025,000
Canary Islands	22,500
Cayman Islands	2,000
Chile	1,250
China	480
Colombia	1,000
Congo	60
Costa Rica	200
Cuba	10
Cyprus	8,000
Czechoslovakia	30
Denmark	8,000
East Germany	70
Ecuador	480
Egypt	2,200
El Salvador	60
Ethiopia	300
Falkland Islands	500
Fiji	400
Finland	300
France	315,000
Gabon	200
Gambia	30
Ghana	500

Country	*Number*
Gibraltar	5,500
Greece	9,000
Grenada	300
Guatemala	20
Guinea	50
Guinea-Bissau	20
Guyana	150
Honduras	180
Hong Kong	18,000
Hungary	450
Iceland	400
India	6,980
Indonesia	2,500
Iraq	1,000
Israel	50,000
Italy	28,800
Ivory Coast	9,300
Jamaica	1,500
Japan	200
Jordan	1,000
Kenya	8,000
Kiribati	45
Korea	480
Kuwait	6,000
Lebanon	320
Lesotho	360
Liberia	400
Libya	4,500
Luxembourg	2,000
Macao	90
Madagascar	100
Malawi	4,000
Malaysia	2,340
Malta	2,000
Mauritius	690
Mexico	1,300
Mongolia	10
Montserrat	20
Morocco	440
Mozambique	500
Nepal	500
Netherlands	20,000
New Zealand	750,000
Nicaragua	250
Nigeria	4,700
North Yemen	70
Norway	6,500
Oman	4,500
Pakistan	550
Panama	20
Papau New Guinea	4,000
Paraquay	150
Peru	500
Phillipines	910
Poland	100
Portugal	9,000
Qatar	4,000
Republic of Ireland	150,000
Rumania	2
St. Helena	100
St. Kitts	100
St. Lucia	400
St. Vincent	160
Saudi Arabia	23,000
Senegal	90
Seychelles	300
Singapore	5,000
Solomon Islands	400
Somalia	150
South Africa	210,000
South Korea	800
Spain	59,000
Sri Lanka	1,000
Sudan	1,000
Swaziland	2,000
Sweden	10,000
Switzerland	22,050
Syria	400
Tanzania	1,360
Thailand	2,000
Tonga	100
Trinidad	600
Tunisia	200
Turkey	1,000
Turks and Caicos Islands	200
Uganda	670
United Arab Emirates	23,500
Uruguay	120
USA	470,000
USSR	800
Vanuatu	450
Venezuela	2,000
Vietnam	20
Virgin Islands	350
West Germany	59,300
Yugoslavia	200
Zaire	200
Zambia	4,700
Zimbabwe	5,000

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will state how many overseas residents, by country, are currently registered to vote in British elections; and if he will give the equivalent figures for each of the past five years.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The number of attestations of overseas electors' declarations carried out by consular officials in each country is available centrally for 1986, the first year of operation of the overseas franchise introduced by the Representation of the People Act 1985, and is given in the following table; this information is not available for subsequent years. The total number in 1986 was slightly greater than the total number who were registered that year (11,100), since a number of declarations were either not received by the electoral registration officer or were rejected.

Overseas electors, 1986

Country	*Number of attestations*
Afghanistan	9
Algeria	7
Angola	4
Anguilla	3
Antigua and Barbuda	18
Argentina	2
Australia	228
Austria	78
Bahamas	71
Bahrain	127
Bangladesh	22
Barbados	31
Belgium	324
Belize	7
Bermuda	34
Bolivia	3
Botswana	142
Brazil	74
Brunei	127
Bulgaria	4
Burma	3
Cameroon	19
Canada	52
Cayman Island	34
Chile	5
China	63
Colombia	5
Congo	1

Country	*Number of attestations*
Costa Rica	8
Cuba	2
Cyprus	193
Czechoslovakia	2
Denmark	36
Dominica	5
Ecuador	8
Egypt	83
Equatorial Guinea	1
Ethiopia	36
Falkland Islands	24
Fiji	57
Finland	14
France	507
Gabon	24
Gambia	11
German Democratic Republic	2
Federal Republic of Germany	344
Ghana	33
Gibraltar	14
Greece	148
Grenada	10
Guatemala	4
Guyana	6
Hong Kong	304
Iceland	1
India	43
Indonesia	145
Iran	6
Iraq	34
Ireland, Republic of	58
Israel	54
Italy	222
Ivory Coast	21
Jamaica	36
Japan	114
Jordan	47
Kenya	179
Kiribati	331
Korea, Republic of	44
Kuwait	135
Lesotho	40
Liberia	20
Luxembourg	46
Madagascar	4
Malawi	54
Malaysia	147
Malta	59
Mauritius	18
Mexico	15
Mongolia	1
Montserrat	2
Morocco	15
Mozambique	14
Nepal	43
Netherlands	243
New Zealand	141
Nigeria	80
Norway	138
Oman	332
Pakistan	37
Papua New Guinea	215
Paraguay	9
Peru	45
Philippines	62
Poland	18
Portugal	113
Qatar	193
St. Helena	8
St. Kitts and Nevis	2
St. Vincent	15
Saudi Arabia	811
Senegal	38
Seychelles	10
Sierra Leone	55
Singapore	284
Solomon Islands	36
Somalia	2
South Africa	499
Soviet Union	11
Spain	1,532
Sri Lanka	38
Sudan	14
Swaziland	23
Sweden	53
Switzerland	206
Syria	2
Tanzania	82
Thailand	84
Tonga	2
Trinidad and Tobago	23
Tunisia	15
Turkey	45
Uganda	35
United Arab Emirates	459
United States of America	656
Uruguay	4
Vanuatu	13
Venezuela	19
Virgin Islands (British)	2
Yemen Arab Republic	26
Yemen, Peoples Democratic Republic	6
Yugoslavia	5
Zaire	18
Zambia	102
Zimbabwe	92
	12,266

Security Industry

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the working group on the self-regulation of the security industry submitted its report; and whether he will place this report in the Library.

Mr. John Patten: The working group submitted its report last July. Its recommendations are being considered within the Home Office.

Racially Motivated Crimes

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have been brought in each of the past 15 years for each category of racially motivated crimes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: Information is not collected on the number of prosecutions for offences which were racially motivated. The research and planning unit of the Home Office published in 1989 a paper, No. 54, on "Racially motivated incidents reported to the police", a copy of which is in the Library.

Cheltenham Conference (Security)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the cost of the policing operation to protect the Prime Minister when she addressed the Conservative party in Cheltenham on 31 March 1990.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the Chief Constable of Gloucestershire that the estimated additional cost of policing the Conservative party conference in Cheltenham was £120,000 over the three days.

Leicestershire Police Authority

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what additional support he is proposing to offer the Leicestershire police authority to meet its extra policing requirements.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. and learned Friend has approved 53 additional police posts for the Leicestershire constabulary for 1990-91. The police authority has applied for 25 police posts for 1991-92. This will be considered, with the advice of Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary, along with the applications from other police authorities. The aim is to announce decisions on force increases in the autumn.

Vehicle Removal

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Newham, North-East of 30 March, *Official Report*, column *373*, if he will call for a report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis on the daily average of vehicles recorded as parked unlawfully in Green street and Katherine road in the London borough of Newham and as to whether he has any proposals to increase the number which are removed.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the Commissioner that no specific records are kept of the average number of unlawfully parked vehicles in these roads.

Routine enforcement action is undertaken by traffic wardens and police officers, usually by issue of a fixed penalty notice. However, there will be many instances where illegally parked vehicles will be driven away before an officer is able to issue a notice.

The removal of illegally parked vehicles will continue to be arranged subject to traffic conditions and the availability of resources. There are no plans at present to increase the number of vehicle removals in the specified roads.

Correspondence

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now reply to the letter sent to him by the hon. Member for Gower on 5 March regarding staffing at Swansea prison.

Mr. Mellor: I replied to the hon. Member on 6 April.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now reply to the letter sent to him on 24 February by the hon. Member for Gower regarding his constituent from West Cross, Swansea.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I replied to the hon. Member on 5 April.

Serious Disorder, London

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ask the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis to make an early decision as to whether events on Saturday 31 March in London constituted a riot for Riot Damages Act purposes.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The receiver for the Metropolitan police district is satisfied that the terms of the Riot (Damages) Act 1886 apply. The Metropolitan police announced on 2 April that any person who believed that they had a claim for damage to a house, shop or building or any property in such premises should make a claim to the receiver, G9 branch, 2 Bessborough street, London SW1V 2JF within 14 days of the disturbance on 31 March, or submit notice of intention to make such a claim.

Parking Offences

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many motor vehicles were towed away for fixed penalty offences in London in 1989;

(2) how many motor vehicles were wheel-clamped in London in 1989;

(3) how many vehicles towed away in London in 1989 were towed away for *(a)* dangerous parking, *(b)* obstruction, *(c)* restricted street offences, *(d)* parking in designated parking bays and *(e)* parking in residents' parking bays;

(4) how many vehicles wheel-clamped in London in 1989 were clamped for *(a)* dangerous parking, *(b)* obstruction, *(c)* restricted street offences, *(d)* parking in designated parking bays and *(e)* parking in residents' parking bays.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the Commissioner that during 1989 a total of 149,666 vehicles were wheel-clamped and 116,315 vehicles were removed for illegal parking in London.

Information about the number of vehicles wheel-clamped or removed for specific offences could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

As a matter of police policy, fixed penalty notices are issued to all vehicles before wheel-clamping. In the case of vehicles which are removed for parking offences, although the great majority are issued with a fixed penalty notice, there are certain circumstances where the issue of a fixed penalty is not appropriate because of the seriousness of the offence.

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines are used by the Metropolitan police for the priorities for the wheel-clamping and removal of motor vehicles.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Wheel-clamping and vehicle removal operations are used by the Metropolitan police as an aid to the enforcement of parking regulations.

Guidelines are issued to all officers engaged on these duties. In areas where wheel-clamping is authorised, any offending vehicle may be clamped or removed. Police officers are expected to exercise discretion as to whether wheel-clamping or removal is the desirable course of action dependent upon prevailing circumstances. A vehicle would not normally be clamped if it is parked in a position which causes serious obstruction or danger to other road users, or if it is parked in a bus lane, bus stop or cab rank, on the approach to or exit from a pedestrian crossing, adjacent to a fire exit or across an access used by emergency vehicles or leading to private premises.

In order of priority, enforcement action is concentrated on those vehicles which are causing danger, obstruction, parked illegally in restricted areas or parked illegally in permitted parking places.

Personal Injury

Sir Anthony Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the percentage of all crimes represented by crimes of violence and of road accidents involving personal injury in each of the county police areas in England and Wales in each of the last five years.

Mr. Waddington: The information requested on crimes of violence is given in the following table. Information on road accidents is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport.

Violence against the person as a percentage of total recorded crime in non-metropolitan police force areas.

Police force area	*1985*	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*
			Percentages		
Avon and Somerset	3·3	3·3	3·5	4·1	5·0
Bedfordshire	4·9	4·4	4·7	5·0	5·2
Cambridgeshire	3·8	4·0	4·6	4·9	5·8
Cheshire	4·2	4·1	4·3	5·0	5·4
Cleveland	3·6	3·4	3·7	4·1	4·1
Cumbria	3·8	3·7	4·8	5·7	6·3
Derbyshire	4·6	4·7	5·2	6·6	6·7
Devon and Cornwall	3·8	3·6	3·9	4·8	5·0
Dorset	2·7	2·6	3·1	3·5	3·5
Durham	3·8	3·7	4·5	4·9	5·2
Dyfed-Powys	4·5	5·0	5·4	6·3	8·2
Essex	3·8	3·6	4·4	5·5	5·0
Gloucestershire	3·1	3·1	2·9	3·5	3·7
Gwent	5·5	5·4	6·0	7·3	7·8
Hampshire	3·2	3·3	3·4	4·0	4·1
Hertfordshire	3·4	3·4	3·9	4·5	4·5
Humberside	5·3	5·0	5·6	6·2	6·3
Kent	2·9	3·2	3·8	4·1	4·5
Lancashire	2·9	2·7	3·1	3·4	3·2
Leicestershire	4·4	4·3	4·6	5·2	5·1
Lincolnshire	4·1	3·7	4·2	4·9	5·2
Norfolk	2·9	2·7	3·4	4·2	4·1
Northamptonshire	3·8	4·3	4·8	5·4	5·4
North Yorkshire	3·1	3·6	3·8	4·4	5·0
North Wales	4·8	4·7	5·3	6·2	6·5
Nottinghamshire	5·6	5·7	6·2	6·4	6·9
South Wales	2·8	2·8	3·1	3·3	3·8
Staffordshire	7·4	6·8	7·0	7·9	8·7
Suffolk	4·2	4·0	4·8	5·1	5·4
Surrey	4·0	3·9	4·9	5·5	5·2
Sussex	3·1	3·4	3·6	4·0	4·4
Thames Valley	3·0	2·9	3·3	3·8	3·7
Warwickshire	3·3	3·4	3·6	4·4	4·5
West Mercia	4·3	4·4	4·5	5·4	6·0
Wiltshire	4·9	4·7	5·8	6·2	7·2

Probation Service

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the discussion paper on the probation service and the independent sector, foreshadowed in chapter 10 of the Green Paper, "Supervision and Punishment in the Community", will be available.

Mr. John Patten: The discussion paper "Partnership in Dealing with Offenders in the Community" was published yesterday; a copy has been placed in the Library. It has been distributed to probation services and other criminal justice agencies, and to a wide range of voluntary and other organisations. Further individual copies may be obtained, free of charge, by writing to:

Room 440
Criminal Justice and Constitutional Department
Home Office
50 Queen Anne's Gate
London SW1H 9AT

Tyre Dumps (Fires)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what contingency plans exist to deal with a major fire at a major tyre dump in Britain.

Mr. Waddington: It is the duty of each fire authority to make provision for firefighting purposes in its area, and to ensure that its fire brigade has adequate and efficient fire cover arrangements. These would include contingency plans for all significant fire risks such as those inherent in major tyre dumps for which the fire service has available special techniques. Typically, a comprehensive contingency plan would also detail arrangements for liaising with the police and the other emergency services, and for the evacuation of the area should the situation require it.

Rule 43 Prisoners

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will initiate a review of the policy of holding prisoners subject to rule 43 protection in the same buildings as other prisoners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: Prisoners segregated under rule 43 for their own protection are housed in separate buildings where it is practicable to do so. At most establishments, however, this is not feasible because of the relatively small numbers of such prisoners and the need to make maximum use of the limited accommodation available.

Police Complaints Authority

Mr. Flannery: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what power the Police Complaints Authority has to investigate events occurring before its establishment in April 1984.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 gives the Police Complaints Authority no investigative powers, but vests it with considerable powers to supervise investigations into complaints or, in some circumstances, into incidents which have not been the subject of a complaint. The Act precludes the authority from supervising the investigation of any matter which occurred before its establishment on 29 April 1984.

Police Equipment

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide full details of the names and sponsors of the international police equipment conference.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The international police exhibition and conference (IPEC) is organised by a private company, Major Exhibitions and Conferences Ltd., for which my right hon. and learned Friend has no responsibility.

Fraud Squads

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish in respect of the fraud squad within each police force in England and Wales (i) the number of officers allocated to the fraud squad, (ii) the number of fraud squad officers as a percentage of the total number of police officers in each force, (iii) the planned numbers in the fraud squad for each force up to the year 2000, (iv) the number of prosecutions for fraud for the latest available date, (v) the number of convictions for fraud for the latest available date and (vi) the amount spent on computer hardware and software during the year 1988-89; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The future allocation of officers to specific duties is an operational matter for each chief officer of police. Information on computer expenditure by fraud squads is not available and would be obtained only at disproportionate cost. I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to his question on 30 March 1990 at column *631* for the remainder of the information requested.

Radio Stations

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the new franchises which the shadow Radio Authority has advertised for in respect of *(a)* the numbers of franchises to be issued and *(b)* the date when the franchises are to take effect;

(2) if he will make a statement on the recent announcement by the Independent Broadcasting Authority that it is inviting letters of intent for new radio franchises.

Mr. Mellor: The shadow Radio Authority has invited letters of intent from prospective licensees to assist in the process of drawing up a plan for the introduction of new independent stations. This exercise will give the authority an indication of the geographical spread of demand for new services, and the nature of that demand. The number of new licences which will be advertised in due course will be determined by factors such as local audience demand, financial viability, frequency availability and the extent to which the range and diversity of listener choice would be enhanced. In the course of the 1990s several hundred new services of various sizes could gradually emerge across the country. Advertising of licences for specific services will start when the Radio Authority is formally established in January 1991, if Parliament approves the provisions of the Broadcasting Bill.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the proposed licence fee for the radio stations franchised by the shadow Radio Authority.

Mr. Mellor: Under the provisions of the Broadcasting Bill the Radio Authority will be expected to receive its income from licence fee revenue. The authority aims to operate a differential scale of fees for the various services which it will license, but has yet to determine what those fees should be. We propose to amend the Broadcasting Bill in order to require the Radio Authority to publish its tariff of licence fees.

Detective Inspector Paul Matthews

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ask the Chief Constable of the West Midlands for a report as to whether any complaint has been received against former Detective Inspector Paul Matthews regarding his role in the case against Malcolm Herring.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand that such a complaint has been received, and that it is being investigated by the team led by Mr. Donald Shaw, Assistant Chief Constable of West Yorkshire, under the supervision of the Police Complaints Authority.

Prisoners' Earnings

Mr. Rees: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the average weekly earnings of prisoners in England and Wales.

Mr. Mellor: Following a recent increase in inmates' earnings, it is estimated that average weekly pay in 1990-91 for inmates in England and Wales (including those who are unoccupied) will be about £2·80. All convicted inmates, as well as those unconvicted inmates who offer themselves for work, receive a basic weekly payment of £1·75 whether occupied or not. A range of flat-rate, piece-rate and incentive pay schemes provide opportunities to earn up to a maximum of £5·87 per week in certain workshops and kitchens.

Mr. Rees: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is *(a)* the average and *(b)* the maximum weekly earnings of a prisoner undertaking group I, group II and group III employment, respectively.

Mr. Mellor: With effect from 9 April 1990, the weekly rates under the flat rate scheme for inmates in England and Wales are as follows:

	Average £	*Maximum* £
Group I	2·95	3·55
Group II	2·75	3·35
Group III	2·55	3·15

Mr. Rees: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the hourly overtime rate for prisoners' work.

Mr. Mellor: The rate is 8p.

Mr. Rees: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the weekly rate of earnings paid to prisoners for whom no work is available.

Mr. Mellor: With effect from 9 April 1990, £1·75.

Extradition

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list (i) those countries within the European Community which will extradite their nationals to the United Kingdom when charged with fraud-related offences committed here and (ii) those countries within the European Community to which the United Kingdom would extradite British nationals resident here to face charges of fraud committed in those countries.

Mr. John Patten: Fraud is included as an extraditable offence in all the bilateral treaties between the United Kingdom and the other members of the European Community, and is also covered by the backing of warrants procedure which operates between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

The United Kingdom, which has very limited extra-territorial jurisdiction, is prepared (subject to the circumstances of the case and our treaty arrangements with the country concerned) to extradite United Kingdom nationals to stand trial in the place where the offence was committed. This contrasts with the position in many civil law countries, which have wide extra-territorial powers to prosecute for offences committed outside their territory, but which are restricted constitutionally from extraditing their own nationals. The United Kingdom's extradition arrangements with the member countries of the European Community reflect this difference of approach.

Under the treaties with Belgium, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Portugal and Spain, the United Kingdom may extradite nationals to stand trial abroad, but those countries have discretion to refuse the extradition of their nationals here. The Netherlands are in a broadly similar position, although an amendment to their domestic law in 1981 now permits the extradition of a Dutch national here if the Dutch authorities are satisfied that there is sufficient guarantee that the offender would be returned to serve any prison sentence in the Netherlands. The Luxembourg treaty expressly prohibits the extradition of their nationals, while allowing United Kingdom nationals to be extradited there. Three further treaties, with Denmark, Greece and Italy, prohibit the extradition of nationals in either direction, so that the United Kingdom cannot at present extradite United Kingdom nationals to those countries. (This limitation on United Kingdom freedom of action will be removed later this year when the United Kingdom ratifies the European convention on extradition, which will take the place of existing extradition treaties with convention countries.) There are no restrictions on the extradition of nationals in either direction between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

Mr. Neil Larkman

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department why the inquest into the death of Neil Larkman at Swansea prison on 4 November has not yet taken place; and why the original date was deferred.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The conduct of an inquest is a matter for the coroner, who has informed me that the inquest into the death of Neil Larkman began on 22 March when the evidence of several witnesses was heard. The hearing was then adjourned at the request of solicitors acting for Mr. Larkman's family because two witnesses failed to appear. The coroner has now issued subpoenas for their attendance at a resumed hearing on 3 May.

Armley Prison

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners were in Armley Prison on the night of Monday, 2 April and Tuesday 3 April; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Mellor: On the mornings of Tuesday 3 April and Wednesday 4 April 1,311 and 1,273 prisoners respectively were held at Her Majesty's prison Leeds. Population figures are not collated separately for the evening.

Manchester Prison

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners during the recent disturbances at Her Majesty's prison, Manchester escaped outside prison boundaries; and how many of such prisoners were recaptured.

Mr. Mellor: No prisoners have escaped from Manchester prison during the recent incident.

Bramham Moor Hunt

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set up an inquiry into the circumstances resulting in the deaths of four horses at the Bramham moor hunt's point-to-point meeting at Wetherby racecourse on Saturday 31 March.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 5 April 1990]:* No. These are matters for the responsible authorities.

Victim Support, Newcastle

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy towards victim support schemes in east Newcastle.

Mr John Patten *[holding answer 5 April 1990]:* The Home Office pays grant in aid (£3·7 million in 1989-90 and £4·5 million subject to parliamentary approval this year) to Victim Support headquarters for the benefit of local victim support schemes. The grant is administered by the funding panel of Victim Support in accordance with agreed criteria which provide for payment of salaries or running costs. I understand that salaries grant is paid for two posts in the east Newcastle scheme. Responsibility for the funding of one of these posts was taken over from the local authority from 1 April 1989.

TRANSPORT

Maritime Safety

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether his Department has prepared a paper for presentation to the International Maritime Organisation requesting urgent consideration of the application of a revised standard of damage stability to all existing roll-on roll-off passenger ships, as recommended by the steering committee of the roll-on roll-off ferry safety research programme; and when in May the maritime safety committee of the International Maritime Organisation will meet.

Mr. McLoughlin: My Department has already submitted a paper to the 58th session of the maritime safety committee of the International Maritime Organisation, which takes place from 21 to 25 May 1990. Our paper sets out the work and recommendations of the ro-ro safety research programme, and proposes that

> "the Committee consider the adoption of a standard of residual stability for existing ro-ro ferries higher than that now required by the Convention",

and will include the steering committee and overview reports.

Marchioness

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a further grant to the Marchioness disaster fund to cover the cost of legal representation of the relatives of the victims at the forthcoming inquest; and if he will make a statement.

Mr McLoughlin: I announced on 18 October 1989 that the Government had contributed £125,000 to the

Riverboat Trust Fund set up by the mayor of Southwark, following the Marchioness disaster. Payments from the trust are matters for the trustees within the terms of the deed of trust, and I see no reason for a further contribution to the fund for the suggested purpose.

Toton Goods Yard

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will meet the chief executive of the British Rail Property Board to discuss the use of British Rail land at Toton for Transport related uses.

Mr. Portillo: No; this is a commercial matter for British Rail.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will obtain a copy of the Halcrow Fox Consulting Engineers report on the viability of access to the Toton goods yard through existing transport routes;

(2) what proposals he has to develop road and rail links between the A52 and the proposed Toton international freight terminal;

(3) what steps he is taking to ensure that an international freight terminal for the east midlands is built at Toton goods yards on land currently owned by British Rail.

Mr. Portillo: The responsibility for planning international rail freight services rests with British Rail. Any road implications of particular proposals will be considered by my Department in due course.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what correspondence he has received from Nottinghamshire county council, Mr. Cedric Ford and the Nottinghamshire chamber of commerce regarding delays in the freeing of derelict land in the ownership of British Rail in the Toton area.

Mr. Portillo: I am not aware of any such correspondence.

Rail Safety

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the answer of 29 March, *Official Report*, column *239*, if he will place in the Library a copy of the full report on the test carried out by the railways inspectorate into the safety effects of the incapacitation of one-person operation train drivers.

Mr. Portillo: No tests were carried out by the inspectorate; it observed the exercise carried out by London Underground Ltd. The chief inspecting officer of railways was satisfied by the result.

Sub-standard Shipping

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the efficacy of the powers that exist at present to eliminate sub-standard shipping from entering ports in the United Kingdom; and if he has any plans to amend those powers.

Mr. McLoughlin: The United Kingdom, with 13 other European countries, is a signatory to the memorandum of understanding (MOU) on port state control, under which foreign ships using its ports are subject to inspection to check compliance with the requirements of the international maritime conventions. Each signatory country should achieve an annual total of inspections corresponding to 25 per cent. of the estimated number of individual foreign merchant ships which enter its ports during a 12-month period; the United Kingdom has always exceeded 25 per cent. In practice, this should result in an inspection rate of around 85 per cent. of all individual ships using ports in the region.

The Department's marine surveyors possess substantial powers to ensure that deficiencies found on ships are rectified. These powers include the sanction of detention in cases where the deficiency is serious and clearly hazardous to safety, health or the environment: the owner or master may also be prosecuted. I have no immediate plans to seek amendments to the present powers.

Merchant Fleet

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the number of merchant vessels in the United Kingdom fleet *(a)* today and *(b)* 15 years ago; and what assessment he has made of the reasons for the decline.

Mr. McLoughlin: The number of merchant vessels—over 500 gross registered tonnes—in the United Kingdom fleet, including Crown dependencies, but excluding British dependent territories overseas at 28 February 1990 were as follows:

Year	*Number*
1975	1,776
1990	444

The number of ships on the United Kingdom register reduced as a consequence of the general decline in world shipping from the economically unsustainable levels of the 1970s. Changes in trading patterns, notably arising from adjustments to oil price increases, particularly affected the United Kingdom tanker fleet. Additionally, British operators have withdrawn from less profitable shipping sectors and concentrated on the higher value-added sectors.

Merchant Fleet

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is the number of officers and ratings employed on British merchant ships *(a)* today and *(b)* in 1975; and what assessment he has made of the reasons for the decline.

Mr. McLoughlin: The most recent figures are as follows:

Officers and ratings employed in the United Kingdom shipping industry: 1975, 1989

	31 December 1975	*31 December 1989*
Officers	35,815	8,573
Ratings	33,524	11,953

Note: Figures derived from General Council of British Shipping statistics.

The number of jobs on British merchant ships reduced with the decline in the British world fleets from the economically unsustainable levels of the 1970s. Automation and new technology have further reduced the number of crew required.

Coastal Trading

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will take steps to eliminate from coastal trading the ships of countries which do not allow British ships access to their coastal trades.

Mr. McLoughlin: No. The adoption of such a policy would be against our aim of promoting competition in shipping markets and reducing transport costs. My right hon. Friend is pressing his colleagues in the Transport Council of the European Community to reach early agreement to the liberalisation of all Community coastal and offshore trading. However, as a last resort we would consider using the powers under the 1988 Merchant Shipping Act to introduce a test of establishment for any operator trading in United Kingdom coastal waters.

Chemical Discharge, Salisbury

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will call for a report from the Health and Safety Executive on the discharge of chemicals by British Rail on to private land in Salisbury on 5 and 6 March; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: On 6 March, BR staff applied the locally stored pesticides to brambles. Shunting staff considered the brambles to be a safety hazard. Subsequently, the chemicals were spread by the wind on to some nearby private properties causing damage to plants, grass and herbage. The environmental health officer wrote to all households in the vicinity warning them not to eat any produce from the affected gardens. I understand the two herbicides involved, Atlacide and Borocil, are MAFF-approved products, but their effects could persist for some time.

British Rail has accepted full responsibility for the incident and is, I understand, in touch with local people to discuss compensation. An officer of the railway inspectorate is investigating the matter and will decide whether any further action is necessary.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Training

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people from developing countries have been financed to come to the United Kingdom for training for each year since 1979.

Mrs. Chalker: The number of overseas students in this country under United Kingdom Government support schemes for the years 1979 to 1988 is estimated as follows. Some schemes are recorded only on a financial year basis. Where this is so the number for the financial year (for example) 1983-84 has been counted as 1983.

	Number
1979	16,021
1980	14,433
1981	13,755
1982	12,639
1983	15,460
1984	17,587
1985	16,731
1986	16,952
1987	18,764
1988	19,544

Water and Sewerage Projects

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many water supply and sewerage projects have been financed by the Overseas Development Administration for each year since 1979.

Mrs. Chalker: A total of 62 projects in the water supply and sewerage sectors were financed during the years 1980-88, some of which have spanned more than one year. This includes projects committed before 1980.

The numbers of new commitments in these sectors each year were:

	Number
1980	1
1981	9
1982	0
1983	3
1984	3
1985	3
1986	4
1987	4
1988	6

The figure for 1989 is not yet available.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the major projects currently being undertaken by the Natural Resources Institute.

Mrs. Chalker: The Natural Resources Institute aims to alleviate poverty and hardship in developing countries by increasing the productivity of their renewable natural resources. It does this by supporting projects which help to increase agricultural productivity and farmer income through the more effective use and management of resources; develop robust, cost-effective solutions to pest management problems, paying particular attention to environmental safety and user needs; and reduce crop losses and improve the supply and quality of food and cash crops in the domestic and export markets of developing countries.

I shall send the hon. Member a copy of the framework document of the Natural Resources Institute, together with the latest annual report, which reviews major projects. Both documents are in the Libraries of the House.

Energy Projects

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will outline the Overseas Development Administration's current policy towards providing advice and finance for new energy projects in developing countries;

(2) which organisations in Britain provide advice to the Overseas Development Administration on energy policy in developing countries.

Mrs. Chalker: The policy of the Overseas Development Administration towards providing advice and finance for new energy projects in developing countries is based on the assessment, case-by-case, of several factors. These include economic appraisal of the energy supply-demand situation; the scope for increase in the technical and economic efficiency of existing energy supply and use systems; social and environmental issues; and the need to ensure the reliability and sustainability of energy supplies.

In making such assessments, the ODA draws on the advice of its own substantial body of economic, engineering, natural resources, and social development advisers, supplemented by that of British consultants as necessary. In addition, the Administration keeps in touch with national and international expertise in British industry, academic bodies; the World Bank; regional development banks; the United Nations Environmental Programme and the development assistance committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Women

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will outline the ways in which the Government is specifically assisting women in developing countries.

Mrs. Chalker: Our booklet "Women, Development and the British Aid Programme", published in March 1989 copies of which are in the library, explains our women in development policy and how we are helping women in developing countries. I have today sent the hon. Gentleman a copy.

Anniversary Review

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the total cost to his Department of producing the booklet, "British Overseas Aid—Anniversary Review 1989".

Mrs. Chalker: It cost £105,000 to produce 20,000 copies of the anniversary review 1989 at a unit cost of £5·25.

Kenya

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what types of project are being financed by the Overseas Development Administration in the Embu, Meru and Isiolo districts of Kenya.

Mrs. Chalker: We have been assisting Kenya's arid and semi-arid lands development strategy by funding projects to stem environmental deterioration and to improve the productivity of the land in the drier areas of Embu, Meru and Isiolo districts. Under these projects £3·7 million has been committed for soil and water conservation, forestry development, livestock improvement and goat and sheep improvement.

We have also recently completed the financing of the construction and equipping of a 160-bed district hospital at Isiolo at a cost of over £3 million; we are continuing to help, for example, with the provision of technical co-operation.

Aid Shipments

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will introduce a policy of using only British ships for the shipment of United Kingdom aid cargoes.

Mrs. Chalker: No. Government policy is that aid cargoes should be shipped in accordance with normal commercial competitive practice and not directed to ships or companies of any particular flag or country. This policy is designed to ensure value for money for the aid programme.

Vietnam

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer concerning the lack of a shadow programme between Vietnam and international financial institutions, *Official Report*, 2 April, column 889, if he will define the term shadow programme and give any examples of countries that have previously established such programmes.

Mrs. Chalker: The term "shadow programme" refers to programmes of economic reform undertaken by a number of countries which have fallen into arrears on repayments due to the IMF, World Bank and regional development banks and have been declared ineligible for further lending. After approval by the IMF's executive board, these programmes are known as fund-monitored programmes (FMPs). They have specific targets and performance criteria, as in any normal IMF programme, but do not include any access to IMF resources. The purpose of an FMP is to allow a country to establish a track record of economic reform as a condition for international assistance with the clearance of arrears and for resumption of access to IMF lending. FMPs were agreed for Guyana in April 1989, Somalia in July 1989, and Zambia in March 1990. The executive board has not yet approved an FMP for Vietnam.

Sierra Leone

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Sierra Leone currently has *(a)* arrears owed to the International Monetary Fund, and *(b)* an economic programme agreed with the International Monetary Fund; and whether there is currently a British aid programme in Sierra Leone.

Mrs. Chalker: Yes, Sierra Leone has arrears to the International Monetary Fund amounting to $91 million at the end of March 1990. There is currently no economic programme agreed with the International Monetary Fund, but discussions with the fund and the World Bank are taking place.

The current British programme to Sierra Leone comprises technical co-operation and training; expenditure in 1989-90 amounted to some £1·6 million.

Zambia

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether United Kingdom aid to Zambia has ceased at any point since 1985.

Mrs. Chalker: No. Gross annual United Kingdom bilateral aid to Zambia since 1985 has been:

	£ million
1986	35.351
1987	25.349
1988	16.683

The 1989 figures are not yet available. As I announced on 5 April, we intend to provide a further tranche of £30 million in balance of payments support in 1990 to assist the implementation of the economic recovery programme agreed with the IMF, in addition to our ongoing technical co-operation programme.

ACP Debt

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of the Minister for Overseas Development on 2 April, *Official Report*, column 415, when and in which forum a decision is expected to be taken on cancelling outstanding repayments owed by ACP countries under the STABEX system; what is the estimated amount of such outstanding repayments; and whether Her Majesty's Government is in favour of their cancellation.

Mrs. Chalker: The ACP-EC Council of Ministers is responsible for resolving this issue. A decision was not reached at its recent meeting in Fiji, and the matter is now unlikely to be formally settled until next year's meeting. In the meantime, no repayment of the sums involved, some 90 million ecu—around £70 million—will be required. A final decision will be taken in the preparation for next year's meeting.

SCOTLAND

Local Government Finance

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the sources of local authority income which have financed total local authority expenditure for each region in Scotland for every year since 1979-80 in constant prices and percentage terms.

Mr. Rifkind: The figures are given in the table. They have been converted to 1988-89 prices using the gross domestic product deflator. Amounts for rate and revenue support grant are final amounts or those applying to the most recent order. Figures for non-domestic and domestic rates are derived from data published in rating review for the relevant years up to 1988-89. For 1989-90 and 1990-91 amounts of non-domestic rate income and community charge income are taken from the provisional outturn-budget estimate returns made by local authorities by the Scottish Office. Domestic rates figures are net of domestic rate relief. All figures of domestic rate and community charge income are inclusive of rebates.

	Rate Support Grant		*Non-Domestic Rate Income*		*Domestic Rates*		*Total*
	£ million	*per cent.*	*£ million*	*per cent.*	*£ million*	*per cent.*	*£ million*
1979-80							
Borders	40·614	74·2	7·530	13·8	6·577	12·0	54·721
Central	83·315	57·9	43·834	30·5	16·783	11·6	143·932
Dumfries and Galloway	53·403	72·7	11·139	15·2	8·879	12·1	73·421
Fife	111·977	67·0	34·804	20·8	20·317	12·2	167·098
Grampian	162·117	62·9	64·241	24·9	31·447	12·2	257·805
Highland	97·281	75·5	20·368	15·8	11·260	8·7	128·909
Lothian	252·395	58·5	115·978	26·9	63·363	14·7	431·736
Strathclyde	996·116	71·9	252·944	18·3	136·408	9·8	1,385·468
Tayside	139·460	67·5	43·254	20·9	23·906	11·6	206·620
Orkney	9·157	42·9	11·026	51·7	1·159	5·4	21·342
Shetland	11·551	45·1	13·249	51·7	0·811	3·2	25·611
Western Isles	26·351	87·1	2·744	9·1	1·161	3·8	30·256
1980-81							
Borders	41·705	71·5	8·865	15·2	7·725	13·3	58·295
Central	86·564	58·2	44·287	29·8	17·882	12·0	148·733
Dumfries and Galloway	53·725	70·7	12·211	16·1	10·066	13·2	76·002
Fife	113·949	63·5	40·697	22·7	24·880	13·9	179·526
Grampian	163·786	62·1	67·181	25·5	32·881	12·5	263·848
Highland	98·623	72·0	24·640	18·0	13·746	10·0	137·009
Lothian	250·737	53·4	139·186	29·6	79·744	17·0	469·667
Strathclyde	1,038·548	68·3	308·514	20·3	173·340	11·4	1,520·402
Tayside	140·773	65·9	46·089	21·6	26·862	12·6	213·724
Orkney	10·142	48·4	10·222	48·8	0·582	2·8	20·946
Shetland	12·769	26·3	34·366	70·9	1·366	2·8	48·501
Western Isles	27·137	84·6	3·436	10·7	1·487	4·6	32·060
1981-82							
Borders	41·707	68·8	10·143	16·7	8·787	14·5	60·637
Central	84·553	53·8	51·605	32·9	20·926	13·3	157·084
Dumfries and Galloway	53·716	68·5	13·545	17·3	11·158	14·2	78·419
Fife	113·177	60·2	46·053	24·5	28·869	15·4	188·099
Grampian	165·917	61·0	71·273	26·2	34·794	12·8	271·984
Highland	96·747	67·0	30·700	21·2	17·062	11·8	144·509
Lothian	195·921	39·0	193·716	38·6	11[illegible]·738	22·4	502·375
Strathclyde	1,002·856	62·3	383·143	23·8	224·544	13·9	1,610·543
Tayside	140·219	60·6	56·696	24·5	34·320	14·8	231·235
Orkney	9·904	47·5	10·341	49·6	0·613	2·9	20·858
Shetland	13·051	27·2	33·835	70·5	1·133	2·4	48·019
Western Isles	27·850	81·3	4·516	13·2	1·897	5·5	34·263
1982-83							
Borders	41·857	68·3	10·303	16·8	9·165	14·9	61·325
Central	82·471	49·5	58·755	35·3	25·243	15·2	166·469
Dumfries and Galloway	54·720	63·6	16·994	19·8	14·314	16·6	86·028
Fife	108·173	55·7	52·432	27·0	33·536	17·3	194·141
Grampian	156·627	56·3	80·563	28·9	41·271	14·8	278·461
Highland	97·667	65·4	33·766	22·6	17·926	12·0	149·359
Lothian	229·679	47·2	162·308	33·4	94·482	19·4	486·469
Strathclyde	998·191	60·6	403·543	24·5	244·401	14·9	1,646·135
Tayside	135·904	58·1	60·523	25·9	37·584	16·1	234·011
Orkney	9·363	47·1	9·848	49·5	0·666	3·4	19·877
Shetland	13·561	27·7	34·237	70·0	1·139	2·3	48·937
Western Isles	29·913	81·4	4·777	13·0	2·041	5·6	36·731
1983-84							
Borders	42·342	71·7	8·899	15·1	7·835	13·3	59·076
Central	82·989	52·1	53·871	33·8	22·490	14·1	159·350
Dumfries and Galloway	55·731	66·9	14·961	18·0	12·596	15·1	83·288
Fife	110·575	56·3	52·341	26·6	33·556	17·1	196·472
Grampian	163·977	56·4	85·612	29·5	41·095	14·1	290·684
Highland	99·360	67·0	32·121	21·7	16·793	11·3	148·274
Lothian	226·505	51·5	134·614	30·6	78·628	17·9	439·747
Strathclyde	995·009	61·5	389·194	24·0	234·943	14·5	1,619·146
Tayside	137·077	58·8	58·992	25·3	37·260	16·0	233·329

	Rate Support Grant		*Non-Domestic Rate Income*		*Domestic Rates*		*Total*
	£ million	*per cent.*	*£ million*	*per cent.*	*£ million*	*per cent.*	*£ million*
Orkney	11·587	56·9	8·225	40·4	0·567	2·8	20·379
Shetland	12·929	26·7	34·264	70·9	1·150	2·4	48·343
Western Isles	29·711	81·5	4·681	12·8	2·082	5·7	36·474
1984-85							
Borders	40·613	69·2	9·600	16·4	8·441	14·4	58·654
Central	82·378	52·2	50·839	32·2	24·722	15·7	157·939
Dumfries and Galloway	53·192	65·6	15·097	18·6	12·833	15·8	81·122
Fife	96·967	50·9	56·876	29·8	36·800	19·3	190·643
Grampian	155·758	55·7	83·770	29·9	40·357	14·4	279·885
Highland	93·455	65·2	32·174	22·4	17·740	12·4	143·369
Lothian	210·524	48·0	143·054	32·7	84·487	19·3	438·065
Strathclyde	921·511	59·9	383·807	24·9	234·296	15·2	1,539·614
Tayside	128·654	57·3	58·823	26·2	37·062	16·5	224·539
Orkney	9·491	47·3	9·885	49·2	0·709	3·5	20·085
Shetland	12·636	26·4	34·011	71·1	1·184	2·5	47·831
Western Isles	29·934	81·0	4·826	13·1	2·180	5·9	36·940
1985-86							
Borders	40·248	67·0	10·765	17·9	9·039	15·1	60·052
Central	75·666	50·7	50·136	33·6	23·405	15·7	149·207
Dumfries and Galloway	51·242	63·0	17·182	21·1	12·930	15·9	81·354
Fife	97·471	47·8	68·217	33·4	38·335	18·8	204·023
Grampian	152·845	55·2	85·912	31·0	38·017	13·7	276·774
Highland	92·243	64·2	33·937	23·6	17·567	12·2	143·747
Lothian	205·753	47·6	138·377	32·0	87·936	20·4	432·066
Strathclyde	913·404	60·0	365·587	24·0	243·757	16·0	1,522·748
Tayside	131·170	57·8	57·924	25·5	37·803	16·7	226·897
Orkney	8·932	43·5	10·536	51·3	1·069	5·2	20·537
Shetland	11·907	22·8	38·721	74·1	1·609	3·1	52·237
Western Isles	28·911	81·2	4·575	12·8	2·120	6·0	35·606
1986-87							
Borders	41·780	66·5	11·216	17·8	9·881	15·7	62·877
Central	77·143	50·3	51·150	33·3	25·138	16·4	153·431
Dumfries and Galloway	54·533	62·3	18·387	21·0	14·610	16·7	87·530
Fife	95·238	44·9	77·028	36·3	39·884	18·8	212·150
Grampian	152·217	52·2	94·786	32·5	44·399	15·2	291·402
Highland	93·526	62·3	37·367	24·9	19·128	12·8	150·021
Lothian	182·777	44·4	139·219	33·8	90·083	21·9	412·079
Strathclyde	824·541	55·2	393·871	26·4	274·161	18·4	1,492·573
Tayside	129·595	57·6	56·930	25·3	38·568	17·1	225·093
Orkney	8·765	43·2	10·556	52·0	0·985	4·9	20·306
Shetland	11·565	22·8	37·632	74·1	1·613	3·2	50·810
Western Isles	31·153	82·3	4·527	12·0	2·166	5·7	37·846
1987-88							
Borders	44·124	65·8	11·948	17·8	10·961	16·4	67·033
Central	84·178	49·5	56·773	33·4	29·127	17·1	170·078
Dumfries and Galloway	58·470	63·0	18·971	20·4	15·438	16·6	92·879
Fife	85·736	41·0	80·950	38·7	42·526	20·3	209·212
Grampian	155·850	51·6	98·719	32·7	47·417	15·7	301·986
Highland	99·185	60·7	41·482	25·4	22·665	13·9	163·332
Lothian	190·086	41·1	163·137	35·3	109·476	23·7	462·699
Strathclyde	851·185	52·7	446·372	27·6	317·666	19·7	1,615·223
Tayside	132·100	54·6	63·738	26·4	45·951	19·0	241·789
Orkney	10·089	51·9	8·568	44·0	0·797	4·1	19·454
Shetland	11·843	24·3	35·256	72·5	1·558	3·2	48·657
Western Isles	32·134	82·4	4·589	11·8	2·271	5·8	38·994
1988-89							
Borders	44·008	66·0	11·648	17·5	11·057	16·6	66·713
Central	78·551	47·7	56·240	34·2	29·885	18·2	164·676
Dumfries and Galloway	57·227	61·5	19·490	20·9	16·399	17·6	93·116
Fife	105·635	45·8	81·804	35·5	43·035	18·7	230·474
Grampian	158·614	50·3	104·691	33·2	52·188	16·5	315·493
Highland	100·978	62·7	38·768	24·1	21·220	13·2	160·966
Lothian	187·897	37·5	183·967	36·7	129·751	25·9	501·615
Strathclyde	898·472	54·8	428·452	26·2	311·584	19·0	1,638·508
Tayside	139·187	54·9	65·019	25·7	49·224	19·4	253·430
Orkney	10·353	53·3	7·814	40·2	1·262	6·5	19·429

	Rate Support Grant		*Non-Domestic Rate Income*		*Domestic Rates*		*Total*
	£ million	*per cent.*	*£ million*	*per cent.*	*£ million*	*per cent.*	*£ million*
Shetland	11·945	19·2	48·079	77·2	2·291	3·7	62·315
Western Isles	31·439	82·5	4·431	11·6	2·225	5·8	38·095

	Revenue Support Grant		*Non-Domestic Rate Income*		*Community Charge*		*Total*
	£m	*per cent.*	*£m*	*per cent.*	*£m*	*per cent.*	*£m*
1989-90							
Borders	47·218	68·3	9·565	13·8	12·353	17·9	69·136
Central	87·606	50·8	49·606	28·8	35·229	20·4	172·441
Dumfries and Galloway	60·946	63·6	16·644	17·4	18·269	19·1	95·859
Fife	110·175	48·3	69·189	30·3	48·695	21·4	228·059
Grampian	170·559	53·4	85·164	26·7	63·737	20·0	319·460
Highland	102·735	63·8	32·394	20·1	25·913	16·1	161·042
Lothian	204·251	40·5	151·883	30·1	147·731	29·3	503·865
Strathclyde	934·510	57·6	378·404	23·3	310·831	19·1	1,623·745
Tayside	145·968	56·2	57·934	22·3	56·064	21·6	259·966
Orkney	11·008	56·8	6·705	34·6	1·686	8·7	19·399
Shetland	18·886	45·4	21·011	50·5	1·685	4·1	41·582
Western Isles	33·136	82·0	4·695	11·6	2·582	6·4	40·413
1990-91							
Borders	50·589	70·4	9·417	13·1	11·860	16·5	71·866
Central	91·815	53·3	42·489	24·7	37·923	22·0	172·227
Dumfries and Galloway	66·468	65·4	16·972	16·7	18·163	17·9	101·603
Fife	113·708	46·8	73·916	30·4	55·545	22·8	243·169
Grampian	193·213	60·4	72·148	22·6	54·619	17·1	319·980
Highland	109·168	65·5	32·097	19·3	25·481	15·3	166·746
Lothian	206·404	41·7	135·937	27·5	152·752	30·9	495·093
Strathclyde	918·348	57·4	356·168	22·3	324·506	20·3	1,599·022
Tayside	154·278	58·8	52·364	20·0	55·736	21·2	262·378
Orkney	13·060	63·2	5·938	28·7	1·680	8·1	20·678
Shetland	27·040	60·5	16·353	36·6	1·285	2·9	44·678
Western Isles	34·549	82·7	4·312	10·3	2·917	7·0	41·778

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the most recent Government estimates of the cost to local authorities in Scotland of recovery of poll tax arrears.

Mr. Rifkind: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) on 15 January.

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what criteria his Department has given to assessors for assessing the commerciality of single self-catering units.

Mr. Rifkind: The Abolition of Domestic Rates (Domestic and Part Residential Subjects) (Scotland) Regulations 1990, which came into force on 1 April, exclude from the definition of domestic subjects dwelling houses made available for letting, commercially, as self-catering accommodation for short periods amounting in aggregate to at least 140 days per year. This has the effect of rendering such properties liable to non-domestic rates. Implementation of the regulations is in the first place a matter for assessors, whose decisions regarding particular properties are subject to the normal appeal procedures.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list his latest estimate of the percentage of the community charge liability of chargepayers received by each charging authority for 1989-90.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is not held centrally, but we understand that in most regions 85 to 95 per cent. of those eligible for the community charge have made some payment, with a figure of 98 per cent. in one area.

Accountancy Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the accountancy firms used by his Department.

Mr. Rifkind: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 18 December 1989 at column *50*. The five firms used in 1989 were:

Coopers and Lybrand
Deloitte Haskins and Sells
Ernst and Young
Peat Marwick McLintock
Price Waterhouse

Medical Treatment

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish in the *Official Report* a list of those medical conditions which cannot be treated by hospitals within Scotland but can be treated by hospitals within England.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: None; although in practice patients' conditions requiring certain surgical procedures, for example heart and liver transplants and pancreatic implants, are currently treated in specialised units in England.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) which hospital in Scotland has the longest waiting list for arthritic hip joint surgery; which has the lowest waiting period for arthritic hip joint surgery; and if he will specify the number of waiting days for each;

(2) which hospital in Scotland has the longest waiting period for varicose veins surgery; which has the lowest waiting period for varicose veins surgery; and if he will specify the number of waiting days for each;

(3) which hospital in Scotland has the longest waiting list for hernia operations; which has the lowest waiting period for hernia operations; and if he will specify the number of waiting days for each.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information on waiting times for individual operations is collected centrally on an annual basis. That for 1988, the last year for which statistics are available, revealed the following:

(a) Raigmore hospital, Inverness (Highland health board) had the longest median wait of 214 days for operations which are performed on arthritic hip joints. Stirling royal infirmary (Forth Valley health board) had the lowest median wait of 51 days.

(b) Victoria hospital, Kirkcaldy (Fife health board) has the longest median wait of 803 days for varicose vein operations. Dr. Grays hospital, Elgin (Grampian health board) had the lowest median wait of 43 days.

(c) Glasgow royal infirmary (Greater Glasgow health board) had the longest median wait of 124 days for hernia operations. Stracathro hospital, Brechin (Tayside health board) had the lowest median wait of 19 days.

In all three instances, hospitals with less than 50 such cases were excluded.

Rents-to-Mortgages Scheme

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many inquiries from tenants interested in purchasing their homes under the rents-to-mortgages scheme are now in the process of converting from rent to mortgage.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Scottish Homes is responsible for the processing of applications to purchase under the rents-to-mortgages scheme. As at 26 March Scottish Homes had received 839 inquiries from tenants interested in purchasing their homes under the scheme and at that date was processing 84 applications to purchase.

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the number of inquiries from tenants interested in purchasing their homes under the rents-to-mortgages scheme for each Scottish Homes area office.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on the source of inquiries under the rents-to-mortgages scheme is not held centrally. I have asked Scottish Homes to supply the information directly to the hon. Member.

Capital Gains Tax

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether under the Scottish community charge regulations the 60-day period beyond which capital gains tax becomes chargeable upon the proceeds of the sale of a private home which is used in part as a bed-and-breakfast business refers to consecutive days or to the total in any one year.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have been asked to reply because of my responsibilities for the community charge in Scotland. I intend to write to my hon. Friend shortly about her question.

New Towns

Mr. Ingram: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what submissions he has received from individuals or organisations interested in taking over the development corporation housing stocks in each of the Scottish new towns; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: None.

Bankruptcy

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the maximum hourly rate of remuneration that has been accepted as reasonable by the accountant in bankruptcy, in terms of section 53(4) of the Bankruptcy (Scotland) Act 1985, being work reasonably undertaken by the trustee in sequestration.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The maximum hourly rate allowed by the accountant in bankruptcy other than in exceptional circumstances in assessing claims for the remuneration of trustees and their staff is the same as that published by the Law Society of Scotland in respect of charges by the legal profession for similar work. The present Law Society rate is £62.

Books and Equipment

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide to the latest available date the figures for Scotland equivalent to the answer given to the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock), of 13 February, *Official Report*, columns *142-44*, on expenditure on books and equipment.

Mr. Rifkind: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that my hon. Friend gave to the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) on 14 February 1990, *Official Report* columns *190-92*.

Court Reporting

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Moray, *Official Report*, 2 April, column *474*, he will list in the *Official Report* the names and addresses of organisations and companies which were successful in winning contracts for function of shorthandwriting in Scottish courts.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The following four firms secured Government shorthand writing contracts for the period April 1990 to March 1992 in the Scottish courts:

William Hodge (Shorthand Writers) Ltd.
20 York Place
Edinburgh

William Hodge & Pollock Ltd.
36 North Frederick Street
Glasgow

John Larking
Coniston Bunch [illegible]ane
Haslemere
Surrey

Verbatim Reporters
98 Hanover Street
Edinburgh

Roads

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the Government's conclusions following consultation on the routes south of Edinburgh road study.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I announced today the results of our consultation exercise. Copies of the report on the consultation responses and on the Government's proposals in the light of them have been placed in the Library of the House. As with the original consultation paper, I have also arranged for a copy of the report to be sent to all Scottish Members.

Health Boards

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish for each health board in Scotland *(a)* the net income from private patients and clinics and *(b)* the amounts written off in bad debts each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 5 April 1990]:* The information requested is not held centrally.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were prescription charges in Scotland in 1979; if he will list each subsequent increase; and what has been the percentage change since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 5 April 1990]:* On 16 July 1979 the United Kingdom National Health Service prescription charge was increased from 20p to 45p. Since then the charge has been increased on 11 occasions to its present level of £3.05; the increases are listed in the table.

This represents an increase of 237 per cent in real terms.

Year	*Prescription Charge*	*Cash Increase*
1979 (July)	£0.45	25p
1980 (April)	£0.70	25p
1980 (December)	£1.00	30p
1982 (April)	£1.30	30p
1983 (April)	£1.40	10p
1984 (April)	£1.60	20p
1985 (April)	£2.00	40p
1986 (April)	£2.20	20p
1987 (April)	£2.40	20p
1988 (April)	£2.60	20p
1989 (April)	£2.80	20p
1990 (April)	£3.05	25p

Police Rent Allowances

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make an estimate of the cost to public funds of *(a)* uprating rent allowance in the three police forces in Scotland whose rent allowance was last reviewed in 1988 by the index agreed by the police negotiating board and *(b)* by the movement in the retail prices index since their force maximum was last reviewed.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 5 April 1990]:* If the formula proposed by the police negotiating board for uprating the new housing allowance were used to uprate the rent allowances in payment on 31 March in the three forces concerned, the cost to public funds would be about £2 million in 1990-91; but no such course of action was proposed by the police negotiating board. My right hon. and learned Friend's decision to uprate rent allowances in the three police forces concerned by reference to the increase in the retail prices index is likely to cost about £0·84 million in 1990-91.

Shellfish Harvesting, Solway Firth

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the findings of the recent research report to the Nature Conservancy Council on the effects of mechanised shellfish harvesting on the conservation of wildlife in the Solway.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 5 April 1990]:* This report was prepared for the Nature Conservancy Council. I await its considered views and advice on the matter.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to control or prohibit potentially damaging operations in estuaries for the purposes of meeting Her Majesty's Government's obligations under the Ramsar convention on the conservation of wetlands of international importance.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 5 April 1990]:* Sites selected for designation under the Ramsar convention will have previously been notified as sites of special scientific interest by the Nature Conservancy Council. They are protected under sections 28 and 29 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 against those potentially damaging operations specified by the council.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what provisions currently exist to control mechanised shellfish harvesting in areas which meet the criteria for protection under the EC directive on the conservation of wild birds.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 5 April 1990]:* Mechanised shellfish harvesting may be controlled through byelaws made by the Nature Conservancy Council in those areas which are national nature reserves. Local authorities have similar byelaw-making powers to control access in other areas.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will indicate the seaward limit of sites of special scientific interest notified in accordance with section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 5 April 1990]:* I will write to the hon. Member.

Hepatitis B

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he has taken to encourage the take-up of the hepatitis vaccine in Scotland, particularly among people in high-risk groups; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 5 April 1990]:* Advice on hepatitis B vaccination is contained in the memorandum, "Immunisation against Infectious

Disease", which is prepared for the health departments by the joint committee on vaccination and immunisation and is issued to all doctors in Scotland. The memorandum identifies the high-risk groups and gives advice on those to whom vaccination should be offered. A new edition of the memorandum, which will be issued shortly, will remind doctors of the high-risk groups.

Guidance on measures for the protection of health care workers in hospital and the community against occupational infection with HIV and hepatitis viruses was issued on 5 April. The guidance, which is based largely on the advice of the expert advisory group on AIDS, draws attention to the joint committee's recommendations on immunisation.

PRIME MINISTER

Official Visits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister how many *(a)* towns and *(b)* cities (i) in Britain and (ii) abroad she has visited in 1990.

The Prime Minister: My official duties involve visiting a considerable number of towns and cities. This year I have visited 12 towns and cities in the United Kingdom and two overseas, other than capital cities.

Archbishop of Canterbury

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister how many official meetings she has had with the Archbishop of Canterbury since his appointment.

The Prime Minister: I have met the Archbishop of Canterbury on many occasions, whether formal or otherwise, during the last 10 years.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on recent representations she has received about the poll tax.

The Prime Minister: I continue to receive many representations about the community charge.

Now that bills are arriving in people's homes they can see the substantial help that the Government are providing through grants, rebates and transitional relief. They can also see the link between their councils' spending plans and the level of the charge for their area.

I share the concern of many over the unjustified high charges that have been set by some councils and I am confident that in the years ahead local electors will demand restraint. In the first year of the new arrangements however I warmly endorse the action of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in taking firm and immediate action against 20 authorities whose budgets are excessive.

Mr. Charles Powell

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister whether it was with her authority that Mr. Charles Powell participated at a recent dinner with Mr. Aspinall, Sir James Goldsmith, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mr. Clark) and Conrad Black, to discuss the attitude of *The Daily Telegraph* towards her position as leader of the Conservative party; and what consequences such participation by a civil servant has for the Armstrong guidelines on the role of civil servants.

The Prime Minister: The circumstances are not as the hon. Member describes them, and the issues in his question do not arise. The way in which the hon. Member attempts to vilify individual civil servants is deplorable.

Speeches

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Prime Minister how many times, excluding Prime Minister's Question Time, she has spoken in the House in *(a)* debates and *(b)* statements, in each year since 1979; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: This information is available in the Library of the House of Commons.

WALES

NHS (Capital Allocations)

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what changes are taking place for capital allocation for the Health Service in Wales in 1991-92; for how long there will be transitional arrangements; and whether such arrangements will protect major schemes approved or commenced in each of the next three years.

Mr. Grist: The NHS and Community Care Bill proposes changes in the way in which health services will be funded and charged for. This requires a new approach to determining capital allocations which will take account of health authorities' role as procurers of services and that of hospitals as providers of those services. Authorities will be consulted soon on possible future arrangements. However, it is not intended to begin changing the basis for allocating capital resources until 1992-93 in view of the lead time required to adjust service plans accordingly.

In addition, transitional arrangements will be introduced before the changes take their full effect with the aim of minimising disruption to health authorities' short term programmes and to protect existing contractual commitments. It is not possible to be specific about the length of time these arrangements will be required until the changes have themselves been agreed. For the same reason, it is not possible to confirm that all major schemes, other than those already subject to contractual commitments, will necessarily be protected under the transitional arrangements.

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the level of capital allocation for the Health Service in Wales for 1990-91; and what is this in real terms after allowing for inflation in the construction industry taking 1982-83 as a base year.

Mr. Grist: The level of cash provision for capital spending in the NHS in Wales in 1990-91 is almost £95 million. It is not possible to say how much of this will be spent on new construction work as the provision includes £44·5 million which has been allocated to district health authorities for their discretionary use and it is possible that their plans for the use of these funds may have been varied since the submission of their 10-year capital programmes in April 1989. It also has to be borne in mind that the definition of capital expenditure within the Health Service does not relate only to new construction and capital maintenance of buildings. It also includes the purchase of medical and information technology equipment, the purchase of vehicles and the salary costs and travel and subsistence expenses of health service staff wholly engaged on capital works. It is, therefore, not appropriate simply to apply the construction industry price index to total capital provision in order to establish its value at constant prices. Indeed, the real-terms value of any element of programme provision is best expressed in terms of its opportunity cost to the economy as a whole and therefore adjusted by reference to actual and forecast movements in general inflation using the GDP deflator. On this basis and taking 1982-83 as the base year, the real-terms value of capital provision for the NHS in Wales in 1990-91 is some £61·9 million. This compares with £47·7 million in 1982-83 which in real terms represents an increase of nearly 30 per cent.

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he proposes to increase the financial allocation for Wales for the Health Service to fund the building of two general hospital developments, while at the same time meeting normal replacement and updating requirements and the funding for major computer acquisitions.

Mr. Grist: I refer the right hon. and learned Gentleman to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) on 11 January when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, announced the revenue and capital allocations to health authorities in Wales for 1990-91.

I also refer the right hon. and learned Gentleman to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Mr. Jones) on 12 February in which my right hon. Friend announced the distribution of almost £10 million for schemes to be centrally funded under the programme for the valleys initiative. This included provision relating to the development of a new district general hospital to serve the Taff Ely/Rhondda area and the development of community hospitals at Ebbw Vale and Ystrad Fechan.

General Practitioners

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many general practitioner practices in each county in Wales will be eligible under his Department's criteria to become a fund-holding practice;

(2) how many general practitioner practices in Wales will be eligible under his Department's criteria to become fund-holding practices.

Mr. Grist: It is not possible to place a figure on the number of practices meeting the eligibility criteria for fund-holding status. While each practice fund will require a minimum of 9,000 patients, smaller practices are enabled to group together to attain this number. In addition to its patient list size, each practice will need to demonstrate its ability to manage a practice fund.

Capital Receipts

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he permits the use of capital receipts by health authorities in Wales to fund revenue spending; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: Health authorities are permitted a degree of in-year flexibility in the use of their revenue and capital resources. An authority can vire up to 1 per cent. of its final approved revenue cash limit to capital, and conversely up to 10 per cent. of its final approved capital cash limit to revenue. In the event that an authority wishes to exceed its permitted virement limits, this may be allowed if the excess virement requirement can be contained within the all Wales virement totals.

Health Expenditure

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the budget shortfall estimated by each health authority in Wales for the 1990-91 financial year.

Mr. Grist: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave to him on 28 March.

DEFENCE

Environmental Protection

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many managed conservations areas he has established; if he will list them; and if he will make a statement as to how he intends to protect their ecology.

Mr. Neubert: Conservation groups and focal points, several of which cover more than one establishment, are in existence at the locations across the defence estate listed in the table. Conservation groups include among their members both professional and amateur naturalists, including representatives of such bodies as the Nature Conservancy Council and county naturalist trusts. They provide advice upon how the ecology of the area should be protected and, where possible, enhanced. Account is taken of this advice in the management of the area concerned, to the maximum extent consistent with military requirements. Focal points exist at those establishments at which, although there is natural history interest, there is no formal conservation group.

Aberporth RAE
Aldermaston AWE
Aldershot Training Areas
Altcar TAVRA Ranges
Amport House (RAF Chaplain's School)
Ash Common Training Area
Ashchurch CVD
Ballykinler Ranges
Barnham Training Area
Barnsfield Heath
Barry Buddon Training Area
Barton Stacey Training Area
Bassingbourne Training Area
Bawdsey RAF
Beaconsfield RAEC Centre
Beckingham Ranges
Bedford RAE
Benbecula RA Ranges
Bicester COD
Bisley Ranges
Blandford Camp
Bordon Training Area
Boscombe Down RAE
Bourley Training Area
Bovington RAC Centre
Bracknell (Met Office)
Bramley CAD
Brampton RAF
Braunton Burrows Training Area
Broughton Moor RNAD

Browndown Training Area
Burghfield AWE
Caerwent RAF
Camberley
Cambridge HMS
Canterbury Old Park Training Area
Cape Wrath RN Ranges
Carlisle RAF
Castlelaw Ranges
Castlemartin Ranges
Catterick RAF
Catterick Training Area
Chatham (including: Brompton, Upnor, Hoo Salt Marshes, etc)
Chattenden Woods
Chepstow AAC
Chertsey RARDE
Chilmark RAF
Chivenor RAF
Christchurch RARDE
Colchester Ranges and Training Area
Cold Meece P and EE
Coltishall RAF
Coningsby RAF
Coulport RNAD
Culdrose RNAS
Dartmoor (Willsworthy Training Area)
Daedalus HMS
Dean Hill RNAD
Ditton Park ARE
Dolphin HMS
Donna Nook RAF
Donnington COD
Dover Training Areas
Dreghorn Ranges
Dryad HMS
East Riggs Ammunition Depot
Edzell RAF
Elstead Training Area
Ernesettle RNAD
Eskmeals P&EE
Farnborough RAE
Feldom Training Area
Fingringhoe Ranges
Flowerdown
Forest Moor HMS
Fort George Training Area (Inverness)
Fort Halstead RARDE
Foulness Ranges (including Potton Island, Rushley Island, Havengore, etc)
Frater RNAD
Fylingdales RAF
Garelochhead Training Area
Glen Douglas
Gosport RNAD
Hamworthy RM
Hankley Training Area
Haslar RNH
Hawley Training Area
Holbeach RAF
Holcombe Moor Training Area
Hopwas Hayes Wood
Horsea Island
Hullavington RAF
Hurn Test Site
Hythe Ranges
Inskip HMS
Kineton CAD
Kingsbury Wood
Kinloss RAF
Kirkudbright RARDE
Lakenheath RAF (including Wangford Warren)
Leek Training Area
Leeming RAF
Leuchars RAF
Lichfield
Linton-on-Ouse RAF
Llanbedr RAE
Long Marston Depot
Longmoor Training Area
Longtown CAD
Lossiemouth RAF
Lulworth Ranges
Lydd Ranges
Machrihanish RAF
Magilligan Point Training Area
Marham RAF
Mercury HMS
Mere Ranges
Mereworth Woods Training Area
Milton Ranges
Minley Training Area
Mona RAF
Morton on Lugg RAOC Depot
Mount Batten RAF
Mychett Training Area
Nesscliffe Camp and Training Area
Newtown IOW TAVR
Oakington Barracks
Ockley Training Area
Otmoor TARVA
Otterburn Training Area
Pembrey RAF
Pendine P and EE
Penhale Training Area
Pippingford Park Training Area
Pirbright Ranges
Plymouth (including RAF Mount Batten, Manadon)
Portland RNAS
Porton CDE
Portsdown ARE
Portsmouth Harbour (including Gosport, Frater, HMS Dryad)
Predannack RNAS
Proteus Training Area
Purfleet Ranges
Raleigh HMS
Ripon Parks Training Area
Rosyth Naval Base
Salisbury Plain (Centre)—Larkhill Ranges
Salisbury Plain (East)—Bulford Ranges
Salisbury Plain (West)—Imber/Warminster Training Area
Sandleheath
Sandhurst RMA
Saxa Vord RAF
Sculthorpe RAF
Sennybridge Training Area
Shinfield Park (Met Office)
Shoeburyness P and EE
Shorncliffe Training Area
Shrivenham RMCS
Spadeadam RAF
Stainmore Training Area
Stanford Training Area
Stornaway RAF
Stradishall Training Area
Strensall Training Area
Swynnerton Training Area
Tain RAF
Theddlethorpe Dunes
Thorney Island
Thursley Training Area
Trecwn RNAD
Tregantle
Uxbridge RAF
Valley RAF
Vernon HMS
Wainfleet RAF
Waltham Abbey RARDE
Warcop Training Area
Waterbeach Training Area
Wattisham RAF
Welbeck College
West Freugh RAE
West Moors RAOC
Winterbourne Gunner NBC Centre
Wittering RAF
Woodvale RAF
Woolmer Training Area

Worthy Down Camp
Yardley Chase Training Area
Yeovilton RNAS (inc: Breech Wood)

Environmental Protection

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he has taken to promote environmental awareness in the Ministry of Defence.

Mr. Neubert: As a result of action already taken, there is an enhanced level of awareness of the different ways in which the activities of the Ministry of Defence can impact on the natural environment.

The essay on "Defence and the Environment" in chapter 4 of the Statement on the Defence Estimates 1990 (CM 1022-I) gives examples of where this greater awareness has had beneficial consequences.

More recently, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has charged me with responsibility for environmental issues throughout the Department, in support of the Government's overall environmental objectives.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research is being done on alternatives to paints harmful to marine life to prevent contaminated discharges in shipyards from entering estuarial waters.

Mr. Neubert: The Ministry of Defence is encouraging efforts by the paint industry into the research of environmentally acceptable toxins for anti-fouling paints and is undertaking trials of new products on the hulls of Her Majesty's ships.

Until non-toxic alternatives are available, measures are being taken to prevent contaminated discharges from entering estuarial waters. The effectiveness of these measures has been confirmed by an extensive monitoring programme.

The Ministry of Defence's work in this field is reported on at various international conferences and the work has received national and international recognition.

Chlorofluorocarbons

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he is taking to recover chlorofluorocarbons from ships and submarines in dockyards.

Mr. Neubert: It is our policy as far as practicable to recover chlorofluorocarbons from ships and submarines in refit for recycling. In submarines, chlorofluorocarbons are already largely recovered for health and safety reasons. For surface ships, the policy will be introduced progressively.

Biological Warfare

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what evidence he has for his statement in the Defence Estimates that the legitimate spread of biotechnology for scientific and economic purposes has carried with it the potential for the diversion of equipment and expertise into offensive biological warfare programmes.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Advances in biotechnology have facilitated the large-scale production of toxic materials, some for legitimate civil uses, which had hitherto been available only in minute quantities from natural sources. The equipment and expertise, together with a number of these materials, have the potential for diversion into military programmes; however, it would not be in the public interest for me to give further details. Our research into biological and toxic agents is entirely defensive, being aimed at the protection of our armed forces from any biological warfare threat, and is permitted under the 1972 biological and toxic warfare convention.

Type 23 Frigates

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence by which date he intends type 23 frigates will be fitted with integrated command and control systems.

Mr. Neubert: The type 23 frigate command system will enter service in the mid-1990s.

Low Flying

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the areas in which covert surveys of low flying activity in particular areas has taken place in the last 12 months, giving the number of covert surveys made in each area.

Mr. Neubert: Between 1 April 1989 and 31 March 1990 the RAF police carried out covert surveys of low flying activity in the following areas:

Date	*Location*
25-27 April 1989	Liskeard, Cornwall
2- 4 May 1989	Gloucester, Gloucestershire
8-11 May 1989	Blencarn, Cumbria
15-19 May 1989	Wigtown, Dumfries and Galloway
22-26 May 1989	Haddington, Lothian
26-30 June 1989	Knaresborough, North Yorkshire (Skyguard deployment)
24-27 July 1989	Earl Shilton, Leicestershire
24-27 July 1989	Market Bosworth, Leicestershire
31 July-4 August 1989	Penrith, Cumbria (Skyguard deployment)
26-27 September 1989	Glan Conwy, Gwynedd
3-5 October 1989	Alnwick, Northumberland (Skyguard deployment)
30 January-1 February 1990	Machynlleth, Powys
5- 9 March 1990	Wetheral, Cumbria
26-30 March 1990	Hereford, Hereford and Worcester
26-30 March 1990	Alnwick area, Northumberland Kelso area, Borders (Skyguard deployment)

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will place in the Library the central records of the usage of the United Kingdom low flying system.

Mr. Neubert: My right hon. Friend has no plans to do so.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the latest scheduled times of day for low level attacks during each Mallet Blow exercise since 1987; and at what times low flying activity in each of these exercises actually ceased.

Mr. Neubert: The scheduled and actual times when low flying ceased in Mallet Blow exercises since 1987 are as follows:

Mallet Blow	*Scheduled*	*Actual*
87/1	17.30	17.30
87/2	17.30	17.30
87/3	21.10	17.30

Mallet Blow	*Scheduled*	*Actual*
88/1	22.00	17.30
88/2	17.30	17.30
89/1	22.00	22.00
89/2	17.30	17.30
90/1	22.00	21.50

Night Flying

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on changes in the training requirement for night flying during Mallet Blow exercises since 1985;

(2) what plans he has to extend the night flying period in future Mallet Blow exercises to a time later than that used during Mallet Blow 90-1.

Mr. Neubert: I have nothing to add to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman) on 15 December 1987, column *124*.

War Medals

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will consider expanding the team responsible for the issue of war medals in order to satisfy existing claimants during the period of world war II anniversaries.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We are looking at ways in which the waiting time for applicants for world war II medals might be reduced. My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to my hon. Friend when our studies are complete.

Ship Charters

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will introduce a policy of using only British ships for his Department's charters.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is the Government's policy to charter vessels on the basis of availability, suitability and cost and, subject to these conditions, to give preference to British ship operators.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will set out the arrangements governing repayment schemes relating to prescription charge repayments for members of the armed services and their families.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Members of the armed forces who require emergency medical and dental treatment, outside the umbrella of service medical facilities, which necessitates the issue of prescriptions, may claim a refund of prescription charges through service channels.

Dependants of service personnel are charged standard prescription rates when medication is provided from service facilities and pay National Health Service prescription charges in the normal way.

Procurement Executive Airfields

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the representatives of the civilian work force at the aeroplane and armaments experimental establishment at Boscombe Down about the future of the procurement executive airfields.

Mr. Neubert: My Department undertakes research and development flying at three procurement executive airfields at Bedford, Boscombe Down and Farnborough. My hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mr. Sainsbury) informed the House on 15 December 1988, column *683*, of our intention to conduct a study into the future requirements for these airfields.

External consultants were accordingly commissioned in 1989, and they recently submitted their report to the Department. We are now considering the way ahead, with making the most cost-effective use of our facilities against a background of declining flying activity our highest priority.

As part of our normal practice of keeping the work force fully informed of our intentions, the study's terms of reference, which included instructions to consult the trade unions and to take full account of their views, were passed to the appropriate trade unions. There will, of course, be full consultation with the trade unions and other interested parties before any final decisions are taken.

Radiation

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence at what frequency individual dosimeters of refit workers are calibrated and checked.

Mr. Neubert *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* In accordance with IRR85, thermoluminescent dosimeters are calibrated on receipt and re-calibrated at regular intervals, at least every 50 read cycles, by the defence radiological protective service, a dosimetry service approved by the Health and Safety Executive. In addition, the absorbtion rate of these dosimeters is checked every month. Direct reading dosimeters are tested at least once every 14 months, also in accordance with IRR85.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence at what level and individual radiation dose exposure his Department initiates investigation of the cause of these dose exposures.

Mr. Neubert *[holding reply 4 April 1990]:* Investigations are carried out in accordance with the Ionising Radiation Regulations 1985.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how alpha radiation is monitored to and within specific human organs on individual refit workers; and what account is taken of radium daughter products occurring naturally;

(2) what is the individual lung dose for submariners and refit workers arising from absorption of tritium;

(3) what is the internal organ dose arising from absorption of the radionuclide cobalt-60;

(4) what is the internal organ dose arising from absorption of the radionuclides strontium-90, caesium-137, carbon-14 and the isotopes of plutonium and uranium.

Mr. Neubert *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* The results of routine monitoring of levels of the contamination in the working environment and where applicable, biological monitoring of personnel, confirm that there is no requirement to record radiation doses for submariners or workers at the royal dockyards arising from intakes of radioactive material. In the unlikely event of an accident or incident occurring in the workplace leading to any suspicion of intake of radioactive material, special monitoring of the individual concerned would be undertaken.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many claims for compensation have been received from refit workers for radiation-induced illness; how many of these claims have been settled; and how many remain in dispute or progress.

Mr. Neubert *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* My Department has received a number of claims over the years from service and civilian employees for radiation-related illness, but it is not possible to identify, without disproportionate cost and effort, claimants who were engaged on refit work. Every claim received by the Department is dealt with on the basis of legal liability.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of those refit workers subject to radiation doses in excess of 50 milliSieverts in a particular year received the greater part of such doses as a result of some incident or accident outside the range of normal refit operations; if he will describe such incidents; and what conclusions he has reached as to why such abnormal exposures occurred.

Mr. Neubert *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* In the period 1979-89, only one employee engaged on refit work has recorded as receiving an annual dose above 50 milliSieverts, which could not be sensibly attributed to exposure arising from normal refit operations. The majority of his total assessed radiation dose of 88·10 milliSieverts arose from a single dose assessment of 83·75 milliSieverts from a dosimeter issued for use by that employee in June 1984. A local investigation concluded that the dosimeter had been exposed in the absence of the employee. Nevertheless, the recorded over-exposure was notified to the Health and Safety Executive and the assessed radiation dose remains on the record. Data for years earlier than 1979 are not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give a breakdown of annual individual radiation exposure for refit workers in the bands 0 to 10, greater than 10 to 20, greater than 20 to 30, greater than 30 to 40, and greater than 50 milliSieverts, for all years since the onset of the naval nuclear propulsion programme.

Mr. Neubert *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* A breakdown of annual individual radiation dose for workers at the royal dockyards for each of the years 1979-89 is given in the following table. The figures shown in brackets are the number of additional employees monitored for exposure to ionising radiations by the local issue of direct reading dosimeters while employed under a written system of work. A more detailed or alternative breakdown of the figures and data for years earlier than 1979 can be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Annex A

Annual individual radiation exposure for workers at the Royal Dockyards

Year	*Numbers of workers in dose ranges*					
	0 to 15 mSv	*15 to 20 mSv*	*20 to 30 mSv*	*30 to 40 mSv*	*40 to 50 mSv*	*Over 50 mSv*
1989	1,306 (2,763)	29	31	5	1	0
1988	1,469 (2,862)	18	10	0	0	0
1987	1,781 (2,891)	19	5	2	0	0
1986	2,115 (2,560)	53	39	5	0	0
1985	2,093 (2,419)	76	62	17	0	0
1984	1,869 (2,190)	111	138	52	8	1
1983	2,090 (2,518)	75	86	36	29	0
1982	2,165 (2,672)	85	69	14	6	0
1981	1,997 (2,566)	93	133	45	11	0
1980	1,784 (2,877)	85	154	89	48	1
1979	1,469 (1,697)	102	125	75	66	2

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the dates when his Department's radiological protection measures and guidelines for submariners and refit workers were changed, altered or modified.

Mr. Neubert *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* Within the Royal Naval submarine flotilla, detailed radiological protection instructions and training and qualification standards are promulgated in classified books of reference which are subject to regular update. The detailed instructions were subject to complete reissue in 1985, following publication of the Ionising Radiations Regulations (IRR85), and have been subject to minor amendments since that time. In addition to these specific instructions, nuclear submariners must also comply with general joint services instructions, which are also updated regularly in line with the promulgation of relevant national approved codes of practice.

Within the royal dockyards, radiological protection aspects are covered by site-specific instructions and standing orders which are produced by the companies and are subject to statutory control. Where relevant, the specific MOD instructions are also compiled with by the contractor in accordance with the terms of the contract.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide a definition of those personnel who are generally classed as refit workers who are involved in naval nuclear propulsion plant facilities and who are engaged on or involved with radioactive materials or radioactive processes.

Mr. Neubert *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* The term "refit worker" is not a designation used by either MOD or its contractors. All personnel within the royal dockyards, who require access to controlled radiation areas as a result of their employment, are regarded as being occupationally exposed to radiation. It is in regard to this group that the radiation dose statistics are provided in answering the hon. Member's several other questions.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if in cases where refit personnel are subject to extraordinary radiation doses, such as in excess of 15 milliSieverts in a particular year, largely as a result of some incident or accident outside the range of normal refit operation, he will publish details of such incidents or cause them to be published in the Health and Safety Executive quarterly statement of nuclear incidents; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neubert *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* All exposures of 15 milliSieverts or more within any calendar year are subject to investigation in accordance with regulation 28(1) and (2) of the Ionising Radiations Regulations, with the objectives of triggering procedures to ensure that exposures are being kept as low as reasonably practicable. If an exposure greater than 30mSv in any calendar year occurs, the Health and Safety Executive is notified as required by regulations 13(f) of IRR 85.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the gross numbers of refit workers employed in the United Kingdom, in terms of years employed at each respective port or refit dockyard facilities.

Mr. Neubert *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* The data are not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The numbers of employees occupationally exposed to radiation at each royal dockyard since 1979 are shown in the table.

Year	*Chatham*	*Devonport*	*Rosyth*	*Total*
1989	9	2,394	1732	4,135
1988	10	2,677	1,672	4,359
1987	12	2,669	2,017	4,698
1986	17	3,035	1,720	4,772
1985	19	2,936	1,712	4,667
1984	22	3,074	1,273	4,369
1983	447	3,016	1,371	4,834
1982	1,246	2,547	1,218	5,011
1981	1,456	2,159	1,230	4,845
1980	1,915	1,643	1,480	5,038
1979	1,008	1,265	1,263	3,536

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what in-house radiological protection measures and guidelines are adopted for submariners and refit workers; and if these are in addition or supplementary to Ionising Radiations Regulations.

Mr. Neubert *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* Within MOD, radiation exposures continue to be authorised only on the basis that they are justified, comply with statutory limits, and are as low as reasonably practicable (ALARP). Individual measures taken are often site-specific and, in the case of the royal dockyards, are the responsibility of the contractors, who are subject to the legislative requirements.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the accuracy of dosimeters worn by refit workers in terms of percentage of the recorded radiation dose.

Mr. Neubert *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* The accuracy of the personal dosimeters worn by workers monitored for exposure to ionising radiation by the defence radiological protection service meets the criteria specified by the Health and Safety Executive in its "Guidance on the Approval of Dosimetry Services" under the Ionising Radiations Regulations 1985, part 1—external radiations.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the average individual radiation dose, whole body equivalent, for all refit workers involved or who have been involved in the naval nuclear propulsion programme and associated facilities.

Mr. Neubert *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* The average annual radiation doses to workers at the royal dockyards for each of the years 1979 to 1989 inclusive are shown in the following table. Data for years after 1986 have been included with the permission of the dockyard contractors. The data include doses to individuals working under a written system of work who were issued with direct reading dosimeters. Figures for years before 1979 are not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Average annual radiation doses of refit workers

Year	*Average annual dose (mSv)*
1989	1·69
1988	1·26
1987	1·46
1986	1·82
1985	2·47
1984	3·82
1983	2·84
1982	2·34
1981	3·15
1980	3·60
1979	4·91

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the distribution of total radiation exposure for refit workers in the ranges 0 to 5, greater than 5 to 10, greater than 10 to 15, greater than 15 to 20, greater than 20 to 25, greater than 25 to 30, greater than 30 to 35, greater than 35 to 40, greater than 40 to 45, greater than 45 to 50 and greater than 50 milliSieverts in terms of percentage of overall work force.

Mr. Neubert *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* The distribution of total radiation exposures of those workers at the royal dockyards who have radiation dose records maintained on computer by the defence radiological protection service, is given in the table. A more detailed breakdown for employees ceasing radiation work before the date on which computerised record keeping was introduced is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Lifetime dose (milliSieverts)	*Numbers*	*Percentage*
0 to 5	2,318	35·3
5 to 10	714	10·9
10 to 15	485	7·4
15 to 20	332	5·1
20 to 30	463	7·0
30 to 40	352	5·4
40 to 50	255	3·9
50 to 100	794	12·1
100 to 200	574	8·7
Over 200	283	4·2
Totals	6,570	100·2

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the maximum radiation dose, rounded to the nearest milliSievert, received by any refit worker in one year during the last three decades; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neubert *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* Rounded to the nearest milliSievert, 88 milliSieverts represents the highest recorded annual dose for any worker at the royal dockyards in the past 10 years. Data for earlier years are not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The circumstances of this exposure are described in my earlier reply to the hon. Member.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the maximum total radiation dose received by any refit worker over any period, or number of periods, spent as a classified radiation worker; and whether such an individual or individuals are still working as classified radiation workers within nuclear-propelled submarine refit facilities.

Mr. Neubert *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* The maximum total radiation dose recorded for any worker at the royal dockyards registered in the defence radiological protection service's record keeping system is 775·95 milliSieverts. This total dose accrued over the period June 1953 to March 1982. The man is no longer working, having reached retirement age. Data for personnel ceasing radiation work before 1 January 1979 are not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the standard radiation exposure measuring device, issued to and worn by refit personnel during all refit operations; and whether the type of measuring device has changed since the onset of the naval nuclear propulsion programme.

Mr. Neubert *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* The personal radiation dosimeter currently issued to radiation workers monitored for exposure to ionising radiation by the defence radiological protection service, an HSE approved dosimetry service, is the thermoluminescent dosimeter introduced in March 1983. Before this date, and from the onset of the naval nuclear propulsion programme, the photographic film dosimeter was used. Currently, a variety of direct reading dosimeters are used for the monitoring of employees.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the total occupational, whole body equivalent, radiation exposure of all refit workers in the United Kingdom in milliSieverts, for each year since the onset of the naval nuclear propulsion programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Neubert *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* The cumulative radiation doses of all workers in the royal dockyards, for each of the years 1979 to 1989 inclusive, are shown in the table. These figures include the cumulative radiation doses of employees monitored for exposure to ionising radiations by the local issue of direct reading dosimeters within the refit yards. These latter figures have been supplied by, and are included with the permission of, the dockyard contractors, who assumed responsibility for health and safety of persons employed within the nuclear licensed sites at Rosyth and Devonport on 5 April 1987.

Data for earlier years are not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Year	*Cumulative dose (MilliSieverts)*
1989	6,978
1988	5,501
1987	6,837
1986	8,704
1985	11,536
1984	16,680
1983	13,734
1982	11,717
1981	15,276
1980	18,158
1979	17,378

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what limits are adopted for internal organ radiation dose exposure for refit workers.

Mr. Neubert *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* All dose limits adopted by the MOD and its contractors comply with the requirements of the Ionising Radiations Regulations 1985 which are listed at schedule 1 of those regulations.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of refit workers are classified as radiation workers; and how these personnel are selected and deemed fit for classification.

Mr. Neubert *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* At present about 25 per cent. of workers at the royal dockyards are designated "classified". The criteria against which these employees are selected and designated as classified persons are specified in regulation 9 of the Ionising Radiations Regulations. Certification that an employee is fit to be designated as a classified person is provided by an appointed doctor, in accordance with the requirement of regulation 9(3)(b) and regulation 16 of IRR85.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department maintains an agreement with the United States Department of Defence regarding transfer of information and data about nuclear submarine refit accidents, risk or safety of refit workers.

Mr. Neubert *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* No.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department's research into morbidity and mortality among refit workers has considered genetic effects which have passed on to offspring due to exposure of refit workers to radiation in the normal course of their duties.

Mr. Neubert *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* No such research has been undertaken by my Department.

Mr. McFall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the refit personnel receiving doses in excess of 15 milliSieverts in two or more consecutive years, or three or more separate annual doses, were thereafter removed from the occupation or positions where they had been or likely would be in future, subject to such doses; and if these personnel were advised of the radiation risk they were undergoing.

Mr. Neubert *[holding answer 4 April 1990]:* It is not my Department's policy, nor to my knowledge that of any other United Kingdom employer, to remove persons receiving, as a result of their occupational external exposure to ionising radiation, doses in excess of this level, whether in two or more consecutive years or in three or more separate annual doses. With regard to the hazards associated with working with ionising radiation, all personnel who are occupationally exposed receive such information, instructions and training as are required by regulation 12 of the Ionising Radiations Regulations 1985. My Department ensures that such personnel have access to their individual radiation dose records, and receive appropriate counselling from specialist medical officers and health physics staff as deemed necessary or if requested.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Irradiated Food

128. **Mr. Michael J. Martin:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what guidance has been given to trading standards officers on how to detect irradiated food contravening the Trades Description Act.

129. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what guidance has been given to trading standards officers on how to detect irradiated food contravening the Trades Description Act.

130. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what guidance has been given to trading standards officers on how to detect irradiated food contravening the Trades Description Act.

Mr. Maclean: I am not aware of a need for specific guidance to local authority officers on this subject. The Government are, however, funding research on the development of detection methods.

Hatcheries

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any plans to introduce new regulations regarding hatcheries.

Mr. Maclean: The measures relating to hatcheries, together with other parts of the salmonella control programme, are being kept under review.

Farm Diversification

Mr. Butler: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the uptake of the grants available for farm diversification.

Mr. Curry: Uptake to the end of February 1990 was as follows:

	Number of applications since start of scheme	*Grant aid*	*Grant committed for future*
		£ million	*£ million*
Capital Grants	2,491	2·884	5·973
Feasibility			
Study Grants	191	0·047	0·131
Marketing Grants	43	0·008	0·124

Farm Animal Welfare Council

Mr. Pike: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the Farm Animal Welfare Council.

Mr. Maclean: The Government value the Farm Animal Welfare Council's independent and authoritative advice very highly. The council has provided the impetus for many new welfare measures and will, I am sure, continue to lead the way in its future work.

Local Government (Agricultural Land Holdings)

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the acreage of agricultural land sold during the last financial year by local authorities.

Mr. Curry: Details for the last financial year (1989-90) are not yet available. In 1988-89 local authorities in England and Wales sold 887 hectares from their smallholdings estates.

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the average size of agricultural holding owned by local authorities in England and Wales; and what was the figure 10 years ago.

Mr. Curry: The average size of agricultural holdings owned by local authorities in England and Wales was 22·6 hectares in 1988-89 compared with 18·9 hectares in 1979-80.

Agricultural Wages Board

Mr. Strang: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met the chairman of the Agricultural Wages Board; and what was discussed.

Mr. Curry: None of the Ministers in the Ministry have met the chairman of the Agricultural Wages Board.

Green Pound

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress is being made to abolish the green pound by 1992.

Mr. Curry: As part of this year's farm price review the Commission proposed a further step towards the elimination of the gap between the market and green rates of exchange for the pound.

Surplus Food and Wine

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will raise at the next meeting of the Council of Agriculture Ministers the provision made for the disposal of surplus food and wine in the current year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: As my hon. Friend knows, the United Kingdom has taken the lead over a number of years in pressing for action to be taken to control the level of agricultural surpluses and the cost of the common agricultural policy. We have achieved considerable success and at the forthcoming meeting of the Council of Agriculture Ministers we will be looking to maintain this progress.

Avoparcin

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to be able to complete the process of deliberations with the European Community over a starch refund under regulation 1009/86 in respect of Avoparcin.

Mr. Curry: Additions to the list of products eligible for the Community starch production refund are decided by the Commission using powers exercised under the management committee procedure. I understand that the Commission is considering possible additions to the list, including that of Avoparcin, but is not yet in a position to make any firm proposal to the cereals management committee.

Countryside (Access)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on access to the countryside.

Mr. Maclean: Under section 17 of the Agriculture Act 1986 we have to balance the interests of promoting an efficient agricultural industry, the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty and amenity of the countryside and its enjoyment by the public. It is generally recognised that there is a delicate balance between the increasing demand for public access and its impact upon the countryside and farming. The Ministry's policies are designed to encourage farmers wherever practicable to provide for countryside recreation. To this end, grants are available under the farm diversification grant scheme for farm walks and nature trails and the Ministry, jointly with the Countryside Commission, has published a ploughing code which reminds farmers of their responsibilities in relation to rights of way. Furthermore, we support the Rights of Way (Agricultural Land) Bill, introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh) which seeks to clarify the existing law on rights of way over agricultural land.

Rabies

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Caerphilly of 15 March, *Official Report*, column *241*, how he proposes to implement his plan in the event of a rabies outbreak to bring about the destruction of foxes in the infected area; and what assessment he has made of the impact of any control methods on other animals and bird species.

Mr. Maclean: Action taken would depend on the circumstances and the geographical spread of any outbreak. Urban foxes might have to be controlled by shooting and trapping if poisoning were not possible but the main method of destroying foxes in an infected area would involve the use of poisoned bait. Trained Ministry staff would select and mark the baiting points and uneaten baits would be recovered and destroyed. Accidental casualties among other species would be kept to the minimum compatible with the task of stamping out any outbreak of rabies before it became established.

"At the Farmers Service"

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the cost to public funds of producing the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food/WOAD booklet, "At the Farmers Service"; how many copies were produced; how they are being distributed; and whether any charge per copy is being required of the recipients.

Mr. Curry: The new edition of "At the Farmers Service" was produced using desk-top publishing techniques to provide value for money and make future revisions easier. Production costs were £20,000 for 50,000 copies, giving a unit cost of 40p per copy. The booklet is distributed free to members of the farming community and other interested parties.

Set-aside Scheme

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will place a copy of his Department's set-aside application forms in the Library.

Mr. Gummer: Yes, I have done so.

Healthier Eating

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how much he has spent on research into healthier eating *(a)* within his Department and *(b)* to outside organisations for (i) 1989-90 and (ii) 1990-91; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how much money he intends to spend in the promotion of a healthier diet in 1990-91; and if he will make a statement;

(3) how much money was spent by his Department in the promotion of a healthier diet in 1989-90; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what assessment he has made of the efficacy of the publicity efforts of his Department to promote a healthier diet; and if he will make a statement;

(5) whether he will launch a nationwide campaign to encourage a healthier diet, using leaflets for widespread distribution, and other promotional methods; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: My Department, the Department of Health and the Health Education Authority are now in the final stages of preparing a booklet setting out a simple set of dietary guidelines intended to help consumers choose an overall balanced diet. The guidelines are targeted in the first instance at those giving dietary advice, for example, health professional teachers and the media, but will apply to the general public. It is intended to adapt them for other specific audiences such as school children, the elderly and pregnant women.

In addition to this specific initiative my Department monitors the nutritional quality of the household diet through the national food survey and provides essential information on the nutrient content of particular foods. We have produced the "Manual of Nutrition" which describes all the important nutrients, their roles in the body and the foods that provide them. We commissioned jointly with the Department of Health the "Dietary and Nutritional Survey of British Adults" which will be published shortly. We also recognise the importance of food labels in providing information and have pressed for EC legislation which would require more nutritional information to be shown. Our free booklet "Look at the Label" on understanding food labels explains the significance of the nutritional declarations which are increasingly being made on food labels and relates them to dietary advice.

The directly attributable cost of the guidelines to my Department was about £14,000 in 1989-90 and a further £20,000 has been allocated for 1990-91. The total cost of work to promote a healthy and nutritious diet cannot be separately identified, but the cost of "Dietary and Nutritional Survey of British Adults" was over £1 million.

In 1989-90 my Department spent £900,000 on research into applied nutrition and £200,000 on monitoring nutrients in food. This work was contracted with outside organisations. It represents only part of my Department's total research expenditure (£8·6 million) on food safety and hygiene which is carried out so that consumers may have a safe and nutritious food supply from which they may choose a healthy diet. Figures for 1990-91 are not yet available.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his policy in respect of those research projects which have been identified as near market which subsequently fail to attract industrial support; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Near-market research that does not attract industry support will have to cease. Work that is close to commercial application should be funded by industry, which is the direct beneficiary and best able to judge priorities for this work. Public expenditure is better redeployed on basic science, strategic research and research aimed at benefiting and protecting the community at large.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) on 9 February, *Official Report,* column *824,* which projects have so far attracted near-market funding; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The projects listed in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) on 9 February 1990 will be funded by my Department until their completion. This will be by 31 March 1991 or earlier as appropriate. The areas being researched by these projects have been identified as near market, that is, suitable for industrial funding. I am pleased to be able to say that the Meat and Livestock Commission (MLC) will be funding from 1990-91 onwards a programme of research that will cover many of these areas of research.

Poultry

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Newark (Mr. Alexander), 13 February, *Official Report,* column *200,* what evidence he has that the security of poultry premises could be jeopardised by open registers; and if he will now review his decision.

Mr. Maclean: The decision to remove the provisions in question was based on general concern about security rather than specific threats. I am satisfied that the action taken was a sensible precaution which does not prejudice the effectiveness of the salmonella controls.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what European agriculture guidance and guarantee fund grants have been paid to Unigate plc in respect of poultry processing plants.

Mr. Curry: No EAGGF grants have been paid to Unigate plc or any of its subsidiary companies in respect of poultry-processing plants.

Soil Preservation

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to ensure the survival of rendzina soils subject to arable cropping; and what information he possesses concerning their degradation.

Mr. Curry: The special problems of rendzinas, and other soil types in England and Wales, are well understood by soil scientists of the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service. These specialists are located at the regional offices and sub-centres of MAFF and WOAD, and are available to provide advice and information on all aspects of soil care to all who require it.

The Department continues to fund research on a very wide range of soil-related problems. The many facets of soil degradation, such as heavy-metal contamination, erosion and acidification, are included in these studies.

Information is published in suitable format, for example, in scientific journals, from individual projects within this programme, as soon as conclusions can be drawn with confidence.

In addition to the work funded by my Department, there is a large amount of information available from other sources, both in the United Kingdom and overseas. It would not be possible to draw all this together for presentation, except at inordinate cost.

Agricultural Wages

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next expects to meet representatives of the Agricultural Workers Union to discuss wages and conditions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Ministers from this Department have no plans at present to meet representatives of the Transport and General Workers Union agriculture sector trade group.

Bovine Offal

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Truro, 2 February, *Official Report*, column *409*, on what information he bases his statement that industry's policy is not to use those bovine offals currently banned for use in human consumption.

Mr. Maclean: The statement was based on the knowledge of the pet food industry that this Department has built up through its normal work in relation to this sector.

Salmonella

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to conduct periodic surveys of broiler flocks to establish the incidence of salmonella.

Mr. Maclean *[holding answer 5 April 1990]:* Under the Government's salmonella control programme measures are being taken to reduce the level of salmonella infection in the broiler production chain. The impact of these measures on the incidence of salmonella will be kept under review.

Artioposthia Triangulata

Mr. Alton: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will make a statement on the spread and effects of Artioposthia triangulata in Northern Ireland;

(2) what information his Department has as to how Artioposthia triangulata first entered Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement;

(3) what studies have been commissioned about the spread and effects of Artioposthia triangulata; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what studies his Department has commissioned into the effect of Artioposthia triangulata on the earthworm population of Northern Ireland and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The New Zealand planarian (flatworm), Artioposthia triangulata, has colonised Northern Ireland. It feeds on earthworms and may be capable of reducing populations. It is found in all counties in Northern Ireland and has been associated with the disappearance of worms from grassland.

The Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland has a programme of research into the distribution and biology of Artioposthia triangulata in Northern Ireland. Associated with this research, scientists are also monitoring reported sightings elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Research is necessary to define both the threat and the need for control measures.

Fishing Vessels (Decommissioning Grants)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has about decommissioning grants available to fishing vessels and the amount put in by European Community sources for decommissioning for *(a)* Holland, *(b)* France, *(c)* Denmark, *(d)* the United Kingdom and *(e)* Spain.

Mr. Curry *[pursuant to his reply, 22 February 1990, c. 990-01]:* The information supplied by the Commission is as follows:

	£ million
Denmark	1·64
France	nil
Netherlands	1·87
Spain	nil
United Kingdom	nil

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

City Regulation

9. **Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on City regulation.

85. **Mr. Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on City regulation.

Mr. Ridley: Regulation of investment business is, for the most part, the responsibility of the Securities and Investment Board, which is the designated agency under the Financial Services Act 1986. Other aspects of City activity are regulated under other arrangements, such as the Insurance Companies Act 1982 and the Banking Act 1987.

Drink Prices

10. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will refer the decision of the brewers to increase the price of alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks to the Office of Fair Trading.

78. **Mr. McWilliam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will refer the decision of the brewers to increase the price of alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks to the Office of Fair Trading.

100. **Mr. Allen McKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will refer the decision of the brewers to increase the price of alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks to the Office of Fair Trading.

Mr. Redwood: No. We have introduced a number of measures to increase competition in this area, and the Office of Fair Trading is already taking steps to keep the situation under review.

Manufactures

13. **Mr. Livingstone:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the OECD countries which had a more favourable trade balance in manufactures than Great Britain in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the OECD countries which had a more favourable trade balance in manufactures than Great Britain in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Redwood: The latest complete data refer to 1987 when 11 of the 23 OECD countries had surpluses or smaller deficits than the United Kingdom as a percentage of their total trade in manufactures.

The list is as follows:

71. **Mr. Leadbitter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the OECD countries which had a more favourable trade balance in manufactures than Great Britain in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Forth: The information is in the following table:

Trade in Manufactures[1] *1987*

	Balance as a percentage of Total Trade[2] *in Manufactures*
Japan	61·5
Germany	24·3
Italy	14·1
Sweden	6·5
Finland	4·1
Belgium/Luxembourg	3·4
Switzerland	0·7
Ireland	−0·5
France	−2·2
Austria	−4·2
Netherlands	−5·3
United Kingdom	−8·4
Denmark	−11·0
Canada	−12·0
Portugal	−14·3
Spain	−14·9
Turkey	−16·7
United States of America	−30·9
Norway	−31·9
Greece	−38·8
New Zealand	−54·1
Australia	−57·9
Iceland	−69·7

Notes:

[1] Standard International Trade Classification, Sections 5 to 8.

[2] Exports plus imports.

Source: OECD Series A.

IT Skills Shortages

16. **Mr. John Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from the information technology sector on skills shortages.

Mr. Forth: There have been a number of representations from the information technology sector, in the past, with regard to IT skills shortages. In recognising this my Department has supported a number of initiatives aimed at reducing such shortages, including support of up to £440,000 over three years for the recently launched Women into Information Technology (WIT) campaign where this support is appropriately matched by industry.

70. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from the information technology sector on skills shortages.

97. **Mr. Robert Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from the information technology sector on skills shortages.

Mr. Forth: There have been a number of representations from the information technology sector, in the past, with regard to IT skills shortages. In recognising this my Department has supported a number of initiatives aimed at reducing such shortages, including support of up to £440,000 over three years for the recently launched Women into Information Technology (WIT) campaign where this support is appropriately matched by industry.

My Department also has an Information Technology Advisory Board (ITAB) with representatives from industry, commerce and academia. One of the ITAB's support committees advises specifically on education and training and comments on IT skills issues.

CBI Regional Bodies

19. **Mr. James Lamond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he last met a regional body of the Confederation of British Industry; and what was discussed.

20. **Mr. Lambie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he last met a regional body of the Confederation of British Industry; and what was discussed.

62. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he last met a regional body of the Confederation of British Industry; and what was discussed.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My Department maintains regular contact with the CBI at all levels on a wide range of matters relating to industry.

Information Technology

21. **Mr. Bernie Grant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any new plans to encourage research and development in information technology.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any new plans to encourage research and development in information technology.

58. **Mr. Graham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has any new plans to encourage research and development in information technology.

Mr. Forth: I am pleased to announce Government support of £34 million for new national collaborative research and development programmes in the following areas of IT: safety-critical software, the application of parallel processing and open distributed processing. They will be jointly funded by the Department of Trade and Industry and the science and engineering research council.

26. **Mr. Home Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on the training of senior staff in the application of information technology.

69. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on the training of senior staff in the application of information technology.

88. **Mr. Hood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on the training of senior staff in the application of information technology.

Mr. Forth: No. I have nothing to add to my answers of 14 March 1990 at column *292*.

Office of Fair Trading

23. **Mr. Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next expects to meet the directors of the Office of Fair Trading.

60. **Mr. Gareth Wardell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next expects to meet the director of the Office of Fair Trading.

104. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next expects to meet the director of the Office of Fair Trading.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend met the Director General of Fair Trading on 2 April. There are currently no further meetings planned with Ministers in this Department.

National Economic Development Council

24. **Mr. Frank Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will next meet the director general of the National Economic Development Council; and what will be discussed.

83. **Mr. Eastham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will next meet the director general of the National Economic Development Council; and what will be discussed.

30. **Mr. Fisher:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will next meet the director general of the National Economic Development Council; and what will be discussed.

Mr. Ridley: My Department has frequent contacts with NEDO officials on a wide range of business matters and I last chaired the council on 4 April. I have no plans to meet the director general again at present.

Glass Safety

25. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to ensure that all the conditions of BS 6262 on glass safety are made mandatory without delay.

75. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to ensure that all the conditions of BS 6262 on glass safety are made mandatory without delay.

106. **Mr. Lofthouse:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to ensure that all the conditions of BS 6262 on glass safety are made mandatory without delay.

Mr. Forth: I propose to approve British Standard 6262 (code of practice for glazing in Buildings) for the purposes of the general safety requirement under section 10 of the Consumer Protection Act 1987 on publication of amendments to this standard. The standard will specify the use of safety glass in features such as patio doors, panels beside doors and other low-level areas where the risk of injury is greatest.

Textiles

27. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next intends to meet his European counterparts to discuss the textile industry.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Industry Council which I attended discussed the Commission annual report on the state of the textile industry on 13 March. No further EC discussion has been arranged at the moment but the subject frequently comes up in bilateral contacts. In addition, my noble Friend the Minister for Trade is this week attending an informal meeting of world Trade Ministers in Mexico with Ministers from some other EC member states, which will review progress in the GATT Uruguay round including the negotiations on the future of the multi-fibre arrangement.

45. **Mr. Buchan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next intends to meet his European counterparts to discuss the textile industry.

105. **Mr. Buckley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next intends to meet his European counterparts to discuss the textile industry.

Mr. Redwood: The Industry Council which my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry attended discussed the Commission annual report on the state of the textile industry on 13 March. No further EC discussion has been arranged at the moment but the subject frequently comes up in bilateral contacts. In addition, my noble Friend the Minister for Trade is this week attending an informal meeting of world Trade Ministers in Mexico with Ministers from some other EC member states, which will review progress in the GATT Uruguay round including the negotiations on the future of the multi-fibre arrangement.

Poland

28. **Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will give figures for the United Kingdom's trade balance with Poland.

59. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, if he will give figures for the United Kingdom's trade balance with Poland.

Mr. Redwood: In 1989 the crude deficit in United Kingdom visible trade with Poland £134 million.

Manufacturing Output

29. **Mr. Snape:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on his assessment of the causes of the relative performance of each region in terms of constant value manufacturing output since 1979.

53. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on his assessment of the causes of the relative performance of each region in terms of constant value manufacturing output since 1979.

39. **Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on his assessment of the causes of the relative performance of each region in terms of constant value manufacturing output since 1979.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: There are many factors underlying regional performance, including the state of the world economy, and regional industrial structure. Recent indices show continuing growth in all regions of the United Kingdom.

Securities and Investments Board

31. **Mr. Eadie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next plans to meet the chairman of the Securities and Investments Board; and what will be discussed.

65. **Mr. Dunnachie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next plans to meet the chairman of the Securities and Investments Board; and what will be discussed.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend and I meet the chairman of the Securities and Investments Board to discuss a range of topics concerning the regulation of financial services as frequently as is necessary. No date has been fixed for the next such meeting.

Confederation of British Industry

34. **Mr. Radice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next intends to meet the president of the Confederation of British Industry; and what will be discussed.

64. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next intends to meet the president of the Confederation of British Industry; and what will be discussed.

66. **Mr. Frank Cook:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next intends to meet the president of the Confederation of British Industry; and what will be discussed.

91. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next expects to meet the president of the Confederation of British Industry to discuss manufacturing industry.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I have no immediate plans to meet the president of the Confederation of British Industry.

89. **Mr. Oppenheim:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he last met the Confederation of British Industry; and what matters were discussed.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last met representatives of the Confederation of British Industry when he chaired a meeting of the National Economic Development Council on 4 April 1990. The main items discussed on that occasion were business and the environment, the electronics industry and the United Kingdom's trade performance.

Cot Deaths

35. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he first became aware of Dr. Barry Richardson's research into cot deaths; and what action he then took to alert the public.

102. **Mr. McCartney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he first became aware of Dr, Barry Richardson's research into cot deaths; and what action he then took to alert the public.

Mr. Forth: The Department of Health wrote to my Department about Dr. Barry Richardson's research on 7 June 1989. A copy of Dr. Richardson's report dated June 1989 was received on 12 June. As a direct result the laboratory of the Government chemist was asked to undertake a scientific assessment of this research work.

In a written reply on 9 March, my hon. Friend the Minister for Health stated that a group of independent experts had been asked to investigate further claims by Dr. Richardson about emission of toxic gases from soiled mattresses taking account of the assessment still being carried out by the laboratory of the Government chemist.

I shall await the findings of this expert working group to see if there are any implications for the use of fire-resistant treatments in the manufacture of nursery furniture.

Manufactured Goods (Exports)

36. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the level of exports of manufactured goods Japan in 1989.

68. **Mr. Batiste:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the level of exports of manufactured goods to Japan in 1989.

79. **Mr. David Davis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the level of exports of manufactured goods to Japan in 1989.

Mr. Redwood: The level of United Kingdom exports of manufactured goods to Japan in 1989 was £1,938 million, an increase of 29 per cent. over 1988.

49. **Mr. Robert B. Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the growth in exports of manufactured goods to Japan since 1979.

93. **Mr. Irvine:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the growth in exports of manufactured goods to Japan since 1979.

Mr. Redwood: Exports of manufactured goods to Japan have risen from £481 million in 1979 to £1,938 million in 1989, an increase of 303 per cent.

67. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the growth in exports of manufactured goods to the European Community since 1979.

96. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the growth in exports of manufactured goods to the European Community since 1979.

107. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what has been the growth in exports of manufactured goods to the European Community since 1979.

Mr. Redwood: Exports of manufactured goods to the European Community have risen from £13 billion in 1979 to £38 billion in 1989, an increase of £25 billion.

Invisibles

37. **Ms. Short:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the prospects for British invisibles in the European market after 1992.

Mr. Redwood: The single market offers both a challenge and an opportunity to British business. This applies to businesses generating invisible trade as much as to those generating visible trade. The opportunities are great: according to estimates published by the Commission in "European Economy" in March 1988, the Community services sector is expected to contribute about 30 per cent. of the gains from the completion of the single market. The outcome for British invisibles will depend on the dynamic response of individual businesses.

Consumer Guarantees Bill

38. **Mr. Ingram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what further representations he has had on the Consumer Guarantees Bill.

63. **Mr. Roy Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what further representations he has had on the Consumer Guarantees Bill.

74. **Mr. Sean Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what further representations he has had on the Consumer Guarantees Bill.

Mr. Forth: At the Committee Stage of the Bill I undertook to inform members of the Committee of the representations I had received about various aspects of the Bill, where I had the agreement of the parties concerned to do so. This I have done. Further representations received since Committee were made in confidence and it would be inappropriate to give details of them.

Consumer Demand

40. **Mr. Livsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what effect he expects falling consumer demand to have on British industry.

Mr. Redwood: Prospects for the economy to mid-1991, including manufacturing production, are contained in the Financial Statement and Budget Report 1990-91 laid before the House by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 20 March 1990. Chart 3.8 of that statement forecasts continuing growth in consumer expenditure in 1990 and the first half of 1991, but at a slower rate than in 1988 and 1989. The forecasts suggest maintained levels of manufacturing production in 1990 and modest growth of 0·75 per cent. in the first half of 1991.

Product Safety

41. **Mr. Maxton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has as to how many cases have been brought under the Consumer Protection Act 1987 concerning product safety which were already covered by an approved standard.

48. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has as to how many cases have been brought under the Consumer Protection Act 1987 concerning product safety which were already covered by an approved standard.

Mr. Forth: Enforcement of the safety provisions of the Consumer Protection Act 1987 is mainly the responsibility of the trading standards departments of local authorities. A number of suppliers have been successfully prosecuted for breaches of the general safety requirement, but information is not available on whether these cases involved an approved standard.

West Germany

44. **Mr. Bell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the level of United Kingdom trade with West Germany.

99. **Mr. Barron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the level of United Kingdom trade with West Germany.

103. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the level of United Kingdom trade with West Germany.

Mr. Redwood: In 1989 United Kingdom imports from West Germany were £20 billion; United Kingdom exports to West Germany were £11·1 billion. Invisible trade is not separately recorded by country.

87. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the United Kingdom balance of trade with West Germany in 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: In 1989 imports of manufactured goods from West Germany exceeded United Kingdom manufactured exports to that country by £9·6 billion. Invisibles are not separately recorded by country.

Post Office

46. **Mr. Bidwell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next intends to meet the chairman of the Post Office.

54. **Mr. Boyes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next intends to meet the chairman of the Post Office.

Mr. Forth: I will next meet the chairman of the Post Office, Sir Bryan Nicholson, on 4 May.

Tin Mining

47. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the tin mining industry in Cornwall.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The respective managements have decided to cease operations at the Geevor tin mine immediately and at the Wheal Jane tin mine at the end of the year. These decisions appear inevitable given the prevailing low tin prices and the absence of indications of the substantial and sustained improvement in the tin price required for these mines to continue in production.

The remaining tin mine, South Crofty, has been the subject of a major capital investment programme designed to lower costs. This had been assisted by substantial DTI loans. That investment programme, and the geological conditions of the mine, mean that South Crofty is better placed to withstand low prices.

Shipbuilding

50. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the future of the shipbuilding industry in the United Kingdom.

57. **Mr. Ted Garrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the future of the shipbuilding industry in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway).

Exporters

51. **Mr. Dykes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the recent performance of United Kingdom exporters of goods and services.

Mr. Redwood: We have seen a significant and sustained growth in the United Kingdom's export performance. The value of non-oil exports doubled between 1979 and 1988. They increased again by 16 per cent. in 1989. In the three months to February, the value of goods exported was 5 per cent. higher than in the previous three months. This is a remarkable success, achieved in the face of increasingly strong competition, on which British exporters of goods and services are to be congratulated.

52. **Mr. Patchett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any new proposals to assist British exporters.

101. **Mr. Orme:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he has any new proposals to assist British exporters.

Mr. Redwood: I refer the hon. Members to the reply I gave on 14 March to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) at columns *477-79*.

Engineering Products

55. **Mr. Nicholas Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the current balance of trade in engineering products.

80. **Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the current balance of trade in engineering products.

95. **Mr. Ron Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the current balance of trade in engineering products.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The crude deficit on the balance of trade for engineering products was £8·2 billion in 1989.

Regional Assistance

56. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many regional selective assistance grants and regional development grants were awarded to firms in the north-west of England in 1988-89, at what cost to his Department.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: In the financial year 1988-89 my Department made offers of regional selective assistance for 340 projects, and approved regional development grants under the revised scheme for 2,036 projects, in the north-west region. The value of these offers and proposals was £133·4 million which is the amount expected to be paid if the projects proceed as planned.

Note: The north-west region includes the counties of Cheshire, Cumbria, Lancashire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside and the High Peak district of Derbyshire.

Car Manufacturers

61. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will next meet the major car manufacturers; and what will be discussed.

72. **Mr. Clelland:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will next meet the major car manufacturers; and what will be discussed.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Secretary of State and I regularly meet the major car manufacturers to discuss a variety of issues.

Footwear

73. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations he has received from the footwear industry regarding import penetration of the United Kingdom footwear trade.

Mr. Redwood: We have received a small number of representations about footwear issues, including the level of footwear imports.

EC Trade and Industry Ministers

76. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will next meet his counterparts in the European Community; and what will be discussed.

86. **Mr. Cummings:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will next meet his counterparts in the European Community; and what will be discussed.

Mr. Redwood: I maintain regular contacts with my opposite numbers in the European Commission across a wide range of issues.

Government Special Shares

77. **Sir George Young:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if his Department has any plans to extend the use of Government special shares.

Mr. Redwood: The government have a general prejudice against the creation of special shares, but recognise that a special share may be warranted by the particular circumstances of a privatised company. Each case is assessed on its merits.

Steel

81. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the future of the steel industry in the United Kingdom.

84. **Mr. Morley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the future of the steel industry in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: I refer the hon. Gentlemen to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) earlier today.

West German Trade and Industry Minister

82. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he last met his West German counterpart; and what was discussed.

Mr. Redwood: I last met my West German counterpart, Dr. Haussmann, at the Anglo-German summit on 30 March. A range of issues were discussed.

Building Societies

90. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his latest estimate of the proportion of larger building societies having tied arrangements with insurance companies.

Mr. Redwood: Eight of the 10 largest building societies have a "tied" arrangement with a single insurance company. However, seven of these eight also operate an independent financial adviser arm.

Sir Leon Brittan

92. **Mr. Rogers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he last met the Vice-President of the European Commission, Sir Leon Brittan; and what was discussed.

Mr. Ridley: I maintain regular contacts with my opposite numbers in the European Commission across a wide range of issues.

Trade Deficit

94. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will make a statement on the trade deficit.

Mr. Redwood: Exports from the United Kingdom are running at record levels. The present deficit has been caused by excessive growth in domestic demand in relation to domestic industrial capacity. It is therefore a macro-economic problem which will be resolved by the sound macro-economic policies which the Government are pursuing.

Stock Exchange

98. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he next plans to meet the chairman of the stock exchange; and what will be discussed.

Mr. Redwood: Ministers meet the chairman of the stock exchange whenever appropriate to discuss topics of mutual interest.

Balance of Trade

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the European Economic Community countries with which the United Kingdom had a trade surplus in manufactured goods in 1989.

Mr. Redwood: In 1989 the United Kingdom had a manufacturing trade surplus with Ireland, Spain and Greece.

RECHAR Scheme

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many jobs have been lost because of coal mine closures in the south Leeds area since 1 January 1984; if the RECHAR grants scheme can be applied to this area; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will consider in any further discussions with the European Commission on RECHAR allocations that area of the Normanton constituency which is the former coal mining area of south-east Leeds, for allocation of grant; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will list the areas which have been allocated grants through the RECHAR system.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The south-east Leeds area lost approximately 3,000 coal mining jobs since 1 January 1984. The Government have therefore already proposed to the European Commission that it should be among the areas to benefit from the RECHAR initiative for European structural fund grants to coal-mining areas. The Commission's decision is due by 27 April.

Recycling

Sir Charles Morrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the research and development projects being undertaken by his Department and related agencies into recycling, giving the cost of each project.

Mr. Forth: The Department has commissioned a range of projects to aid the development of its policy on recycling. Some have been placed with Warren Spring laboratory, including an examination of present market barriers to recycling in the United Kingdom, and others with management consultants, including investigations into CFC recovery, recycling and destruction, and into the problems of scrap tyre disposal. The Department believes that those companies and organisations directly involved in materials recycling should themselves be the prime initiators of R and D in this area, but stands ready to consider helping worthwhile projects.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many animal experiments for cosmetics took place in the United Kingdom in 1978, 1988 and 1989; if these exceed in number the essential minimum referred to by him in his reply to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 6 March, *Official Report,* column *588*; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: Statistics on the safety testing of cosmetics and toiletries are published by the Home Office. The latest information is contained in table 3 of the "Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals, Great Britain 1988" and similar information was published in previous years. The number of procedures carried out for the safety testing of cosmetic substances is determined by the requirements of current regulations which are kept to the minimum essential for consumer safety.

Unigate plc

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what grants in aid have been paid to Unigate plc in respect of poultry-processing plants.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: St. Ivel Farm Foods Ltd. (formerly Unigate Poultry Ltd.), a subsidiary of Unigate plc, is receiving regional aid in respect of a poultry processing plant at Scunthorpe.

Payments of regional development grant towards the project have totalled £3,729,000 to date. The company also accepted an offer of £10,558,000 of regional selective assistance and the first payment of grant under that offer was made in the quarter January to March 1989.

Details of the RDG payments and the RSA offer were published in *British Business* in accordance with standing arrangements.

Cosmetics

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his Department's policy in respect of the number of clearances given to additives for use in cosmetics; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The "positive" or approved lists of colourants, preservatives and ultra filters are agreed by member states at Brussels on the advice of the EC scientific committee on cosmetology. Since these are potentially more hazardous classes of ingredients the SCC normally asks for a full range of animal test data to safeguard the user.

ECGD (Relocation)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make it a criterion for the privatisation of the Export Credits Guarantee Department that the consequent relocation of offices from Cardiff, should take into account areas in Wales of high unemployment and poverty.

Mr. Ridley: There is currently no proposal for relocating the offices away from Cardiff nor do I expect one: but this would be a matter for the management after privatisation.

London United Investments

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will take steps to satisfy himself that the accounts of London United Investments plc in respect of the financial years ended in 1988 and 1989 showed a true and fair view of the profit and loss accounts and balance sheets and complied with the Companies Acts.

Mr. Redwood: The accounts of London United Investments plc for 1987 and for 1988 were audited by Messrs. Peat, Marwick, McLintock who reported that the financial statements of the company gave a true and fair view of its affairs and had been properly prepared in accordance with the Companies Act 1985 and that the consolidated financial statements had been properly prepared in accordance with the provisions of the Companies Act 1985 applicable to insurance companies. The group's accounts for 1989 are not yet due. In another answer to my hon. Friend today I have set out the action taken by my Department.

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when his Department first sought an actuarial report by Tillinghast into the insurance liabilities of London United Investments plc or its subsidiary companies; what were the dates when the report or reports were received by his Department; what were the dates when his officials took action on each report; and what was the nature of the action taken in each case.

Mr. Redwood: The Department required an actuarial report into Walbrook and its subsidiaries in January 1989. This report by Tillinghast was received in June 1989. The Department after consulting the Government Actuary's Department put various questions to LUI in August and September 1989. In October the DTI told LUI that it would require a further actuarial report covering all the United Kingdom insurance subsidiaries and that the Department needed to discuss a substantial reduction in the new business taken on by Walbrook. None of the other United Kingdom insurance companies in the group were authorised to take on new insurance business. The second actuarial report has not yet been received by LUI. The regulatory action to stop new business being taken by Walbrook, announced at 8.30 am on 26 March, was on the basis of Tillinghast's preliminary work which Schroders, the recently appointed merchant bank advisers to LUI reported to the Department on Saturday 24 March 1990.

Illegal Profits

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce legislation to provide that anyone, including financial institutions, who knowingly conceals the origins of illegal profits, will face a fine or imprisonment.

Mr. Waddington: I have been asked to reply.

It is already a serious offence to launder the proceeds of drug trafficking and terrorist funds, and there are extensive powers both to enable the police and customs officers to investigate such activities and to require banks and other financial institutions to report suspicious transactions to those authorities. The powers to combat drug money laundering have been further strengthened by the Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Act 1990, which also contains provisions to prevent drug traffickers evading the controls on money laundering by importing or exporting their proceeds in the form of cash.

It is also an offence to handle stolen goods or the proceeds of stolen goods; and those who do so may be held to have acted as accessories, conspirators or aiders and abetters in relation to the crime. Additionally, part VI of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 frees banks and others from obligations of confidentiality when they report voluntarily transactions involving funds which they suspect are derived from criminal activity.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 19 April 1990

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Land Tenure

13. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the discussions within the industry concerning land tenure.

Mr. Maclean: We welcome the debate within the industry on ways of revitalising the tenanted sector. Whilst consensus would be desirable we recognise that complete agreement may not be possible. Any proposals must genuinely address the problem and increase the availability of land for letting, including for new tenants. We hope the industry will pursue the debate vigorously with the need for effective measures uppermost in their minds.

Marine Environment

14. **Mr. Fishburn:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action his Department is taking to improve the quality of the marine environment.

Mr. Curry: We have set a date to end all dumping of liquid industrial waste, flyash and sewage sludge, and we will cease incineration at sea at the end of this year.

Scotch Whisky

15. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what subjects he expects to discuss at his next meeting with representatives of the Scotch whisky industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: I will discuss any issues of current commercial interest to the industry should a meeting be requested.

Farms (Pollution)

16. **Mr. Ward:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what schemes his Department has to help farmers deal with on-farm pollution and waste disposal.

Mr. Maclean: All farmers are entitled to initial free technical advice and we also make 50 per cent. grants available for the handling, storing and treatment of agricultural effluent and waste. In nitrate-sensitive areas further payments will be made for substantial restrictions to cut nitrate leaching.

Cereals

17. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the total United Kingdom hectarage of cereals for each of the last five years.

22. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the total United Kingdom hectarage of cereals for each of the last five years.

35. **Mr. Rogers:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the total United Kingdom hectarage of cereals for each of the last five years.

Mr. Curry: Total United Kingdom hectarage of cereals in million hectares over the last five years is:

Year	*Million hectares*
1985	4·015
1986	4·024
1987	3·935
1988	3·896
1989	[1]3·894

[1] Latest estimate

Agricultural Subsidy

18. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the total current level of subsidy to agriculture.

Mr. Curry: Expenditure on agricultural support in the United Kingdom in 1989-90, under the EC's common agricultural policy and on national grants and subsidies, is forecast to be £1,255·5 million.

Green Pound

19. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many European Community countries are in favour of devaluation of the green pound.

Mr. Curry: In the negotiations on the 1990 agricultural price proposals no member state has opposed the principle of a green pound devaluation.

Animal Welfare

20. **Mr. O'Brien:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met the director of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals; and what was discussed.

Mr. Maclean: I met the chief executive and other officers from the society on 27 March when many current issues on farm animal welfare were discussed.

23. **Mr. John P. Smith:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what reports he is expecting from the Farm Animal Welfare Council.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells).

25. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he plans to bring forward any primary legislation on farm animal welfare.

57. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he plans to bring forward any primary legislation on farm animal welfare.

Mr. Maclean: My right hon. Friend the Minister recently announced a major new initiative by the Government to tighten up farm animal welfare standards throughout the European Community. We intend to seek the fullest degree of harmonisation so that all countries of the Community operate to the same high standards. We shall seek to ensure that welfare measures which we consider to be desirable to introduce are, so far as possible, adopted throughout the European Community.

The Government have already announced that primary legislation is required to implement a number of recommendations by the Farm Animal Welfare Council relating to the welfare of animals at slaughter. It remains our intention to introduce the legislation as soon as the parliamentary timetable permits to make provision for those measures which may not be covered by Community law.

38. **Mr. Patrick Thompson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on policy towards animal welfare within the United Kingdom and the European Community.

42. **Mr. Gwilym Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to ensure that the welfare of farm animals is given priority throughout the European Community.

Mr. Maclean: As explained in the reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd) on 7 February, *Official Report*, column *712*, we are pressing for a comprehensive package of measures on farm animal welfare to be adopted in the Community in order to achieve the widest possible safeguards.

44. **Mr. Cox:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the Farm Animal Welfare Council.

Mr. Maclean: The Government value the Farm Animal Welfare Council's independent and authoritative advice very highly. The council has provided the impetus for many new welfare measures and will, I am sure, continue to lead the way in its future work.

White Fish (North Sea)

21. **Mr. Wallace:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent discussions he has had with his European Community counterparts regarding further conservation measures for the fishing of North sea white fish stocks.

Mr. Curry: High-level discussions are now taking place in Brussels on conservation and I expect the report on this to be discussed at the next Fisheries Council. The United Kingdom has submitted proposals, following discussion with the industry.

Agriculture (Capital Investment)

24. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the figure for the amount of fixed capital investment in the agricultural industry over the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Curry: The figures requested are as follows:

Annual fixed capital investment in the United Kingdom agricultural industry

	£ million (current price)
1985	1,226
1986	1,057
1987	941
1988	1,010
[1]1989	1,004

[1] Provisional.

Extensification

26. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the European Community proposals for extensification.

36. **Mrs. Clwyd:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the European Community proposals for extensification.

Mr. Curry: We shall shortly be announcing decisions on pilot schemes for extensification of beef and sheep following consultations with interested organisations and with the Commission.

We are also intending to issue a consultation document outlining a possible extensification scheme under which grant aid would be available to farmers wishing to convert from conventional to organic production.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

27. **Mr. Sean Hughes:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the cost to date of the bovine spongiform encephalopathy slaughter and compensation schemes.

56. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the cost to date of the bovine spongiform encephalopathy slaughter and compensation scheme.

Mr. Maclean: From the introduction of the compulsory slaughter policy on 8 August 1988 to the end of February 1990, the total cost was £6,436,167.

34. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what further action he proposes to reduce the risk of bovine spongiform encephalopathy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The Government have introduced a comprehensive package of measures to tackle BSE in cattle and to eliminate the remote risk to public health.

52. **Mr. George Howarth:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the estimate of the Southwood committee of the level of reporting of bovine spongiform encephalopathy; what is the current level of reporting; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The Southwood working party did not predict the level of reporting of suspect BSE cases. It did, however, make certain estimating assumptions about the development of the disease and concluded that there might be some 350 to 400 cases of BSE per month. Since the beginning of this year, the number of suspect BSE cases notified to the Ministry has risen and at present around 350 to 400 are being reported each week.

Milk Marketing Board

28. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the factors that will affect the operation of the Milk Marketing Board in 1992.

Mr. Curry: 1992 will not, of itself, affect the operation of the Milk Marketing Board. But the single market will reduce barriers to trade and there is now more milk available as a result of the recent increase in quotas. It is important that our dairy industry should be in a position to compete vigorously at home and in other member states in order to exploit these new opportunities. That is why I am encouraging the board and the Dairy Trade Federation to pursue discussions with a view to devising milk marketing arrangements suited to the 1990s.

Fishing Industry

29. **Mr. Kennedy:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will assess the prospects for the United Kingdom fishing industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: While fishing opportunities in 1990 for certain stocks, in particular North sea cod and haddock, have had to be reduced to safeguard the stocks, the value of landings in the early part of the year has been similar to that at the same time last year. We are, however, working hard on improvements to measures aimed at the conservation of fish on a Communitywide basis to achieve improved fishing prospects in the future.

Fishing Industry (Northumberland)

30. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the effect of recent restrictions on the viability of the fishing industry in the Northumberland fishing ports.

Mr. Curry: The measures I announced on 8 March were necessary to conserve North sea haddock, in the light of the current state of that stock. For this reason, they are essential to ensure the long-term viability of all sections of the haddock industry.

Food Safety Bill

31. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to lay the first orders under the Food Safety Bill.

Mr. Maclean: The Food Safety Bill is very much an enabling framework and many orders and regulations will be required. I hope to issue the first of these for consultation soon after Royal Assent.

46. **Mr. Michael Brown:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether the regulations under the Food Safety Bill will cover diet products.

Mr. Maclean: At present foods marketed as diet products are subject to the general provisions of the Food Act 1984 and to regulations made under it. In particular, schedule 6, part II, item 6 of the Food Labelling Regulations 1984 lays down the conditions under which slimming claims may be made. Some slimming aids for consumption are marketed as medicines and are licensed under medicines legislation. It is intended that these arrangements should be continued under the Food Safety Bill, but my hon. Friend may wish to be aware that the definition of food is being extended in the Bill to include

"articles and substances of no nutritional value".

This is to make it entirely clear that all diet products fall within the scope of legislation.

Consumer Needs

32. **Mr. Batiste:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action his Department is taking to encourage farmers to meet the needs of the consumer.

Mr. Curry: Recent changes to the common agricultural policy, which the Government have supported, are intended to increase the role of market forces in agriculture and so encourage farmers to respond more effectively to demand from consumers. The Government have also taken a number of specific measures, including continued funding of Food from Britain, to help farmers respond rapidly to market signals.

Bovine Offal

33. **Dr. Marek:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will reconsider his decision on the bovine offal ban so as to include calves of under six months of age.

37. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will reconsider his decision on the bovine offal ban so as to include calves of under six months of age.

50. **Mr. Gareth Wardell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he will reconsider his decision on the bovine offal ban so as to include calves of under six months of age.

Mr. Maclean: No. These animals were born after the ban on ruminant feedstuffs was introduced and even if BSE is transmitted from dam to calf, the agent would be undetectable in such young animals.

Dairy Sector

39. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next intends to meet the president of the National Farmers Union to discuss the dairy sector.

Mr. Curry: I have nothing to add to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend on 8 March, *Official Report*, column *847*.

National Farmers Union

40. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met representatives of the National Farmers Union; and what was discussed.

Mr. Curry: The Minister and I meet representatives of the National Farmers Union frequently to discuss agricultural matters.

Less-favoured Areas

41. **Mr. Amos:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assistance has been given to help farmers in the less-favoured areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Farmers in the less-favoured areas benefit from the payment of hill livestock compensatory allowances and from higher rates of grant for investments under the farm and conservation grant scheme. They are also eligible for a wider range of grants than other farmers under the farm diversification grant scheme and for special aid to encourage co-operative forage production. All told, these extra payments amount to over £140 million a year for the United Kingdom. This is a considerable package of extra help over and above our general agricultural support policies which benefit hill farmers as well as other farmers.

Access to the Countryside

43. **Mr. Jim Marshall:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on access to the countryside.

Mr. Maclean: Under section 17 of the Agriculture Act 1986 we have to balance the interests of promoting an efficient agricultural industry, the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty and amenity of the countryside and its enjoyment by the public. It is generally recognised that there is a delicate balance between the increasing demand for public access and its impact upon the countryside and farming. My Department's policies are designed to encourage farmers wherever practicable to provide for countryside recreation. To this end, grants are available under the farm diversification grant scheme for farm walks and nature trails and this Department, jointly with the Countryside Commission, has published a ploughing code which reminds farmers of their responsibilities in relation to rights of way. Furthermore, we support the Rights of Way (Agricultural Land) Bill, introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), which seeks to clarify the existing law on rights of way over agricultural land.

Food Labelling

45. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what further action he proposes to improve the labelling of foodstuffs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: On 15 November 1989 I announced that I had asked the Food Advisory Committee to carry out an independent assessment of our current food labelling legislation and practices to see how these can best be developed to give consumers what they need and want to know. I look forward to receiving the committee's recommendations. In the meantime proposals relating to datemarking and nutrition labelling, resulting from recently agreed Community legislation, are already in preparation.

North Sea Dumping

47. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from North sea fishermen about the dumping of industrial waste; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: We have received representations from fishermen's organisations and individuals concerned about the dumping of industrial waste in the North sea. I am able to reassure them that licensed dumping is strictly controlled and has no adverse effects on fish stocks.

In view of progress in the development of safe alternative land-based disposal methods I have recently announced termination dates for the sea dumping of industrial waste and sewage sludge, and marine incineration.

54. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research his Department is pursuing into ways of reducing North sea dumping of industrial and other wastes.

Mr. Curry: In the light of progress in the development of environmentally acceptable methods of disposal of waste on land we have now set deadlines for the termination of the sea dumping of industrial waste and sewage sludge, and marine incineration.

Coastal Flood Defences

48. **Mr. Adley:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when his Department last reviewed coastal flood defences.

Mr. Maclean: The state of the country's flood defences, both inland and on the coast, is kept under continual review through close contact between my officials and drainage bodies, in particular the National Rivers Authority. The increases in grant provision from £36 million to £54 million for the period 1989-90 to 1992-93 announced following the public expenditure surveys in 1988 and 1989, resulted from our most recent reviews of current and future flood defence needs.

We are currently considering with the National Rivers Authority and local authorities the need for adjustments to current programmes as a result of recent storm events.

Anti-pollution Measures

49. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received about the cost to the agricultural industry of complying with anti-pollution measures.

Mr. Maclean: We have received representations on the proposed regulations setting minimum standards for silage, slurry and agricultural fuel oil installations issued for consultation by the Department of the Environment, the proposal to ban, in time for the 1993 harvest, the burning of crop residues, and the proposed pilot nitrate sensitive areas scheme.

Sheep

51. **Mr. Geraint Howells:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the present state of the sheep industry.

Mr. Curry: Prices and exports of lamb are well above the levels of the corresponding period in 1989. The increase in exports suggests that the industry is already taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the new sheepmeat regime.

Agricultural Intervention Board

53. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to announce the name of the site chosen for the relocation of the agricultural intervention board.

Mr. Curry: As soon as my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Wales, and for Northern Ireland, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Minister have concluded their consideration of the advice received from the Intervention Board for Agricultural Produce.

Pesticides

55. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last reviewed the arrangements for pesticide approval.

Mr. Maclean: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) on 3 April, *Official Report*, column *86*.

Badgers

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many badgers were killed by or on behalf of his Department during 1989; and whether all those were killed under the bovine tuberculosis control scheme;

(2) how many of the badgers killed by his Department during 1989 were *(a)* uninfected with tuberculosis, *(b)* showing signs of tuberculosis and *(c)* capable of infecting other animals;

(3) if he will make a statement on the progress made to date in developing *(a)* a vaccine against tuberculosis in badgers and *(b)* a live trap side test for tuberculosis;

(4) what extensions have recently taken place to the scope of the badger destruction element of his bovine tuberculosis clearance scheme; and if he will make a statement;

(5) what was the total cost during 1989 of the tuberculosis eradication scheme; and of this sum how much was earmarked for badger control.

Mr. Maclean: A total of 727 badgers were killed by Ministry Officers in 1989, all in connection with the eradication programme for bovine tuberculosis. Tuberculosis was not identified in 605 badgers. Tuberculosis was confirmed in 122 animals and those animals were considered capable of transmitting the disease to other animals.

Collaborative research on the development of a vaccine has been carried out by workers at the Middlesex hospital and the Ministry's central veterinary laboratory. Workers from the Middlesex hospital have completed a study in the Republic of Ireland on the acceptance of the vaccine by wild badgers. A field trial of efficacy is in progress, again in the Republic of Ireland. A pilot study at the central veterinary laboratory of the possibility that the vaccine could sensitise cattle to tuberculin, and a larger study in Ireland, have suggested that this would not be a problem. An experiment at the central veterinary laboratory to investigate possible desensitisation of cattle infected with tuberculosis has been approved in principle, and is likely to start this year; it will take at least 15 months to complete.

A diagnostic test for use in badgers has been developed at the central veterinary laboratory and shows some promise. It has reached a stage where a field trial is necessary to study its effectiveness and the logistics of its use. It is hoped that a trial will begin in September 1990.

There have been no modifications to the policy of badger control adopted following the Dunnet review.

The total cost of the tuberculosis eradication programme in the financial year 1989-90 was £7·3 million. Of this, £0·4 million was spent on the badger control strategy.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the findings of the Stormont research laboratory on the spread of bovine tuberculosis; what action he proposes to take in the light of the reports' findings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: I am aware of the work done by the veterinary research division at Stormont. The conclusions in no way invalidate the existing badger control strategy.

Record Keeping

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what new administrative responsibilities regarding the keeping of records on the movement of animals, artificial insemination, home mixing of feed, and use of medicines and crop sprays have been imposed on farmers since 1 September 1989.

Mr. Curry: On 1 September 1989 the requirements of the Movement of Animals (Records) Order 1960 were extended to the movement of deer. As regards crop spraying, the health surveillance requirements of the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1988, parts of which took effect after 1 September 1989, involve keeping of records of employees' work with pesticides containing anticholinesterase compounds. This builds upon obligations previously in the Poisonous Substances in Agriculture Regulations 1984. There have been no new administrative responsibilities placed upon farmers as regards the keeping of records relating to artificial insemination, home mixing of feed and on the use of veterinary medicines since 1 September 1989.

Bass

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he proposes to proceed with plans to designate nursery areas for the protection of juvenile bass stocks; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I have decided that, following extensive consultations with interested parties over the last two years, regulations should be introduced as soon as practical to establish 34 nursery areas in the coastal waters of England and Wales in which fishing for bass from any boat will be prohibited for all or part of the year. The nursery areas and the duration of the seasonal prohibition on bass fishing will be as follows:

Area	*Duration of prohibition (dates inclusive)*
Bradwell Power Station outfall (River Blackwater)	1 May to 31 October
Isle of Grain Power Station outfall (River Medway)	All year
Kingsnorth Power Station outfall (River Medway)	All year
Chichester Harbour	1 May to 31 October
Langstone Harbour	1 May to 31 October
Portsmouth Harbour	1 May to 31 October
Southampton Water	1 May to 31 October
Fawley Power Station outfall (Stanswood Bay, Solent)	1 May to 31 October

Area	*Duration of prohibition (dates inclusive)*
Poole Harbour	1 May to 31 October
The Fleet	All year
River Exe	1 May to 31 October
River Teign	1 May to 31 October
River Dart	1 May to 31 December
Salcombe Harbour	1 May to 31 December
River Avon (Devon)	1 May to 31 December
River Yealm	1 May to 31 December
Plymouth Rivers	All year
River Fowey	1 May to 31 December
Fal Estuary	1 May to 31 December
Percuil River	1 May to 31 December
Helford River	1 May to 31 December
River Camel	1 May to 30 November
River Torridge	1 May to 31 October
River Taw	1 May to 31 October
Aberthaw Power Station outfall	All year
Burry Inlet	1 May to 31 October
Taf, Twyi and Gwendraeth Estuary	1 May to 31 October
Milford Haven	1 May to 31 October
River Dyfi	1 May to 31 October
River Mawddach	1 May to 31 October
Dwyryd/Glaslyn Estuary	1 May to 31 October
Conwy Estuary	1 May to 31 October
Dee Estuary	1 June to 30 September
Heysham Power Station outfall (Morecambe Bay)	1 June to 30 September

We shall also be inviting the National Rivers Authority and sea fisheries committees to consider the introduction of additional restrictions in some areas or parts of areas where juvenile bass stocks are particularly vulnerable to other fishing activities. Full details of the extent of the 34 nursery areas and the additional restrictions proposed have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. It is not proposed that any restrictions should be placed on fishing from the shore for which primary legislation would be necessary. However, any bass taken from the shore and landed will still need to comply with the minimum landing size of 36 cm.

The introduction of nursery areas forms the final part of the package of measures that are being adopted for the long term conservation and management of the bass fishery in our coastal waters. The other measures, the introduction of mesh size controls for gill and similar nets and an increase in the minimum landing size for bass from 32 to 36 cm, which was subsequently adopted by the European Community, took effect from 1 January this year.

Drift Net Fishing

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on drift net fishing.

Mr. Curry: Properly regulated drift net fishing is an efficient method of fishing. We oppose the indiscriminate use such as the large-scale drift net operations for tuna on the high seas which has been occurring in the south Pacific and the United Kingdom has supported the recent United Nations resolution promulgated to deal with by such misuse. In United Kingdom waters drift nets are generally used in small-scale coastal operations for herring or salmon and where needed controls are placed on these fisheries.

PRIME MINISTER

Official Information

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list those statutes currently in force which control the release of official information.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office, to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) on 2 April 1990 at columns *439-41*, which listed statutes other than the Official Secrets Acts which create criminal sanctions for the release of certain kinds of information.

Television Licences

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Prime Minister what correspondence she has received from Key housing association about concessionary television licences; what were its terms; and what action she proposes.

The Prime Minister: Key housing association wrote to me on 20 March asking that its accommodation should attract the £5 concessionary television licence available to occupants of certain residential homes and comparable accommodation.

I welcome Key housing's policy of providing mixed housing developments designed to integrate mentally handicapped people into the community. But I am advised that such accommodation cannot qualify for the concessionary television licence. The regulations approved by Parliament in 1988 were explicitly intended to restore the original intention of the concessionary scheme, which was to cater for self-contained units of accommodation rather than those which are mixed in with other housing.

Nuclear Non-proliferation

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister when she last raised the issue of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and its forthcoming fourth review conference with a visiting Head of State or Government; and when she next expects to do so.

The Prime Minister: I have not recently discussed this issue thoroughly with a visiting Head of State or Government, and do not have plans to do so. The non-proliferation treaty and other matters related to non-proliferation are regularly discussed in the appropriate fora, and in bilateral contacts at various levels.

Engagements

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 19 April.

Ms Short: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 19 April.

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 19 April.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 19 April.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 19 April.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Ramsar Convention

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he last designated an area under the Ramsar convention on the conservation of wetlands of international importance; if he will indicate the area which is next to be designated; and when he expects to designate it.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: At the time of ratification of the Ramsar convention on wetlands of international importance especially as waterfowl habitat by the United Kingdom in 1976 Lough Neagh and Lough Beg were jointly listed as being conserved under the terms of the convention. This is the only Ramsar site in Northern Ireland, although a number of other areas are under consideration. It is essential that any further sites in Northern Ireland are fully protected under the provisions of the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 before designation as Ramsar sites and there are no plans for the listing of further sites in the immediate future.

Police and Criminal Evidence

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the authorities and officials who have to operate under *(a)* a code of practice under article 65 of the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 and *(b)* the persons, authorities and officials who are covered for the purposes of article 65 by section 66.

Mr. Cope: Those who have to operate under a code of practice issued under article 65 of the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 are members of the following police forces:

the Royal Ulster Constabulary;
the Belfast Harbour Police;
the Larne Harbour Police;
the Northern Ireland Airport Police.

Those who are covered for the purposes of article 65 by article 66 and who are therefore required to have regard to the provision of such a code are persons, other than police officers, who are charged with the duty of investigating offences or charging offenders.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the persons and organisations whom he consulted before introducing codes of practice under the provisions of article 65 of the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989.

Mr. Cope: The information is as follows:
Kevin McNamara Esq MP
Labour Party

Right Hon. Paddy Ashdown MP
Social and Liberal Democrats

Right Hon. Dr. David Owen MP
Social Democratic Party

The Lord Prys-Davies
Labour Party

The Lord Blease
Labour Party

The Lord Donaldson of Kingsbridge OBE
Social and Liberal Democrats

The Lord Hampton
Social and Liberal Democrats

The Lord Hylton DL

Rt Hon. James Molyneaux MP
Ulster Unionist Party

Rev I R K Paisley MP MEP
Democratic Unionist Party

John Hume Esq MP MEP
Social Democratic and Labour Party

J A Kilfedder Esq MP
Ulster Popular Unionist Party

Dr. J Alderdice
Alliance Party

The Secretary
Progressive Unionist Party

The Secretary
The Workers' Party

The Secretary
Labour Party of Northern Ireland

The Secretary
Irish Independence Party

The Lord Chief Justice for Northern Ireland

Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland

The Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary

The Director
Northern Ireland Court Service

The Chairman
Independent Commission for Police Complaints for Northern Ireland

The Chairman
Police Authority for Northern Ireland

The Chairman
Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights

The Secretary
Association of Chief Police Officers for Northern Ireland
The Secretary
Superintendents' Association for Northern Ireland

The Secretary
Police Federation for Northern Ireland

The Secretary
Northern Ireland Committee
Irish Congress of Trade Unions

The Secretary
Northern Ireland Resident Magistrates' Association

The Secretary
Belfast Solicitors' Association

The Secretary
The Law Society for Northern Ireland

The Secretary
The Committee on the Administration of Justice

The Secretary
Bar Council
Belfast

The Secretary
The Belfast Law Centre

Information Officer
Northern Ireland Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux

The Secretary
Northern Consensus Group
Belfast

The Secretary
Two Traditions Group
Belfast

The Moderator
Presbyterian Church in Ireland

President of the Methodist Church in Ireland

Dr. R. H. A. Eames LLB PhD
Church of Ireland Archbishop and Primate of all Ireland

His Eminence Cardinal Tomas O'Fiaich
Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of all Ireland

The Chief Officer
Belfast Harbour Police

The Chief Officer
Larne Harbour Police

Chief Executive
Northern Ireland Airports

HM Customs and Excise
London

HM Customs and Excise
Belfast

The Secretary
Northern Ireland Committee
Quaker Peace and Service

The Director
Northern Ireland Branch CBI

The Dean
Faculty of Law
Queen's University of Belfast

Ministry of Defence

Home Office

Scottish Home and Health Department

All Northern Ireland Government Departments

Belfast Education and Library Board

Fisheries Conservancy Board for Northern Ireland

Bar Library
Belfast

Law Lecturer
University of Ulster

The Secretary
Foyle Fisheries Commission

Probation Board for Northern Ireland

Clerks of the following District, Borough and City Councils:
- Limavady
- Omagh
- Hillsborough
- Strabane
- Derry
- Magherafelt
- Ballycastle
- Newry
- Bangor
- Antrim
- Belfast
- Newtownards
- Coleraine
- Armagh
- Cookstown
- Ballymena
- Portadown
- Ballymoney
- Downpatrick
- Banbridge
- Dungannon
- Enniskillen
- Carrickfergus
- Larne

Director of Administration
Council Offices
Ballyclare

Director of Environmental Health Services
Belfast City Council

The Principal Environmental Health Officers of the following Committees:

- Western Group Public Health Committee—Omagh
- Northern Group Public Health Committee—Ballymena
- Eastern Group Public Health Committee—Upper Castlereagh Belfast
- Southern Group Public Health Committee—Armagh

Strangford Lough

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many applications have been made for consents to carry out notifiable operations in the Strangford Lough area of special scientific interest; and in how many cases consents have been granted.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To date, 45 applications have been made. In 36 cases consents have been issued and in two cases consents were not actually required. Three consents are expected to be given shortly and four cases are as yet unresolved.

I am pleased to note that 22 of the applications were verbal. Landowners and occupiers are taking full advantage of this less formal approach which was introduced by article 10 of the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (Amendment) (Northern Ireland) Order 1989.

The Sunday Times

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether any current officials of his Department or others involved in security force operations in Northern Ireland requested permission to give evidence on behalf of *The Sunday Times* in the libel action brought by Mr. T. Murphy and Mr. P. Murphy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 18 April 1990]:* No.

Lough Foyle

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the minimum depth of water in the shipping channel to Lisahally dock in Lough Foyle.

Mr. Peter Bottomley *[holding answer 26 March 1990]*: The answer is 6·5 metres.

Kincora Boys Home

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he hopes to complete his consideration of the issues raised by the Channel 4 television programme of 28 March on Kincora.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 2 April 1990]*: I have studied the transcript of the Channel 4 News programme. I note that there were some statements by Mr. Mike Taylor which are not consistent with what I understand to be the content of his 1982 statement to the police. If he has anything to add to his 1982 statement, he should give it to the police.

For the remainder, the transcript contains no new material. As the Terry report confirmed, rumours about the homosexual tendencies of one member of the staff at Kincora reached the police in Northern Ireland during the 1970s but this did not amount to substantive evidence of homosexual abuse of boys at the hostel. Sir George Terry in his published conclusions refers, against the background of intense contemporary terrorist activity, to

> "an understandable inability to recognise that extremely vague information which arose in 1974, if probed thoroughly, may well have revealed that which was finally discovered in [the] 1980 investigations"

but adds:

> "I do not consider . . . that an earlier investigation would reasonably have been prompted on the basis of the information available . . ."

A full account of such rumours, which are known to have come to the attention of social services, is contained in the Hughes report. Rumours that a man may have homosexual tendencies are not by themselves a basis for criminal or disciplinary action against him. However, if anyone believes that they have substantive new evidence which is relevant, they should give it to the police.

Stevens Inquiry

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many soldiers from the Ulster Defence Regiment who were arrested in connection with the Stevens inquiry but who were not charged with a scheduled offence have subsequently had to move home for security reasons.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 23 March 1990]*: I understand that 10 such soldiers have moved house, or plan to do so.

HEALTH

Nuclear Weapons Testing

Mr. John Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish in the *Official Report* the correspondence between himself and Mr. Chazov, Minister of Public Health of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, about nuclear weapons testing.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have placed copies of the relevant correspondence in the Library.

South Manchester Health Authority

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the average cost per head of spending in the National Health Service for the South Manchester district health authority in each of the past 15 years *(a)* in cash terms and *(b)* in real terms.

Mr. Freeman: Figures of average annual expenditure per head of resident population for the South Manchester health authority for the years since its establishment on 1 April 1982 are shown in the table:

Revenue expenditure per head of resident population
Hospital and community health services (HCHS)

	£ (cash)	*£ (at 1989-90 prices)*
1982-83	388	559
1983-84	416	572
1984-85	434	568
1985-86	453	563
1986-87	473	569
1987-88	518	591
1988-89	571	608

Sources:

(a) Annual accounts of the South Manchester Health Authority—1982-83 to 1988-89 (latest available).

(b) Mid-year estimates of resident population—1982 to 1988 (Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys).

Notes:

1. The figures have been expressed at 1989-90 prices by the use of the gross domestic product deflator.

2. HCHS includes hospital, community health and other services provided by the health authority. Capital expenditure and expenditure on family practitioner services is excluded; the latter expenditure is accounted for by family practitioner committees (FPCs) and cannot be attributed to particular districts.

3. People do travel across district boundaries for treatment and resource allocations reflect the pattern of service provision locally. The population figures used make no allowance for people resident in one district who receive treatment in another or for the difference in morbidity and age/sex structure of particular populations.

4. Prior to 1 April 1982 the authority's predecessor health district formed part of a larger area health authority and in such cases district based figures were not collected centrally.

Distinction Awards

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has met the chairman of the Central Advisory Committee on Distinction Awards to discuss progress towards a more open system, as advocated by the Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration in April 1988.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Discussions have taken place between the chairman of the advisory committee on distinction awards and the Department of Health's officials and with the British Medical Association about ways to make the awards system more open and better understood. Further information about the operation of the awards system, following the changes proposed in the Government's White Paper "Working for Patients" will be available later this year.

GP Budgets

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether any general practitioners' practices have expressed an interest in holding their own budgets.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) on 14 March at column *280*

Acute Operations

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current average waiting time for acute operations in *(a)* England and *(b)* Cornwall.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The median waiting time for patients who underwent surgery in the year ending March 1989 was seven weeks for England and nine weeks for Cornwall and Isles of Scilly.

Source: Hospital Episode Statistics 1988-89

Mentally Handicapped People

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the provision of services for the profoundly mentally handicapped.

Mr. Freeman: Government policy is to encourage the development at local level of a comprehensive range of well co-ordinated health and social services for mentally handicapped people. Advice to authorities in meeting the needs of those who are profoundly mentally handicapped was contained in "Helping Mentally Handicapped People with Special Problems" 1984—a copy of which is in the Library.

Community Care

Mr. Hind: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he will take to improve the management of social services departments prior to implementation of care in the community.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is predominantly, of course, for local authorities themselves to determine the management skills and approaches they need to develop in order to implement care in the community policy. The Department is supporting management development through a joint project between the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS) on financial management training and also a joint project between ADSS and Price Waterhouse looking at the organisational response needed successfully to implement the policy.

Family Planning (Nottingham)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on the reduction of family planning services in Nottingham district health authority.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: None.

Mike Heaffey Sports Centre, Stanmore

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the Health Service will be making any contribution to the funding of the Mike Heaffey sports centre for the disabled, Stanmore; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: I am informed that North West and North East Thames regional health authority will be offering ASPIRE a joint contribution to the running costs of the Mike Heaffey centre of £45,000 in 1990-91, to be followed by a further £45,000 in 1991-92.

North West Thames RHA, whose patients are the main users of the Royal National Orthopaedic hospital where the Mike Heaffey centre is sited, will be contributing a total of £60,000; North East Thames, whose patients are the second main users, will be contributing a total of £30,000. These contributions will help put the finances of the Mike Heaffey centre on a firm footing; and, by demonstrating the NHS's support for ASPIRE's efforts to improve the situation of those with spinal injuries, encourage further voluntary donations to this worthwhile cause, which has much public support.

Health Authorities

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the largest population served by one health authority in Great Britain.

Mr. Freeman: West Midlands RHA (resident population 5,206·5 thousand) and Leicestershire DHA (885·5 thousand) were the largest regional and district health authorities respectively in England and Wales at mid-1988. In Scotland, the Greater Glasgow health board served a resident population of 939·2 thousand at the same date.

Porton Down

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the future of the centre for applied microbiology and research at Porton Down, near Salisbury.

Mr. Freeman: I said in my reply of 7 February to my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury at column *705* that we were considering a number of possible options for the future of the centre for applied microbiology and research (CAMR), including an approach by Porton International plc to acquire CAMR. The current proposal from Porton International is unacceptable, but talks between the financial advisers to the two sides are continuing. Whatever the outcome, I am confident that the essential public sector interests in CAMR's work, including its public health aspects, can be safeguarded.

NHS Capital Expenditure

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list National Health Service capital expenditure for each year since 1979-80 *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* adjusted by the gross domestic product deflator and *(c)* adjusted by the appropriate service deflator, listed both inclusive and exclusive of income from National Health Service land sales.

Mr. Freeman *[holding answer 30 March 1990]:* The information requested is given in the table.

National Health Service capital expenditure since 1979-80

£ million	*Net public expenditure*	*Total at 1988-89 prices adjusted to:*		*Capital receipts (mainly land sales)*	*Total*	*Total at 1988-89 prices adjusted to:*	
		GDP deflator	*HCHS capital deflator*			*GDP deflator*	*HCHS capital deflator*
1979-80	407	766	707	10	417	785	724
1980-81	552	878	760	16	568	903	782
1981-82	673	975	899	20	693	1,004	925
1982-83	700	946	920	19	719	971	945
1983-84	718	927	925	34	752	971	969
1984-85	793	975	980	51	844	1,038	1,043
1985-86	842	983	984	85	928	1,083	1,084
1986-87	858	968	954	150	1,007	1,137	1,120
1987-88	838	898	887	204	1,042	1,116	1,102
1988-89	830	830	830	300	1,130	1,130	1,130
1989-90	967	908	[1]	292	1,259	1,182	[1]

[1] HCHS capital inflation figure for 1989-90 is not available yet.

TRANSPORT

Railways, Greater Manchester

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the provision of funding for railway services in Greater Manchester.

Mr. Portillo: The provision of funding for local passenger rail services in Greater Manchester is a matter for agreement between the Greater Manchester PTE and British Rail.

Coastal Trading

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those nations whose ships are able to carry cargoes in the coastal trade of the United Kingdom but whose coastal trade is closed to British registered ships.

Mr. McLoughlin: The United Kingdom's coastal trades are open to all vessels regardless of flag. In the EC, British registered vessels do not have reciprocal rights presently in France, Spain, Italy, Portugal and Greece. We are pressing vigorously for these coastal and offshore trades to be liberalised before the end of 1992. Further afield, opportunities for British registered vessels to carry cargoes in coastal trades are extremely limited.

Light Dues

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has received the British Ports Federation study about extending light dues to pleasure craft.

Mr. McLoughlin: The British Ports Federation report is being published today, and I have placed copies of it in the Library.

I am grateful for the work done by the Federation on this difficult subject. I will wish to consider its report carefully, and I have reached no conclusions on its primary recommendation. This is that a flat rate light dues charge should be introduced for pleasure craft users based on a new compulsory registration system. The federation argues that closer regulation of the growing number of pleasure craft is increasingly desirable to assist with crime prevention and safety as well as to provide a basis for levying a contribution towards the costs of the aids to navigation provided by the general lighthouse authorities which are used by pleasure craft.

I believe these wider issues require careful consideration, and I am therefore seeking the views of interested parties on all aspects of the BPF report before reaching any conclusions. The changes recommended by the BPF could in any event not be implemented without primary legislation.

Learner Drivers

Mr. Sumberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has reached a decision on the regulations governing those who are supervising learner drivers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Responses to the recent consultation indicated overwhelming support for the introduction of minimum requirements on the age and experience of those who supervise learner drivers.

In the light of the comments received, I have decided to introduce requirements for a minimum age of 21 years and three years as the holder of a full driving licence. There will be no change in the requirements for supervisors of HGV and PSV learner drivers.

I have today issued draft regulations for comment by 18 May, with a view to implementing the changes by the summer.

Vehicle Inspectorate

Mr. Knowles: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the vehicle inspectorate executive agency business plan for 1990-91 will be published.

Mr. Atkins: The business plan has been published today. Copies are available in the House Libraries.

London Regional Transport

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set financial objectives for London Regional Transport.

Mr. Parkinson: I have today written to the Chairman of London Regional Transport in the following terms:

> "On 20 December 1989, I wrote to you setting quality of service objectives for London Underground Limited, for bus services operated by or on behalf of London Regional

Transport, and for the Docklands Light Railway. In the same letter, I formally endorsed the safety objectives which you had set for London Regional Transport and all its subsidiaries. I am now writing to you, in exercise of my powers under section 16 of the London Regional Transport Act 1984, to set financial objectives to be achieved by London Regional Transport, by London Underground Limited and by London Buses Limited.

I must reiterate that safety is your top priority. We have also agreed on the need to improve the quality of the services LRT provide and hence to meet the quality of service objective I set you on 20 December. These financial objectives are concerned with ensuring that you meet your other objectives as efficiently as possible, thereby ensuring that passengers and taxpayers receive value for money.

I am setting three main financial objectives. In each case I have specified a level of performance which I wish to see achieved in respect of the financial year ending 31 March 1993, set at 1989-90 prices. For the purpose of measuring the achievement against the objectives, the figures actually achieved will be deflated to 1989-90 prices using the Retail Price Index.

The objectives relate to the operating surplus of London Regional Transport and to the operating costs of your principal subsidiaries. Achievement of these objectives will not in any way impact on the pursuit of your ambitious capital expenditure programme. In the Chancellor's Autumn Statement, we announced our intention of contributing £1·75 billion of grant over the three years up to 1992-93, towards your investment programme of £2·2 billion. That arrangement is unaffected by these objectives.

London Regional Transport

London Regional Transport has forecast that it will make an operating loss, before making deductions in respect of depreciation and renewals, of £76 million in the financial year ending 31 March 1990. I propose that you should transform this loss into an operating surplus of £70 million in the financial year ending 31 March 1993, so that the day to day operations of LRT can at least make some contribution towards its investment programme. This objective assumes that London Underground Limited and London Buses Limited achieve the unit cost reduction objectives set out below and that London Regional Transport secures additional improvements in the financial performance of its other subsidiaries. The objective is based on London Regional Transport's own forecasts of future revenue, which include the conventional assumption that fare increases in future years will be in line with the increase introduced in February this year. If for any reason this assumption proves to be ill-founded, the objective will need to be modified accordingly.

In order to meet the objective, it will be necessary for all London Regional Transport businesses to exercise their best endeavours to optimise revenue whilst running their operations efficiently and cost-effectively. Certain activities of London Regional Transport are categorised as being essentially commercial in nature. These include certain commercial bus and coach operations undertaken by subsidiaries of London Buses Limited, and all the activities undertaken by the Victoria Coach Station Ltd., London Transport International Services Ltd., London Transport Catering and London Transport Advertising. It has previously been agreed between the Government and London Regional Transport that each of these commercial activities should, as a minimum, earn a 5 per cent. return on turnover, taking one financial year with another. I confirm that I wish these activities to continue to meet this requirement.

The Docklands Light Railway is not covered by this requirement. Nor have I sought to set a loss reduction objective for it. This reflects the fact that there are very many uncertainties about the future financial performance of the railway, whose services are still evolving: the extensions to Beckton and the City, for instance, should both open within the period covered by these financial objectives. I will wish to set a financial objective for the Docklands Light Railway, as soon as possible. Although the Docklands Light Railway is not a major contributor to the costs or revenue of London Regional Transport at this stage, it accounts for a significant part of your capital expenditure. We need to ensure that the benefits of this investment are realised in Docklands. I have asked officials to hold urgent discussions with the Docklands Light Railway to consider what form of objective it would be appropriate to set the railway at this stage. In the interim, I look to the Board of London Regional Transport to ensure that the Docklands Light Railway makes its proper contribution to achievement of the profit target.

London Underground Limited

Expenditure in the day-to-day running of the London Underground system has risen significantly over the last two years. It is now some 23 per cent. above the level of 1987-88. The reasons are well known. The actions which London Regional Transport and London Underground Limited set in hand in the wake of the fire at Kings Cross, and the further actions called for in the report by Sir Desmond Fennell QC and other reports, have involved incurring additional capital and current expenditure. The complement of the British Transport Police 'L' Division has likewise increased in response to the urgent need to tackle crime on the Underground. You have introduced a new management structure within London Underground Limited, which is designed to ensure that the individual lines and stations are brought within better day-to-day management control. Last, but not least, you are now embarked on an ambitious capital expenditure and maintenance programme, which makes additional demands on your staff resources. All these developments are very welcome, and I recognise that there are further areas of the business where you see a legitimate case for increased operating expenditure.

Nevertheless, I consider it essential that London Underground Limited should be set a financial objective, which ensures that this enormous expansion in activity with its associated costs is achieved with due regard to efficiency. This is a necessary safeguard for the fare-payers and taxpayers who must, between them, bear the cost of running the London Underground system. I propose a target to be calculated on the basis of operating costs, excluding depreciation and renewals, per operated train mile. The figure I propose is £14·02. This compares with a forecast outturn figure for 1989-90 of £14·97. We are both satisfied that this can be achieved without prejudicing the achievement by London Underground of a steady improvement in both safety and quality of service.

London Buses Limited

As noted above, certain bus and coaching operations of subsidiaries of London Buses Limited are categorised as commercial. They are subject to the requirement that each service earns not less than a 5 per cent. return on turnover. The remainder of London Buses' operations consists of network routes and routes operated under contract to London Regional Transport. I propose that these routes should be set a unit cost reduction target expressed in terms of operating costs (including depreciation and renewals, but excluding severance payments) per operated bus mile.

The Government remains firmly committed to the deregulation of the London bus market, and the subsequent privatisation of the subsidiaries of London Buses Limited, but has yet to determine a timetable. I recognise that the absence of a firm date for deregulation makes it difficult for LBL to plan unit cost reductions too far ahead. However, the prospect of deregulation and privatisation makes it vital that the subsidiaries of London Buses Limited should move as quickly as possible to a position where they can compete successfully in a deregulated bus market. Their efforts to achieve this can only be strengthened by having a firm financial objective to work to. I am therefore setting a unit cost target for the financial year ending 31 March 1993. We will review the position for future years in the light of the decisions we take on the timing of deregulation. The target figure is £2·57. This compares with a forecast outturn figure for 1989-90 of £2·77.

Public Accountability

I would like the Board to report performance and progress in achieving all its different objectives in its annual Report and Accounts. This should include:

(a) progress in implementing the safety objectives you have set for London Regional Transport and its subsidiaries;

(b) the quality of service achieved against the objectives set for London Underground Ltd, London Regional Transport bus services and the Docklands Light Railway;

(c) progress towards the achievement of the financial objectives set in this letter."

President of India (State Visit)

Sir Neil Macfarlane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if his Department was consulted about the traffic arrangements in the city of Westminster on 3 April prior to the arrival of the State President of India; whether the procedures adopted were assessed by his officials; what prior warning was given to the road user in London on traffic effects within his Department's responsibilities; and if he will make a statement about the effect upon traffic in London when Victoria station is used as the arrival point for a state visit.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 18 April 1990]:* The Department was not consulted. Traffic control arrangements for state visits are the responsibility of the Metropolitan police. I understand that they provided advance warning signs and informed the media of diversions well in advance.

ENERGY

Landfill Gas

Sir Charles Morrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the research and development projects being undertaken by his Department or related agencies on landfill gas.

Mr. Peter Morrison: The list of research and development projects currently being supported by the Department of Energy on landfill gas is as follows:

Title	*Contractor*
1. FUNDAMENTAL STUDIES	
Cellulolysis in landfill	AFRC Institute of Food Research, Norwich
Methanogenesis in landfill	Queen Mary College, London University
Interactions between species in landfill	Strathclyde University
Assessment of Fungi in landfill	Institute for Grassland and Animal Protection (Hurley). [Recently completed]
Protozoa in landfill	NERC Institute of Freshwater Ecology
Anaerobic methane oxidation	Warwick University
General consulting	D. Archer, IFRN
Microbiology of landfill gas enhancement test cells	Biotechnology Group, Harwell
Review of microbiological techniques for assaying landfill	Biostrategy Associates [Proposed—due to start shortly]
2. LANDFILL GAS FIELD STUDIES	
Research and development on landfill gas abstraction and utilisation	Shanks and McEwan Ltd. and Yorkshire Brick Company
Monitoring and technical assessment of above project	Environmental Safety Centre, Harwell
National assessment of landfill gas resource	Environmental Resources Ltd. [Complete, but 2nd phase proposed]
Landfill gas enhancement techniques	Environmental Safety Centre, Harwell
Assessment of leachate recirculation to enhance landfill gas production[1]	Water Research Centre
Monitoring of trace components in condensate from landfill gas	Environmental Safety Centre, Harwell
Landfill gas Guidelines[2]	Environmental Resources Ltd.
3. ENERGY EFFICIENCY DEMONSTRATION SCHEMES[3]	
Landfill Gas from shallow landfill site	Cory Waste Management Ltd., Stanford-Le-Hope
Monitoring of Bilham Grange Farm landfill gas	Lemace Ltd., Doncaster [Completed November 1989]
Spark ignition engines fuelled by landfill gas	Shanks and McEwan Ltd. Bedford
Gas turbine to convert landfill gas to electricity	Packington Estates Enterprises Ltd., Meriden
Landfill gas to electricity using dual fuel engine	Summerleaze Gravel Co. Ltd., Maidenhead

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[1] Part funded by Landfill Gas Ltd.

[2] Funded by D. Energy, DoE and Ofgas.

[3] Schemes also supported by the Department of Energy using landfill gas.

Gas Industry

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information his Department collects on the gas industry.

Mr. Wakeham: The Department collects a variety of information on the United Kingdom gas industry. Key figures are published in the "Development of the Oil and

Gas Resources of the UK" (the Brown Book), and in the Department's statistical publications "Energy Trends" and the "Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics".

Offshore Oil Production

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he has any plans to award offshore petroleum production licences in the frontier exploration areas to the north and west of Scotland.

Mr. Peter Morrison: I am today making available a list of the licence areas for which applications will be invited in a round of licensing in the frontier exploration areas to the north and west of Scotland.

Eleven licences will be on offer in the frontier round. I shall place in the Libraries of both Houses a full list of the grouped blocks which will be on offer in the round.

The purpose of a separate round for frontier areas is to encourage a fresh start to exploration in areas which have been little explored in the past and where existing geological information is sparse or low in quality. A fresh start needs to be made to exploration in these areas if the contribution which the United Kingdom continental shelf makes to the economy is to be extended further in the next century.

To offset the high financial risks attached to exploration in the deep water areas concerned, the areas for licensing will be substantially larger than usual. Together, the 11 licences will cover 117 blocks. Licensees will be expected to carry out a programme of seismic exploration in the first part of the initial phase of the licence. It is expected that any drilling will normally take place in the second part of this phase. A feature of the licences granted in these areas will be extended terms to allow licensees longer periods in which to plan and carry out activity on the licences.

As soon as possible, I will publish in the London, Edinburgh and Belfast *Gazettes* a formal announcement giving the detailed licence terms for frontier licences (including financial terms) and the basis on which awards will be made. Any additional licence conditions, the format of licence applications, and the information required will be available from my Department as soon as the *Gazette* notices have been published.

Applications will be returnable by a date in January or February 1991 which has yet to be determined.

I will shortly make available a list of the licence areas for which applications will be invited in a separate 12th round of licensing for the established petroleum areas of the UKCS.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Offences

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the offences currently triable only on indictment.

Mr. John Patten: The list of offences currently triable only on indictment in England and Wales is given in the table.

There may in addition be a few common law mischiefs which would be triable only on indictment, where it is not definite how far the common law remains effective.

Offences	*Short title of Principal Statutes*
OFFENCES AGAINST THE PERSON:	Common Law, and Offences against the Person Act, 1861, Secs. 1, 9 and 10.
Attempted murder	Ibid, also Criminal Attempts Act 1981
Threats, conspiracy or incitement to murder:—	
Conspiring or soliciting, etc, to commit murder.	Criminal Law Act 1977 Sec. 1 Offences against the Person Act, 1861, Sec. 4
Assisting offender by impeding his apprehension or prosecution in a case of murder.	Criminal Law Act, 1967, Sec. 4(1).
Manslaughter, etc:—	
Manslaughter	Common Law and Offences against the Person Act, 1861, Secs. 5, 9 and 10
Infanticide	Infanticide Act, 1938 Sec. 1(1)
Child destruction	Infant Life (preservation) Act, 1929 Sec. 1
Causing death by reckless driving	Road Traffic Act 1988 Sec. 1
Diminished responsibility	Homicide Act 1957, Sec. 2
Wounding and other acts endangering life:—	
Wounding, etc, with intent to do grievous bodily harm, etc, or to resist apprehension.	Offences against the Person Act, 1861, Sec. 18.
Shooting at naval or revenue vessels.	Customs and Excise Management Act, 1979, sec. 85(2).
Attempting to choke, suffocate etc, with intent to commit an indictable offence (garroting)	Offences against the Person Act, 1861, Sec. 21.
Using chloroform, etc, to commit or assist in committing an indictable offence.	Offences against the Person Act, 1861, Sec. 22.
Burning, maining, etc, by explosion.	Offences against the Person Act, 1861, Sec. 28.
Causing, explosions or casting corrosive fluids with intent to do grievous bodily harm.	Offences against the Person Act, 1861, Sec. 29.
Impeding the saving of life from shipwreck.	Offences against the Person Act, 1861, Sec. 17.
Placing, etc., explosives in or near ships or buildings with intent to do bodily harm, etc.	Offences against the Person Act, 1861, Sec. 30.
Endangering life or causing harm by administering poison.	Offences against the Person Act, 1861, Sec. 23.
Possession etc. of explosives with intent to endanger life.	Explosives Substances Act, 1883, Sec. 3 (in part).

Offences	*Short title of Principal Statutes*
Possession of firearms etc. with intent to endanger life or injure property etc. (Group I)	Firearms Act, 1968. Sec. 16. as amended by the Criminal Justice Act 1972, Sec. 28(2).
Possession of firearms etc. with intent to endanger life or injure property etc. (Group II).	Firearms Act, 1968, Sec. 16 as amended by the Criminal Justice Act 1972, Sec. 28(2).
Possession of firearms etc. with intent to endanger life or injure property etc. (Group III).	Firearms Act, 1968, Sec. 16 as amended by the Criminal Justice Act 1972 Sec. 28(2).
Using etc. firearms or imitation firearms with intent to resist arrest etc. (Group I).	Firearms Act, 1968, Sec. 17(1) as amended by the Criminal Justice Act 1972, Sec. 28(2).
Using etc. firearms or imitation firearms with intent to resist arrest etc. (Group II).	Firearms Act, 1968, Sec. 17(1) amended by the Criminal Justice Act 1972, Sec. 28(2).
Using etc. firearms or imitation firearms with intent to resist arrest etc. (Group III). (for definition of Group I, II and III See Appendix 1 Pt. 3—Classification 115)	Firearms Act, 1968. Sec. 17(1) as amended by the Criminal Justice Act 1972, Sec. 28(2).
ENDANGERING RAILWAY PASSENGERS:	
By placing, etc., anything on railway, taking us rails, changing points and signals etc.	Offences against the Person Act, 1861 sec. 32.
By throwing anything at railway carriages, etc.	Offences against the Person Act, 1861 Sec. 33.
Possessing firearms or imitation firearm at time of committing or being arrested for an offence specified in Schedule 1 of the Act. (Group I).	Firearms Act, 1968, Sec. 17(2) as amended by the Criminal Justice Act 1972, Sec. 28(3).
Possessing firearms or imitation firearm at time of committing or being arrested for an offence specified in Schedule 1 of the Act. (Group II).	Firearms Act, 1968, Sec. 17(2) as amended by the Criminal Justice Act 1972, Sec. 28(3).
Possessing firearms or imitation firearm at time of committing or being arrested for an offence specified in Schedule 1 of the Act. (Group III).	Firearms Act, 1968, Sec. 17(2) as amended by the Criminal Justice Act 1972, Sec. 28(3).
Possessing firearms or imitation firearm with intent to commit an indictable offence, or resist arrest etc. (Group I).	Firearms Act, 1968, Sec. 18(1) as amended by the Criminal Justice Act 1972, Sec. 28(3).
Possessing firearms or imitation firearm with intent to commit an indictable offence, or resist arrest etc. (Group II).	Firearms Act, 1968, Sec. 18(1)) as amended by the Criminal Justice Act 1972, Sec. 28(3).
Administering poison with intent to injure or annoy.	Offences against the Person Act, 1861 Sec. 24.
Setting spring guns, etc., to injure trespassers.	Offences against the Person Act, 1861 Sec. 31.
Causing bodily harm by furious driving.	Offences against the Person Act, 1861 Sec. 35.
Assaults on person preserving wreck.	Offences against the Person Act, 1861 Sec. 37.
Possessing firearms or imitation firearm with intent to commit an indictable offence, or resist arrest etc. (Group III) (For definition of Groups I, II and III see Appendix 1 part 3 Classification 115).	Firearms Act, 1968, Sec. 18(1) as amended by the Criminal Justice Act 1972. Sec. 28(3).
PROCURING ILLEGAL ABORTION:	
Administering or using drugs or using instruments to procure abortion.	Offences against the Person Act 1861, Sec. 58 as amended by the Abortion Act 1967
Procuring drugs, etc., to cause abortion.	Offences against the Person Act 1861, Sec. 59 as amended by the Abortion Act 1967.
BUGGERY:	
With a boy under the age of sixteen or with a woman or an animal.	Sexual Offences Act 1956, Sec. 12 as amended by the Sexual Offences Act 1967 Sec. 3(1).
By a man with a male person of the age of sixteen or over without consent.	ibid.
By a man of the age of 21 or over with another male person under the age of 21 with consent.	ibid.
By a man with another male person other than as in 1, 2 or 3 above.	ibid.

Offences	*Short title of Principal Statutes*
Male member of staff of hospital or mental nursing home committing buggery or an act of gross indecency with male patient.	Mental Health Act 1959 Sec. 128(1) (a) as amended by Sexual Offences Act 1967 Sec. 1(4).
Man committing buggery or an act of gross indecency with mentally disordered male patient who is subject to his care.	Mental Health Act 1959 Sec. 128(1) (b) as amended by Sexual Offences Act 1967 Sec. 1(4).
Attempt to commit buggery with a boy under the age of 16 or with a woman or an animal.	Sexual Offences Act 1956 Sec. 12 as amended by the Sexual Offences Act 1967 Sec. 3(1).
Attempt by a man to commit buggery with a male person of the age of 16 or over without consent.	ibid.
Attempt by a man of the age of 21 or over to commit buggery with another male person under the age of 21 with consent.	ibid.
Attempt by a man to commit buggery with another male person other than as in 7, 8 or 9 above.	ibid.
Assault with intent to commit buggery.	Sexual Offences Act 1956 Sec. 16.
RAPE:	
Man having unlawful sexual intercourse with a woman who is a defective.	Sexual Offences Act 1956 Sec. 7 as amended by Mental Health Act 1959 Sec. 127.
Male member of staff of hospital or mental nursing home having unlawful sexual intercourse with female patient.	Mental Health Act 1959 Sec. 128(1)(a).
Man having unlawful sexual intercourse with mentally disordered female patient who is subject to his care.	Mental Health Act 1959 Sec. 128(1)(b).
Rape.	Sexual Offences Act 1956 Sec. 1.
Attempted Rape.	ibid.
Unlawful sexual intercourse with girl under 13.	Sexual Offences Act 1956 Sec. 5.
INCEST:	
Incest with a girl under 13.	Sexual Offences Act 1956 Secs. 10 and 11.
Other incest	ibid.
PROCURATION OF MALES AND FEMALES:	Sexual Offences Act 1956 Secs. 2, 3, 4, 22 and 23.
Procuring female for immoral purposes, or using drugs to obtain or facilitate sexual intercourse.	
Detention of female in brothel or other premises.	Sexual Offences Act 1956 Sec. 24.
Person responsible for girl under 16 causing or encouraging her prostitution etc.	Sexual Offences Act 1956 Sec. 28.
Procuring, permitting or causing the prostitution etc. of female defective.	Sexual Offences Act 1956 Secs. 9, 27 and 29.
ABDUCTION:	
Abduction of female having interest in property.	Sexual Offences Act 1956 Secs. 17 (in part) and 18.
Abduction of female by force.	Sexual Offences Act 1956 Sec. 17 (in part).
Abduction of unmarried girl under 16.	Sexual Offences Act 1956 Sec. 20.
Abduction of unmarried girl under 18.	Sexual Offences Act 1956 Sec. 19.
Abduction of female defective.	Sexual Offences Act 1956 Sec. 21.
OFFENCES AGAINST PROPERTY WITH VIOLENCE:	
Burglary in a dwelling	
Burglary, with the intent to commit, or the commission of an offence triable only on indictment.	Theft Act, 1968 Sec. 9.
Burglary with violence or the threat of violence.	Theft Act, 1968, Sec. 9.
Aggravated burglary in a dwelling (including attempts).	Theft Act, 1968, Sec. 10.
Burglary, other than a dwelling	
Burglary, with the intent to commit, or the commission of an offence triable only on indictment.	Theft Act, 1968, Sec. 9.
Aggravated burglary in a building *other than* a dwelling (including attempts).	Theft Act, 1968, Sec. 10
Robbery and assaults with intent to rob:—	
Robbery	Theft Act, 1968 Sec. 8
Assault with intent to rob	Theft Act, 1968, Sec. 8.
Blackmail	Theft Act. 1968, Sec. 21
Kidnapping	Common Law
Hijacking	Aviation Security Act 1982 Secs. 1-3, 6(2)

Offences	*Short title of Principal Statutes*
False imprisonment	Common Law
OFFENCES AGAINST PROPERTY WITHOUT VIOLENCE:	
Frauds by company directors etc:-	
Fraudulently inducing persons to invest money.	Prevention of Fraud (Investments) Act 1958 Sec. 13
Other Frauds	
Conspiracy to defraud.	Common Law and Criminal Justice Act 1987 Sec. 12.
Fraudulent issue of money orders by Post Office servant.	Post Office Act, 1953 Sec. 22.
Frauds in connection with sale of land etc.	Law of Property Act 1925 Sec. 183.
MALICIOUS INJURIES TO PROPERTY:	
Arson	
Arson endangering life	
Threat and possession with intent to commit criminal damage:-	
Possession with intent.	Offences Against the Person Act 1861, Sec. 64
	Explosive Substances Act 1883 Sec. 3 (part)
OTHER OFFENCES NOT INCLUDED IN THE ABOVE CLASSES:	
Offences against the State and Public Order	
High treason and other offences against Treason Acts.	Treason Acts 1351-1842
Treason Felony	Treason Felony Act 1848
Rioting:—	
1. Riot	Public Order Act 1986. Section 1
Perjury:—	
Perjury and false statements (also false declarations and representations made punishable by any statute)	Perjury Act 1911, Section 1 Criminal Justice Act 1967, S 89
Libel	Common Law and Libel Acts 1792 and 1843
Suicide (aiding, abetting etc)	Suicide Act 1961, Sec. 2(1)
Attempting to Pervert the Course of Public Justice (Fabrication of false evidence, cause person to be wrongly convicted, interference with witness, etc.)	Common Law
Absconding from lawful custody	Common Law

Breath Tests

Sir Ian Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what circumstances a breath test may be administered by the police other than those listed in his answer of 21 March, *Official Report,* column *635*; and what was the total number of such breath tests administered in 1988 and 1989.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: In addition to the circumstances set out in the reply given on 21 March by my right hon. and learned Friend to my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) at column *635*, a constable in uniform may require a person to provide a breath test where he has reasonable cause to suspect that that person has committed a moving traffic offence, or reasonable cause to believe that that person has been involved in an accident.

Breath tests are recorded under two headings according to the reason for the test:

(i) where there is suspicion of consumption of alcohol *or* suspicion of a moving traffic offence; and,
(ii) where an accident has occurred.

In 1988, 443,000 breath tests were recorded. Of these, 365,000 were in the first category and 78,000 in the second category. In the most recent 12 months for which statistics are available (to September 1989), 502,000 tests were recorded. Of these, 403,000 were in the first category and 99,000 in the second category. Statistics for the fourth quarter of 1989 are not yet available.

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether there are plans to conduct a publicity campaign to explain to the motoring public the full powers available to the police to stop and breath-test drivers.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Government will continue to support the full use by the police of the powers available to them, including during our regular campaigns against drinking and driving. These powers have been explained on many occasions, most recently in the reply given by my right hon. and learned Friend to my hon. Friend on 21 March at column *635*. We do not consider that a further specific publicity campaign is necessary.

Immigration Officials

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the staffing levels of immigration service officials at *(a)* Heathrow airport (all terminals) and *(b)* Gatwick airport, in terms of total numbers of staff and by grade, at 1 June for each year from 1986 up to 1 June 1989.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The tables below set out the allocation of staff, by grade, at Heathrow and Gatwick airports on the dates requested. The figures relate primarily to permanent staff but also include seasonally employed officers who operate the embarkation control during the summer, thereby releasing permanent staff for the arrivals control.

Immigration service staff in post on 1 June

Year	*Assistant chief inspector*	*Inspector*	*Chief immigration officer*	*Immigration officer*	[3]*Seasonal immigration officer*	[1]*General service grades*
Heathrow (all terminals)—by grade						
1 June 1986	3	14	77	518	70	62·5
1 June 1987	3	17	85	[2]571·5	66	61·5
1 June 1988	3	19	85	525	54	54·5
1 June 1989	3	16	88	552·5	53	59
Gatwick—by grade						
1 June 1986	1	4	22	152·5	21	11
1 June 1987	1	4	19	149	8	10
1 June 1988	1	6	29	193	5	13
1 June 1989	1	6	35	214	18	13

Notes:

[1] The general service grades shown in the final column are given as one figure for ALL grades. This includes the following grades; higher executive officer, executive officer, administrative officer, administrative assistant, personal secretary, typist, messenger and interpreter.

[2] The 1987 staff in post figures for immigration officers is unusually high because of the need to deal with the large backlog of casework which arose from the introduction of the various visa requirements in 1986 and 1987. It also reflects the fact that a number of staff were based at Heathrow prior to transfer to Gatwick when the new terminal opened there on 22 March 1988.

[3] The number of seasonal immigration officers increases further in July and August.

Police Housing Allowances

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what meetings with *(a)* the Police Federation and *(b)* senior representatives of the police forces in England and Wales he and his ministerial colleagues have had since 1 September 1989 to discuss police housing allowances.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend the then Home Secretary met representatives of the staff side of the Police Negotiating Board to discuss this subject on 24 October 1989. My right hon. and learned Friend and my right hon. and noble Friend also met the chairman and secretary of the staff side, and my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby), for the same purpose on 17 January this year. The staff side includes members of all police representative organisations including the Police Federation. My right hon. and learned Friend also discussed the matter with the chief constable of Surrey when he accompanied my right hon. Friend the member for Woking (Mr. Onslow) and other hon. and right hon. Friends to a meeting with him on 21 February.

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when representatives of the police forces of England and Wales were first informed of his general proposals with regard to the police housing allowance.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Draft regulations giving effect to my right hon. and learned Friend's initial decisions on the Police Negotiating Board's recommendations on police housing allowance were sent to the board for comment on 4 January. All three police staff organisations for England and Wales are represented on the staff side of the board.

Homosexuality

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultation has taken place with the United Kingdom Government over the wording of chapter 38 of the Sex Offences Bill currently before the House of Keys in the Isle of Man; and what response the Government have made.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Sexual Offences Bill has recently been sent to the Home Office by the Isle of Man Government as part of the usual consultative procedures. Section 38 of the Manx Sexual Offences Bill, which is on the same lines as section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988, takes account of earlier discussions between Her Majesty's Government and the Isle of Man authorities.

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what indication he has given to the authorities in *(a)* Jersey and *(b)* the Isle of Man about the steps which he would take in relation to the criminal law on homosexuality, in the event that the parliaments of these islands fail to amend their current legislation to the satisfaction of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Both Jersey and the Isle of Man have been made aware of the need to amend their current legislation in order to enable the United Kingdom to conform with its international obligations under the European convention on human rights. The Island authorities are also aware that the United Kingdom would need to legislate on their behalf, if necessary.

Police Officers (Resignations)

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many resignations of officers under the age of 45 years there have been from the police forces of England and Wales in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and how many were occassioned by *(a)* serious injury in the course of duty and *(b)* all other factors.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information is not held centrally.

State Visits

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the number of occasions in the past year when parts of central London have been closed to traffic due to the arrival of visiting dignitaries; and if he will make a statement on the traffic disruption caused by these closures;

(2) why parts of central London were closed to traffic on 3 April; and if he will make a statement on the traffic disruption caused by this closure.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the Commissioner that parts of central London have been closed to traffic during the past year due to the arrival of visiting dignitaries on the following dates:

6 April 1989—Official visit, President of USSR
8 May 1989—State visit, President of Nigeria
30 May 1989—Official visit, President of USA
5 July 1989—Official visit, Prime Minister of Pakistan
3 April 1990—State visit, President of India

On these occasions parts of central London were closed to traffic for a short time and traffic held up at junctions to facilitate progress of the visitors. In every case, advance warning was given by road signs and via the media. It is inevitable that the closure of major thoroughfares will result in some increased congestion, but every effort is made to plan diversionary routes and to enable traffic to flow freely on these routes.

United Kingdom Warning and Monitoring Organisation (Exercises)

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give details for each of the United Kingdom warning and monitoring organisation exercises at Royal Observer Corps bunkers by *(a)* name, *(b)* location, *(c)* starting and finishing dates and *(d)* starting and finishing times.

Mr. John Patten: The 1990 exercise dates for the United Kingdom warning and monitoring organisation (UKWMO) are:

INTEX 1990:—17-18 March—0800-0700 hours
POSTHORN 1/90:—20 May—0700-1800 hours
POSTHORN 2/90:—14 October—Times to be decided

These exercises, which are designed to practice operational procedures, will involve all UKWMO operational controls and monitoring posts throughout the United Kingdom. The field force of UKWMO is the Royal Observer Corps.

London Demonstration

Mr. Hattersley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, when the organisers of the 31 March poll tax demonstration asked for the location to be transferred from Trafalgar square to Hyde park, he consulted the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis about the desirability of meeting their request.

Mr. Peter Lloyd *[holding answer 5 April 1990]:* I understand that the organisers applied on 18 January to the Department of the Environment for permission to hold the rally in Trafalgar square. After discussions with the Metropolitan police permission was granted on 7 March. The details of the route of the proposed march from the assembly point in Kennington park to Trafalgar square were discussed and agreed with the police. On Monday 26 March the organisers asked the Department of the Environment for permission to hold the rally in Hyde park. The Metropolitan police were contacted about this very late request but no formal decision was taken. At a meeting later that day between the police and the organisers the request was not pursued and plans for holding the rally in Trafalgar square were finalised. On Tuesday 27 March the organisers withdrew their request to hold the rally in Hyde park.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Bogus Invoices

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether there has been any progress in trying to secure action to be taken against those who send out bogus fax invoices from addresses both within the United Kingdom and from abroad; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The Unsolicited Goods and Services Acts 1971 and 1975 provide that any demand for payment in respect of a directory entry which has not been ordered by the person concerned is an offence, and the recipient of the demand is not liable to pay for it. The Acts seem to have proved effective in controlling such practices by firms within the United Kingdom.

For invoices originating from overseas we liaise with the authorities in the countries involved. They share our concern but attempts at legal action in their courts have not to date proved effective. Many of the invoices originate from Switzerland and the Swiss have taken legal action under a new law on unfair competition which came into force in 1988. The outcome of this action is not expected until later this year.

Amateur Radio Licences

Mr. Andrew MacKay: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will report progress on the introduction of an amateur radio novice licence.

Mr. Forth: I am pleased to announce that following discussions on novice licence conditions with the Radio Society of Great Britain, the Radiocommunications Agency has today published a final draft of the proposed novice licence. A copy has been placed in the Library. Work is also in hand on setting up arrangements for the training and examination of potential licensees. Those arrangements will necessarily take some time to put in hand but the agency would hope to the be ready to issue the first novice licences in early 1991.

Origin Marking

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress he has made on the establishment of a European origin marking regime.

Mr. Forth: In accordance with an undertaking I gave to the House on 10 November 1988, *Official Report,* column *588-89,* I wrote to ministerial colleagues in other member states and to the Commissioner then responsible for origin marking matters.

I sought their views on a possible European Communitywide origin marking regime which would require the corrective marking of third-country imports bearing European brand-names. Such a regime would appear to be the most that could be required within the relevant provisions of the treaty of Rome, the interpretation of which has been established in a number of European Court rulings.

Responses to my letter ranged from varying degrees of support to outright opposition. In several cases I received no reply even after several reminders. I have therefore reluctantly concluded that such a proposal would not command sufficient support to secure its implementation, and I do not propose to pursue the matter further.

Estate Agency Report

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will implement the recommendations in the Director General of Fair Trading's report on estate agency.

Mr. Forth: Since receiving the Director General of Fair Trading's report last month, I have given it careful consideration and generally agree with his analysis of the problems and with his recommendations.

I believe that the package of legislation which he has proposed would deal effectively with the malpractices identified in the report while not imposing significant burdens on reputable estate agents. It is therefore the Government's intention that, as soon as legislative time is available, the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 should be extended to cover misdescription of property. It is also my intention, as soon as the consultation required under the Estate Agents Act 1979 can be carried out and the results considered, to make and lay before Parliament orders under section 3 and regulations under section 18 to deal with misdescription of property, forced sales, misleading terms and other abuses identified in the report and to add to the list of offences which can trigger banning action against estate agents.

I have read with interest the analysis in the report of the arguments for and against licensing and use of the power under section 22 to prescribe minimum qualifications for estate agents. I agree with the Director General's view that the case for these measures has not been made out. This finding on section 22 is in line with the conclusion I reached in the review of estate agency which I completed last year and also with the conclusion reached by the Consumers Association in its recent report on estate agency.

I have noted with regret the Director General's conclusion that there is little prospect of agreement in the immediate future on an industrywide voluntary code of practice. However, I consider that the package of legislation I propose deals with the main problems. I welcome the Director General's undertaking that his Office will maintain contact with the industry with a view to resuming discussions on a voluntary code of practice if the climate of opinion becomes more favourable.

Telephone Charges

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish a table showing the comparable costs in sterling of a local telephone call in each European Community country, making clear where the minimum duration per unit cost of such calls varies.

Mr. Forth: There is no standard measure which enables comparisons to be made between the cost of local calls in different European Community countries. For example, the average local call area is particularly large in the United Kingdom, which means that many calls at local rates here would be charged at long distance rates in other countries.

However, OFTEL has produced figures (which include exchanges line rentals and long distance calls) comparing both the cost of an average resident's telephone bill and the cost of an average business bill in the four European countries which are most readily comparable in terms of population and size. Taking the United Kingdom (British Telecom only) as index 100 (and excluding VAT) the figures are as follows:

	Residential basket	*Business basket*
United Kingdom	100	100
France	76	83
Italy	97	120
Federal Republic of Germany	98	96

(OFTEL: "International Comparisons of Telecommunications Prices" January 1990)

European Single Market

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which of the measures contained in the single market White Paper remain to be implemented.

Mr. Redwood: The table lists the single market White Paper measures which have been adopted, and which are not yet required to have entered into force.

Directives in the White Paper programme which are not yet required to have entered into force

	Subject		*Required date of entry into force*	*Remarks*
Part one: The removal of physical barriers				
1	*Control of Goods*			
2	*Veterinary and phytosanitary controls*			
1	Microbiological controls (meats, poultry, red meat)	Dir 85/323 Dir 85/324	Time for implementation not yet fixed	
2	Mince meat and similar products imported from third countries	Dir 88/657	1 January 1992	
3	Zoo technical standards applicable to breeding animals of the porcine species	Dir 88/661	1 January 1991	
4	Modification of Directive 77/99/EEC on meat products	Dir 88/658	1 July 1990	
—	Amendment to Directive 74/63 on undesirable substances and products in animal nutrition (maximum pesticide residues in animal feedingstuffs)	Dir 87/519	3 December 1990	Implementing regulations have been made and will come into operation on 3 December 1990.
5	Imports of meat products from third countries (animal and public health rules)	Dir 89/227	30 June 1990	
6	Pedigree animals (sheep and goats)	Dir 89/361	1 January 1991	
7	Hygiene and health problems affecting the production and the placing on the market of egg products	Dir 89/437	31 December 1991	
8	Embryos of farm animals	Dir 89/556	1 January 1991	

	Subject		*Required date of entry into force*	*Remarks*
9	Mutual assistance between the administrative authorities of the member states and cooperation between the latter and the Commission to ensure the correct application of legislation on veterinary and zoo technical matters	Dir 89/608	1 July 1991	
10	Veterinary checks in intra-Community trade	Dir 89/662	31 December 1991	
11	Marketing of compound feedingstuffs	Dir 90/44	22 January 1992	

GATT

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action the Government have taken to ensure that the outcome of the Uruguay round of multilateral trade negotiations under the GATT will *(a)* promote environmentally sustainable development, *(b)* promote food security for the poorest groups in developing countries and *(c)* decrease the dependence of developing countries on primary commodities.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 18 April 1990]:* The Government attach a high priority to the successful conclusion of the GATT Uruguay round, and we are working with our European Community partners to bring this about. Matters under discussion include several of particular interest to developing countries; a successful agreement will therefore help promote trade in the products concerned, and hence the economic development of such countries.

Cotton Goods

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals to control the dumping of Indian poplin he will put to the EC as part of the negotiations on the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade rules in relation to textiles.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 18 April 1990]:* Our aim in the GATT Uruguay round negotiations is to secure improvements in the general rules governing anti-dumping action. The European Community has put forward proposals for the amendment of the GATT anti-dumping code, some of which are of particular relevance to the textiles sector. Complaints about the dumping of particular products are best followed up with the European Commission in the normal way by the industry concerned.

European Single Market

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what funds have been made available to Her Majesty's Government and public bodies by the European Economic Community and its institutions for the purpose of circulating information about the 1992 programme and policies.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 18 April 1990]:* No funds have been made available to Her Majesty's Government for the purpose of circulating information about the 1992 programme and policies. Some pump-priming funds have been made available to some local authority organisations to help in the administration of information on European Community matters more generally.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disability

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what response he has received to "The Way Ahead: Benefits for Disabled People" from the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The council was represented at a meeting that I held on 5 April with the Disability Benefits Consortium to discuss "The Way Ahead". We shall give careful consideration to all the council's comments in carrying forward the detailed work on our proposals.

Benefits, Manchester

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish tables using the assumptions in his answer to the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden) of 22 June 1988, *Official Report*, columns *571-6*, but using expenditure and benefit figures appropriate for families in Manchester, together with a column showing the extent of the differences resulting from the April 1988 social security changes.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The tables are no longer published, for the reasons given in my reply to the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman) on 23 February at c. *937-38*.

Mobility Allowance

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will publish in the *Official Report* the guidance to be issued on the interpretation of regulation 3(1A) of the Mobility Allowance Regulations 1975.

Mr. Scott *[holding answer 18 April 1990]:* The guidance which is issued, with report forms, to examining doctors is in the table.

DEAF/BLIND CLAIMANTS—NOTES FOR EXAMINING DOCTORS

1. The requirement of the legislation is that there should be a measurable test of BOTH blindness and deafness. The Regulations stipulate that the degree of disablement resulting from the loss of vision amounts to 100 per cent. and that the degree of handicap resulting from loss of hearing amounts to not less than 80 per cent.
2. An assessment of 100 per cent. blindness is appropriate not only where there is a total lack of vision, but also where there is residual vision. Experience with other benefits indicates that an assessment of 100 per cent. will be appropriate where the vision is found to be less than 6/60, using both eyes whilst glasses are used; or where finger counting is not possible beyond one foot. Depending on the location and circumstances of the examination, possible methods of testing including Snellen's Chart finger-counting or E-test. Please note your findings overleaf.
3. Hearing should be tested on the basis of simple clinical examination. The test should be a simple instruction or question, shouted from just beyond one metre behind

the claimant. As it must test the claimant's need to understand, rather than just the ability to react to the shout by turning the head, it should be in a form such as "Please lift your right arm" or "How old are you?" If possible the test should be conducted outdoors so that the effect of loss of hearing on the claimant's outdoor mobility problems can be properly assessed. Where an outdoor test is not possible the results should be related to the outdoors. Experience with other benefits indicates that an assessment of 80 per cent. will be appropriate where the claimant is unable to hear a shout beyond 1 metre using both ears (with aids). Please record your assessment overleaf.

4. Also, the examining doctor needs to assess the ability of the deaf/blind person to walk to any intended or required destination whilst out of doors without the assistance of another person. If a walking test is appropriate it should be carried out on the kind of surface which the claimant would normally have to cope with outdoors. Where this in not possible, the examining doctor should use medical judgement to assess walking ability in such outdoor circumstances, bearing in mind the effects of both blindness and deafness.
5. Unless it is clear beyond doubt that the specific criteria for deaf/blind people are satisfied a full test of walking ability should be undertaken (this should include balance tests, if it seems that a person needs physical support to walk). This will make it possible for a decision to be made as to whether a person qualifies under any of the criteria which apply to disabled people generally if the criteria for deaf/blind people are not fulfilled.

Child Benefit

Mr. Allen McKay: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what has been the increase in child benefit since 1987.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: *[pursuant to her reply of 2 April,* Official Report, *c. 486]: My reply was found to be incomplete; the full reply is as follows.*

Child benefit has remained payable at £7·25 per week for each child since April 1987.

We have however since then devoted considerable extra resources totalling some £350 million in real terms to the least well-off families—those on income support and family credit—who do not gain from an increase in child benefit of itself and who are now therefore better off than they would have been if child benefit had been uprated.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Iraq (Nuclear Weapons)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to instruct *(a)* Her Majesty's Government's representative on the board of governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency and *(b)* the United Kingdom ambassador to the United Nations, to initiate investigations at the International Atomic Energy Agency and United Nations, respectively, into the Iraqi nuclear weapons programme.

Mr. Waldegrave: Iraq is a party to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, and as such has undertaken not to develop nuclear weapons. We expect Iraq to abide by her international legal obligations. We are currently considering, in consultation with interested parties, how to strengthen barriers against proliferation. We do not, however, envisage taking the specific action outlined by the hon. Member.

Hong Kong

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the annual report on Hong Kong will be laid before Parliament.

Mr. Maude: The report was laid before Parliament and published on 18 April. Copies will be placed in the Library of the House.

Czechoslovakia

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has about the cessation of exports of Semtex from Czechoslovakia.

Mr. Waldegrave: As I informed the House on 10 April 1989, *Official Report,* column *360,* we had been told that Czechoslovakia ceased exporting Semtex in 1982. We have now received further clarification from the Czechoslovak authorities, who have explained that the last foreign trade exports had indeed been in 1982, but that in addition "special deliveries" to the GDR and Hungary had continued in the context of Warsaw pact commitments. These deliveries were distinct from normal foreign trade operations and had been covered by a guarantee of non re-export to third countries. They have informed us that all exports of Semtex, including the "special deliveries", ended in 1989. We are in discussion with the Czechoslovak authorities about past exports of Semtex, and have noted President Havel's statement that about 1,000 tonnes had been exported to Libya.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library a copy of the guidance issued to district rating valuation officers as to the criteria to be used by them to determine the rateable values on which the uniform business rate is calculated.

Mr. Lilley: No. The material contains information confidential to indvidual ratepayers.

Civil Service Relocation

Mr. Speller: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if there are any plans to relocate any part of the civil service to north Devon.

Mr. Ryder: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) on 17 January 1990, *Official Report,* c. *289-90.* Departmental Ministers will announce their own decisions on relocation venues once the essential processes of assessment and consultation have been completed.

Gross Domestic Product

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a list of the top 30 countries in the world in descending order for gross domestic product per head for the latest available date.

Mr. Ryder: Information for the OECD member states is available in the OECD publication "National Accounts, Main Aggregates, volume 1, 1960-1988". Wider coverage is given by the United Nations publication "National Accounts Statistics, Analysis of Main Aggregates, 1986". Both volumes are available in the Library of the House.

For ranking countries in terms of gross domestic product per head, no fully comparable worldwide official statistics are readily available. For many of the centrally planned economies, the official estimates available are prepared in accordance with United Nations system of material product balances (MPS), which differs from the United Nations system of national accounts (SNA) used to describe market economies.

Money Laundering

Mr. Irvine: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to publish the report of the financial action task force on money laundering; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Major: The Government welcome the report of the financial action task force which is published today. A copy of the report has been placed in the Library of the House.

The task force was established following the G7 Paris summit in July 1989 to review existing measures against money laundering and to recommend improvements. Experts from 15 countries (G7 countries, Austria, Australia, Belgium, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland) and the EC Commission, the OECD, the IMF and the bank for international settlements contributed to the work of the task force, with the United Kingdom playing a leading role. The report has three main sections: an assessment of the extent and nature of the problem; a review of existing legal and administrative measures against money laundering; and 40 detailed recommendations for further action.

The report's recommendations encompass domestic measures implementing the United Nations Vienna convention against illicit traffic in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, improvements in laws and administrative practice relating to institutions dealing with large amounts of cash, and strengthening international co-operation. While acknowledging that the recommendations have no formal legal status, the Government fully endorse them. The priority now is for their implementation in all participating countries. In the United Kingdom, the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986 already makes drug money laundering an offence and gives the police and Customs and Excise strong enforcement powers.

Provisions included in the Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Act 1990, which received Royal Assent on 5 April, will further strengthen these powers and allow the United Kingdom to ratify the United Nations convention. Further measures are also being considered to reinforce our defences against money laundering inside and outside the formal financial sector.

However, money laundering is an international problem which cannot be tackled by individual countries in isolation; the commitment by the major industrialised countries to strengthen international co-operation in the fight against money laundering is therefore all the more welcome. Our record is good and many of the areas of co-operation covered in the report are already covered by our bilateral agreements to trace, freeze and confiscate the proceeds of drug trafficking. So far agreements have been signed with 13 countries and negotiations are in progress with several others.

European Community Contributions

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer why the payments to European Economic Community institutions less VAT abatement increased from £4,066 million in 1987 to £4,442 million in 1989, as set out in table E of the Central Statistical Office leaflet of 13 March; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder *[holding answer 18 April 1990]:* The increase in the United Kingdom's gross contribution less abatement between 1987 and 1989 reflected an increase of around a quarter in the size of the Community budget. The United Kingdom's share of gross contributions, after abatement, fell from 16·2 per cent. in 1987 to 15·4 per cent. in 1989.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer why the general Government receipts from European Economic Community funds have fallen from £2,282 million in 1987 to £2,141 million in 1989, as set out in table E of the Central Statistical Office leaflet of 13 March; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder *[holding answer 18 April 1990]:* The fall is mainly due to a reduction in the level of receipts from the structural funds arising from the fact that Community support frameworks were not signed until the end of 1989. As a result, some payments were delayed. Receipts in 1990 are expected to be significantly higher than in 1987 or 1989.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement explaining the nature and extent, in respect of each calendar year, of the increase in payment to the European Economic Community in respect of previous years following the annual reassessment, as referred to on page 3 of the Central Statistical Office leaflet of 13 March; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder *[holding answer 18 April 1990]:* Contributions in respect of VAT own resources and the GNP-based fourth resource are paid by member states to the Commission on the basis of agreed economic forecasts. Each year an adjustment is made to contributions paid in previous years to take account of outturn information. As such, the adjustment can be either positive or negative.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Local Management of Schools

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Blackburn of 29 March, *Official Report*, column *274*, if he will now make arrangements to deposit in the Library copies of each scheme for the local management of schools which he has approved.

Mr. MacGregor: Yes.

History Teaching

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will provide a list of all individuals, organisations and others whom he will consult in respect of the recommendations in the final report of the national curriculum history working group.

Mrs. Rumbold: They are too numerous to list individually but include LEAs, teacher associations, religious bodies—including the General Synod of the Church of England board of education and the Board of Deputies of British Jews—and subject associations such as the Historical Association, the Royal Historical Society, the Primary History Association and the History Curriculum Association. Others consulted include for example the Commission for Racial Equality and the National Childrens Bureau.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Romania

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Moray of 27 February, *Official Report,* column *111,* he will list in the *Official Report* what further medical supplies, food, clothes and other non-financial aid Her Majesty's Government have provided to Romania.

Mrs. Chalker *[holding answer 18 April 1990]:* I have been asked to reply.

Since my hon. Friend's answer on 27 February, column *111,* we have donated AIDS testing equipment, provided small contributions to British charities caring for Romanian children and, as I announced on 5 April, column *734,* £500,000 to the World Health Organisations programme for the Romanian health service. We have also donated 118 tonnes of paper (worth £100,000) for the use of Romanian political parties during the election campaign.

DEFENCE

RAF Brawdy

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the cost of the proposed over-the-horizon radar facility at Brawdy, Wales, will be borne by the NATO infrastructure fund.

Mr. Alan Clark: This question will be addressed once it has been decided whether to retain the over-the-horizon radar as a permanent operational facility in the United Kingdom.

Residential Accommodation

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of his Department's houses or flats have been empty for three months, six months, nine months or longer; and how many of these are situated at Medhurst.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Records are not maintained in the precise form requested. As at 30 November 1989, the latest date for which figures are available, 8,296 service married quarters in the United Kingdom, both houses and flats, had been vacant for under one year and 4,127 for one year and over. In addition, as at 31 December 1989, 103 Ministry of Defence civilian houses and flats in the United Kingdom had been vacant for under six months and 120 for six months and over. Many of these properties were either undergoing or awaiting major maintenance work or modernisation, some were already allotted to entitled occupants who were due to move in shortly and others were in the process of disposal.

We have been unable to identify the location to which the hon. Gentleman refers in his question but, if he will write to me with further details, I will attempt to provide the information requested.

Royal Army Veterinary Corps

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will make a statement on his review of the future of the Royal Army Veterinary Corps, Melton Mowbray.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: On 11 July last year at columns *495-96,* my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Mr. Neubert) announced that he was minded to accept the recommendation that a service animal centre should be formed. I am now able to confirm the intention to form such a centre, under unified command. For the foreseeable future, however, this will operate at the existing separate locations of RAVC Melton Mowbray, RAF Newton and RAF Syerston, because reduced estimates of disposal value have affected the recommendation to vacate and sell all the land at Melton Mowbray.

The service animal centre will be a candidate for defence support agency status, but the centre will in any case be expected to build on the savings in running costs referred to by my hon. Friend in his earlier answer.

WALES

M4

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to purchase land along the missing gap of the M4 between Earlswood and Baglan to enable additional lanes to be constructed if traffic flows exceed current forecasts.

Mr. Roberts: If needed, any necessary land would be acquired at the appropriate time.

Conservation Sites

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what is the number of sites which meet the criteria for designation and protection under the European Community directive on the conservation of wild birds, the number of sites so designated, the name of the site next to be designated and the date he expects to designate it;

(2) when he last designated an area under the Ramsar convention on the conservation of wetlands of international importance; if he will indicate the area which is next to be designated, and when he expects to designate it.

Mr. Roberts: The designation of special protection areas and Ramsar sites is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. Welsh sites are designated in consultation with me.

I understand that the NCC has so far identified 14 potential SPAs in Wales, of which three have been designated. The last Ramsar designation in Wales, Cors Fochno and Dyfi, was on 5 January 1986.

I cannot forecast which site will be designated next nor when. Government officials are currently carrying out consultation on a number of sites in both England and Wales.

General Practitioners

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many general practitioners and general practitioner practices in Wales have requested information from his Department about practice budgets;

(2) how many general practitioners and general practitioner practices in each family practitioner committee area in Wales have requested information from his Department about practice budgets.

Mr. Grist: The booklet "Funding General Practice—The Programme for the Introduction of General practice Budgets" was mailed directly to all Welsh general practitioners in early January 1990. Effectively, therefore, all Welsh GPs have received basic information regarding the scheme. Comprehensive records of requests for supplementary information are not available.

Health Authority Budgets

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for each health authority in Wales *(a)* the standstill budget for that authority in 1990-91 as estimated by that authority, *(b)* the standstill budget for that authority as estimated by the Welsh Office and *(c)* the figure made available by his Department for that authority for 1990-91.

Mr. Grist: It is not clear what the hon. Gentleman means by the term "standstill budget". The initial 1990-91 revenue allocations to health authorities in Wales by comparison with their final allocations for 1989-90 (subject to end-of-year adjustments) are as follows:

DHA	*1989-90 £ million*	*1990-91 £ million*
Clwyd	110·175	116·584
East Dyfed	68·060	74·897
Gwent	129·520	137·968
Gwynedd	65·436	69·164
Mid Glamorgan	150·828	161·446
Pembrokeshire	25·123	28·379
Powys	30·758	33·393
South Glamorgan	179·064	188·955
West Glamorgan	109·449	119·263

The figures for 1990-91 take account of the full-year effect of all developments funded on a part-year basis last year before 31 December 1989. The full-year effect of developments funded subsequently during 1989-90 will be taken into account in adjustments to the initial 1990-91 allocations which have yet to be notified to authorities along with those centrally directed developments for 1990-91 which have yet to be allocated.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will set out the approved practice of health authorities in Wales regarding the separation of capital and revenue funds *(a)* under Government regulations, *(b)* in respect of guidance issued by his Department and *(c)* under independent guidance from other bodies including CIPFA and the Audit Commission.

Mr. Grist: The definition of capital expenditure which is currently applied by district health authorities in the separation of capital and revenue is as follows:

Capital expenditure comprises spending on:

1.1 Acquisition of land and premises, lump sum payments for related rights (including capitalised rents), and payments made under the Land Compensation Act 1973 (including payments to local authorities for rehousing persons displaced by National Health Service acquisition); and associated fees;

1.2 Individual works schemes costing £15,000 or more (including related fees and equipment—but excluding land) for the initial provision, extension, improvement or adaptation (including upgrading), renewal, replacement or demolition of buildings, building elements (eg. roofs), external works, engineering services or plans;

1.3 Complete individual items of equipment costing £7,500 or more before the deduction of any sum obtained for any item replaced (except where the item is associated with a works scheme when paragraph 1.2 above applies regardless of cost). This includes all categories of equipment not associated with works scemes referred to in paragraph 1.2 above, other than vehicles.

1.4 All purchases of vehicles regardless of cost; and

1.5 Pay, and directly attributable expenses such as travelling allowances, of works officers and all the staff (including typists, clerical and administrative staff) of their departments who are fully or mainly engaged on spending charged to capital.

2. Spending on maintaining capital assets in effective working order, or in good repair, is charged to revenue, unless it falls within the above definition of capital spending. For example, interior or exterior redecorating, or repointing of brickwork, would be revenue whatever the cost.

3. The definition of a scheme given in the "Glossary of Hospital Building Cost Control Terminology" should be used in applying the definition of capital spending. Where the provision or replacement of certain pieces of equipment comprises two or more separate and distinct interdependent units (for example electro-diathermy equipment) doubt may arise; each interdependent unit should be regarded, for the purpose of the financial limit in paragraph 1.3 above as a complete individual item.

4. The whole cost of schemes with a mixture of capital and revenue type spending should be charged to revenue unless the estimated capital type spending exceeds the limits set out in paragraph 1; then the capital type element should be charged to capital."

All other expenditure not covered by the above definition is charged to revenue.

As noted in a separate reply to the hon. Gentleman of today's date in respect of the use of capital receipts in meeting revenue funding requirements, district health authorities in Wales are permitted a degree of in-year flexibility between revenue and capital provision.

Neither CIPFA nor the Audit Commission has any locus in issuing guidance to health authorities on such matters.

SCOTLAND

Pensioners

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the number of single pensioner households in Scotland as a percentage of all households in Scotland.

Mr. Rifkind: At 30 June 1989 approximately 16 per cent. of households in Scotland consisted of one person of pensionable age.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the most recent estimate of *(a)* the number of pensioners in Scotland, *(b)* pensioner-headed households in Scotland, *(c)* single pensioner households and *(d)* pensioner couple households.

Mr. Rifkind: The most recent estimates for Scotland are:

	Number
(a) Number of persons of pensionable age at 30 June 1988	896,000
(b) Number of households headed by a person of pensionable age at 30 June 1989	582,000
(c) Number of households with one person of pensionable age at 30 June 1989	314,000
(d) Number of households with 2 persons of pensionable age at 30 June 1987	152,000

Boundary Commission

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the Boundary Commission for Scotland intends to conduct any further interim reviews of parliamentary constituencies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Rifkind: The Boundary Commission for Scotland has informed me that it intends to conduct interim reviews of 10 parliamentary constituencies under section 3 of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986. The constituencies are as follows:

Midlothian and Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale;
North Tayside, Perth and Kinross, and Stirling;
Motherwell North and Linlithgow; and
Edinburgh East, East Lothian and Midlothian.

I understand that the reviews have arisen from alterations to local authority boundaries which those of the parliamentary constituencies concerned no longer follow exactly.

Speech Therapy

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will meet the Scottish councillors, Mrs. Joan Munro and Mrs. Moira McGovern of Queen Margaret college, to discuss representations made to him by, and on behalf of, the speech therapy profession.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 18 April 1990]:* I have nothing to add to the letter that I sent to the hon. Member on 8 April.

Arts and Design

Mr. Fisher: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what expenditure was made by his Department on *(a)* the arts and *(b)* design in the last financial year.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 21 December 1989]:* Expenditure by the Scottish Office was £21·015 million in 1988-89 on the three national institutions (the National Library of Scotland, the National Galleries of Scotland and the National Museums of Scotland). Further expenditure of £1·998 million covered assistance to the Scottish Museums Council, the Scottish Film Council, Scottish Film Production Fund and various arts and cultural organisations.

The Scottish Office does not directly fund design, although I understand that the Scottish Development Agency does, from time to time, support various design projects. Details of the agency's expenditure on such projects are not separately recorded.

Local Income Tax

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what would be the estimated charge on the basis of current expenditure *(a)* per household and *(b)* per capita for each Scottish district if a system of local income tax were to be introduced.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 5 April 1990]:* Local income tax bills per household and per capita would depend on the taxable income of each household and person in every district in Scotland. This information is not available to my Department.

On the basis of the estimates of local income tax rates which were provided on 27 February in reply to a question from the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Maxton), the tax bill for a single person on Scottish average earnings would be as shown in the table.

Authority	*Tax bill single person (£)*
Borders	683
Berwickshire	659
Ettrick and Lauderdale	683
Roxburgh	683
Tweeddale	691
Central	780
Clackmannan	836
Falkirk	716
Stirling	860
Dumfries and Galloway	683
Annandale and Eskdale	708
Nithsdale	683
Stewartry	675
Wigtown	683
Fife	836
Dunfermline	812
Kirkcaldy	828
North East Fife	892
Grampian	780
Aberdeen	844
Banff and Buchan	764
Gordon	732
Kincardine and Deeside	699
Moray	724
Highland	635
Badenoch and Strathspey	651
Caithness	627
Inverness	627
Lochaber	659
Nairn	635
Ross and Cromarty	667
Skye and Lochalsh	627
Sutherland	571
Lothian	1,061
East Lothian	1,037
Edinburgh	1,085
Midlothian	1,013
West Lothian	997
Strathclyde	828
Argyll and Bute	772
Bearsden and Milngavie	828

Authority	*Tax bill single person (£)*
Clydebank	828
Clydesdale	836
Cumbernauld and Kilsyth	764
Cumnock and Doon Valley	764
Cunninghame	772
Dumbarton	828
East Kilbride	884
Eastwood	780
Glasgow	852
Hamilton	812
Inverclyde	812
Kilmarnock and Loudoun	748
Kyle and Carrick	852
Monklands	812
Motherwell	844
Renfrew	820
Strathkelvin	828
Tayside	860
Angus	812
Dundee	900
Perth and Kinross	828
Orkney	410
Shetland	314
Western Isles	474
Scotland	836

Notes:

1. The estimate of average gross earnings has been taken from the 1989 new earnings survey and is the average of the male and female full-time adult earnings not affected by absence at April 1989.

2. In calculating the tax bill for a single adult, it is assumed that earnings are the only source of income and that only personal tax allowances apply.

EMPLOYMENT

Skill Centres

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what recent representations he has received regarding the future of skill centres.

Mr. Eggar: I have received representations from hon. Members, some skill centre staff, and trade unions.

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what amount Astra Training Services has paid for each of the skill centres in Wales.

Mr. Eggar: Terms of sale have been agreed with Astra Training Services Limited covering 46 skill centres, together with the Skills Training Agency's head office, mobile training service, sales teams and colleges, and involving a payment from the Government to Astra in respect of the entire business of some £11 million. All four skill centres located in Wales are included in the sale package.

Training

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have completed employment training courses; and if he will give a breakdown of *(a)* the vocational qualifications they obtained and *(b)* the destinations of those who left the programme.

Mr. Nicholls: Thirty-five per cent. of people leaving employment training during July 1989 to October 1989 completed their agreed training: of these 51 per cent. entered jobs or full-time further education or training; 43 per cent. were unemployed and 6 per cent. were doing voluntary work or something else. Information about vocational qualifications obtained is not yet available.

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of training managers have been approved to award qualifications.

Mr. Nicholls: The Training Agency does not approve training managers to award qualifications.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what changes there will be in Ministers' decision-making powers on training in 1991-92.

Mr. Nicholls *[holding answer 18 April 1990]:* Ministers' powers to make arrangements for training are derived from the Employment and Training Act 1973 as amended by the Employment Act 1988. From April 1991 (subject to parliamentary approval) it is intended that similar powers will in Scotland be exercised by Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, subject to approval of their plans by the Government under the terms of the Enterprise and New Towns (Scotland) Bill now before Parliament.

Earnings Comparisons

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the disparity of wages between men and women; and what plans the Government have to address this disparity.

Mr. Nicholls: This disparity is due to a range of factors including differences in educational qualifications and skills, occupational levels, occupational choices and work experience. Take home pay is also affected by women doing more part-time work and less overtime than men. Equal pay legislation has helped considerably to reduce any disparity based on sex discrimination and the Government are firmly committed to eliminating unjustifiable discrimination in pay. The Equal Pay Act 1970 (as amended) provides a real avenue of redress for any woman who thinks she is being denied equal pay because of her sex.

Moreover, the increasing number of women entering higher paid jobs in "non-traditional" areas of employment will work its way through and further reduce the difference. The Government both welcome and encourage this.

ENVIRONMENT

Rented Accommodation

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the consequences of the general level of rent increases in the private, council and housing association sectors for the supply of rented property.

Mr. Chope: The deregulation of rents for new private tenancies will encourage landlords to invest: so far proposals for between 6,000 and 7,000 new assured tenancies have been reported under the business expansion scheme. Deregulation of rents for new housing association tenancies has enabled private finance to be used to supplement public expenditure, and so increase output of new subsidised rented housing; we estimate that some 13,000 additional units over three years will result. In the local authority sector our aim is to move towards a pattern of rents that better reflects the value of the accommodation provided and enables authorities to maintain their stock in good condition. Both housing association and local authority rents continue to benefit from substantial subsidies; and housing benefit is available to tenants who would otherwise have difficulty affording their rents.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consideration he has given to any changes in the basis of community charge for 1991-92.

Mr. Chope: The underlying principle of the community charge is that almost all adults should pay something towards the costs of local services. There are no proposals for changing that principle.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance he has given to local authorities on the procedures to be adopted for the levying of the community charge on properties which become vacant and available for sale on the death of the home owner; if he will take steps to prevent local councils from levying a double community charge in cases where the properties have not become available through the process of probate or where the ownership of the property is subject to division in consequence of the terms of the will of the deceased; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt *[holding answer 18 April 1990]:* The Secretary of State has prescribed that no standard charge is payable in respect of unoccupied property which has become vacant on the death of the owner, and with respect to which no grant of probate or letters of administration have been made or less than three months have elapsed since the day on which a grant of probate or letters of administration were made. Local authorities have discretion to extend this period or set a standard charge multiplier lower than the maximum for such a period as may be specified by the authority.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing *(a)* the total amount of community charge benefit to be paid in 1990-91 and *(b)* the expected community charge benefit caseload for 1990-91 on the basis of (i) the Government's estimates of community charge levels and (ii) the actual levels of community charge which have been set.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 22 March 1990]:* I have been asked to reply.

The Public Expenditure White Paper (Cm 1014) stated that £1·82 billion would be spent on community charge benefit in 1990-91, and that there would be an average of 7·9 million community charge benefit cases in 1990-91 on a Great Britain basis. More recent estimates suggest that £2·5 billion will be spent on community charge benefit in 1990-91, and that the number of benefit cases will be in excess of 8 million on a Great Britain basis which, since a couple are treated as one benefit unit, equates to about 10 million individuals. The caseload estimates mean that about one in four of all individual charge payers will be helped by community charge benefit.

Sir Peter Hordern: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* showing actual or, where not available, budgeted expenditure for all local authorities in England and Wales in each of the last three years, and the proposed expenditure in 1990-91, showing percentage increase, for each authority, and giving total expenditure for all authorities in each year.

Mr. David Hunt: Total expenditure for English authorities in 1987-88, 1988-89 and 1989-90 is £25,686, £27,736 and £29,563 respectively. The figures for 1987-88 and 1988-89 are latest estimates of outturn expenditure, where available, and the figure for 1989-90 is local authority budgeted expenditure. Information is not yet available for 1990-91.

I am arranging for details of budgeted expenditure for individual local authorities in England to be placed in the Library of the House.

The information relating to Welsh local authorities is a matter for the Secretary of State for Wales.

Control of Pollution Act

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to lay before Parliament the regulations relating to part II of the Control of Pollution Act.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The majority of part II of the Control of Pollution Act 1974 was repealed by, and substantially re-enacted by, the Water Act 1989. We have no plans to lay any further regulations under part II of the 1974 Act.

Housing

Mr. Bright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the proportion of the Housing Corporation's approved development programme for 1990-91 on average spent on each unit of rented accommodation; what is the equivalent figure for housing for sale; and if he will provide the same figures for the two succeeding years where planned levels of approved development programme have been identified.

Mr. Chope: Detailed information about the Housing Corporation's approved development programme for 1990-91 and provisional plans for the following two years was made available by the Housing Corporation in January 1990, and I am arranging for details to be provided to my hon. Friend direct. The Housing Corporation is currently reassessing plans for 1990-91 and subsequent years in the light of more up-to-date information on housing associations' development programmes.

Mr. Hind: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many housing association projects were funded by the Housing Corporation in Liverpool in each of the last three years for which figures are available.

Mr. Chope: This is a matter for the Housing Corporation. I have therefore asked the corporation to respond to my hon. Friend direct.

Developers

Mr. Gorst: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any proposals to protect home owners from undue harassment from developers.

Mr. Moynihan: My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Secretary of State for Wales have today issued a consultation paper seeking views on a proposal to include a statement of owners' property rights on the certificates which have to be served on the owners of land which is the subject of a planning application. The paper also invites comments on proposals to amend the General Development Order 1988 to provide general planning permissions *(a)* to install equipment for driver information systems, *(b)* to install postal pouch boxes, *(c)* to install liquefied petroleum gas tanks for dwelling houses, *(d)* so that industrial and warehouse extensions erected as permitted development under schedule 2, part 8, can be used for workplace-related social, recreational and welfare purposes; and on a proposal to amend the Use Classes Order 1987 so as to include launderettes and dry cleaning establishments within the shops use class (A1). This last proposal is not associated with the independent research into the effects of the order which is being carried out on behalf of the Department.

London Demonstration

Mr. Hattersley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the organisers of the 31 March poll tax demonstration asked permission to hold that demonstration in Hyde park; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chris Patten *[holding answer 5 April 1990]:* The organisers applied on 18 January for permission to hold the rally in Trafalgar square. After discussions with the Metropolitan police permission was granted on 7 March. The details of the route of the proposed march from the assembly point in Kennington park to Trafalgar square were discussed and agreed with the police. On Monday 26 March the organisers asked my Department for permission to hold the rally in Hyde park. The Metropolitan police were contacted about this very late request but no formal decision was taken. At a meeting later that day between the police and the organisers the request was not pursued and plans for holding the rally in Trafalgar square were finalised. On Tuesday 27 March the organisers withdrew their request to hold the rally in Hyde park.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 20 April 1990

PRIME MINISTER

Children

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Prime Minister whether she will attend the summit meeting of world leaders to be held by the United Nations on 29 to 30 September to address the urgent needs of children in the 1990s; and if she will make a statement about the role of Her Majesty's Government in planning the agenda for the meeting.

The Prime Minister: I cannot yet say whether it will be possible for me to attend this summit. The United Kingdom is, however, contributing actively to its preparation. We are a member of the planning committee set up by the six original sponsors, and are also playing a full part in the working groups set up to prepare particular aspects.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Teachers (Criminal Proceedings)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish for each of the last five years for each local education authority the number of teachers who lost their posts following a successful prosecution in the criminal courts.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The information requested is not available. A teacher's employment may be terminated as a result of misconduct (whether evidenced by criminal conviction or otherwise) either following a decision by my right hon. Friend to exclude him or restrict his employment, or as a result of internal disciplinary proceedings by his employer. The available information relates only to decisions taken by my right hon. Friend and is not categorised by local education authority area.

Asbestos (Schools)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many schools have asbestos in them; and where they are located.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Department does not keep records of how many individual schools contain asbestos.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Vagrancy

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people of no fixed abode were arrested in the years 1988 and 1989 in *(a)* the Metropolitan police district and *(b)* England and Wales.

Mr. Waddington: The information requested is not available.

Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the total sums airlines have been fined under the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act for each year since its introduction; and what are the figures for each airline.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The number of demands for payment of the currently set penalty of £1,000 issued to all carriers (that is, airlines and sea operators) in each year since the introduction of the Act in March 1987 was as follows:

	Number
1987	3,921
1988	4,211
1989	6,337

Information on demands issued to individual airlines is not readily available.

Justices' Clerks

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who has responsibility for instigating disciplinary procedures against justices' clerks.

Mr. John Patten: This is a matter for the magistrates courts committee concerned.

ENVIRONMENT

European Environment Commissioner

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met the European Environment Commissioner; and what was discussed.

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. Friend met Commissioner Ripa di Meana at the meeting of the Environment Council on 22 March. The outcome of these discussions was reported in my right hon. Friend's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Mitchell) on 27 March.

Wargaming

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the impact of wargaming upon the environment; and whether he plans to take any protective measures.

Mr. Trippier: Sensitive environments are protected in appropriate cases by regulations and byelaws against damage from recreational activities. Local authorities and local residents have powers to take action against excessive noise or other forms of nuisance. The need for additional protective measures is kept under constant review.

London Demonstration

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the organisers of the anti-poll tax march and rally held in London on 31 March asked to transfer the rally venue to Hyde park; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) on 19 April.

Charge Capping

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list in the *Official Report* the precise criteria used to decide the extent of the budget reduction required for each local authority designated for charge capping in 1990-91.

Mr. Hunt: The cap which my right hon. Friend has proposed for each designated authority reflects his view, on the basis of all the information available to him, of a reasonable and appropriate level of budget reduction for that authority in all its circumstances.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the local authorities which would have been subject to the capping of the community charge had his selection of expenditure levels not been included as a qualification.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 18 April 1990]:* It would not be right for me to speculate about the consequences of adopting some selection principles different from those which my right hon. Friend has determined and which he is satisfied are reasonable, appropriate and in accordance with the statute.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many district councils will be affected by his statement on capping which was given to the House on 3 April; what is the number of adults liable for the poll tax in each district council area and what is the total; what is the number of people eligible for rebates or transitional relief in each district council area and what is the total; and if he has any estimate of the likely costs of rebilling and recalculating for the total number of people affected.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 18 April 1990]:* My right hon. Friend designated 10 district councils for capping on 3 April 1990. Another 14 district councils (excluding Bristol which itself was designated) will be affected by capping by virtue of the designation of Avon and Derbyshire county councils. Following is a list of the district councils concerned together with the relevant population of each and the total. The Department does not have information about the numbers of people eligible for community charge benefit or transitional relief in each area.

(i) District Councils designated for capping

Council	*Relevant Population*
Barnsley	167,712
Basildon	119,185
Bristol	290,725
Calderdale	143,540
Doncaster	218,650
North Tyneside	151,181
Rochdale	158,227
Rotherham	201,284
St. Helens	136,039
Wigan	231,410
Total	1,817,953

(ii) Other District Councils affected by capping

Council	*Relevant Population*
Bath	57,700
Kingswood	67,953
Northavon	94,745
Wansdyke	60,311
Woodspring	140,098
Amber Valley	86,949
Bolsoiver	54,433
Chesterfield	77,412
Derby	164,676
Erewash	83,899
High Peak	63,382
North East Derbyshire	75,126
South Derbyshire	54,510
Derbyshire Dales	53,569
Total	1,134,763
Grand Total	2,952,716

The Department estimates that the cost of issuing new charge bills, including recalculating community charge benefit and transitional relief as appropriate, would on average be about £200,000 per charging authority.

Local Authority Debt

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the total amount of debt incurred by each English shire county for the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Chope: The information requested is set out in the table:

Total debt outstanding at 31 March 1989

	£ million
Avon	155
Bedfordshire	178
Berkshire	n/a
Buckinghamshire	123
Cambridgeshire	105
Cheshire	193
Cleveland	282
Cornwall	91
Cumbria	105
Derbyshire	203
Devon	211
Dorset	138
Durham	53
East Sussex	128
Essex	n/a
Gloucestershire	92
Hampshire	156
Hereford and Worcester	n/a
Hertfordshire	128
Humberside	157
Isle of Wight	35
Kent	221
Lancashire	360
Leicestershire	181
Lincolnshire	104
Norfolk	53
Northamptonshire	147
Northumberland	48
North Yorkshire	99
Nottinghamshire	208
Oxfordshire	82
Shropshire	68
Somerset	72
Staffordshire	245
Suffolk	108
Surrey	249
Warwickshire	92
West Sussex	32
Wiltshire	47

n/a = Berkshire, Essex and Hereford and Worcester have not yet submitted returns.

Atmospheric Pollution

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress the United Kingdom has made towards meeting its target reduction of nitrous, nitric and sulphuric oxides emissions by 1993.

Mr. Trippier: Using 1980 as a baseline, the UK is committed to reducing emissions of sulphur dioxide (SO_2) by 20 per cent. and oxides of nitrogen (NOx) by 15 per cent. from existing large combustion plants by 1993 as the first stage of directive 88/609/EEC. The current "Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics" (a copy of which is in the House of Commons Library) shows that in 1988 relevant emissions of SO_2 and NOx were 21 per cent. and 10 per cent. lower, respectively, than in 1980.

Nature Conservancy Council

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to respond to the report of the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology on the future of the Nature Conservancy Council.

Mr. Trippier: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 5 April to the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthrope (Mr. Morley) at column *784*.

Local Government Finance

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what proposals he has to collect information from local authorities about the level of their standard community charge;

(2) when he expects to know which local authorities are levying a standard community charge at less than twice the personal community charge.

Mr. Chope: We are collecting information about standard charge multipliers for 1990-91 in a return which authorities have been asked to make to the Department in May.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list for each district authority in England *(a)* the amount of Government grant per authority, *(b)* the amount of UBR income per authority, *(c)* the taxable income per authority and *(d)* the revenue from taxable income per authority assumed in the 1990-91 "Illustrative Capital Value Rates and Local Income Tax" published by his Department on 4 April;

(2) if he will set out the formula for taxable income used to produce the 1990-91 "Illustrative Capital Value Rates and Local Income Tax" published by his Department on 4 April;

(3) if he will set out the grant formula used to produce the 1990-91 "Illustrative Capital Value Rates and Local Income Tax" published by his Department on 4 April.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 18 April 1990]:* The illustrative capital value rates and local income tax figures published on 4 April assume that Government funds and business rates are distributed to achieve full equalisation of local income tax rates. This means that in every area the same local income tax rate could apply if all local authorities were spending at the level needed to provide a standard level of services. The level of grant entitlement would vary if expenditure were at a different level in order to ensure that each £1 per head of additional spending in any area would lead to exactly the same change in the local income tax rate. Areas with high average taxable incomes would receive less grant with higher spending, while areas with low taxable resources would receive more grant with higher spending. No reliable estimate of the taxable income of residents in each local authority area is available and hence no estimate of grant and business rate payments to each authority was made when producing the illustrative figures.

Bathing Water

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a list of those bathing beaches sampled by the water research centre in its project on rotaviruses in sewage discharges.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: In the centre's research for the Department, samples were taken from the north and south beaches and bathing water at Tenby; bathing water and sediment at Watchouse bay, near Barry; bathing water at Barmouth and, in Dyfed, Pendine East and Pembrey, Cefn Sidan.

Demolition (Planning Control)

Mr. Dykes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will issue a consultation paper inviting views on whether planning controls should be extended to the demolition of dwelling houses.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Secretary of State for Wales have today issued a consultation paper. It describes the issue, invites views on the scale of the problem, and seeks comments on various options for extending planning controls to the demolition of dwelling houses.

Storm Damage

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will announce the special financial assistance under the Bellwin scheme to be given to those local authorities whose coasts suffered damage as a result of the severe storms during 25 and 26 February.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 18 April 1990]:* I hope to make an announcement shortly.

Radioactive Gas Emissions, Sellafield

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment has been made of the extent to which emissions of radioactive gas from Pond 5 fuel handling plant at Sellafield arising from works carried out and chemical reactions in the pond itself, comply with statutory requirements.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 18 April 1990]:* The emissions of radioactive gas from this plant are continuously sampled and monitored by BNFL. The measurements demonstrate that these discharges comply with statutory requirements.

DEFENCE

Submarines

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish a list of Z-berth locations for submarines in the United Kingdom and those sites which he is planning to use.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms. Gordon) on 5 May 1989 at column *276*. We have, since this date, decided to establish Swansea as a Z-berth. The Royal Navy's requirements for port visits by nuclear-powered submarines are continually under review. When a port appears suitable and practical, the safety considerations are discussed with local civil authorities.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration he has given to the development of Milford Haven as an operational base for submarines.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None.

ENERGY

British Coal (Notification Procedures)

Mr. Andy Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects to receive the results of the attitude survey carried out to assess public satisfaction with British Coal's notification procedures.

Mr. Baldry: I have now received this report and the accompanying data and have placed copies in the Library of both Houses. It clearly shows that there is a strong wish for individual notification of households and we are discussing with British Coal how best this can be implemented.

Environmental Protection

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what steps he will take to ensure that the timetable for reviewing the proposals for renewable energy projects does not preclude a full environmental assessment.

Mr. Peter Morrison: All renewable energy projects will have to comply with normal planning procedures.

My Department's research programme on renewable energy includes extensive work on environmental assessment to help provide information on which the environmental acceptability of renewable energy technologies could be judged.

Mains Supply (Rural Areas)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what forms of grant aid or subsidy will be available after privatisation to electricity distribution companies seeking to connect rural areas to the mains supply.

Mr. Wakeham: I do not believe that the post-privatisation arrangements for rural supplies require financial assistance by the Government.

Fuel Exports and Imports

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he will give for each month from January 1989 the total export and import of *(a)* oil, *(b)* gas and *(c)* coal in tonnes and in value on the same basis as his answer of 9 November 1989, *Official Report*, columns *767-68*;

(2) if he will give for each month from January 1989 the total export and import of *(a)* oil, *(b)* gas and *(c)* coal in coal-equivalent tonnes for both gas and oil.

Mr. Wakeham: The equivalent information for exports and imports of oil, gas and coal for each month from January 1989, set out on the same basis as my earlier answer of 9 November 1989, *Official Report*, columns *767-68*, are shown in tables 1 and 3. I have also set out figures in tonnes of coal equivalent, for both gas and oil, in table 2.

Table 1

Thousand tonnes

1989	*Exports (f.o.b)*		*Imports (c.i.f)*		
	Coal	*Oil*[1]	*Coal*	*Gas*[2]	*Oil*
January	167	6,519	940	1,456	5,332
February	126	4,346	930	1,566	4,820
March	175	6,298	1,214	1,474	4,506
April	119	5,320	1,100	1,586	4,693
May	126	4,379	1,034	1,526	4,610
June	170	5,681	999	1,176	4,824
July	179	5,688	653	962	4,756
August	175	5,286	771	906	4,195
September	175	5,883	902	854	5,450
October	260	7,184	1,005	906	5,511
November	218	6,876	1,638	1,316	4,944
December	182	5,849	949	1,356	4,443
1990					
January	269	7,552	1,194	1,462	6,523
February	181	6,209	893	1,433	5,292

Source: Customs and Excise Overseas Trade Statistics (The oil exports figures include adjustments to the Overseas Trade Statistics data for the under-recording of direct exports of crude oil).

[1] Contains a small amount of natural gas exports.

[2] Coal equivalent.

Table 2 *Thousand tonnes of coal equivalent*

1989	*Exports (f.o.b)*		*Imports (c.i.f)*	
	Gas	*Oil*	*Gas*	*Oil*
January	—	11,142	1,456	9,094
February	—	7,434	1,566	8,216
March	—	10,774	1,474	7,687
April	—	9,105	1,586	7,993
May	—	7,476	1,526	7,871
June	2	9,687	1,176	8,230
July	—	9,727	962	8,103
August	4	9,017	906	7,152
September	2	10,052	854	9,296
October	—	12,249	906	9,394
November	—	11,730	1,316	8,447
December	—	9,991	1,356	7,587
1990				
January	—	12,901	1,462	11,122
February	6	10,597	1,433	9,023

Table 3

£ million at 1985 prices[1]

1989	*Exports (f.o.b.)*		*Imports (c.i.f.)*		
	Coal	*Oil*[2]	*Coal*	*Gas*	*Oil*
January	6	1,124	50	109	860
February	5	751	50	118	777
March	7	1,069	65	111	727
April	5	912	59	119	757

1989	*Exports (f.o.b.)*		*Imports (c.i.f.)*		
	Coal	*Oil*[2]	*Coal*	*Gas*	*Oil*
May	5	749	55	115	743
June	7	971	53	88	778
July	7	972	35	72	767
August	7	900	41	68	677
September	7	1,012	48	64	879
October	10	1,222	54	68	889
November	8	1,165	88	99	797
December	7	993	51	102	716
1990					
January	10	1,287	64	110	1,052
February	7	1,066	48	108	853

[1] Figures at 1985 constant prices have been derived by applying the unit value for exports in 1985 to the relevant volumes in 1989 and 1990.

[2] Contains a small amount of natural gas exports.

Accountancy Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the accountancy firms which are being used for the electricity privatisation.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend gave to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) on 5 February 1990 at columns *454-58.*

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disablement Benefits

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what response he has received to "The Way Ahead: Benefits for Disabled People" from the Spastics Society; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: The Spastics Society was represented at a meeting I held on 5 April with the Disability Benefits Consortium to discuss "The Way Ahead". We shall give careful consideration to all the society's comments in carrying forward the detailed work on our proposals.

Nursing Homes

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will indicate projected expenditure in the current year and the next five years on *(a)* private residential homes, *(b)* private nursing homes and *(c)* Department of Social Security payments to local authorities for community care; and if he will indicate the expected number of elderly persons who in each case will benefit.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: At August 1989, the latest date for which figures are available, total income support expenditure on an annualised basis for people in independent residential care homes and nursing homes was estimated to be £1,073 million to 173,000 claimants. Of that total £639 million is for those receiving residential care, £434 million for nursing care. All figures are rounded. Information about expected numbers of income support claimants and expenditure for future years is published in the public expenditure White Paper (Cm. 1014). It has never been the practice to publish separate forecasts about expenditure specifically on people in residential care and nursing homes.

Community Charge Benefit

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many poll tax payers in Scotland who are in receipt of benefit have been subject to deduction of benefit; and if he will classify benefit recipients by size of income and on that basis, indicate for each category, how many persons have been subject to deduction of benefit of *(a)* less than 20p a week, *(b)* 20p to 49p a week, *(c)* 50p to 99p a week, *(d)* £1 to £1·99 a week, *(e)* £2 to £4·99 a week, *(f)* £5 to £9·99 a week and *(g)* over £10 a week.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information requested is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

TRANSPORT

Motorways (Speed Restrictions)

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish for motorways in England a list of any sections where speed restrictions up to 50 mph have been in existence for periods of (i) up to one year, (ii) one to three years, (iii) three to five years and (iv) over five years.

Mr. Atkins: Mandatory speed restrictions for some motorway maintenance schemes were introduced in August 1988 for reasons of safety. Since then the following sections have been subject to speed restrictions for major (over £0·5 million) maintenance schemes. All had durations of less than one year.

1988-89	*Section*
A1(M)	Barton—Burtree
M1	J4-5
M1	J14
M1	J40-41
M2	J5
M2	J5-6
M3	j5-6
M4	J12-11
M4	J16-18
M5	J9-11
M5	J24-25
M6	J6-7 (Thornbridge Viaduct)
M6	J16-17
M6	J29-31
M6	J34-35
M11	South of J7
M25	J24
M27	J2-3
M40	J5-7
M62	J37—Ouse Bridge

1989-90	*Section*
A1(M)	Sprotborough—Alverley
A1(M)	Warmsworth—Marr
A1(M)	Aycliffe—Bradbury Interchange
M1	J9
M1	J12-13
M1	J15-16
M1	J25—R. Trent
M1	J29-30
M1	J34 (Tinsley Viaduct)
M1	J37-38
M2	Park Pale—Thong Lane
M2	J4-5
M2	J5 Slip Roads
M2	J5-6 (2 Schemes)

1989-90	*Section*
M4	J16-17
M5	J1-M6 (stages 1 and 2)
M5	J16-17
M5	J20
M5	J25-26
M6	J16-17
M6	J34—County Boundary
M6	J41-42
M11	North and South of J5
M11	J12
M25	J18-20
M27	J8-10
M40	J5-7
M42	J4-5
M42	J6-7
M53	J1-4
M56	J6-7
M61	J1-3
M61	J6-8
M61	J8-M6
M62	J7-9
M62	J23—Scammonden
M62	J34-35
M62/M18	Langham Interchange
M180	J1-M18 (J5)
M180	West of R. Trent
M606	Bradford

In addition a relatively small number of motorway non-major maintenance schemes will have been subject to mandatory speed restrictions for the same reason. These schemes would be of short duration, considerably less than one year.

There have also been the following recent motorway improvement schemes where mandatory speed restrictions were in force:

	Section
Less than one year	
M25	J10-13
M42	J3A
M56	J3-5
M61	J2-4
M62	J12-19
M62	J21-22
M63	J8-10
M63	J11-J12
M67	J1-2
M602	J1-2
Less than one year to date, but ongoing	
M1	J23A
M20	J8
M40	J7
One to three years	
M5	J4-4A
M5	J4A-5
M5	J5-6
M20	J11-12
M42	J1-M5
M63	J3-5

There have not been any such restrictions lasting more than three years.

There are permanent speed restrictions on the following sections of motorway:

	Section
M1	J43-47 (50 mph)
M4 (London)	Elevated Section (50 mph)
M4[1]	Severn Bridge (40 mph)
M6/M62	Croft Interchange (40 mph)
M621	J1-3 (50 mph)

[1] Mandatory speed limit imposed in 1986 during bridge strengthening and resurfacing work. This will remain in force until about the end of this year.

Speed Limits

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to extend mandatory speed limits where roadworking is in operation to those roads for which local authorities are the highways authority.

Mr. Atkins: Local highway authorities already have the power to introduce mandatory speed limits at roadworks where they consider it appropriate.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures, other than mandatory speed limits, are in force to ensure the safety of roadworkers and motorists where road repairs and maintenance are being carried out.

Mr. Atkins: In addition to any speed limit, measures to ensure safety at roadworks, both for road users and workers, comprise provision of proper signing and traffic management together with maintenance of an appropriate safety zone between moving traffic and the works. Advice on the signing of roadworks is given in chapter 8 of the traffic signs manual. A report prepared jointly by the Department of Transport, the County Surveyors Society and the Health and Safety Executive provides guidance for ensuring the safety of personnel undertaking works.

Substandard Shipping

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the number of defective merchant vessels that have been detained at British ports for each of the last five years.

Mr. McLoughlin: The number of merchant ships which have been detained in United Kingdom ports as a result of defects indentified by Department of Transport marine surveyors in the course of general or port state control inspections in each of the last five years is as follows:

	Number
1985	33
1986	33
1987	26
1988	48
1989	47
[1]1990	23

[1] January—March

Compulsory Head-guards

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to make it compulsory for cyclists to wear protective head-guards.

Mr. Atkins: If everbody wore cycle helmets, a great many injuries and deaths would be prevented, particularly among children. While I have no present plans for making it compulsory, I urge cyclists to wear them, and parents to encourage their children to do so.

Maritime Safety

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what current statutory regulations exist concerning the seaworthiness of vessels and the number of shipmen relative to size that should be sailing a ship.

Mr. McLoughlin: Statutory regulations issued under the various Merchant Shipping Acts are promulgated by way of a merchant shipping notice. There are many such regulations in force covering, inter alia, crew matters, dangerous goods, fire, life-saving, marine pollution, navigation, ship construction and equipment, and health and safety. Each year the list is revised, and I have placed a copy of the latest notice in the Library. (Merchant Shipping Notice No. M.1407, Principal Acts and Regulations on Merchant Shipping, published by the Department of Transport in February 1990.)

Apart from the statutory requirements for certificated officers, the minimum safe complement of other seafarers depends on other factors as well as size—the ship's equipment, trading areas and the nature of cargo all have to be taken into account when assessing a safer manning level. Passenger ships must have an adequate crew to muster and assist the passengers in an emergency.

Private Security Firms

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what weapons private security firms are empowered to employ in dockyards and ports.

Mr. McLoughlin: Private security firms are not empowered to carry firearms in dockyards and ports unless they have a firearms certificate from the chief officer of police under section 1 of the Firearms Act 1968.

Southend (Official Visit)

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make an official visit to Southend-on-Sea by train.

Mr. Portillo: My right hon. Friend or I will be happy to do so when a suitable opportunity arises.

THE ARTS

British Library

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Minister for the Arts what progress has been made on the British Library; when he expects work on it to be completed and at what cost; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Luce: Construction on the first phase of the building is proceeding within its budget of £300 million and a schedule which will enable the British Library to start moving books into St. Pancras by mid-1991. The first phase is planned to be fully operational by mid-1993.

The completion phase upon which I will shortly be making a separate announcement is scheduled to be opened to the public in 1996.

Bathgate Fossil

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will make a statement on his latest discussions with Dr. Robert Anderson and Dr. Ian Rolfe of the Scottish Museum on the issue of the 340-million-year old reptile found in the constituency of the hon. Member for Linlithgow.

Mr. Luce: I have had no discussions with either Dr. Robert Anderson or Dr. Ian Rolfe of the National museum for Scotland, on the issue of the Bathgate fossil, but as the hon. Gentleman knows the question of bringing natural heritage items under existing controls has been referred by me to the reviewing committee on the export of works of art for advice.

Lieu of Tax

Sir Hal Miller: To ask the Minister for the Arts if there have been any items accepted in lieu of tax or allocated since he last made an announcement on the subject to the House.

Mr. Luce: Since my announcement on 29 March, *Official Report, col 264,* I am very pleased to announce the acceptance of three further offers in lieu of tax: a portrait of the children of Henry Herbert, first Lord Porchester, by William Beechey in lieu of £151,489 tax; a painting by Lucas de Heere, entitled "The Family of Henry VIII: An Allegory of the Tudor Succession", in satisfaction of £527,898 tax, and a group of four paintings in satisfaction of £6,650,000 tax; two portraits by Thomas Gainsborough, a portrait of Peirre Pecquis by Sir Peter Paul Rubens and "View of Wageningen" by Hercules Seghers. The acceptance of the Lucas de Heere and the group of four paintings was made possible by the arrangements for a call on the Reserve first announced by Lord Gowrie in 1985 and brings the total call on the Reserve for 1989-90 to £9,977,898 and total expenditure on the acceptance in lieu scheme for that year to over £11·5 million. This is a record amount for a single financial year and demonstrates beyond doubt the investment and vital role of the scheme, and its benefits to individual estates.

In accordance with the conditions on which they were offered, the Beechey and de Heere paintings will remain in situ at Highclere castle, Berkshire, and Sudeley castle, Gloucestershire, respectively while the group of four paintings from the estate of the late Mrs. Eva Borthwick-Norton will be allocated in consultation with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland in a manner consonant with the testator's wishes as expressed in her will. The Secretary of State for Scotland will make an announcement about this in due course.

CIVIL SERVICE

Health Hazards

Dr. Marek: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service whether assessments under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations have been undertaken for all workplaces used by civil servants within the civil service.

Mr. Luce *[holding answer 18 April 1990]:* The civil service is a multi-departmental organisation and in common with other major employers assessments under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations are the responsibility of individual Departments. There is no requirement to record these assessments centrally and it is not possible to confirm that all assessments have been carried out.

In the period leading to enactment of the regulations representatives of many Departments attended training and information courses within the civil service and externally.

In October 1988 representatives of the civil service occupational health service (CSOHS) discussed the requirements of the regulations with departmental establishment officers. The CSOHS issued a detailed briefing note in January 1989 to assist Departments in meeting their statutory obligations. CSOHS health advisers and hygienists have provided information and advice on the regulations during routine visits and on request.

Departments which require professional support on assessments can obtain those on request from CSOHS who continue to provide advice, guidance and specialist input as required.

SCOTLAND

Vacant Accommodation

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list those local authorities known to him which have allowed in 1989-90 an extension of beyond three months to the period when a poll tax is not payable in respect of empty and unfurnished accommodation.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I understand that in 1989-90, all levying authorities made use of the powers given to them under section 10(8) of the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987 to determine different periods from the statutory minimum of three months during which the standard community charge is not payable in respect of unoccupied and unfurnished premises. Some authorities determined a longer period in respect of all unoccupied and unfurnished premises in their area, while others restricted the use of their discretionary power to certain classes of premises.

Tourism

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement concerning the provision of accommodation within the tourist industry following the implementation of the poll tax.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: As a consequence of the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc. (Scotland) Act 1987, property which was previously valued as a dwellinghouse will have been removed from rating as from 1 April 1989, but if the assessor considers that the degree to which a particular property is used for commercial purposes is such that it should fall within the non-domestic sector, he will enter it in the valuation roll. There remains a valuation judgment for the assessor to make.

However, to ensure a consistent approach throughout Scotland, my right hon. and learned Friend recently decided to clarify the boundary between the domestic and non-domestic sectors for self-catering properties and bed-and-breakfast establishments. The Abolition of Domestic Rates (Domestic and Part Residential Subjects) (Scotland) Regulations 1990 accordingly provide that dwellinghouses made available for letting, commercially, as self-catering accommodation for short periods amounting to at least 140 days per year are to be treated from 1 April 1990 as non-domestic, thus rendering them liable to non-domestic rates.

In the case of bed-and-breakfast establishments, we have been consulting interested parties on a proposal to include within the statutory definition of domestic subjects any dwellinghouse which is made available for the provision of bed-and-breakfast accommodation for at least 100 days per year or which provides such accommodation for no more than six guests. My right hon. and learned Friend is likely to bring forward appropriate regulations on this before long.

Engineering Apprenticeships

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what were the numbers of engineering apprenticeships available in *(a)* Greenock and Port Glasgow, *(b)* Strathclyde and *(c)* Scotland as a whole in (i) 1979, (ii) 1984 and *(c)* the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Lang: Statistics are not collected about the number of available engineering apprentices. However, the engineering industry training board compiles a register of those completing the first stage of engineering craft training. For the Strathclyde area the figures are 1,071 in 1978-79, 418 in 1983-84 and 360 in 1988-89. For Scotland the figures are 1,694 for 1978-79, 686 for 1983-84 and 769 for 1988-89. No separate figures are available for the Greenock and Port Glasgow area.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Eastern Health and Social Services Board

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the managerial relationship between the newly appointed director of public health in the Eastern health and social services board and *(a)* environmental health officers and *(b)* the area board chief medical officer.

Mr. Needham: The title of chief administrative medical officer (that is, the area board's chief medical officer) changed to director of public health on 1 September 1989. Environmental health officers are employed by local councils and have no managerial relationship with the Eastern health and social services board.

Accountancy Firms

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list accountancy firms used by his Department.

Mr. Cope: During 1989-90 the information requested is as follows:

Binder Hamlyn
Capita Muir and Addy
John Compton Associates
Coopers and Lybrand
CSL Group Ltd—formerly known as CIPFA Services Ltd
Deloitte Haskins and Sells
F.M. Donaghy and Company
Ernst and Young
Hanna Thompson
KPMG Peat, Marwick, McClintock
D. J. MacRitchie
B. R. McGuire and Company
John McVeigh and Company
Muir and Addy
Price Waterhouse
Brendan Quinn and Company
Stoy Hayward
Touche Ross and Company
Witt Thornton

Fair Employment

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a list of types of employment in each church-based society or organisation in Northern Ireland for which the Fair Employment Agency and/or Commission has advised that the successful applicant must belong to the same religious denomination as the church-based society or organisation which is inviting applications to fill vacancies.

Mr. Needham: Neither the Fair Employment Agency nor the Fair Employment Commission has ever advised any organisation that a successful applicant for employment must belong to a particular religious denomination. The agency/commission has, however, taken the view that in the case of staff of organisations with a religious basis who had to act in a "in loco parentis" role, the organisations could take religion into account when making such appointments.

An individual has the right to challenge the organisation's view of the nature of a particular job and the onus is on the organisation to show that the "essential nature of the job" requires it to be done by a person holding, or not holding, a particular religious belief or political opinion as permitted under section 37 of the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Act 1976.

The Sunday Times

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what requests were received from *The Sunday Times* for assistance in defence of the libel action brought by Mr. T. Murphy and Mr. P. Murphy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope *[holding answer 18 April 1990]:* The Government received a number of requests from members of the staff and representatives of *The Sunday Times* for assistance in defence of the libel action brought against the newspaper in the Irish High Court by Thomas and Patrick Murphy. After careful consideration it was decided that there was no direct help which the Government could usefully or properly provide in the Irish courts.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Cotton Goods

Mr. Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the current output of cotton goods in north-east Lancashire.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 18 April 1990]:* Sectoral output statistics are not readily available at sub-regional level. However, in the north-west standard region (Lancashire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire) latest figures (1988) show that the net output from the cotton and silk industries amounted to £263·1 million (or 54·7 per cent. of United Kingdom net output). (Source: Central Statistical Office).

Paper Production

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has on progress within the paper and pulp industry for the increased use of straw as a resource.

Mr. Douglas Hogg *[holding answer 18 April 1990]:* I am aware of a commercial venture which Berisford Bristar is investigating for the production of pulp from straw on a site near Immingham. In addition I am aware of an application for support of collaborative research and development on the use of United Kingdom-grown crops for industrial use under the LINK initiative. This programme, which is receiving consideration, will be able to cover the necessary research to enhance the potential use of straw.

HEALTH

Leukaemia

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) of 2 April, *Official Report,* columns *430-34*, he will list the other studies currently under way on leukaemia clusters referred to in column *430* and state who is funding them; if he will list the other studies of workers receiving high radiation doses referred to in column *431* and state who is funding them; which Government Departments are involved in the co-ordination of research and what arrangements have been made; and if he will list the related research proposals into the offspring of radiation workers referred to in column *431*.

Mr. Freeman: In respect of the studies currently under way on leukaemia clusters, I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) on 15 February at columns *397-98*. The studies are being funded by the Scottish Office (Dounreay studies) and the Department of Health.

The studies referred to in my earlier reply comprise those referred to previously and, in addition, a number of proposals for research submitted to the Department and to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), as well as research commissioned independently of Government. The HSE has drawn up a protocol investigation at Sellafield. This investigation will be in two parts: the first will consist of an epidemiological case-control study comparing the occupational records of the case fathers with those of matched controls; the second is a case-only study into the particular operational histories of the fathers of the leukaemic children.

The lead Government Department involved in co-ordination of research is the Department of Health, in collaboration with HSE, and a co-ordination group has been established for the purpose of expediting progress on existing and proposed research. Other Government Departments and the Medical Research Council will provide representation as appropriate.

In relation to the proposed studies of the health of the offspring of radiation workers, I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) on 7 March at columns *646-47*.

Scanner Unit (North Devon)

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received about the need for a scanner unit within the North Devon health authority area.

Mr. Freeman: We have received one representation, from the mayor of Barnstaple.

Hospital Doctors

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the change in the pay and conditions of hospital doctors in the National Health Service since 1979.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Between April 1979 and April 1990 the pay of hospital doctors in the National Health Service has increased in real terms by 37·2 per cent. From April 1990 they will receive a further 7 per cent. rise in their pay and subsequently a further 2·5 per cent. from 1 January 1991.

The terms and conditions of service for hospital doctors are frequently amended following negotiations between the Health Departments and the medical and dental professions. Copies of the current version of the handbook of terms and conditions of service for medical and dental staff have been placed in the Library.

Hospital Incinerators

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library details of all hospital incinerators in England, by health authority area, specifying for each incinerator *(a)* the date commissioned, *(b)* the name of the manufacturer, *(c)* the temperature in the main chamber, *(d)* the temperature in the after-burner, *(e)* the type of temperature control used and *(f)* the monitoring regime for air pollution.

Mr. Freeman: This information is not available centrally and could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

Constituencies

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the constituencies of *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland in order of size based on the 1990 register, indicating in each case the extent to which the electorate is above or below the electoral quota.

Mr. Freeman: Information about the 1990 electoral registers has now been collected by OPCS from electoral registration officers. The number of electors in each local authority area will be published in "OPCS Monitor EL 90/1" on 26 April, before the local elections. The figures are still being reassembled by parliamentary constituency. They will be published in the latter form in "Electoral Statistics 1990 (Series EL No. 17)" in July.

Human Spermatozoa

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the reply to the question from the hon. Member for Linlithgow of 2 April, *Official Report*, column 982, if he will make a statement on the use of the hamster test in the study of chromosomal abnormalities of human spermatozoa.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To achieve penetration by a human sperm the hamster egg must first have had its zona pellucida removed by a chemical. The normality of chromosomes derived from the human sperm can be assessed by examining them within the product of fusion of a human sperm and a hamster egg. The test is completed about 24 hours after fusion begins and at that point the material is destroyed. Normally it will not have divided into two cells. Schedule 2 to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill would require that if two cells did appear they must be destroyed.

Microbiology

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future of the centre for applied microbiology and research.

Mr. Freeman: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) on 19 April.

Nurses

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review the current levels of nurse staffing.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) on 18 April at column *875*.

Eye Tests

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his Department's latest estimate of the reduction in the number of eye tests since the introduction of charges.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have commissioned an independent survey into the number of sight tests carried out during the first quarter of 1990. The figures collected will be compared with earlier periods; results should be available by the early summer.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether figures are collected nationally to show whether the detection of illnesses such as diabetes has been influenced by the introduction of charges for eye tests on 1 April 1989.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information is not collected centrally on the number of patients referred by their optometrist or ophthalmic medical practitioner to a doctor for further medical investigation and diagnosis following a sight test. The number of cases seen by the hospital eye departments since April 1989 is unlikely to be available before the end of the year.

General Practitioners

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what modification he is proposing for screening targets in the new contract for general medical practitioners; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: A modification to the operation of screening targets was announced on 10 April. This change means that entitlement to target payments will be based on partnership lists rather than individual practitioner's lists. No further modifications are planned.

Indicative Drug Budgets

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he intends to issue guidelines on the operation of indicative drug budgets; and whether he has any modifications to propose to the proposals originally outlined in the White Paper.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We intend to publish in May a further working paper on the operation of indicative prescribing budgets. The working paper will set out details of the development of our proposals since the White Paper was published.

Mental Hospitals

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will update information given in the answer to the hon. Member for Dagenham on 20 March 1987, *Official Report*, column *669*.

Mr. Freeman *[pursuant to his reply, 4 April 1990, c. 650-52.]:* I regret that due to a typing error there was an omission in the answer given. Table 2 should have ended after the sixth entry and been followed by a third table. The correct information is contained in the following tables.

Table 2

Mental illness hospitals closed between 1987 and 1989.

Yorkshire
Naburn Hospital, Near York

Trent
Saxondale Hospital
St. John's Hospital, Lincolnshire

South Western
Horton Road Hospital
Digby Hospital, Exeter

West Midlands
Powick Hospital, Worcester

Table 3

Mental Illness Hospitals which have, or have had, over 200 beds, which Regional Health Authorities have indicated they plan to close, subject to consultation and to suitable alternative provision being made, by about 1995.

	Latest numbers of inpatients
Yorkshire	
Storthes Hall Hospital, Near Huddersfield	389
Trent	
Rauceby Hospital, South Lincs.	304
Pastures Hospital, Southern Derbyshire	454
Carlton Hayes Hospital, Leicestershire	470
Mapperley Hospital, Nottingham	305
Middlewood Hospital, Sheffield	606
Towers Hospital, Leicestershire	394
Kingsway Hospital, Southern Derbyshire	363
East Anglian	
St. Audry's Hospital, Woodbridge	372
St. Nicholas' Hospital, Great Yarmouth and Waverney	131
St. Andrews, Norwich	335
North East Thames	
Friern Hospital[1]	673
Claybury Hospital	722
South East Thames	
Cane Hill Hospital	343
Tooting Bec Hospital	420
Hellingly Hospital	154
St. Augustines Hospital	235
South West Thames	
Long Grove Hospital, Epsom	404
Brookwood Hospital	489
Wessex	
Whitecroft Hospital	75
Herrison Hospital, Dorchester	263
Old Manor Hospital[1]	216
Oxford	
St. John's Hospital, Aylesbury	282
St. Crispin's Hospital, Northampton	263
Littlemore Hospital, Oxford	226
West Midlands	
Barnsley Hall Hospital, Bromsgrove and Redditch	169
Rubery Hill Hospital, South Birmingham	211
Central Hospital, South Warwickshire	298
Hollymoor Hospital, Solihull	279
Mersey	
Rainhill Hospital	487
Parkside Hospital	485
Winwick Hospital	815
North Western	
North Manchester (Springfield) Hospital[1]	145
Northern	
St. Mary's, Stannington	495
South Western	
Mendip Hospital	96
Moorhaven Hospital	157

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[1] With some facilities remaining on site.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Soviet Union

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Soviet authorities about Mr. Adolf Borisovich Gorvitz.

Mr. Waldegrave: We have made numerous representations to the Soviet authorities about this case—most recently during my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs' visit to the USSR from 9 to 12 April. We shall continue to raise it until there is a satisfactory outcome.

Hong Kong

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many seizures of illegally imported endangered species were made by the Hong Kong authorities in the second six months of 1989; how many seizures were made of similar categories intended for export; and if he will make a statement giving details of all seizures made, including country of origin.

Mr. Waldegrave *[holding answer 29 March 1990]:* The Hong Kong authorities made 60 seizures of illegally imported endangered species during the period July to December 1989:

The following illegal imports were seized:

Species	*Number*
Gibbon	2
Slow Loris	1
Pangolin	3 live, 2 carcasses, 25·45 kg meat, 20 pieces of scale and 1·5 kg of scale

Species	*Number*
Rhino (horn)	17 pieces
Whale (bone)	1 piece
Bear (paw)	4 pieces
Otter (skin)	2 pieces
Wild cat	82 skins and 1 stuffed specimen
Monitor Lizard (skin)	16,342 pieces
Alligator/crocodile	1,498 pieces (skin), 56 kg (meat) and 1 stuffed specimen
Python (skin)	86 pieces
Turtle/tortoise (live)	8
Sea turtle	34 stuffed specimens and 119 eggs
Giant salamander (carcass)	1
Parrot (live)	15
Bird of prey plus owl	11 live, 4 carcasses and 2 stuffed specimens
Asiatic bony tongue fish (live)	29 tails
Black coral (skeleton)	4
Giant clam (live)	4
Orchid	1
Ivory	2·39 tonnes

Countries of export included China, United Arab Emirates, Bangladesh, Federal Republic of Germany, Spain, France, Indonesia, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Taiwan, United States of America, Venezuela, South Africa.

Only one seizure was made of endangered species intended for export: a live parrot destined for Switzerland.

European Investment Bank

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what projects in the United Kingdom have received support, in each year since 1979, from the European investment bank; and if he will set out in each case the level of financial support received.

Mr. Ryder: I have been asked to reply.

The projects supported by the European investment bank and the levels of financial support in 1987, 1988 and 1989 are given in the table. To go back to earlier years would involve disproportionate cost.

	Amount of loan £ million
1987	
PROJECT	
Construction of units at Torness Nuclear Power Station	19
Construction of storage facilities for nuclear waste. Sellafield	16 + 34
Nuclear Fuel reprocessing facilities Sellafield	60
Conversion of Kilroot Power Station to duel coal/oil firing system	30 + 33
Development of Arborathoil field	50
Construction of municipal waste recycling plant at Hastings	0·700
Reduction of traffic congestion in Plymouth	8
Construction of approach road to Ramsgate Harbour and inner Chatham ring road	3
Construction of A120 by pass	4
Upgrading of five roads in Powys	1·2
Improvement of traffic conditions on three of main Swansea approach roads	2·5
Improvement to approach and landing systems at several airports	5
Construction of second terminal at Gatwick	150
Construction of airport in London Docklands	4
Construction of new passenger terminal at Norwich airport	2·6
Improvement to water supply and sewerage schemes in Edinburgh area	8
Sewerage schemes in Mersey area	20 + 18
Improvements to drinking water supply network and reduction of river and coastal pollution in Wales	8
Construction of Roadford Storage reservoir in Devon	10
Land drainage and sewerage system in Birmingham area, River Tame flood protection	20
Water supply and sewerage schemes in Humberside, East Anglia, East Midlands and South East England	45+20
Water supply and sewerage schemes in York, Bradford and Sheffield areas	10+20+20
Improvements to sewerage works in East Lothian	5
Sewerage works in coastal areas of North East England	10·5
Sewerage works in coastal areas in South West England	11
South Cardiff: construction of access road to city centre development of industrial estate	6+5+6·5
Industrial development schemes in Lancashire	1
Road schemes, water supply networks and sewerage facilities in Tayside	5
Development of three industrial areas, construction of tourism and exhibition centre, development of marina and runway at airport near Plymouth	6·3
Road, water supply, sewerage, drainage schemes and improvements to an agricultural college in Dumfries and Galloway	4
Development of six industrial estates, improvements to Coventry Technical College, Museum of Transport and road schemes to reduce traffic congestion	5
Road, water supply, sewerage schemes in Dunfermline and Kirkaldy	5
Road, water supply and sewerage schemes in Strathclyde	13
Improvements to roads and sewerage plant in Durham	3·3
Expansion of industrial estate in Rossendale, North West England	0·100
Road schemes, new ferries, improvements to industrial sites and water supply and sewerage schemes in the Shetlands	10
Infrastructure work in Newcastle	11·5
Construction of Bridge over Loughor River and of western approach road, new building's at Haverford West Technical College	2·5
Development of road network, industrial and business infrastructure/waste disposal sites in North Cheshire	10
Expansion of industrial estate in County Durham	0·200
Road schemes, enlargement of Technical College, energy conservation schemes in Staffordshire	2
Construction of relief road, factory buildings, enlargement of Polytechnic and removal of asbestos from public buildings in Manchester	5
Road schemes, industrial estates and coastal protection works in Lancashire	2

	Amount of loan £ million
Construction of M65 Calder Valley motorway section, science park, college buildings; and conversion of quarry	3
Improvement of industrial sites, construction and improvement of factory buildings in Oldham	4
Motorway and road development, pedestrianisation schemes, Manchester	5
Modernisation of alumium plants in North West England, the Midlands and Wales	20
Installation of new computerised management system in retail chain	1·4
Improvements to paperpulp recycling plant and construction of clinical waste incinerator in Manchester	1
Electrification of Glasgow/Ayr railway line and purchase of rolling stock	10
Total of loans signed in the United Kingdom in 1987	*£801·3*
1988	
Project	
Nuclear fuel processing facilities, Sellafield	190
Municipal waste recycling plant in Hastings	1
Construction of Channel tunnel	70
Improvements to port installations, Plymouth, Southampton, Hull, Immingham, Grimsby, Barry and Ayr	16
Approach and landing systems at several airports	18
Second passenger terminal at Stansted airport	100
Development of telecommunications, Scotland	200
Water supply, sewerage, road schemes in the Grampians	10
Modernisation of production facilities and factory, Gateshead	3·3
Modernisation and extension of aircraft engine overhaul facilities at Nantgarw	7·3
Design and construction of wings for Airbus A-320 at various plants in England	50
Facilities for overhaul of jet engines and components in Prestwick	11
Construction of textile mill in Bradford and modernisation of dyeing and finishing plant in Huddersfield	2
Polysterene production plant in Manchester	3
Construction of hotel in Birmingham	17
Trusthouse Forte: Construction of metals	5
Construction of new computer centre, Manchester	1·5
Global loans. Barclays Bank Investors in Industry Group plc	10
(to on lend to small and medium sized enterprises in the UK)	10
Lending under the New Community Instrument to small and medium sized enterprises	
Intermediary	
Barclays Bank plc	30
Investors in Industry Group	35
Total of loans signed in the United Kingdom in 1988	£790·1
1989	
Project	
British Aerospace A320B	100
Stag Furniture Factory	1·85
Fownes Hotel Solihull	5
Ravenspurn North Gas Field A	15
Ravenspurn North Gas Field B	50
Ravenspurn North Gas Field C	30
Trade Centre Cardiff	12
Trusthouse Forte Motels	7
East Sussex Fuel Plant	0·50
Trusthouse Forte II	3·80
Hurtsman Chemicals Manchester	2
National Computing Centre	0·70
Hall UK Projects	5·7
Irvine PaperMill	50
Slaley Hall Hexham	3
Eurotunnel	25 + 50
BAA Stansted	100
Lancashire Industrial Estates	5
ISE Chairs Cardiff	0·75
Pall Newquay	0·50 + 5·97
Shotton Paper	20
Port of Felixstowe	25
Cerestar UK Glucose	2·70 + 2·00
Wytch Farm Oilfield	33·60
Cadbury Schweppes	50
Stadco	2·95
Pilkington Glass	40
Burrendale Hotel, Northern Ireland	1
Slough Heat and Power	15
United Biscuits	10
Yorkshire Water Authority	21 + 20
Wessex Water	25
Severn Trent Water	100
Thames Water	75
Anglian Water	15
WWA Wessex Environment	38
Safeway Bellshill Scotland	25
Slumberland Lancashire	3·50
Barclays Bank Global Loan[1]	40
31 Global Loan VB[1]	15
Barclays Bank Global Loan III[1]	30
Total of loans signed in the United Kingdom in 1989	1,084·1

[1] For on lending to small and medium sized enterprises.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Monetary Union

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the outcome of the discussions at the Council of Ministers on the issue of monetary union on 1 April; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement my right hon. Friend the Chancellor made to the House on 3 April, *Official Report*, col 523.

Purchasing Costs

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if his Department achieved the target of 5 per cent. saving in purchasing costs in 1988-89, set by the Paymaster-General, through use of the central unit on purchasing.

Mr. Ryder: I am pleased to report that the Treasury (excluding CISCO) achieved an 8·5 per cent. saving in overall purchasing costs in 1988-89.

EMPLOYMENT

Bed-and-breakfast Accommodation

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether his Department has commissioned any research into the provision of bed-and-breakfast acommodation within the British tourist industry after the introduction of poll tax.

Mr. Nicholls: No.

Wages Council Inspectors

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he has any plans to increase the numbers of wages council inspectors.

Mr. Nicholls: No.

Disabled People

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, pursuant to his answers to the hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Hannam) of 18 January, *Official Report*, column 401, and Stoke-on-Trent, South of 14 March, *Official Report*, column 252, if he will give the most recent figures for the percentage of *(a)* firms and *(b)* public sector employers satisfying their quota obligations under the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944;

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 5 April 1990]:* In June 1989, the latest date for which figures are available, 23·3 per cent. of private sector employers subject to the obligations of the quota scheme employed 3 per cent. or more registered people with disabilities. At the same date 4·7 per cent. of the public sector employers who are subject to the obligations of the quota scheme employed 3 per cent. or more registered people with disabilities.

In both the public and private sectors 0·9 per cent. of employees of employers subject to the obligations of the quota scheme are registered as disabled.

Training

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether a training credit pilot scheme will operate in Scotland.

Mr. Eggar *[holding answer 18 April 1990]:* The prospectus which I have issued on training credits for young people invites training and enterprise councils, and local enterprise companies in Scotland, to bid to run local training credit pilots. There is to be a geographical spread of pilots throughout Great Britain. The actual range will depend on the bids received.

WALES

M4

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to improve the M4 east of the Baglan roundabout.

Mr. Roberts: Currently the only work planned for this part of the M4 is renewal work on the Groes-Pentyla section which is expected to start this summer. The whole of the M4 is included in the south Wales traffic study which will identify sections of the trunk road network where traffic is likely to exceed recommended traffic flow levels, and consider solutions.

Hedgerows

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many miles of hedgerows have been removed, and how many miles planted *(a)* since 1 January 1960 and *(b)* since 1979.

Mr. Roberts: Although various estimates have been made for past periods none covers precisely the periods referred to.

A survey of landscape change in England and Wales carried out for the Department of the Environment and the Countryside Commission by Huntings Survey and Consultants Ltd. showed annual hedgerows losses in Wales of some 250 miles (out of a total of 2,600 miles for England and Wales) between 1947 and 1969, 400 miles (England and Wales total 2,900 miles) between 1969 and 1980, and 500 miles (England and Wales total 4,000 miles) between 1980 and 1985. A postal survey of environmental topics on farms carried out by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, however, showed annual losses of 500 miles for England and Wales between 1980 and 1985 with losses in Wales accounting for just over 100 miles of the total. The two surveys used different methodologies and neither can be regarded as definitive.

Since 1973 grants have been offered to farmers for planting of new hedgerows and for hedgerow laying. In Wales in the two years 1987 and 1988, grant was paid for the equivalent of almost 500 miles of new hedge planting.

Work is continuing to improve information on the rate of removal and on the extent of new planting.

Ford Plant, Bridgend

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has plans to visit the Ford plant at Bridgend.

Mr. Peter Walker: I have no immediate plans to do so.

Burns Unit, St. Laurence Hospital

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will specify the date when the plastic and burns unit will be transferred from the St. Laurence hospital, Chepstow to Morriston hospital.

Mr. Grist: I understand that the managing health authority, West Glamorgan health authority, and the Welsh health common services authority expect that the new burns, plastic and maxillo-facial surgery unit being developed at Morriston hospital, Swansea, should be completed in mid-1994, after which the service can be transferred from St. Laurence hospital, Chepstow.

General Practitioners

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many general practitioners and general practitioner practices in Wales have indicated an interest in becoming budget-holding practices.

Mr. Grist: To date, 42 practices comprising some 217 general practitioners have expressed an interest in becoming fund-holding practices.

Meat Processing Plant

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on what grounds he turned down the Development Board for Rural Wales proposals to assist the financing of the proposed integrated meat processing plant at Three Cocks, near Brecon.

Mr. Peter Walker: Since the Development Board for Rural Wales withdrew its application in respect of these proposals, my Department has taken no formal view of this particular scheme.

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what steps he is taking to ensure that an integrated meat processing plant is established in south Powys, pursuant to the requirements of the single European market.

Mr. Peter Walker: The question of the establishment of a meat processing plant in any particular location is entitely a matter for the commercial judgment of the company concerned.

Special Needs Housing

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he proposes to make changes to the funding arrangements for special needs projects undertaken by housing associations in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Grist: Special needs housing projects financed by Housing for Wales will be subject to new funding arrangements introduced from 1 April 1990.

The capital element of these projects will be funded by a mixture of housing association grant from Housing for Wales and private finance, as is already the case with the general needs housing. The level of grant will take into account the higher costs of providing special needs housing. This means that from 1 April 1990 all new allocations for housing association schemes funded by Housing for Wales will be on a mixed funding basis.

A new revenue allowance, to be known as special needs management allowance, will cover the additional housing management costs incurred for special needs housing; it will replace hostel deficit grant. Care costs will continue to be met from other topping-up sources.

These new arrangements will lead to the more effective and efficient use of public money in the funding of special needs schemes and improvements in estimating future expenditure demands.

Initially, the level of the new allowance will average £2,800 per bed space for existing schems and £3,600 per bed space for all new schemes coming into occupation in 1990-91. Existing schemes will continue to claim hostel deficit grant until 1991-92 when they, too, will be eligible for the new allowance.

To allow payments of the allowance to be paid from the start of the financial year, parliamentary approval of the revised estimate (class XVI vote 6 1990-91) is being sought for expenditure estimated at £168,000 to be met from repayable advances from the Contingencies Fund.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 170**

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SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc, between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instrument etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Mr. Speaker and his deputies are brought together under the heading Speaker's rulings and statements.

Other contributions by Mr. Speaker and his deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

Opposition Day Debates, Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions.*

Abbreviations

Bills 1R=first reading, 2R=second reading, Money res=money resolution, Com=Committee stage, Rep=Report stage, 3R=third reading, amendt/amendts=amendment/amendments, *=matter taken formally, without debate.

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